A Dissertation

entitled

A Pioneering Antiracism Effort in Higher Education:

A Single Case Study of a University Racial Equity Center (REC)

in a Predominantly White Institution (PWI)

by

Quatez B. Scott

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Foundations of Education

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An Abstract of

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A single case study was conducted to explore how and in what ways a university Racial Equity Center (REC) conceptualizes antiracism to engage in racial equity efforts. Ten sub-research questions are answered in this research using qualitative data (i.e., fieldwork, documents, and interviews). Through this research method, it was found that the site of this study (the Student Success and Racial Equity Center or SSREC) conceptualized antiracism to be the work of actively opposing racism that is manifested in the form of racist policies and racist practices. The SSREC opposes racism collaborating with campus partners to advocate on behalf of underrepresented racial minority students (URMs), and by coordinating academic programs which cater to the academic needs of students of color. As a result, the SSRECs efforts aim to increase sense of belonging among URM students and to enhance graduation rates among URM students attending Midwestern State University (MSU). This research extends the newly theorized antiracism as developed by Ibram Kendi (2019) by contextualizing antiracism in educational settings.

First, I dedicate this project to my committee- Drs. Dale Snauwaert, Ed Janak, Vicki Dagostino-Kalniz, and Ketwana Schoos. Through your guidance, we created a beautiful and truly pioneering project. With this study, I commit to you the promise of making this world a more racially just place. I dedicate this project to my biological and piecemeal families. I love you all more than you will ever know. I dedicate this project to foster kids around the world who have been counted out. May you know that though our struggle is painful, our struggle is never, ever terminal. So, dream ambitiously, believe deeply, and live intentionally. Lastly, this work is dedicated to the people who have, who do, and who will work tirelessly to achieve racial equity across the globe-especially those in higher education. Remember: Those before us paved the way for us to prepare the next generation of scholars and activists.

Galatians 6:9.

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Thank you to Ron and Phyllis McSwain, as well as their entire family. Ron has always told me to keep the details of our relationship private, so I will respect that. What I will share is that I am not right here, right now without you.

Lastly, I will thank me for not giving up and for doing the work. #IDidDat

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List of Abbreviations

AU………...American University

BCC……….Black Cultural Center

BCM……….Black Campus Movement

BIPOC …….Black and Indigenous People of Color

BPM……….Black Power Movement

BU…………Boston University

CDO……….Chief Diversity Officer

CRE^2……….Center for Race, Ethnicity, and Equity

CRM……….Civil Rights Movement

CRT………..Critical Race Theory

ESP………...Ethnic Studies Program

FHA………..Federal Housing Act

GPA………..Grade Point Average

HEA………..Higher Education Act

HSIs………..Hispanic Serving Institutions

HUD………..Department of Housing and Urban Development

IBT…………Implicit Bias Training

IES…………The Institute of Education Sciences

IRB…………Institutional Review Board

LGBTQ…….Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning

LGBT………Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender

LLC………...Living Learning Community

MSU………..Midwestern State University

NCES……...National Center for Education Statistics

NSSE………National Survey of Student Engagement

OEI………...Office of Equity and Inclusion

OMSA……. Office of Multicultural Student Affairs

Ph.D………..Doctor of Philosophy

POC………..People of Color

PTSS……….Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome

PWI………...Predominantly White Institution

REC………...Racial Equity Center

SCiT………..Students of Color in Transition Program

SNCC………Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

SSREC……..Student Success and Racial Equity Center

SU………….Student Union

UNC………..University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

UNIA………Universal Negro Improvement Association

UP………….University of Pennsylvania

URM……….Underrepresented Racial Minority

USC………..University of Southern California

USP………...Underrepresented Scholars Program

VPEI………..Vice President for Equity and Inclusion

Chapter One

Introduction

Recent studies have shown that antiracism efforts in higher education have increased over the last two decades (Arellano & Vue, 2019; Blakeney, 2005; Brown, 2017; Case & Ngo, 2017; Diggles, 2014; Donner et al., 2004; Galloway et al., 2019; Garran et al., 2015; Hamilton-Mason & Schneider, 2018; Niemonen, 2007; Welton et al., 2018). Over the last half-century, there have been various conceptions of antiracism. In 2019, historian and National Book Award winner for Nonfiction Ibram X. Kendi released *How to be an Antiracist* where he theorized antiracism. He defined antiracism as the powerful collection of antiracist policies leading to racial equity which are justified by antiracist ideas (p. 20). He defined antiracists as those who support antiracist policies through their actions or their expression of antiracist ideas (p. 13). Therefore, antiracism refers to the normative processes which structurally lead to racial equity.

Theoretically, antiracism asserts that racial equity is achieved through the implementation of antiracist policies (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Kendi, 2019; McNair et al., 2020). As the subject of antiracism continues to surface on college campuses, it is of educational significance to consider how institutions in higher education conceptualize antiracism to engage in antiracism. Furthermore, it is important to identify emerging strategies to achieve racial equity in college settings.

In *From Equity Talk to Equity Walk: Expanding Practitioner Knowledge for Racial Justice in Higher Education*, Tia Brown McNair, Estela Mara Bensimon, and Lindsey Malcom-Piqueux (2020) offered a practical guide for engaging in racial equity. They argued that racial equity efforts must consist of understanding student needs and

addressing those needs by implementing the necessary academic and social support to level the playing field. As such, antiracist practices in higher education must seek to identify the needs of racialized students, identify where the most glaring racial inequities exist, identify obstacles that perpetuate racial inequities, and work to implement antiracist policies and strategies that remove opportunity barriers that historically disadvantage racialized students to create racially equal outcomes. One emerging initiative is the establishment of university Racial Equity Centers (RECs).

Using themes identified from numerous university RECs, a university REC is defined as an institutional unit engaged in efforts to identify and eliminate structural barriers which systemically affect people of color. In 2011, the Center for the Study of Race and Equity was established at the University of Pennsylvania (UP) under the leadership of Shaun R. Harper. In 2017, this center moved on to the University of Southern California (USC) and was renamed the USC Race and Equity Center. That same year, American University launched the Antiracist Research & Policy Center under the direction of Ibram X. Kendi. Kendi would go on to Boston University in 2020 and direct the newly founded Center for Antiracist Research.

Also in 2020, the Center for the Study of Race, Ethnicity & Equity (CRE^2) was launched at the University of Washington in St. Louis. Among others, several other university RECs exist in higher education, including the Center for Racial Justice and Youth Engaged Research (University of Massachusetts Amherst), the Center for Racial Justice (University of Michigan), Stanford Center for Racial Justice (Stanford Law School). At the conclusion of this study, more university RECs emerged.

The emergence of university RECs could be an indicator that participating colleges and universities are committing to more direct action to enhance racial equality. There is also the chance that such institutions are merely responding to the political climate in a performative effort. Regardless, as concepts such as antiracism and racial equity continue to trend upward, it is of scholarly importance to understand how centers promoting racial equity conceptualize antiracism. Additionally, it is of scholarly interest to understand how and in what ways university RECs promote racial equity, as well as examine how such centers justify their initiatives as being antiracist and racial equity efforts. These types of studies can distinguish university RECs from more common university diversity efforts such as cultural centers and DEI offices.

One way to describe the functions of university RECs is through qualitative research methods. According to Vibha Pathak, Bijayini Jena, and Sanjay Kalra (2013), qualitative research methods are used to understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, etc. through the collection and interpretation of non-numerical data (p. 192). Qualitative methods help to make the world and sites being studied more visible (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 35). Therefore, a qualitative research method would describe the world of university RECs and their contributions to advancing racial equity and antiracism in college settings.

Statement of the Problem

To describe the relevance of university RECs, one must seek to understand racism and racial inequity in the context of higher education. Chrystal Mwangi, Barbara Thelamour, Ijeoma Ezeofor, and Ashley Carpenter (2018) conducted a qualitative study examining the ways Black students connect broader racial issues to their campus

communities. They found that "Black students have negative perceptions of their campus climate due to racial/ethnic hostility, inequitable treatment, microaggressions, isolation, tokenization, lack of representation, and overt racism" (p. 457). Marissa Sanchez (2017) conducted a qualitative study on Latin American student experiences at Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). For the purpose of this research, "Latin American" is used (unless specified otherwise in national reports) to reference anyone of the Latin American diaspora because "the term *Latinx* is not commonly used among people of Latin American origin and diaspora" (Salinas, 2020, p. 165).

The results of Sanchez's (2017) study indicated that many Latin American students encountered stereotypes and generalizations, residential students experienced physical and social segregation in the residence halls, and sense of belonging among Latin Americans increased the more they enrolled in HSIs. In short, the Latin American students thrived more socially in educational settings with students who looked like them, while experiencing higher levels of isolation in PWIs. The issues related to belonging and culture also exist at the graduate level.

In 2009, a qualitative study explored Black doctoral student experiences. Data collected from 60 participants in the study revealed that poor advising, lack of financial support, departmental bureaucracy, as well as overall institutional and local fit were pervasive problems (Blockett et al., 2016, p. 98). Pamela Felder, Howard Stevenson, and Marybeth Gasman (2014) conducted a study analyzing African American Ph.D. earner's experiences with the ways in which race intersects with advising and mentoring. They argued that at the doctoral level, "Black and Hispanic students perceive more feelings of

racial discrimination and receive less research and teaching assistantships than their white counterparts" (p. 24).

These issues illuminate that graduate degree programs consistently fail in meeting the emotional, financial, and educational needs required to adequately support Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC). Concerns are then raised if doctoral programs at PWIs are structured to adequately meet the needs of BIPOCs as compared to their white counterparts. Another question is if such institutions want to do this work. One can look to traditional admissions standards to answer this question.

Admissions processes in higher education have a long history of disadvantaging Black and Latin American students. In *Challenging Racism in Higher Education: Promoting Justice*, Mark Chesler, Amanda Lewis, and James Crowfoot (2005) draw attention to these and other subtle and overt forms of racial discrimination. They stated that "failing to adopt admission standards that take students' different preparatory opportunities into account" (p. 29) is a form of discrimination. When higher education policies fail to consider the K-12 schooling experiences of students of color, these environments continue the cycle of disadvantaging students of color and perpetuating racial inequity. Not immune to these issues are faculty of color.

Today, approximately 84% of all college faculty are white (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 558). Research conducted by Felder et al. (2014) found that in 2011, 74% of doctoral degree earners were white. However, just 12.8% of all Ph.D. earners will go on to hold a faculty position in higher education at some point in their professional career (Larson et al., 2014, p. 745). This leaves a disproportionate percentage of people of color with desires of becoming faculty accepting lower wage positions such as post-docs, or

staying on the job market for extended periods of time (Larson et al., 2014, p. 745). These probabilities leave Ph.D.'s of color at the disadvantage of being underpaid and taking longer to secure faculty positions than their white counterparts.

Some scholars have attempted to explain these disparities. Reginald Blockett, Pamela Felder, Walter Parrish, and Joan Collier (2016) identified one of the core issues related to gaps in faculty of color representation being a "pipeline problem." The pipeline problem asserts that the low representation of faculty of color is simply due to fewer students of color attending earning graduate degrees (p. 97). According to David Merolla & Omari Jackson (2019), as of 2017, 10.1% of white Americans aged 25-29 earned a graduate degree compared to 5.5% of Blacks and 3% of Latin Americans (p. 3). Institutional environments have been a significant socializing barrier for students of color (Blockett et al., 2016; Felder, 2010; Felder & Barker, 2013; Felder et al., 2014). Kendi would describe these environments as the manifestation of racist policies.

Kendi (2019) defined a racist policy as "any measure that produces or sustains racial inequity between racial groups" (p. 18). On the surface, individuals may conceive of racist policies as anything written to officially govern practice. However, Kendi asserted that policies do not have to operate in written form (p. 18). Racist policies can be the everyday discriminatory practices that either maintain or exacerbate inequities between racial groups. Because racism is a socializing construct by which people are indoctrinated (Chesler et al., 2005; DeGruy, 2017; DiAngelo, 2021; DiAngelo, 2018; Fleming, 2018; Walter et al., 2017), understanding that racist policies do not have to be intentional to reproduce racial inequity is critically important to understanding how pervasive these policies are and the work it will take to dismantle racism.

With the growing implementation of university RECs, racist policies can be replaced with what Kendi (2019) described as antiracist policies. An antiracist policy "is any measure that produces or sustains racial equity between racial groups" (p. 18). However, there is a gap in literature examining antiracism efforts in colleges and universities (Case & Ngo, 2017, p. 215). A significant number of studies on antiracism are focused on K-12 educational settings, empirical experiences, or departmental efforts. No studies currently exist which explore university racial equity centers.

Barry Troyna is a British sociologist of education whose work examined policy, racism and racial inequality in K-12 schools. Much of his research was conducted in the 1980s and 1990s. In one of his most referenced publications, Troyna (1987) critiqued multicultural education. He argued that emphasizing multiculturalism as having the "emancipatory properties which might overcome the debilitating effects of racism in education and occupational contexts is misleading and empirically spurious" (p. 313). In short, using multiculturalism to address issues related to race and racism were disingenuous. Instead, he championed the idea that schools must adopt antiracist approaches to challenge racism and racial inequity to interrogate the origins of racism in the social and political structure of the schools (p. 311).

Patrick Solomon (2002) conducted a qualitative study with 10 school administrators (eight principals and two vice principals) to describe their experiences engaging in antiracist practices in K-12 school settings in the U.S. Administrators (1) acknowledged that racism is a pervasive issue in schools and communities, (2) failed to understand the difference between antiracism and multiculturalism, (3) differed in approaches to antiracist practices (i.e., through conflict resolution/mediation vs. inclusive

curriculum), and (4) efforts were often restricted in schools due to resistance by teachers and families.

Terry Husband, Jr. (2010) described his personal experiences engaging in antiracist pedagogy as an early childhood educator teaching African American history. He acknowledged difficulties with what to include in the curriculum, he observed that students had more critical awareness of race and racism than he presumed prior to engaging in the curriculum, he observed that students struggled to conceptualize the injustice embedded in pressing white perspectives of African American history in education, and most of the resistance to his curriculum he encountered came from parents of his students.

Mollie Galloway, Petra Callin, Shay James, Harriett Vimegnon, and Lisa McCall (2019) used a qualitative study to understand how 18 educators from three K-12 schools used language to conceptualize culturally responsive, antiracist, and anti-oppressive pedagogy. Although all participants shared definitions for each of these concepts, researchers identified that "some were initially at a loss or uncomfortable sharing a definition" (p. 490) of the terms. When engaging in antiracist and anti-oppressive pedagogy, participants indicated that it is important to teach students about white privilege and oppression, to teach students how to identify and critique structural inequalities, to highlight the living conditions of their students in schooling and social contexts, and to confront racism. Most recently, Esther Ohito (2021) theorized antiracist K-12 teaching from the perspective of a Black male educator while sharing strategies for educators.

While there is growing scholarship on the experiences of K-12 educators, there is an empirical gap in literature examining antiracism efforts in higher education. There has been a slight increase in scholarship addressing antiracist efforts in higher education on smaller scales. For example, a case study by Jenell Paris & Kristin Schoon (2007) analyzed how evangelical students make sense of whiteness and use their identities to promote antiracism. They concluded that particularly among white students, attitudes and identities are critical starting points for inspiring a commitment to racial justice.

Susan Donner, Joyce Everett, and Kathryn Basham (2004) analyzed reports of designed antiracist field experiences of social work students in the Smith College School for Social Work. By using descriptive statistics, they were able to identify the areas where students excelled as well as the areas in which students struggled. Similarly, Ann Garran, Samuel Aymer, Caroline Gelman, and Joshua Miller (2015) introduced team teaching strategies of antiracism focused in social work courses to promote social justice. The authors emphasized these strategies because social workers are trained to be agents of change. As such, social workers must be taught how to become aware of sociopolitical factors related to power and oppression, and how power and oppression affect their capacity to serve disadvantaged communities.

Although there are growing initiatives being implemented by academic programs like social work and education, what remains to be seen are studies examining institutional antiracism and racial equity efforts. Institutional refers to efforts and initiatives which are part of the college or university's strategic plans. Therefore, there is a need to explore antiracism and racial equity efforts in higher education like the recent incline of university RECs. Describing how university RECs conceptualize antiracism

and how these centers advance racial equity in a university setting will benefit readers interested in enhancing their efforts or establishing such centers at their respective institution. This is inclusive not only of resources being put into place, but the policies being addressed as well.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how one university REC conceptualizes antiracism and to describe how and in what ways this university REC advances racial equity. A university REC is defined in this study as an institutional unit engaged in efforts to identify and eliminate structural barriers which systemically affect people of color. This study advanced scholarship on university REC conceptualization and implementation of antiracism engagement in racial equity efforts in a university setting.

The site of the university REC in this study was the Student Success and Racial Equity Center (SSREC) at a Midwest State University. The center name, university, name, and all other subsequent identifying information including participant names will be replaced with pseudonyms as the center requested anonymity in this study. The SSREC is located at a midsize (15,000 to 29,999 students) research university. According to the 2021 Census report, 58.1% of residents in the metropolitan city where MSU is located identified as white. However, the most recent Strategic Diversity Plan revealed that as of 2019, 66.7% of students attending MSU-a public Predominantly White Institution (PWI)-identified as white (Table 1).

Table 1

Four-Year MSU Student Ethnicity Enrollment Trend

Ethnicity	By Academic Year				
	2015	Percentage	2019	Percentage	Change
American Indian or Alaskan Native	39	0.2%	25	0.1%	-35.9%
Asian	615	3.0%	611	3.1%	-0.7%
Black or African American	2,207	10.8%	1,810	9.1%	-18.0%
Hispanic/Latino	876	4.3%	936	4.7%	6.9%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	15	0.1%	15	0.1%	0.0%
Nonresident Alien	1,795	8.8%	1,645	8.3%	-8.4%
Race and Ethnicity Unknown	698	3.4%	865	4.4%	23.9%
Two or More Races	537	2.6%	706	3.6%	31.5%
White	13,589	66.7%	13,169	66.6%	-3.1%
Total	20,371	100.0%	19,782	100%	-2.9%

Note. Data is reflective of the 2020-23 Strategic Diversity Plan at MSU.

According to the center's webpage, the SSREC is dedicated to transforming the lives and educational experiences of Black and other students of color. As university RECs continue to advance in higher education, this study was conducted to illuminate how university RECs conceptualize antiracism to engage in racial equity efforts. As such, this study produced an analytic narrative of one university REC (SSREC) which served

as a benchmark of analysis for other university RECs to compare their experiences and racial equity efforts.

Lastly, educator and bestselling author Robin DiAngelo (2021) pose a critical component to advancing antiracism. She asserted that commitment to antiracism "takes both personal and public courage to stand firm in the face of the inevitable pushback, retaliation, and seductive rewards for silence and complicity" (p. 173). This study sought to convey how the SSREC advances their racial equity efforts despite possible institutional and societal pushback during calls to eliminate Critical Race Theory (CRT) from public curriculum.

Operational Definitions for this Study

The theoretical framework guiding this study was Kendi's (2019) conception of antiracism. According to Kendi, antiracism is the body of antiracist policies leading to racial equity which is substantiated by antiracist ideas (p. 20). An antiracist policy is any measure-written or unwritten-which governs people, practices, and produces or sustains racial equity (p. 18). Antiracist ideas-the justificatory arguments of antiracist policies, suggests that all racial groups are equals in all perceived differences, and identifies racist policies as the root cause of racial inequity (p. 18). At the core of antiracism is the dismantling of all forms of racism to create racial equality (DiAngelo, 2021; Fleming, 2018; Kendi, 2019; O'Brien, 2007; McNair et al., 2020; Museus et al., 2015; Niemonen, 2007; Reynolds & Kendi, 2020; Welton et al., 2018). To achieve racial equity not only requires antiracist policies. Advancing racial equity requires antiracists.

Kendi (2019) defined an antiracist as "one who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea" (p. 13). To be an antiracist is to

actively contribute to creating, implementing, and supporting policies that create racial

equity. The task at-hand for antiracists is to identify, challenge, and transform structures

and systems that create racially oppressive conditions (Dei, 2005, p. 3). It is matter of

democracy and civic duty for individual members of society to develop the capacity to

identify and disrupt the pervasive issue of racial inequity.

However, sociologist Crystal Fleming (2018) argued that developing historical

and sociological literacy is a critical component of being able to decode the racial issues

of today and connect these concerns to our society's past (p. 46). Again, racism is a

socializing process in which most people are indoctrinated. Therefore, "to be an antiracist

is a radical choice in the face of this history, requiring a radical reorientation of our

consciousness" (Kendi, 2019, p. 23). In short, it is an antiracist choice to grow one's

critical understanding of the history of race, racial oppression, and the ways in which

systemically racist policies create and sustain racial inequity.

Some antiracist scholars contend that policies are key to promoting racial equity

in societies and institutions (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Dei, 2005; Kendi, 2019; O'Brien, 2007;

Museus et al., 2015; Niemonen, 2007; Reynolds & Kendi, 2020; Sue, 2003; Troyna,

1987; Welton et al., 2018). This means critically examining the ways in which racial

inequity is tied to racist policies. Antiracist policies are designed to directly challenge the

production and reproduction of racial inequity (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Dei, 2005; Kendi,

2019; Welton et al., 2018). This fuels the importance of antiracist policy implementation

as an important step in the transformation of societies.

Renowned sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2021) asserted in *Racism without*

Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America:

Being an antiracist begins with understanding the institutional nature of racial matters and accepting that all actors in a racialized society are affected materially (receive benefits or disadvantages) and ideologically by the racial structure. This stand implies taking responsibility for your unwilling participation in these practices and beginning a new life committed to the goal of achieving real racial equality. (p. 16)

To achieve racial equality requires becoming active participants in promoting antiracism. Bonilla-Silva's position speaks to why Kendi (2019) maintained the binary between racists and antiracists. "Every policy in every institution in every community in every nation is producing or sustaining either racial inequity or equity between racial groups" (p. 18). If a policy is producing or sustaining racial equity or racial inequity, every action one takes is either dismantling or promoting racial equity or racial inequity. Therefore, it is a democratic necessity and urgent matter of justice to engage in antiracism to improve all racial group's opportunity to participate and be treated as equal human beings. This necessitates an exploration of how university RECs are being used to transform campus communities in to racially equitable spaces.

Research Question

Central Question: How and in what ways does a pioneering university Racial Equity Center (REC) conceptualize antiracism to engage in racial equity efforts in a PWI?

   Sub Questions:

1. How is antiracism conceptualized in a university Racial Equity Center?

2. What is the mission and vision of a pioneering university Racial Equity Center?

3. How is one pioneering university Racial Equity Center structured regarding staffing and how does this structure support antiracism?

4. How does one pioneering university Racial Equity Center distinguish its work from other diversity units (i.e., multicultural affairs, culture and identity centers, etc.) across its respective campus?

5. How is the ontological nature of reality regarding racism and racial inequity explored by one pioneering university Racial Equity Center?

6. What practices does one pioneering university Racial Equity Center use to create racial equity?

7. In what ways are the mission, vision, and conceptualization of racial equity by the university Racial Equity Center justified as antiracist?

8. In what ways do professional employees in a pioneering university Racial Equity Center personally identify as antiracist?

9. What is the understanding of the pioneering university Racial Equity Center's power position in the university and is power a basic question of racial equity?

10. What challenges has the pioneering racial equity center encountered while engaging in racial equity efforts?

Anticipated Research Findings

There are several anticipated research findings in this study. To begin, there is a long history of resistance to antiracism and racial equity (Chesler et al., 2005; Gelber, 2016; Harper et al., 2009; Husband, Jr., 2010; McNair et al., 2020; Patton, 2010; Patton, 2016; Rogers, 2012; Solomon, 2002). Resistance can occur through denial that racism exists (DiAngelo, 2018; DiAngelo, 2021; Fleming, 2018; Hill, 2020; Kendi, 2016; Kendi,

2019; Manglitz et al., 2014), being colorblind to issues of race and racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Cabrera et al., 2017; Fleming, 2018; Kendi, 2019; Harper, 2012; Sue, 2015; Tisby, 2021; Walter et al., 2017), rejecting the concept of white privilege (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; DiAngelo, 2018; Fleming, 2018; Manglitz et al., 2014; O'Brien, 2007), or the current political movement where states like Ohio are seeking to remove critical race theory (CRT) from public schools (Ohio Council for the Social Studies). Therefore, it is anticipated that as the SSREC encounters significant campus resistance as an institutional barrier.

Another common barrier to promoting diversity efforts is institutional and external financial resources supporting these initiatives (Patton, 2010; Williams, 2013; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). Financial resources contribute to the power and ability to transform educational outcomes of racialized students in university settings. Limited financial resources could affect staffing, programming & research funds, and other support services. As a diversity effort, this researcher anticipates research findings revealing that the SSREC will have financial difficulties.

Financial challenges could also affect the ability for the SSREC to adequately staff the center, which could affect the quality of level of service to students. Financial difficulties may adversely affect the ability to bring in prominent antiracist consultants and programs. This could limit the center's ability to be introduced to emerging concepts and practices in the field. Therefore, it is anticipated that the SSREC may disclose collaborating closely with other diversity units across campus as well as engage in external financial support efforts (i.e., fundraising, grant writing, etc.).

Lastly, it is anticipated that the SSREC will report on the emotional challenges of engaging in antiracist and racial equity work. Diversity and social justice efforts tend to spark emotional, intellectual, and psychological experiences (Garran et al., 2015, p. 799). As a new and growing unit, it is believed university RECs build community through the emotional, physical, and psychological experiences which connect people to antiracism. Furthermore, whereas cultural centers in higher education focus on building communities through group identity in addition to celebrating the history and culture of these groups (Broadhurst, 2014; Kasper, 2004; Patton, 2010; Rogers, 2012), it was anticipated that the SSREC builds community through joint efforts across the institution.

Significance of this Study

According to John Creswell & David Creswell (2018), research should address the significance of the study for the audience (p. 194). Researcher Robert Yin (2018) stated that the significance of a study must be presented in the initial chapter or section of the study's introduction (p. 287). This helps readers early in the review process to understand what could potentially be learned in the study and why such a study is critical to advancing knowledge of a phenomenon. Researchers are encouraged to share three to four reasons as to how the study will contribute to scholarly research, describe how the research will improve practice, and inform how the study will improve policies and decision-making (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 194).

Describing How One University REC Conceptualizes Antiracism

Scholars tend to agree that antiracism is often difficult to conceptualize (Gillborn, 2000; Kendi, 2019; Rebollo-Gil & Moras, 2006). Kendi (2019) therefore asserted that one reason antiracism is difficult to conceptualize is because it goes against the flow of

history (p. 17). From America's founding to chattel slavery, to Naturalization Acts, and Jim Crow, the history of the United States is littered with racist policies. As Fleming (2018) stated, racist societies socialize all members to be racially ignorant (p. 38). Therefore, it is difficult to conceptualize antiracism and racial equity because contemporary history has normalized and conditioned society and its institution to perpetuate racial inequity. Because there are no known studies which explore university RECs-particularly those in PWI settings, the significance of this study is that it will provide an analytical benchmark as to how one university REC is conceptualizing antiracism.

Provide Methodologies for Racial Equity Efforts through University RECs

Antiracism refers to ideologies, practices, and beliefs to achieve racial equity (Arellano & Vue, 2019; DiAngelo, 2021; Grosland, 2019; Kendi, 2019; O'Brien, 2007; O'Brien, 2009; Zamalin, 2019). However, some scholars argue that no research exists which advances how to systemically achieve racial equity (Dei, 2005; Welton et al., 2018). Because there are no known studies which examine how any university REC practically advances antiracism to achieve racial equity, an added significance of this study is that it will reveal the methodologies employed by the one university REC to advance these efforts.

Normalizing University RECs in Higher Education

One way that higher education has attempted to address issues related to race and racism is through the implementation of cultural centers. Between the Civil Rights Movement (CRM) and Black Power Movement (BPM) of the 1960s and 1970s, student activists began challenging racial inequities at their respective colleges and universities

(Broadhurst, 2014; Conner, 2020; Joseph, 2009; Patton, 2010; Rogers, 2012). Many universities responded to Black student activist resistance to the racial status quo and demands for fair and equal treatment by implementing Black Cultural Centers (BCCs) and other identity centers (Broadhurst, 2014; Patton, 2010; Rogers, 2012). According to Patton (2010):

> The history of culture centers is rooted in a struggle for students to hold institutions of higher education accountable. They made a host of demands to ensure that their experiences were represented and supported in the cultural, academic, and social contexts of the university. (p. xiv)

During the period of radical activism, Black student activists were reluctant to compromise Black citizens' racial equity (Joseph, 2009, p. 708). As Black student activists continued protesting and demonstrating in higher education, institutions agreed to meet some of the demands made by these student groups. Institutions responded by improving access to Black students, recruiting, and hiring Black faculty and staff, and implementing Black Studies programs and courses (Broadhurst, 2014; Patton, 2010; Rogers, 2012).

Educator and race theorist Lori Patton (2010) produced *Culture Centers in Higher Education: Perspectives on Identity, Theory, and Practice.* She and other scholars provided histories of cultural centers like BCCs, Chicano Centers, Women's Centers, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) Centers, etc. However, "much remains to be learned about their historical roots, current status, and future presence on college campuses" (p. xiv). While cultural centers have been used to create community and advocacy for marginalized groups on campus, these efforts do not significantly speak

to addressing the issues of racial equity through antiracist policies and praxis. Therefore, not directly challenging racism through antiracist practices serves to uphold the racist status quo in higher education (Patton, 2016, p. 326).

Summary

Racial inequity is a pervasive issue in higher education, particularly in PWIs. These institutions must work harder and more deliberately to challenge the racial status quo (Barabino, 2020, p. 1277). This work can be done through the implementation of a university RECs. This study will be a significant contribution to scholarship because it examines how and in what ways a university REC conceptualizes antiracism and practically dismantles racial inequity.

Higher education has failed to disrupt the cycle of racial inequities (Harper & Davis, 2012; Harper et al., 2009; Patton, 2016). As such, one can argue that higher education has not been intentional enough about the efforts it employs to transform such conditions (Barabino, 2020; Harper, 2012; Patton, 2010). As more university RECs continue to emerge in PWIs, they must be explored to understand how they conceptualize antiracism and practically advance racial equity. This study was the first of its kind to investigate such efforts and establish an analytical benchmark of how one pioneering university REC conceptualizes antiracism to engage in racial equity.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

To study how and in what ways a university REC in a PWI conceptualizes antiracism to engage in racial equity, there must be a foundational conception of antiracism. This literature review provides a breakdown of scholarship on antiracism and antiracism efforts. This process begins by providing a brief evolution of antiracist scholarship.

A Brief History of Antiracist Literature and Scholarship

Some scholars have argued that antiracism is as old as racism itself (Aptheker, 1991; Aptheker, 1993; Kendi, 2016; Kendi, 2019; O'Brien, 2007; Zamalin, 2019). Herbert Aptheker (1993), Kendi (2016), and Alex Zamalin (2019) provided histories of events and prominent figures in antiracist movements. Recently, scholars like Crystal Fleming (2018) used *How to Be Less Stupid About Race* to explore how "living in a racist society exposes us all to absurd and harmful ideas that, in turn, help maintain the racial status quo" (p. 10). She guided readers through practical antiracist action needed to confront one's own understanding and contribution to dismantling or upholding racial equity. DiAngelo used *White Fragility: Why it's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (2018) and *Nice Racism* (2021) to specifically address white-identified readers and their relative challenges to living antiracist lives.

While literature on antiracism continues to grow, it is important to introduce how antiracism has evolved over time. This review of literature briefly introduces the foremost antiracist scholars from the early 20th century to present scholarship. This

section will also conclude by thematically introducing antiracist scholarship and concepts, which will lead to the current antiracist movement in the U.S.

W.E.B. Du Bois

Scholars typically agree that antiracism literature was introduced by sociologists W.E.B Du Bois (Aptheker, 1991; Cabrera et al., 2017; O'Brien, 2007) and Oliver C. Cox (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; O'Brien, 2007) in the early part of the 20th century. Two of Du Bois' most referenced works that address race relations are *The Souls of Black Folk* (originally published in 1903) and *Black Reconstruction* (originally published in 1935). Each essay offered a unique perspective of race relations in America during their respective time periods. They also described how race relations contributed to the social order and racial inequity in America.

In Du Bois' (2016) often referenced *The Souls of Black Folk*, he introduced the problem of the color line. The color line described the relationship between darker and lighter-skinned races at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries (p. 9). He concluded that the root of the problem can be traced back to chattel slavery (p. 52) which ended less than five decades prior to when this work was published. Thus, living in a world still healing from its original sin, Du Bois was arguing that many individual and institutional problems concerning race relations were connected to a system of racist policies largely in operation since the early 17th century. In *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois (2013) reflected:

Was the rule of the mass of Americans to be unlimited, and the right to rule

extended to all men, regardless of race and color, or if not, what power of

dictatorship would rule, and how would property and privilege be protected? This

was the great and primary question which was in the minds of the men who wrote

the Constitution of the United States and continued in the minds of thinkers down

through the slavery controversy. It still remains with the world as the problem of

democracy expands and touches all races and nations. (pp. 37-38)

What Du Bois acknowledged were the consequences of racial inequity in society.

Particularly if democracy in the United States was extended to all races. If not, these

conditions were prescribed as outlined in the U.S. Constitution.

Educator Paulo Freire (2000) in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* asserted in the 1970s

that prescriptions represent the imposition of an individual or group's choice upon

another individual or group, which transforms their consciousness into one that conforms

to the consciousness of the dominating group (p. 47). Therefore, Du Bois posed a

rhetorical question. He was conveying that if all racial groups were standing on equal

footing as outlined in the U.S. Constitution, democracy touching all races of people

would not be a question.

Oliver Cox

When it came to social prescriptions from dominating groups onto Black people,

Oliver Cox (1959) reminded us that "negroes had to be thought of as subsocial and

subhuman" (p. xxxi). For much of world history, this ideology justified the inhumane

treatment of people from the African diaspora after forcing them over to America as

human cargo. Stated another way, the racist idea of Black people being perceived as

below human shaped racist policies that would have them positioned as white people's property for 244 years (Kendi, 2016; Rothstein, 2017; Zamalin, 2019). Such racist policies and racist ideas would go on to shape the relationship and tension between Black people and white people for centuries.

Like Du Bois, Cox was a sociologist who studied challenges related to race relations. One of his most referenced works is *Caste, Class, and Race: A Study in Social Dynamics* which was originally published in 1947. According to Cox (1959), the caste system refers to the type, structure, and substance of a given society (p. 3). As Isabel Wilkerson (2020) put it in *Caste: The Origins of our Discontents*, "caste is the infrastructure of our divisions. It is architecture of human hierarchy, the subconscious code of instructions for maintaining, in our case, a four-hundred-year-old social order" (p. 17). The racial caste system is the basis of normalcy in each society, as well as the basis of which that system is governed.

Cox's work sought to understand and describe how race shaped the social structure and race relations throughout all aspects of society. Society not only referred to the common understanding of countries and nations, but to the collection of groups, families, organizations, values, etc. (Cox, 1959, p. 4). In short, Cox was also concerned with how race affected human relationships across difference. He engaged the discussion of race relations in various caste systems by considering cultural phenomenon such as social class and capitalism and focusing on a variation of social groups (i.e., women, race, religion, etc.). It was arguably early evidence an intersectional approach to understanding the complexity of racial inequity in the U.S. Cox (1959) argued:

The "race problem" includes all the immediate or short-run instances of overt friction between Negroes and whites; maladjustments due to disparity in population characteristics, such as death rate, disease, unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, and so on, and innumerable conflicts of opposing attitudes and policies. The whites determine the pattern of these problems and the grounds upon which they must be thrashed out. (p. 545)

The race problem Cox described was one reflective not simply the racist idea that Black people were inferior to white people. What Cox argued was that the racial tensions and the social position of Blacks was due to white racism. Sociologist Joe Feagin (2014) defined white racism as "centuries long, deep-lying, institutionalized, and systemic" (p. 4). Therefore, racist policies enacted by white elites have reproduced centuries of higher rates of death, disease, unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, etc. in Black communities.

To achieve social advancement, Cox (1959) argued that assimilation was necessary. He argued that advancing one's social status as a member of a subordinate group means voluntary or involuntary conceding to the dominating group's ideals (p. 569). According to Cox: (1) conceding to the values, expectations, and behaviors of dominating groups (i.e., white people) was all but inevitable, (2) Black people and other marginalized groups would never truly experience liberty as their values, expectations, and behaviors would always be driven out by white ideals, and (3) white dominating group ideals will always be the norm of American society. As such, it can be argued that Cox advocated for the adoption of socially racist policies through the concept of assimilation as assimilation is grounded in conformity and the racist ideology non-white equating to inferiority (Kendi, 2016; Kendi, 2019).

Although Cox is regarded as one of the earliest antiracist scholars, his work serves as a reminder that there are debatable areas of antiracist talk. According to Kendi (2019), to be antiracist is to be one who expresses any idea that racial groups are equals, to not believe that any racial group needs to be developed, and to support policies that reduce racial inequity (p. 19). This begins with the position that no racial group is greater, lesser, nor superior to any other racial group in any manner. What Cox shared in his literature was that for subordinated groups to experience any type of social success, they must submit to dominating group ideals through the process of assimilation. This is similar to another prominent educator who sought Black advancement: Booker T. Washington.

Booker T. Washington (2009) was born into the enslavement system of forced labor and eventually went on to graduate from a rigorous training program at the Hampton Institute. In his often referenced Up from Slavery (originally published in 1901), Washington detailed the strenuous curriculum developed at Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute (now Tuskegee University) where he became the inaugural president. Tuskegee adopted the Hampton model where students studied and worked long days performing extensive manual labor. In justifying the purpose of this work, Washington (2009) stated:

From the very beginning, at Tuskegee, I was determined to have the students do not only the agricultural and domestic work, but to have them erect their own buildings. My plan was to have them, while performing this service, taught the latest and best methods of labour, so that the school would not only get the benefit of their efforts, but the students themselves would be taught to see not only utility in labour, but beauty and dignity; would be taught, in fact, how to lift labour up from mere drudgery and toil, and would learn to love work for its own sake. (p. 164)

Washington viewed Black education as values, expectations, and dignity being built through manual labor. His work also focuses on Black people advancing socially and economically through manual labor to society, rather than focusing on enhancing Black political power, Black civil rights, and higher education aspirations of Black youth. As Du Bois (2007) stated, Washington represented "the old attitude of adjustment and submission" (p. 38). This occurred during the critical period of Reconstruction with "the suppression of the Negro votes, the changing and shifting of ideals, and the seeking of new lights in the great night" (Du Bois, 2007, p. 38).

Bonilla-Silva (2001) offered a critical take on Cox. He stated that "the lack of any critical race viewpoint is amazing considering that Cox, a Black writer, wrote this book at a time of great white working-class hostility toward black and minority workers" (p. 24). This was a time when Cox surely faced white hostility. Alda Blakeney (2005) contended that challenging caste systems means confronting the issue of race head on (p. 124). But rather than problematizing the issue of racial inequity, Cox urged Black and other racially minoritized communities to assimilate.

So, even though Cox is regarded as one of the forefathers of antiracist work, some of the proposed ideas of his work exacerbated racist ideas and racist policies. The reason assimilation is problematic is that assimilationist ideas aim to develop, civilize, and integrate racial groups into dominate cultures (Kendi, 2019, p. 29). In some ways, Cox perpetuated the idea of racial inferiority, even if not intentionally.

Herbert Aptheker

Herbert Aptheker was a historian who authored books such as *American Negro Slave Revolts* (1936), *Abolitionism: A Revolutionary Movement* (1989), and *Anti-Racism in U.S. History: The First Two Hundred Years* (1993). When Aptheker published the latter book, there existed prior scholarship on slave revolts, civil rights efforts, and other historical events that challenged and illuminated the problem of racism in America. These were efforts which opposed the production and maintenance of racism. Such literature existed through the perspectives of white and Black scholars and can arguably be categorized as antiracist scholarship (Aptheker, 1991, p. 475).

The difference between Aptheker's work and others like Cox and Du Bois was that his was one of the first to be explicitly dedicated to presenting a history of antiracist efforts in the United States from the perspective of white efforts (O'Brien, 2007, p. 432). As Kendi (2019) asserted, antiracist efforts like white antiracism are difficult to comprehend because these events went against the flow of America's history (p. 23). However, this history did exist and has remained hidden or obstructed for centuries. Aptheker (1993) offered an explanation the untold history of white antiracist movements. He said:

A reason for the survival- apart from its usefulness to those who dominate the present order- may lie in the fact that the literature often expresses surprise at its findings, as has been noted earlier; or the literature sometimes asserts the allegedly marginal or exceptional quality of the evidence it presents. (Aptheker, 1993, p. 16-17).

According to Aptheker (1993), history suggests that between the 16th and 19th centuries, antiracism among white people (or antiracist action) was more common than previously believed. This is because historical literature either omitted or minimized white antiracism which affirmed the unchallenged acceptance of racism (p. xiii). Furthermore, antiracist literature existed, but it was of incidence from historical narratives addressing equality, slavery, and other issues. For instance, literature such as *Benjamin Rush's Address upon Slave-Keeping* (1773) attacked the morality of chattel slavery (Aptheker, 1991, p. 472). So, while chattel slavery had fully been in practice for a century and a half, it was not universally accepted.

The first documented antiracists were antislavery abolitionists from the late 17th century through the late 19th century Civil War (Aptheker, 1991; Katz-Fishman et al., 2014; Kendi, 2016; Rogers, 2012; Zamalin, 2019). However, Kendi (2016) detailed in *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (*Stamped* for short) that some abolitionists often urged free Blacks to assimilate by attending church, learning to command the English language, learn math, marry, avoid legal trouble and act civil, etc. so that their actions would prove that Blacks should be treated humanely (p. 124). In other words, Black people were encouraged to assimilate to prove they could be treated like human beings.

While abolitionists played a significant role in anti-slavery movements and promoting assimilation. Rogers (2012) (and more currently Ibram X. Kendi) noted that some white people worked with college educated Black graduates to use their voice as a form of activism in the early 19th century. These speakers went from "initially speaking on colonization and eventually on abolition" (p. 30). So, while the history of the United States is littered with history of racist policies and racist ideas, racist policies and racist ideas were also challenged by well-meaning individuals and groups that included white people.

Ibram X. Kendi

Historian and 2021 MacArthur Genius Grant winner, Ibram X. Kendi authored several books over the past decade addressing racist ideas, antiracism, and student political movements. Among a host of awards and acknowledgements, Kendi authored *The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Racial Reconstruction of Higher Education, 1965-1972*, which won the W.E.B. Du Bois Book prize. Kendi also won the 2016 National Book Award for *Stamped*. In academia, Kendi was the founding director of American University's Antiracist Research & Policy Center and is now the founding director of Boston University's Center for Antiracist Research.

In *Stamped*, Kendi narrated the American history of racist ideas from the 15th century through the early 21st century. He argued that the history of racist ideas has three distinct voices- segregationists, assimilationists, and antiracists. In a book review, Amber Murrey (2018) stated that *Stamped* is useful to antiracist efforts in that it creates a roadmap for antiracist historians to understand the past as a means to intervene in the present (p. 98). As such, it is important that antiracists be historians of racism and the

spread of racist ideas to grasp how these issues in U.S. have evolved over the course of history.

In 2019, Kendi's bestselling novel *How to be an Antiracist* was published. Less than a year later, racial tension regarding the killing of Black men and women such as George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery- some of which were caught on video- at the hands of current and former police sparked public unrest. These events have been identified by many scholars as critical to the current antiracism movement (Lavalley & Johnson, 2020; South et al., 2020). These events called for understanding the plight of Black people in the U.S. as well as building and employing antiracist approaches to transforming the way society treats Black and other people of color. Kendi's work has increasingly become relevant and practical to understanding antiracism and becoming an antiracist.

Early in Kendi's (2019) framing of antiracism, he challenged the positions of neutrality and nonracist in the face of racism. He asserted:

> One endorses either the idea of a racial hierarchy as a racist, or racial equality as an antiracist. One either believes problems are rooted in groups of people, as a racist, or locates the roots of problems in power and policies, as an antiracist. One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an antiracist. There is no in-between safe space of "not racist."
> (p. 9)

The notable difference between the two positions is action. One is either supporting racist policies or antiracist policies through direct action or the action of supporting others engaging in racist policies or antiracist policies, as well as the

expression of racist ideas or antiracist ideas (Kendi, 2019; Reynolds & Kendi, 2020; Zamalin, 2019). In a review, Sociologist Victor Ray (2020) stated that "it is impossible to understand American racism without a deep dive into history" (p. 75). Therefore, it is essential that antiracist efforts and antiracist individuals take more critical examinations of the history of racial inequity in the US and abroad.

Taking an in-depth examination of factors which define and contribute to racism is beyond the scope of this project. However, it is important to identify the prevailing themes that have produced and reproduced racism. Over time, racism has been cemented through the enactment of racist policies such as enslavement, segregation, white supremacy, inequitable distribution of power, and inaction (Aptheker, 1993; Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Feagin, 2014; Kendi, 2016; Kendi, 2019; Roberts & Rizzo, 2021; Sullivan, 2014). As previously addressed, racist ideas inform and are used to justify racist policies. Some authors have described racism as "avoidable" (Applebaum, 2019; Nelson & Dunn, 2011). As such, it will take intentional efforts when engaging in antiracism to dismantle racist policies. However, engagement in such racial equity efforts requires developing the capacity to identify the various ways in which racism operates in America.

Forms of Racism

It is difficult to explore the importance of antiracism without framing racism. This is because antiracism requires engaging in activities which dismantle and transform the various types of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Fleming, 2018; Hartigan, Jr., 2000; Kendi, 2016; Kendi, 2019; Zamalin, 2019). Antiracism requires a fundamental understanding of what the disease of racism is and how it structures society (Matias & Mackey, 2016, p.

34). This section provides working definitions of notable types of racism and their role in shaping contemporary society.

Kendi (2019) argued that terms like "institutional," "systemic," and "structural" racism are too vague and complicated to understand for those unfamiliar with how racism operates (p. 18). He contended that the term racist policy is more exacting because it names the problem and what the problem is doing, e.g., creating or sustaining racial inequity. One argument against Kendi's treatment of these other forms of racism comes from Ray (2020). Ray argued:

> While I agree with Kendi's understanding of racism as a matter of policy, I fear the analytical cost of completely abandoning the distinction between structural and psychological accounts. Psychological accounts of racism remain the cultural common-sense. The distinction between structural and individual accounts can show how racism becomes woven into policy through collective action. (p.75)

In short, the problem with Kendi's treatment of racism could obstruct the view of the psychological factors which shape individual's treatment of people of color and its relation to the maintenance of racial inequity. Bonilla-Silva (2001) agreed with Ray. He posited that an oversimplification of racism as racist policies that lead to racial inequity does not provide a thorough foundation to conceptualize the racial phenomenon (p. 45). What these two argued is that it is not enough to know that racism broadly leads to racial inequity. Rather, individuals must possess the critical capacity to question how and in what ways racism operates.

Therefore, improving one's understanding of racism and the various manifestations of racism leads to better understanding of how pervasive and historically

elusive racism has been to overcome for many individuals and society at-large (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Dyson, 2020; Fleming, 2018; King & Chandler, 2016; Mills, 1997; Mueller, 2020). The following section introduces notable forms of racism through literature. It is important to begin with the concept of race.

Race

The concept of race is vitally important to understanding racism and racists policies (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Clair & Denis, 2015; Kendi, 2019; Zamalin, 2019). Race is understood to be a social construct that assigns people to racial categories based on skin color (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Clair & Denis, 2015; Holst, 2020; Kendi, 2016; Kendi, 2019; Zamalin, 2019). Historically, race was constructed as early as the 15th century as Europeans encountered non-European civilizations (Clair & Denis, 2015; Holst, 2020; Kendi, 2016; Kendi, 2019; Zamalin, 2019). Categorizing human beings along race lines became one of the first ways Europeans "othered" non-Europeans.

This particular othering process was used to lump human beings into monolithic races (Kendi, 2016; Kendi, 2019), and became a tool to justify racist policies such as the genocide of Aboriginal People, the institution of chattel slavery, and contemporary forms of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Kendi, 2016; Mills, 1997). These policies are informed by a multitude of racist ideas that groups subjugated to racist policies are inferior whites. Bonilla-Silva (2021) illustrated the effects of race as a social construct:

When race emerged in human history, it formed a social structure (a racialized social system) that awarded systemic privileges to Europeans (the peoples who became "white") over non-Europeans (the peoples who became "nonwhite"). Racialized social systems, or white supremacy for short, became global and affected all societies where Europeans extended their reach. (p. 9)

This is what historian Oscar Handlin (1959) was referring to in discussing the shaping of the social order of America. He said, "Pick up the story where you will- in the eighteenth or nineteenth century or in our own times- and invariably in these matters the threads lead back to the seventeenth century" (p. 4). The end goal of race has been the justification of a racialized world with white Europeans positioned atop the social hierarchy. This form of racial stratification meant that the differences between people of color and white Europeans would create "hierarchically superposed racial groups" (Bonilla-Silva & Zuberi, 2008, p. 15).

Stated another way by bestselling author and journalist Ta-Nahesi Coates (2015), race has always been the child of racism- "not the father" (p. 7). The racist policy has always been to keep white Europeans atop social structures- race was used to justify the system. Kendi (2019) asserted that racist policies produce or sustain racial inequity; racist policies are inclusive of "written and unwritten laws, rules, procedures, processes, regulations, and guidelines that govern people" (p. 18). Therefore, racism has produced a regulated system which racially categorizes human beings at birth and has ties to social predictors of opportunity for every race group (Anderson, 2016; Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Feagin, 2014; Kendi, 2019; Tatum, 2017; Winters, 2020). As such, race is an instrumental tool of racism used to maintain white supremacy.

White Supremacy

According to Kendi (2019), racist ideas suggest that one racial group is inferior to other racial groups in any way (p. 15). White supremacy is the held belief that white people are superior to all other races- especially the Black race- and should be the dominating ideology and racial group (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Cross, 2020; DiAngelo, 2016; Feagin, 2014; Fleming, 2018; Matias & Mackey, 2015; Wingfield & Alston, 2013). Beginning by describing racism as the maintenance of white supremacy is important as racism has become the institutionalized way that white supremacy is manifested (Cross, 2020, p. 626). This is evidenced through racial inequities observed in educational outcomes, health disparities, wealth, etc. The common denominator continues to be that white-identified individuals outpace their BIPOC counterparts in access and opportunity to each of these categories (Anderson, 2016; Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Feagin, 2014; Kendi, 2019; Tatum, 2017; Winters, 2020).

While white supremacy ideology is the belief and rationalization that white people should sit atop social systems, it is the enactment of racist policies which creates this hierarchy. As Kendi (2019) stated, whoever creates the norm creates the hierarchy and places their race group atop the structure (p. 107). As one comes to understand the variations in types of racism, they can better understand the multitude of ways these variations manifest white supremacy. According to philosopher Charles Mills (1997), white supremacy has been the "political system that has made the modern world what it is today" (p. 1). This helps explain the often-unchallenged cultural norms surrounding whiteness and the maintenance of the racial status quo (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Wingfield & Alston, 2014).

Feagin (2014) defined white supremacy as white racism. White racism refers to centuries-long systemic racism that has preserved white advantage (p. 9). In short, white supremacy has locked in and protected white advantage in America since the inception of racial categories. Some scholars define white supremacy as a disease which afflicts the minds, emotions, and behaviors of white Americans (O'Brien, 1999, p. 307). One consequence of this disease is conservativism. Conservativism calls for the preservation of the status quo which is inherently beneficial to ruling classes (Zamalin, 2019, p. 18). Freire (2005) addressed conservativism in *Education for Critical Consciousness* (originally published in 1965). He said:

> As the dominant social class, they must preserve at all costs the social "order" in which they are dominant. They cannot permit any basic changes which would affect their control over decision-making. So from their point of view, every effort to supersede such an order means to subvert criminally. (p. 11)

It can be argued that conservative minds are threatened by the agenda of progressives because progressive agendas threaten to disrupt the routinization racist policies and white supremacy. Current calls for the elimination of CRT and antiracism are examples. However, Kendi (2019) asserted that the real threat to humanity is white supremacy, because it "poses an existential threat to human existence" (p. 93). This threat to human existence also speaks to the experiences of the least privileged white people.

White supremacy does not equally protect the social status of white people as a collective racial group. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s (2015) *The Radical King* is a collection of notable works which highlight his most revolutionary sentiments in addressing social and racial injustice. "The Drum Major Instinct" was a sermon he preached on February 4,

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1968- just two months before he was slain. Dr. King spoke to the desires of all people

wanting to be "out front" (p. 254) in the social standing of life. During a portion of this

sermon, Dr. King directly addressed poor white people he argued had been tricked to

believe that their lives were better simply because they were not Black. He said:

> Now that's a fact. That the poor white has been put into this position, where
>
> through blindness and prejudice, he is forced to support his oppressors. And the
>
> only thing he has going for him is the false feeling that he's superior because his
>
> skin is white- and can't hardly eat and make his ends meet week in and week out.
>
> (King, 2015, p. 260).

Examining any form of injustice requires an intersectional focus. According to

Shannon Sullivan (2014) in *Good White People: The Problem with Middle-class Anti-*

racism, "intersectionality can cover the significance of race" (p. 15). Therefore,

examining the significance of whiteness and social class, whiteness, and gender, etc. can

illuminate the complexity of white supremacy, and how marginalized social groups (i.e.,

class, gender, etc.) within the race are manipulated into to participating in white

supremacy. Scholars such as Oliver Cox and W.E.B. Du Bois addressed the intersections

of capitalism and white elites. Activist-scholar bell hooks (Beliso-DE Jesus & Pierre,

2019) and legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1988) incorporated Black feminist

perspectives in addressing racism and white supremacy.

Acknowledging the necessity of white women's voices in advancing antiracism,

hooks (1995) addressed white women's responsibilities in such efforts. She stated that

although white women are essential to speaking to the struggle of antiracism to other

white women, they must also learn how to speak with women of color to learn how not to

also "reinscribe and perpetuate white supremacy" (p. 105). For some, this begins with addressing Black people as Black people have often been antiracism's central focus (Zamalin, 2019, p. 12).

Antiblack Racism

Antiblack racism is concerned with the lived experiences of Black people and their interactions with white people (Feagin, 2014, p. 6). This may explain why antiblack racism has always been the primary focus of antiracism (Zamalin, 2019, p. 12). Antiblack racism is deeply embedded in the history of this society (Boykin et al., 2020, p. 777) and has structured the racist policies that have shaped the life opportunities of Blacks in America for more than 400 years. The ensuing centuries would consist of combatting antiblack racism through antiracist movements such as the abolition of slavery (Aptheker, 1993; Kendi, 2016), the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s (Gelber, 2016; McCoy, 2020; Rhoads, 2016; Rogers, 2012), to the 21st century Black Lives Matter movement in the face of police brutality (Boykin et al., 2020; McCoy, 2020; Murrell, 2020; South et al., 2020; Terry, 2021).

As the country has progressed, there have been political victories along the way. These victories have resulted in antiracist policies to protect Black communities. However, antiracist policies have not gone unchallenged and few authors have framed the maintenance of antiblack racism like historian Carol Anderson (2016) in *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide*. She referred to antiblack racism as "white rage." White rage describes the resistance to and the undermining of Black advancement by white people (p. 3).

According to Anderson (2016), white age presents as passive forms of racism (i.e., courts, legislation, and government bureaucracies) (p. 3). Institutions of higher education are not immune to acts of white rage that has contributed to the maintenance of racist policies. Historian Scott Gelber (2016) provided a narrative history of one such racist policy enacted through white rage that is still in operation today. The 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision outlawed segregation in public elementary schools. This decision influenced future court cases addressing segregation in schools.

In 1954, District Court Judge Morris Soper ruled that the University of North Carolina (UNC) had to admit three African American students who were denied admission due to their race. However, Soper reassured the university and its officials that it could continue to evaluate and make admission decisions based on "necessary qualifications" (p. 62). In 1958, UNC began requiring all of its applicants to submit Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores, which is a standardized test. The university knew from the onset that this admission policy would adversely affect the eligibility of Black applicants when factoring in Black students' inequitable educational opportunities in K-12 settings. Thus, this new practice would result in de facto segregation as de jure segregation was no longer protected by federal law.

According to economic policy expert Richard Rothstein (2013), "constitutionally forbidden segregation is commonly termed de jure, whereas racial isolation independent of state action is termed de facto" (p. 52). Rothstein explored the pervasive issue of de jure policies in *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How our Government Segregated America* (2018). He addressed how such policies have shaped America. De jure segregation takes place when segregation is protected by laws and public policies (p.

8), as opposed to de facto segregation which is upheld by unwritten customs and traditions (p. 216). Therefore, institutions like UNC have used de facto policies such as standardized testing and writing samples to create the illusion of equal opportunity. In reality, they have been aware that such racist policies have built-in barriers that inherently disadvantage racially marginalized communities, and ultimately leads to segregated communities and racial inequities in organizations. Whether de facto or de jure, both policies are racist policies because Black people are typically "left behind" (Kendi, 2019, p. 123) in academic opportunity.

De facto segregation also predicts outcomes for BIPOCs. During Reconstruction, Black people in the south identified education as a key resource for social liberation (Anderson, 1988; Washington, 2010). According to Washington (2009), classrooms filled with folks as old as their 70s- many of them had very little to no education, but aspired to become educators, lawyers, and politicians (Washington, 2009, p. 109). White rage showed its face when white liberals with extensive financial resources and their own racist ideas colonized and co-opted the educational experiences of Blacks in the south (Anderson, 1988; Rogers, 2012). White liberals agreed that Black people needed education to have a chance to be successful, but many believed that Black people were intellectually incapable of an education comparable to their white counterparts (Anderson, 1988; Rogers, 2012; Rury, 2020).

Thus, the "Hampton Model" of education was developed which emphasized industrial education over the more traditional education experienced by white people in the north. The Hampton Model was used as a tool to assure that very few Blacks would become the doctors, lawyers, and politicians they aspired to become. Instead, many

educated Black folks were coached into becoming teachers, preachers, and manual

laborers (Anderson, 1988; Du Bois, 2016; Rury, 2020; Washington, 2009). This issue

was exacerbated by the 1896 ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson* which maintained "separate but

equal" (i.e., legalized de jure segregation) (Rogers, 2012; Rury, 2020; Spring, 2013).

Anderson (2016) stated:

> White rage has undermined democracy, warped the Constitution, weakened the
>
> nation's ability to compete economically, squandered billions of dollars on
>
> baseless incarceration, rendered an entire region sick, poor, and woefully
>
> undereducated, and left cities nothing less than decimated. All this havoc has been
>
> wreaked simply because African Americans wanted to work, get an education,
>
> live in decent communities, raise their families, and vote. Because they were
>
> unwilling to take no for an answer. (p. 6)

Many white people tend to attribute the slow economic progress of Black people

in America to laziness (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Kendi, 2019; Reynolds & Kendi, 2020). The

argument is that Black people just don't work as hard as white people, which is then used

to justify their standing in the social hierarchy. Conversely, John Holst (2020) argued that

Black people's slow progress is the result of a lot of miseducation on issues and the

reproduction of racial hegemony (p. 183). Racial hegemony occurs when dominating

groups subordinate other racial groups through racist policies and ideologies (Brown,

2017, p. 1). Therefore, racial hegemony illuminates racist, colonial, imperial

epistemologies which are woven into institutions like higher education (Squire et al.,

2018, p. 6).

Still in the early part of the 21ˢᵗ century, Henrika McCoy (2020) pointed to the steep history of antiblack racism that has made change nearly impossible due to antiblack attitudes. She stated that these attitudes can be traced back to the first relationship between white and Black people (McCoy, 2020, p. 464) which led to the enslavement of Africans in what would eventually become America. It is this relationship which scholars such as Kendi (2016) and Zamalin (2019) contend are foundational to institutional and systemic racism.

Institutional/Systemic Racism

Kwame Ture (who changed his name from Stokely Carmichael), was a Black activist who was one of the former leaders of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). He was the first to coin the term "institutional racism" (Clair & Denis, 2015; O'Brien, 2007). Ture defined institutional racism as general instances of racial discrimination, exploitation, and domination in organizational and institutional contexts that are directed at Black people (Clair & Denis, 2015, p. 860). In short, institutional racism is the normalized racist practice of oppressing BIPOCs.

It is important to contextualize Ture's conception of institutional racism. As a student activist traveling throughout the Jim Crow south during in the Civil Rights, Black Power, and Black Campus Movements, Ture observed how embedded racism had become across social and political organizations. As such, Ture led the separatist and antiracist call for "Black Power" which was a call for Black people to define their own goals, lead their own organizations, and reject further participation in racist institutions (Rogers, 2012, p. 90).

Ture understood that institutional racism operates by embedding racist ideas and racist practices in social institutions (Fleming, 2018, p. 19). When this happens, racist ideas and racist policies become the norm by which racial inequity is reproduced. Consequently, institutionalized racism creates environments that are not conducive to the growth and development of all members of society- particularly those who have been racialized (Terry, 2021, p. 165). This leads to institutionalized barriers that creates racial inequities (Genao & Mercedes, 2021, p. 134). Institutional/systemic racism does have critics.

Jenny Williams (1985) critiqued that institutional racism as a system explicitly designed to operate against Black people is too simplistic of an explanation of racial inequity (p. 324). Anna Souhami (2014) maintained that the "lack of precision about the mechanisms, processes and relationships through which institutional racism is generated and sustained" (p. 6) is another significant criticism. Therefore, incorporating the aspect of organizations and systems into a structural theory of racial inequality can help better understand stability, change, and the institutionalization of racism (Ray, 2019, p. 30).

Structural Racism

Structural racism refers to the construction of racialized social systems and organizations, and how they reinscribe social arrangements and the racial hierarchy (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Boykin et al., 2020; Clair & Denis, 2015; Mullings, 2005; Ray, 2019). One way to frame structural racism is through the "racial contract" as theorized by Charles Mills. According to Mills (1997), the "racial contract" is:

Intended as a conceptual bridge between two areas now largely segregated from each other: on the one hand, the world of mainstream (i.e., white) ethics and political philosophy, preoccupied with discussions of justice and rights in the abstract, on the other hand, the world of Native American, African American, and Third and Fourth World political thought, historically focused on issues of conquest, imperialism, colonialism, white settlement, land rights, race and racism, slavery, jim crow, reparations, apartheid, cultural authenticity, national identity, indigenismo, Afrocentrism, etc. (p. 2)

The "bridge" Mills represents the connection to the lives of BIPOC and non-BIPOCs. One example of structural racism was the Federal Housing Act (FHA). The National Housing Act of 1934 created the FHA, which used the process of redlining to discriminate against Black people (Yearby, 2018, p. 1115). Banks often refused mortgages to African Americans or placed unfair terms and penalties for defaulting on loans when Black people were offered housing loans (Rothstein, 2017, p. 8). The policy was racist because it was not designed to create equitable housing opportunities for Black people, the policy had the *de jure* effect of sustaining racial segregation, and the policy adversely affected people of color. Today, an estimated 75% of neighborhoods that were redlined in the 1930s are the poorest communities nearly a century later (Winters, 2020, p. 54).

According to Ruqaiijah Yearby (2018) "FHA policies are an example of structural racism because Caucasians wrote the policies giving them the advantage in buying homes, while disadvantaging African Americans" (Yearby, 2018, p. 1116). While it is important to acknowledge the writers of such racist policies, it is important to

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acknowledge that not every person enacting racist policies were white. Decision-makers enacting or carrying out racist policies can also be people of color.

Internalized Racism

Institutionally, racist structures can be reproduced by individuals from racially minoritized groups as well (Berman & Paradies, 2010, p. 216). One symptom of structural racism is internalized racism (Berman & Paradies, 2010; Clair & Denis, 2015; Feagin, 2014; Matias & Mackey, 2016; Mills, 1997; Tatum, 2017; Terry, 2021; Walter et al., 2017). Paul Terry (2021) described internalized racism as "the acceptance by stigmatized races of negative messages about their own abilities and intrinsic value" (p. 165). In other words, internalized racism is the conscious or unconscious acceptance of racist ideas regarding racialized groups, which can have negative consequences on the views and beliefs of one's own racial group.

Berman & Paradies (2010) argued that internalized racism occurs when individuals incorporate racial ideologies in their worldview which serves to maintain or exacerbate inequities of power and opportunity between racial groups (p. 217). According to scholars Angela Walter, Yvonne Ruiz, Robbie Tourse, Helene Kress, Betty Morningstar, Bet MacArthur, and Ann Daniels (2017):

> The normalization of racism in daily life involves the internalization of the dominant group's values, norms, and ideas. The unconscious acceptance of the privilege and supremacy of the dominant group is especially insidious as marginalized groups adapt to the negative and critical beliefs about one's position in society. (p. 214)

Psychologist Beverly Tatum (2017) posited an important consideration in the well-received *Why are All of the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* She stated, "we are not at fault for the stereotypes, distortions, and omissions that shaped our thinking as we grew up" (p. 83). People of color cannot blame themselves for the overwhelming racist ideas they have consumed for centuries. Internalized ideas are shaped by external social and political forces. W. E. B. Du Bois himself struggled with some internalized ideas in his early work. In reflection of his early work, Du Bois (2007) stated:

> As I looked out into my racial world the whole thing verged on tragedy. My "way was cloudy" and the approach to its high goals by no means straight and clear. I saw the race problem was not as I conceived, a matter of clear, fair competition, for which I was ready and eager. It was rather a matter of segregation, of hindrance and inhibitions, and my struggles against this and resentment at it began to have serious repercussions upon my inner life. (p. 66)

Although he had a critical view of racial inequity, a younger Du Bois saw the world as a fair place with himself a member of the Black race who was simply "ready and eager" (p. 66) to meet the country's challenges. He viewed many of his Black counterparts failing to have the same level of work ethic. In other words, Du Bois tended to see Black people as lazy in his youth. He failed to acknowledge that the odds were deeply stacked against entire communities of people of color-Black people in particular. One can argue his worldview was socialized by his experiences as a privileged biracial man growing up in the northern part of the U.S. where he also attended more affluent schools. As such, he attributed racial disparities to be a lack of effort on the part of Black

people, rather than the imbalance of social and economic power. Such a worldview can also make folks colorblind to the issues facing BIPOCs.

Color-blind Racism

Kendi (2019) asserted that denial is the heartbeat of racism (p. 9). If denial is the heartbeat of racism, one can argue that being color-blind visually distorts one's view of racial inequity. Bonilla-Silva (2021) is credited with developing the framework of color-blind racism. This concept asserts that Americans believe they have been living in a post-racial society since the civil rights era of the 1960s (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Cabrera et al., 2017; Daughtry et al., 2020; Diggles, 2014; Harper, 2012; Roberts & Rizzo, 2021). The changing of laws, the relative social advancement of people of color, and even Barack Obama's presidency have been used as benchmarks of change. However, racial inequity has withstood time. As such, it is argued that color-blind perspectives have created mental barriers that have barricaded white people from the racial reality of life in the U.S. (Bonilla-Silva, 2021, p. 234).

Fleming (2018) referred to this idea as the "Whites-Only White-Supremacy Fallacy." This is the false idea that evidence of white supremacy and racism requires that every person of color must be deprived of all rights and resources (p. 24). So, if one racialized person can break racial barriers, then racism and white supremacy no longer exist. Therefore, color-blind racists have specialized in either rejecting racial inequities altogether, or minimizing and obscuring the broader realities of racial inequity.

Minimization gaslights the issues of white supremacy and racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; DiAngelo, 2021; Fleming, 2018; Harper, 2012; Hill, 2020). According to Shaun Harper (2012), minimization causes people to see discrimination solely through the lens

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of overt and outrageously racist acts (p. 12). Therefore, people tend to believe that racism

consists of intentional and isolated incidents (O'Brien & Korgen, 2007, p. 359).

Minimization downplays the role of race in predicting the life opportunities of BIPOCs

(Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Bryan, 2012; Driver, 2011; Harper, 2012). Minimization distorts

racial inequities as well as how racist policies are blended into society over time.

Additionally, when people minimize racism or fail to see how racism is a fixed

part of society, concepts such as white supremacy and racism become obscured and/or

reserved for the most egregious acts of racial harm (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; DiAngelo, 2021;

Hill, 2020; Tisby, 2021). During a self-critique exploring racism in health services,

Rachel Hardeman and J'Mag Karbeah (2020) stated:

> The traditional notions of white supremacy keep us focused on hate groups and
>
> vulgar language rather than a culture and ideology born from the premise of black
>
> inferiority and false notions of race as biological that have permeated the ways in
>
> which we conduct our research. (Karbeah, 2020, p. 777)

This reiterates the issue that many people- particularly white people- struggle to

see how racism and racist behavior evolve over time. Racism and white supremacy then

become exclusively reserved to describe the most extreme and inflammatory incidents

and events (Hill, 2020, p. 7), rather than every day and more subtle expressions of racism.

Additionally, minimization has the negative effect of undermining the achievement of

people from racially marginalized groups (Driver, 2011, p. 177). Such practices take for

granted just how difficult it is to reach higher levels of success as members of racially

marginalized communities. Booker T. Washington (2009) was born into the forced labor

system of enslavement and eventually became a college president who once dined in the

White House. He eloquently stated, "I have learned that success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed" (p. 57).

Lastly, colorblindness serves as a race-neutral position which centers people's intentions (King & Chandler, 2016, p. 8) over their potential racial harm (or impact). Kimberly Diggles (2014) offered recommendations for teaching students how to address issues related to race and racism. She argued that even with the best intentions, colorblind attitudes ignore how and in what ways certain laws and policies (1) imply white superiority, (2) privilege white people, and (3) adversely affect racialized communities. As such, focusing on human intent encourages a culture of individual actions and attitudes toward racialized people and ignores how racially discriminatory systems are produced and reproduced.

DiAngelo (2021) brought critical attention to the growing culture of niceness in *Nice Racism: How Progressive White People Perpetuate Racial Harm*. She argued that niceness is a progressive white tactic which only "requires racism to be acknowledged in actions that intentionally hurt or discriminate, which means that racism can rarely be acknowledged" (p. 49). Again, this speaks to how contemporary racism is often obscured when people associate racism with the most blatantly obvious events. For instance, the murder of George Floyd- a Black man who died as three police officers kneeled on his neck, back, and legs as he suffocated to death for roughly nine-minutes.

DiAngelo argued that niceness is simply a basic trait which is a universal expectation of human encounters (p. 53). So, nice people do not go above and beyond what should be basic respect for all human beings. Furthermore, challenging racism

"requires conflict, and conflict is forbidden in a culture of niceness" (p. 50). Therefore, being nice does not engage in the conflict required to disrupt racial inequities. Rather, niceness surface-level respect for human beings without the structural work required to repair harm.

Seeking to be nice can improve personal relationships across races. However, niceness can also produce blind spots. A blind spot "refers to the ways in which most of us, including the most well intentioned and those who vigorously oppose discrimination, are susceptible to unconscious biases toward stigmatized groups and individuals" (Walter et al., 2017, p. 216). While one may be working to be nice, they can still perpetuate racial harm (DiAngelo, 2021, p. 171). Therefore, being colorblind and racially biased can perpetuate aversive responses to transforming society.

Aversive Racism

One can argue that the types of racism named in this chapter are overt forms of racism. There is another form of racism that is more subtle, but still exacerbates racial inequity. This type of racism is aversive racism. Audrey Murrell (2020) conducted a study seeking to understand if well-intentioned people can still produce racial harm. She defined aversive racists as those who "profess egalitarian attitudes, yet engage in subtle forms of discriminatory behaviors and avoid overt displays of bias in intergroup exchanges" (p. 63). Aversive racists seek to avoid tension, emotions, and conflict with racialized communities that surface in the face of racial injustice (Farr, 2004, p. 158). One of the most notable examples is a letter written by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

In April of 1963, Dr. King as well as his fellow activists and organizers were arrested in Birmingham, Alabama for violating a city order against public protests. While

incarcerated, King's (2016) "Letter from Birmingham Jail" was written to address eight ministers who criticized his nonviolent direct-action. In the letter, Dr. King expressed his utter disappointment with the white moderate in America. He described white moderates as individuals who are more devoted to order rather than justice; they prefer negative peace which is void of social tension rather than positive peace which is reflective of justice; they agree in principle with the goals of civil rights, but disagree with the direct-action to secure civil rights; he argued that the white moderate ultimately believes in a timeline or season for social change rather than an urgency to realize racial justice (p. 135).

Aversive racists attempt to avoid BIPOCs and avoid coming off as cold in their personal dealings with racialized people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 105). Tatum (2017) dedicated a section of *Why are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* to explore the concept of aversive racism. She stated that because of the lack of close contact between white people and racialized people, cross cultural interactions can generate uneasiness with white people which causes them to avoid or withdraw from such situations (p. 200). This is where the term "aversive" arises. However, because white people do not experience the same negative consequences of racism (i.e., being racially profiled, police brutality, number of students on average attending poor schools, etc.), this could explain their inability to fully understand the urgency and tactics used by racialized people to achieve racial equity.

Racist Defined

Producing and reproducing racist systems requires people in positions of power to produce, reproduce, and enact racist policies (Kendi, 2019, p. 91). These people are

otherwise known as racists. According to Kendi (2019), a racist is "one who is supporting a racist policy through their actions or inaction or expressing a racist idea" (p. 11). Therefore, anyone in any moment can actively or passively support a racist policy. Kendi shared that "'racist' and 'antiracist' are like peelable name tags that are placed and replaced based on what someone is doing or not doing, supporting or expressing in each moment" (p. 17). This requires a fundamental understanding of how racism is reproduced.

Socialization refers to the norms and ways of doing things that are widely accepted in any given society (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Curry & Curry, 2018; Fleming, 2018; Tatum, 2017). Several scholars have agreed that one reason racism is pervasive is that beginning in childhood, people are socialized in a world of racist policies and practices (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Fleming, 2018; Tatum, 2017). When one is socialized into the accepted or uninterrupted ways of society, they view the ideas, practices, and values as socially acceptable, even if such policies and ideas are morally and/or ethically unjust.

Being socialized to accept racist policies and racist ideas shapes the feelings, perceptions, emotions, and beliefs one has about all racial groups while also informing responses to racial matters (Curry & Curry, 2018, p. 675). Bonilla-Silva (2021) went as far to say "it would be silly to believe that racism has not affected how we see ourselves and even shaped many of our preferences (the phenomenon of "colorism" is but one clear example how the aesthetics of whiteness affect us) (p. 24). So, some people may struggle to see and even feel the need to investigate racism because the very essence of racist beliefs and practices can be perceived as normal. These feelings can be felt even within the most progressive individuals.

Scholars agree that no matter how liberal one's background is, one can engage in racist manners because all humans are socialized within a racist world (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Fleming, 2018; Garran et al., 2015; Kendi, 2019; Walter et al., 2017). As an example, one can refer to Dr. King (2016) and his growing impatience with the white moderate who is more focused on order than justice (p. 135). Fleming (2018) offered a critique of the first Black President of the U.S., Barack Obama. As popular as he was among liberals and progressives, President Obama still deported more undocumented immigrants than any other President before him, and President Obama never publicly condemned or acknowledged systemic racism and police violence in the aftermath of the killing of Michael Brown. He also publicly gave a no excuses speech in response to damaged property by freedom fighters. However, he never exclaimed no excuses in response to rising reports of police officers accused of sexually assaulting and raping Black women (p. 86).

President Obama brought the conversation full circle with understanding the complexity of racism. Specifically, the question of whether BIPOCs can be racist, or at the very least, if BIPOCs can fail to recognize when they are inconsistent in their antiracist efforts. Tatum (2017) offered a unique perspective. She stated that if the mere question of who can be racist relies on the definition of racism itself and racial prejudice, then all people can be racist. However, if the focus of racism is racial prejudice plus power, then only white people can be racist because BIPOCs cannot systemically benefit from racist systems (p. 86).

According to Fleming (2018), a basic view of racism would contend that racism only exists where resources and power are primarily held by white people (p. 24). By

Kendi's (2019) definition, racists are not just people in white communities who lock in their power. Racists can be anyone who directly or indirectly, intentionally, or unintentionally, support the perpetuation of racist policies and racist ideas, or fail to speak out against them (p. 11). Therefore, people from racialized groups with historically limited social power can perpetuate racism (Berman & Paradies, 2010; Fleming, 2018; Kendi, 2019). Such a point is elevated in spaces where racialized people are in power and decision-making positions, but general racial inequities persist. Thus, the question of who can be racist is also relative to one's definition (Tatum, 2017, p. 86).

Critical Race Theory Before Antiracism

Just as there are several frameworks in which the issues of race and racism are studied in the U.S. One framework is Critical Race Theory (CRT) which will be briefly introduced and distinguished from antiracism. CRT is focused here because through the review of literature for this study, CRT was one of the most referenced frameworks.

Critical Race Theory

CRT arose in the 1970s (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and was grounded in critical legal studies and radical feminism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 19). According to Patton, Harper, and Harris (2015), CRT was birthed of the frustrations of notable legal scholars such Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman (among others) who were frustrated with structural change in the U.S. in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement (p. 196). This new framework would provide a lens for examining racial reform in the U.S. and the country's failure to address the adverse effects of racism (Genao & Mercedes, 2021; Hiraldo, 2010; Patton et al., 2015). CRT also offers space for scholars of color to critically examine issues of racism

(Cabrera et al., 2017, p. 19). As such, much of CRT scholarship is authored by scholars of color. Additionally, CRT has created space for activists and scholars to explore and understand the intersections of oppression connected to white supremacy, sexism, homophobia, ableism, classism, the LGBT+ community, etc. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Genao & Mercedes, 2021).

CRT was introduced in education by Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) in the article "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education." In this work, the authors argued that (1) race is a significant factor in determining inequity and life chances in the U.S.; (2) U.S. society is based on property rights (or power); and (3) the intersection of race and power creates a tool to understand inequity. Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) also argued that while education has continued to promote multicultural education, little attention is given to the tensions that arise when diverse groups are gathered together, and that only frameworks centering the issue of race can transform societies.

For nearly 50-years, CRT has provided a framework to explore how endemic the issue of racism in the U.S. This work arguably provided the foundation of antiracist scholarship by connecting the social construct of race to life opportunity and racial justice. Likewise, the next practical step would be to develop and enact frameworks that would use race as a tool to create racial equity.

Contemporary Research on Antiracism and Antiracist Efforts

According to Samuel Museus, María Ledesma, and Tara Parker (2015), history and context are important when it comes to conversations on racism (p. 16). While history reveals extensive evidence of antiracist efforts, this section will focus on

contemporary research in higher education. This will add to the necessity of a study which explores how one REC conceptualizes antiracism and employs antiracist policies and antiracist ideas.

Activists Movements

Holst (2020) stated that contemporary research in educational settings has focused on historical strategies for challenging racism (p. 185). Scholars argue that engaging in diversity efforts in higher education did not seriously take place until the civil rights era of the 1950s to the early 1970s (Conner, 2020; Patton, 2010; Rogers, 2012; Wheatle & Commodore, 2019). Historians regard the Civil Rights/Jim Crow era as the most critical period for social change (Rhoads, 2016; Rogers, 2012). It was during these periods that Black and other students utilized antiracist action to respond to social injustices such as the murder of Emmett Till, the pervasive issue of Jim Crow segregation laws, and voting restrictions on communities of color that served to dehumanize the lived experiences of Black and other people of color. College students engaged in community efforts of resistance and turned inward to face these and similar issues at the university (Broadhurst, 2014; Patton, 2010; Rogers, 2012). It was also during these periods that "students on campuses across the country staged demonstrations to realize social justice outcomes for their communities" (Wheatle & Commodore, 2019, p. 6).

Kendi authored *The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Racial Reconstitution of Higher Education,1965-1972*, which was published in 2012 under his former last name of "Rogers." The Black Campus Movement (BCM) was an extension of the CRM and the Black Power Movement (BPM) of the 1960s. Rogers (2012) narrated the history of social struggles related to racial inequity in society while describing the

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strategies and demands student activists employed. All of this occurred while fighting for racial equity through the implementation of antiracist policies that were not federally recognized in disenfranchised Black communities (i.e., voting and segregation laws). Marc Robinson (2012) noted that Kendi's work contributed to extensive literature on Black student activism during this period, and is "the first work to compile such an inclusive account of actions nationwide" (p. 978). Shirletta Kinchen (2014) expanded by arguing that Kendi provided a fresh perspective of the many ways students involved in off-campus civil disobedience then turned to universities to challenge institutional racism (p. 125).

Largely led by Black student activists, demands included desegregating all functions of the university (i.e., Board of Trustees, Greek life organizations, student housing, etc.), incorporating cultural studies courses (i.e., Black Studies), additional funding for Black spaces (i.e., Black Cultural Centers), and shared-governance and voice in institutional decision-making (Broadhurst, 2014; Patton, 2010; Rogers, 2012). An argument can be made that the efforts of student activists coupled with the efforts and support of activists such as Malcom X, Martin Luther King, Jr., Ella Baker, and Dick Gregory aided the passage of the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965. The HEA of 1965 increased financial resources to students as well as provided additional federal funding to colleges and universities (Rogers, 2012, p. 27). Therefore, Black students and their racialized counterparts were now being afforded more opportunities to persist.

In *We are an African People: Independent Education, Black Power, and the Radical Imagination*, Russell Rickford (2016) authored a history of Black educational movements in the 1970s. This period saw activist-intellectuals challenge Black

communities to rethink the education of Black youth and challenged these communities

to take control of Black schooling in the aftermath of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of*

Education decision to racially integrate public elementary schools. In Harlem, not only

was the average Black student two to four years behind their white peers in academic

performance, but the average Black student's performance also fell further behind the

longer they attended public schools (p. 24).

Rickford (2016) introduced readers to several schools such as Marcus Garvey's

Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and Elijah Muhammad's Nation of

Islam. These schools "sought to create a separate, orderly black world as a shield against

systemic white racism" (p. 74). Inspired by the contributions of organizations such as the

Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Mississippi Freedom

Movement, Freedom Schools for Black students were founded which adopted concepts of

non-violent demonstrations to secure the equal privileges of citizenship their white

counterparts experienced. Freedom Schools increased the real possibility of Black

education becoming an emancipatory experience that could compete with the dominant

society (p. 81). It was important for these schools to improve the literature in their

libraries and introduce children to works and activities associated with social critique by

Black authors.

Clarence Taylor (2017) credited Rickford with adequately narrating how the

failures of integration served to promote the establishment of independent Black schools

(p. 880). What Rickford and Kendi were able to do was introduce the antiracist actions

taken, guided by antiracist ideas, to create equitable schooling experiences that would

provide opportunities for Black students to flourish. Equally important was to assure that

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all students, regardless of race, were humanized. This speaks to understanding the lived experiences of the racially minoritized.

Types of Antiracists

There are different types of antiracist approaches. BIPOC antiracists may work to integrate within existing social structures and systems of power while others may seek to divest from these systems by building racially independent communities (Brown, 2017, p. 4). There are other ideas of thought that often spark differing perspectives about the work of antiracists. Bonilla-Silva (2021) said:

> Being an antiracist begins with understanding the institutional nature of racial matters and accepting that all actors in a racialized society are affected materially (receive benefits or disadvantages) and ideologically by the racial structure. This stand implies taking responsibility for your unwilling participation in these practices and beginning a new life committed to the goal of achieving real racial equality. (p. 16)

Antiracism is not one-size fits all. Antiracism can be contextual to the aims of the movement. For instance, Zamalin (2019) introduced six types of antiracists (1) liberals such as Frederick Douglass, Ida B. Wells, and Martin Luther King, Jr. who advocated for self-determination through claims of preserving liberty and dignity through laws, (2) socialists such as Hubert Harrison, Fred Hampton, and T. Thomas Fortune cultivated networks of resistance that challenged the exploitive nature of capitalism, (3) feminists such as Maria Stewart, bell hooks, Kimberlé Crenshaw asserted that Black liberation relies on ending the oppressive system of patriarchy that often surfaces during antiracist movements, (4) nationalists such as Marcus Garvey, Malcom X, and Amiri Baraka

advanced Black freedom by promoting self-governing and Black-led communities, (5) participatory democrats such as Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) promoted collective action, and (6) queer theorists such as James Baldwin, Audre Lorde, and Feminista Jones defend the liberation of the LGBTQ+ community by challenging what is socially acceptable and deemed normal. However, there is another category of antiracists: white antiracists.

White Antiracists

Sociologist Eileen O'Brien (2007) is most known for her work on white antiracism. She identified several types of white antiracism. One type is critical antiracism. Individuals operating under the critical tenet generally believe that (1) race is a social construct functioning to preserve the power of the racially dominating group (i.e., white people), (2) asserts that white people are the most privileged group in the power majority, (3) there are various expressions of racism (i.e., hate crimes, cultural racism, and systemic racism), (4) white-identifying people aim to change BIPOCs to be like them cultural imperialism (i.e. assimilation), and (5) antiracism is not diversity or multicultural work because the core of the work aims to shift power dynamics along racial lines rather than enhance sensitivity to other racial groups (p. 428). Critical antiracism recognizes that racism must be deeply interrogated within oneself to understand the various ways in which racism operates at the social and individual levels.

Robin DiAngelo (2021) is also a well-known antiracist educator whose work focuses on white people. For white people, she holds that their "voices and perspectives on racism and anti-racism are critical" (p. 174) to transforming society. This is especially when true when factoring in the policy change aspect of antiracism. She stated that

"policy change must be taken up simultaneously with personal and interpersonal work" (p. 17). As such, reflexivity is an important first step for white antiracists in recognizing their roles in reproducing and/or dismantling racism.

According to O'Brien (2007), white antiracists spend a lot of time questioning their personal relationship with communities of color and how white people can reduce their role as perpetrators of racism (p. 429). White antiracists also view whiteness as a social privilege "in a hierarchy, standing in direct contrast to 'color and power' evasive individuals who profess to 'ignore' race, and hence racism along with it" (O'Brien, 1999, p. 309). Therefore, white antiracists see not only the privileges awarded to folks who are white, but the responsibility they carry to use their privilege toward racial equity. There are different ways which spark white people to orient themselves toward antiracist action.

One way that white antiracism can be engaged is through the process of transformative love. Transformative love occurs when people cross racial boundaries and develop more intimate relationships with BIPOCs (O'Brien, 2007, p. 430). This may occur through long-term relationships or the birth of a bi-racial child. These types of antiracists are more likely to experience empathy as the actual target of the racist incident, rather than experience as an observer (O'Brien, 2007, p. 430). This can happen by being told by one's loved ones that they disagree with their relationship, being outright disowned by one's family or experiencing race-based confrontations in public. It is through these encounters and experiences that a non-BIPOC can have their love for BIPOCs transformed.

Barriers to Antiracism

Antiracism refers to the collection of ideologies, practices, and policies which challenge racism (Arellano & Vue, 2019; DiAngelo, 2021; Grosland, 2019; Kendi, 2019; O'Brien, 2007; O'Brien, 2009; Zamalin, 2019) and results in structural and systemic change. Research has shown that race is a significant variable of life opportunity (Anderson, 2016; Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Feagin, 2014; Harper, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Harper et al., 2009; Kendi, 2019; Winters, 2020). Therefore, it is an urgent matter of justice to address racial inequity. While antiracist efforts intentionally center race to transform racial inequity, there are several detractors that exacerbate these issues.

Denial

Kendi (2019) stated that the heartbeat of racism and the biggest obstacle to overcome is denial (p. 9). Denial is an issue for a multitude of reasons. Some people believe that racism does not exist or no longer exists because the United States is in a post-racial society (Acho, 2020; Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Fleming, 2018; Katz-Fisherman et al., 2014; Kendi, 2019; Roithmayr, 2014; Tatum, 2017). This color-blind fallacy of a post-racial society refers to the belief that racism no longer exists nor contributes to racial division within society (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Fleming, 2018; Katz-Fisherman et al., 2014; Harper 2012; Hudson, 2020; Kendi, 2019; O'Brien, 2007; Roithmayr, 2014; Tatum, 2017). This is often attributed to monumental events in society such as emancipation, the extension of voting rights, desegregation, and the election of the first Black President in Barack Obama (Tatum, 2017, p. 30). It is those who believe that the U.S. is in a post-racial society who remain convinced that racism is a thing of the past.

Another reason deniers may see racism as a thing of the past could be their inability to understand how racism has transformed over time. New racism is "the adaption of racism over time so that modern norms, policies, and practices result in similar racial outcomes as those in the past, while not appearing to be explicitly racist" (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 39). The problem this creates is that new racism obscures racial inequities. Racial inequities and racism are obscured beyond comprehension of most people due to a lack of engagement in educational experiences and workshops that elucidate the pervasiveness of racism (Applebaum, 2019; Fleming, 2018; Manglitz et al., 2014).

When individuals are uneducated on the complexity of racial inequity and racism, concepts like white supremacy and prejudice are "often exclusively reserved to describe the most extreme, violent, and inflammatory expressions" (Hill, 2020, p. 7) of racism. Simplifying such concepts to be defined as the most extreme incidents creates and reproduces ignorance. Sometimes this ignorance is willful. Barbara Applebaum (2019) critically examined the problem with relying on implicit bias trainings as a cornerstone of institutional change. She argued that the "refusal to know allows the systemically privileged to 'misunderstand, misinterpret, and/or ignore whole parts of the world' and it preserves ignorance" (p. 138).

The reproduction of ignorance fuels denial which pushes the conceptualization of such concepts like racism, oppression, white supremacy, etc. beyond the reach of dominating groups- particularly those who benefit most from a racist society. The way to make racism visible is by actively rejecting racism in institutional and instructional contexts (Alderman et al., 2019, p. 1). This cannot happen when the most common

response to raised concerns of racial inequity is denial that racism is the problem or exists at all. This is why dialogue is important. True and authentic dialogue is not a simple conversation, but conversation that embodies critical thinking reflective of lived reality for the purpose of transformation (Freire, 2000, p. 92). So, individuals must not only enter conversations with the intent to discuss the matter at-hand, but with the intent to take action which transforms the problematic areas of the item at-hand.

Conversely, Freire described anti-dialogue. Anti-dialogue lacks love does not create critical attitudes that promote reflection and action, and lacks empathy (Freire, 2000; Freire, 2005). Anti-dialogue also aims to keep the oppressed silenced through pure denial or the redirection of the conversation. The dichotomy between dialogue and anti-dialogue is central to understanding not only how racist systems are upheld and reproduced. This dichotomy helps explain how some white people fail to acknowledge whiteness and their white privilege.

Acknowledging Whiteness and White Privilege

Scholarship on antiracism gives a great deal of attention to deconstructing and addressing the prevalence of whiteness (Hartigan, 2000; Jaima, 2021; Kendi, 2019). Whiteness does not solely speak to the racial categorization of being white (Jaima, 2021, p. 80). Whiteness refers to the collection of social power gained and formed through colonialism, slavery, segregation, and oppression (Ohito, 2021, p. 1). As a result, whiteness becomes the normative structure in society that marginalizes POCs and privileges their white counterparts (Cabrera et al., 2017, p. 17). There is a difference between understanding whiteness and aligning oneself with whiteness. According to

Amir Jaima (2021), "identification with whiteness entails a sense of superiority and the adoption of a particular orientation toward state sanctioned violence" (p. 80).

Whiteness functions to preserve social and economic power for those racially categorized as white and is used to exert control over racialized groups (Du Bois, 2016; Fleming, 2018; Gorski & Erakat, 2019; Jaima, 2021; O'Brien, 2007; Ohito, 2021; Squire et al., 2018). For example, the police have a legacy as slave patrols used to preserve chattel slavery and prevent slave revolts (McCoy, 2020, p. 470). In the days of chattel slavery, the American Colonization Act (ACS) was used to promote the removal of free Black people to West Africa (Hannah-Jones, 2021, p. 23). A move that preserved whiteness as free and Blackness as bondage.

The Naturalization Act of 1790 required immigrants to be white in order to become naturalized citizens (DiAngelo, 2021, p. 28). This only extended citizenship rights to white people. Today, *de facto* redlining continues to be used to preserve segregation which materially benefits white people through health, wealth, and education while disadvantaging BIPOCs (Lavalley & Robinson, 2020; McCoy, 2020; Rothstein, 2017; Yearby, 2018).

To be antiracist, individuals must be committed to understanding how oppression is inextricably linked to white privilege (DiAngelo, 2021; Fleming, 2018; O'Brien, 2007). However, scholars have argued that white people often struggle to engage in conversations discussing race, racism, and their functions to preserve power in dominating groups (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Fleming, 2018; Manglitz et al., 2014; O'Brien, 1999; O'Brien, 2007). One argument is that white people tend to disagree on the

existence of white privilege as a natural advantage given at birth compared to their peers of color (O'Brien, 2007, p. 428).

White privilege refers to the systemic advantages of being white (DiAngelo, 2018; DiAngelo, 2021; Rebollo-Gil & Moras, 2006; Tatum, 2017). Such an advantage increases the chances for more quality education, healthcare, economic status, etc. of white people. According to Tatum (2017), if white people:

> Lived, worked, or gone to school in predominantly White settings, they may simply think of themselves as being part of the racial norm and take this for granted without conscious consideration of their White privilege, the systematically conferred advantages they receive simply because they are White. (p.170)

It is important to acknowledge that white privilege does not suggest that white people never experience any form of oppression like exploitation or marginalization. Just before his death in 1968, Dr. King preached a sermon titled "The Drum Major Instinct." King (2016) preached that white people were put into a blind social position where they were forced to support their oppressors. "And the only thing he has going for him is the false feeling that he's superior because his skin is white- and can't hardly eat and make his ends meet week in and week out (p. 237).

Dr. King was acknowledging that poor white people were also victimized by white elites. However, poor white people are tricked to believe that they are superior to racialized groups simply because they believe the lie that "white" equates to superiority. Simply put, white people often fail to acknowledge that race is a significant predictor of opportunity (Acho, 2020; Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Fleming, 2018; Katz-Fisherman et al.,

2014; Kendi, 2019; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Roithmayr, 2014; Tatum, 2017).

However, racial inequality shows staggering data.

In 2014, 71% of white families were homeowners compared to 45% of Latin American families and 41% of Black families (Kendi, 2019, p. 18). A study of more than 700, 000 stops as part of the controversial Stop and Frisk policy in New York City found that 90% of the stops were men of color with 88% of those stops yielding no evidence of wrongdoing (Bellin, 2014, p. 1498). During the global COVID-19 pandemic, studies showed that counties with higher proportions of Black families had higher numbers of confirmed cases of the deadly virus than their white counterparts (Carethers, 2021; Peek et al., 2021). John Carethers (2021) found that when controlling for variables outside of race, Black people were 3.6 times more likely, Indigenous People were 3.4 times more likely, and Latin Americans were 3.2 times more likely to die of the virus compared to their white counterparts (p. 465).

Reliance on Diversity Trainings and Workshops

Paul Terry (2021) argued that systemic reform must encompass trainings that encompass equity and inclusion (p. 163). Diversity trainings and workshops typically incorporate activities which introduce and educate participants on concepts like implicit bias, prejudice, microaggressions, etc., and the various ways such concepts shape the lived experiences of human beings. These activities have been known to have a positive effect on individual participants. For one, participants can become aware of personal biases and how acting on their biases is harmful to others (Applebaum, 2019, p. 131). However, there are growing concerns over the utility of these workshops today.

Implicit Bias Training (IBT), often referred to as unconscious bias training, is "designed to increase the awareness of implicit or unconscious prejudice and its impact on behavior" (Applebaum, 2019, p. 131). Particularly addressing racial bias, racial biases can inform one's attitudes and actions toward people of color (Feagin, 2013, p. 3). IBTs can be a helpful resource in assisting individuals in becoming self-aware while confronting harmful thoughts and behaviors that perpetuate discrimination and racial inequity (Pritlove et al., 2019, p. 502). Attending diversity trainings and workshops can lead individuals to becoming aware of racial injustice. Some individuals may engage in antiracist efforts based on their experiences attending antiracism workshops (O'Brien & Korgen, 2007, p. 367).

As such, diversity trainings and workshops are helpful for understanding bystander intervention. Murrell (2020) addressed bystander intervention as she explored the concept of aversive racism. According to Murrell, research shows that when other people are around during an emergency or crisis, it is unlikely that a bystander will step in to assist the victim. Considerations that contribute to the decision not to intervene are the type of situation (i.e., violent, racial profiling, etc.), location of the event (i.e., public or private), characteristics of the victim (i.e., race, gender, etc.), attributes of bystanders (i.e., fitness level, age, etc.), the ability of bystander to communicate with each other, and the assessment of danger bystanders may endure as a potential result of their intervention (i.e., what can happened to bystander) (p. 64). In other words, bystanders not only factor in what is taking place in the situation, but what can be a potential consequence to the respective bystander. According to Murrell (2020):

The awareness to notice and perceive an event (or warning signs) define the event

as requiring action /intervention, taking responsibility for acting (i.e., feel a sense

of personal duty) and having a sufficient level of self-efficacy (i.e., perceived

competence to successfully intervene) to effectively intervene.

(p. 64)

Murrell made an interesting argument for promoting diversity workshops and

trainings. Specifically, trainings and workshops are not simply about raising awareness of

one's own implicit bias. From the standpoint of justice, diversity trainings and workshops

also serve as useful tools for raising bystander behavior that results in intervening on

behalf of victims during these events.

However, one concern is that there tends to be an overreliance on diversity

trainings (Boykin et al., 2020, p. 779). For one, diversity trainings center individual

change and not systemic change. As Derald Wing Sue (2003) acknowledged, it simply is

not enough to rely on individuals or the institution to become bias-free and culturally

sensitive (p. 231). The underlying assumption is that it is the responsibility of each

individual participant to change the structure. Another challenge with diversity and

implicit bias trainings is that these activities typically take place for just one day or even

less than a day (Hudson, 2020, p. 1).

According to Applebaum (2019), diversity trainings are just a first step, while the

worst they can do is avoid legal consequences while maintaining the status quo (p. 140).

Protection of the status quo is not change. Protection of the status quo is routine

maintenance. Therefore, diversity trainings must not become symbolic gestures which

lead to illusions of change. Rather, diversity trainings must be intentional in their efforts to educate participants in the respective subject matter.

The Illusion of Accountability and Change

Patton (2016) argued that higher education has failed to address the racist status quo (p. 326). Chris Linder, Stephen Quaye, Alex Lange, Ricky Roberts, Marvette Lacy, and Wilson Okello (2019) asserted that maintaining the status quo is a consequence of interest convergence where those who are white address racism only when there are mutual benefits (p. 57). For instance, institutions that place "Black Lives Matter" signs on websites, speak around injustice while never acknowledging racism as an issue in their community, or putting people of color in representative roles with little to no power in decision making processes. While such efforts have the surface effect of appearing genuine, social scientists are calling out these efforts as superficial, cosmetic, and not challenging the racist culture of institutions.

DiAngelo (2021) maintained that "involvement in anti-racism efforts can become 'stylish' for white people, something cool that provides intense feelings and entertaining insights to be consumed in manageable doses" (p. 162). For example, the ability to participate in institutional decision-making was one of the common demands of black student activists during the BCM (Rogers, 2012, p. 150). This was also one of the compromises of institutions in their response.

Students continue to be outnumbered by faculty and administrative decision-makers which limits their institutional power. Getting to the heart of institutional transformation requires innovative ideas and strategies. This means moving beyond denial, moving beyond relying on individual trainings and DEI offices for institutional

change, and focusing on structural issues that exacerbate the problem of racism in higher education.

Evidence of Racism in Higher Education

In John Dewey's (2008) *Democracy and Education* (originally published in 1916), Dewey extensively argued the philosophical purpose formal education stating that schooling is a social necessity. He regarded education as the renewing process by which the continuity of life is shaped by readaptation of the environment to the needs of "living organisms" (p. 4). Dewey was arguing that learning how to adapt environments to the needs of human beings is equipping individuals to promote justice.

In "The Five Faces of Oppression," Iris Young (1988) stated that justice not only refers to the distribution of resources and power but requires that every individual is able to develop and exercise their capacity to participate in society (p. 281). As antiracism seeks to level the playing field for racially marginalized human beings, higher education must become a conduit for racial justice through racial equity. This requires identifying where racial inequities exist.

Racial Inequities in Student Experiences

It is an urgent matter of racial justice for institutions of higher education to question if racialized groups stand on relatively equal footing to their white counterparts. Data reveals some glaring disparities. The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) reports that as of 2018, 59% of Asian students, 37% of Black students, 36% of Hispanic (or Latin American) and 42% of white students ages 18 to 24 are enrolled in college (Hussar et al., 2020, p. 125). In a report, de Brey et al. (2019) illuminate other disparities in educational outcomes. They found that as of 2016, among individuals ages 25 and up, 54% of Asian

adults, 35% of white adults, 21% of Black adults, as well as 15% of Hispanic and American Indian/Islander adults, respectively, earned a bachelor's degree or higher (p. 163).

Racial Inequities in Opportunity and Persistence

A college degree is a near must for access to high-paying middle-class jobs (Houle & Addo, 2018, p. 563). However, universities have not been immune to social issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Racism continues to plague American colleges and universities (Arellano & Vue, 2019; Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Chesler et al., 2005; Diggles, 2014; Gelber, 2016; Harper et al., 2009; Museus et al., 2015; Owen, 2009; Patton, 2016; Rogers, 2012; Squire et al., 2018). While calls for greater access to higher education increase, colleges and universities have become more accessible today than in previous years. Cristobal de Brey, Lauren Musu, Joel McFarland, Sidney Wilkinson-Flicker, Melissa Diliberti, Anlan Zhang, Claire, Branstetter, and Xiaolei Wang (2019) of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) published the "Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2018." This report "examines the educational progress and challenges students face in the United States by race/ethnicity" (p. iii).

de Brey et al. (2019) outlined total college enrollment (graduate and undergraduate) among young adults (18- to 24-year-olds) by race. As of 2016, total enrollment among college students by race was Asian (58%), two or more races (42%), white (42%), Hispanic (39%), Black (36%), Pacific Islander (21%), and American Indian/Alaska Native (19%) (p. vi). However, graduation rates differ. Postsecondary graduation rates reveal that 74% of Asian students, 64% of white students, 60% of students with two or more races, 54% of Hispanic students, 51% of Pacific Islander

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students, 40% of Black students, and 39% of American Indian/Alaska Native undergraduate students graduated within six years from four-year institutions as of 2010 in the same report. Similarly, there are concerns among faculty ranks along racial lines as well.

Faculty Racial Inequities

Issues of racism and racial climates in higher education often center on student experiences (Cabrera et al., 2017; Museus et al, 2015). However, racism is systemic and permeates all areas of social structures (Kendi, 2019, p. 18). This means that racism in higher education affects faculty in addition to students. One glaring issue can be observed among faculty representation. Faculty of color are significantly underrepresented (Chesler et al., 2005; de Brey et al., 2019; Freeman, Jr. et al., 2019; Museus et al., 2015). Cristobal de Brey, Thomas Snyder, Anlan Zhang, and Sally Dillow (2021) published the "Digest of Education Statistics 2019." This publication broadly provided comprehensive statistical information on American education (p. iii). They revealed discrepancies in faculty representation.

According to de Brey (2021), nearly 69% of all college and university faculty self-identified as white as of 2018. Roughly 5.5 percent of college faculty self-identified as Black, roughly 5 percent of faculty self-identified as Hispanic, roughly 10% of faculty self-identified as Asian, less than one percent, respectively, self-identified as either Pacific Islander or Indigenous/Alaskan Native, one percent self-identified as having two or more races, nearly six percent were non-domestic faculty, and three percent of faculty's race/ethnicity was unknown. So, students of color statistically have a

significantly lower opportunity of taking courses with faculty of color- especially a faculty of the same race.

Additionally, as faculty rank increases, faculty of color representation decreases. As of 2011 in four-year degree-granting PWIs, roughly 25% of assistant professors, 21% of associate professors, and 16% of fully tenured professors were faculty of color (Museus et al, 2015, p. 61). Overwhelmingly, the most protected professors in colleges and universities are white.

A recent study detailed the racial climate surrounding faculty of color at PWIs. Sydney Freeman, Jr., Karen Krier, Ahmed Al-Asfour, and Russell Thacker (2019) examined barriers for transitioning to leadership and career advancement for faculty of color. The authors identified that while faculty of colors' representation has improved over the last decade, the growth of this population's representation continues to be marginal at best (p. 362). The low representation of faculty of color correlates with the low representation of administrators of color. This calls for a greater need for administrators to mentor faculty of color as an antiracist policy to help build pipelines from faculty to administration (Williams, 2014, p. 80).

Freeman et al. (2019) described how racial biases are enacted in higher education which adversely affect faculty of color. One clear consequence is the limitation of opportunities to advance within the institution. According to this study, faculty of color experience fewer mentorship relationships within the institution, fewer opportunities to advance scholarship, and fewer opportunities to grow their professional network (p. 362). Faculty of color have found it more challenging to make the transition to administration

compared to their white counterparts (p. 366). In short, faculty of color experience issues advancing in academia which are connected to the institutional environment.

Call for a New Direction in Higher Education

According to Williams (2013), 30 years of affirmative action and diversity trainings have yielded little success when it comes to organizational change (p. 76). According to Diggles (2014), institutions have gone to great lengths to help students "become more aware of their own roles in the system of race-based privilege and oppression" (p. 38). Individualizing the problem ignores the institutional problem. Attention must be turned toward institutions directly confronting the system of race inequities.

Patton (2010) and Rogers (2012) detailed histories and significance of culture centers in higher education. These centers have been instrumental in nurturing resilience and resistance, as well as promoting the retention and academic achievements of students from marginalized communities (Yosso & Lopez, 2010, p. 99). Patton (2010) stated that "the various cultural center models and the role that such centers play in the experiences of students are minimally represented in the current literature" (p. xiv). Likewise, it was empirically observed that there were no existing studies which explored university RECs. Namely, the purpose of these centers, their utility, initiatives, goals toward advancing racial equity on campus or in the broader community, and how these centers distinguish themselves from other DEI offices and culture centers.

University Diversity and Multiculturalism Efforts

In educational settings, diversity is broadly defined as the ways in which individual and group differences form the foundation of thoughts, knowledge, and

experiences that contribute to a liberal education (McNair et al., 2020, p. 6). Williams (2013) stated that in this new generation of higher education, "promoting diversity is no longer simply a question of answering our moral and social responsibilities, but a matter of academic and institutional excellence" (p. 2). However, focusing on diversity as matters of a liberal education as well as academic and institutional excellence can ignore the lived experiences of people of color. Some scholars have argued that broadly focusing on issues related to concepts such as diversity (among others) leads to addressing everything but racism (Bonilla-Silva and Baiocchi, 2007; Harper, 2012).

Some scholars have urged institutions to move beyond a broad focus on diversity-noting that diversity is too vague in the pursuit of structural change in institutions (Arellano & Rue, 2019; Genao & Mercedes, 2021). Higher education in Predominantly White Institutions is more accessible today to people from racially marginalized communities. However, BIPOC students are still less likely to complete a four-year degree than their white counterparts (de Brey et al., 2019, p. vi). Additionally, faculty of color have experienced disparities in their own advancement in comparison to their white counterparts (de Brey et al., 2019; Freeman et al., 2019; Museus et al., 2015). This signals that racism continues to live in higher education.

Since the 1960s, higher education has sought to address issues related to diversity (Broadhurst, 2014; Kasper, 2004; Patton, 2010; Rogers, 2012). According to Cabrera et al. (2017), diversity initiatives in higher education are often created in response racist issues and incidents with the focus being on minoritized student populations (p. 16). This is often done through the promotion of multicultural education. Multicultural education grew out of response to the political unrest of the CRM in the 1960s (Banks & Banks,

2013). The approach of multiculturalism encompasses broader social identities and address their intersections in modern society. "Courses and programs were developed without the thought and careful planning needed to make them educationally sound or to institutionalize them within the educational system" (Banks & Banks, 2013, p. 4).

Multiculturalism and multicultural education have several critiques. Specifically, while multicultural acknowledges cultural differences, it has not been proven to reverse the academic achievement of racially minoritized students, nor has it been proven to be an effective method of bridging the racial divide (Case & Ngo, 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solomon, 2002). In short, multiculturalism takes a bite at the apple without getting to the core. Focusing broadly diversity has contributed to maintaining racial inequities because "diversity has failed to penetrate the salience of racism in schooling" (Genao & Mercedes, 2021, p. 128). As such, diversity offices and culture centers with no antiracist focus cannot be relied on to solely resolve issues related to racial inequity.

Culture Centers

Black Cultural Centers (BCCs) were the first culture centers established in the late 1960s. They were largely implemented on predominantly white campuses in response to the common demands of Black student activists on the backs of the Civil Rights Movement (Broadhurst, 2014; Patton, 2010; Rogers, 2012). One of the nation's leading scholars on culture centers, Patton (2010) stated:

> The history of culture centers is rooted in a struggle for students to hold
> institutions of higher education accountable. They made a host of demands to
> ensure that their experiences were represented and supported in the cultural,
> academic, and social contexts of the university. (p. xiv)

During the period of radical activism, Black student activists were reluctant to compromise the convictions they believed would lead to the social, economic, and cultural advancement of Black people in America (Joseph, 2009, p. 708). As Black student activists continued organizing on college campuses, institutions eventually agreed to some of the demands made by student activist and organizers. Institutions made more commitments to improving access for Black students, they recruited and hired Black faculty & staff, developed BCCs, and incorporated Black Studies programs and courses (Broadhurst, 2014; Patton, 2010; Rogers, 2012). Christopher Broadhurst (2014) noted, "the success of African Americans encouraged other groups to seek their civil rights as well" (p. 9). Other minoritized student groups engaged in respective social movements which led to the implementation of other culture centers such as Women's Centers, Latin American/a Centers, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning (LGBTQ) Centers (Broadhurst, 2014; Kasper, 2004; Patton, 2010).

"The success of African Americans encouraged other groups to seek their civil rights as well" (Broadhurst, 2014, p. 9) in higher education. Other marginalized student groups mobilized throughout the late 1960s to the early 1970s to establish cultural centers related to women, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning (LGBTQ) community, Asians, Latin Americans, etc. (Broadhurst, 2014; Kasper, 2004; Patton, 2010). With more than 460 women's centers across the U.S. (Kasper, 2004, p. 185), roughly 10% of universities have at least one staff member overseeing LGBTQ resources since the first center was established at the University of Michigan in 1971 (Catalano & Jourian, 2018, p. 41). The importance of culture centers has continued to rise with the emergence of racially marginalized student populations on college campuses in

the U.S. However, these centers have not been the type of structural remedy needed to transform college campuses into racially equitable spaces. Thus, the emergence of antiracism can usher in a new era of intentionality in addressing racism.

As Cabrera et al. (2017) put it, "[n]o institution of higher education in the country has a zero-tolerance policy for racism" (p. 17). If this were the case, racism and racial inequities would not be pervasive issues over the lifetime of higher education. History reveals that when institutions are negatively placed in the eyes of the public and face criticism, policies change and new initiatives to address student experiences take place (Patton, 2010; Rogers, 2012). The rising concern is that there is a zero-tolerance policy for events which adversely affect the institution's bottom line, rather than a zero-tolerance policy for racism. This is one of the reasons that universities are known to move at glacial speeds when it comes to change (Broadhurst, 2014; Jones & Reddick, 2017). Still, Black student activists were successful in not only securing BCCs, but in the implementation and recruitment of Black faculty and students, adding Black Studies programs, and creating shared governance within the university.

Theoretical Framework: Antiracism

Antiracism

The central phenomenon of this study was antiracism as framed by Ibram X. Kendi. Kendi (2019) defined antiracism as "the powerful collection of antiracist policies that lead to racial equity and are substantiated by antiracist ideas" (p. 16). Racial equity occurs when two or more racial groups are standing on approximately equal footing (p. 14). Therefore, the goal of antiracism is racial equity which is achieved through structural changes produced through antiracist policies.

Antiracist Policy

An antiracist policy produces or sustains racial equity among all racial groups (Kendi, 2019, p. 18). Policies can be written or unwritten institutional norms. An antiracist idea suggests that each racial group is equal in all their apparent differences, and that racist policies are the root cause of racial inequities (Kendi, 2019, p. 20). Because race is a social construct, the basis of antiracist ideas suggest that racial equity must be socially constructed.

McNair et al. (2020) offered the most recent framing of racial equity-centered policies in the context of higher education. They stated that to ignore how structures are designed is to ignore the processes for eliminating inequities (p. 6). A focus on structural challenges is the basis of equity-mindedness. "Being equity-minded requires examining why inequities exist and understanding how the racialization of institutional practices sustains those inequities" (McNair et al., 2020, p. 7). "Racist power has produced racist ideas about the racialized ethnic groups in its colonial sphere and ranked them- across the globe and within their own nations" (Kendi, 2019, p. 44). Therefore, Kendi (2019) argued, "once we understand the history and policies behind it, it becomes clear" (Kendi, 2019, p. 72).

Antiracists

Antiracists are defined as people who commit themselves to the thoughts, actions, and practices that seek to dismantle structural racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; DiAngelo, 2021; Fleming, 2018; Kendi, 2019). As such, antiracists are the everyday actors needed to achieve an antiracist society. According to Fleming (2018), antiracists "change our cultural heritage of normalizing white folks' economic, social, and political dominance"

(p. 173). Antiracists challenge societies and themselves as members of that society to critically address racial inequities by employing antiracist policies that create racial. However, there are limitations and critiques of antiracism.

Limitations and Critiques of Antiracism

No Pre-Existing Practical Antiracism Frameworks

Antiracism is achieved through structural changes through antiracist policies (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Kendi, 2019; Reynolds & Kendi, 2020). Some scholars agree that this work is socially and politically important, but have argued that there is limited research which advances how to practically achieve racial equity (Dei, 2005; Welton et al., 2018). Therefore, it is difficult for less experienced antiracist practitioners to engage in transformational change grounded in antiracist approaches when the work of antiracism without an antiracist roadmap.

Zamalin (2019) disagreed. He argued against the notion that antiracist praxis does not exist. Historically, Zamalin noted

> Antiracists made their arguments in a wide range of ways. Fiction helped [give] vivid expression to theoretical truths. Film gave visceral texture, while painting and visual art evoked powerful thoughts and ideas. Poetry and song crystallized core philosophical maxims. Political treatises deduced arguments, while emotional speeches moved publics from passivity to action. Some antiracists were activists, others writers- some both, while others neither.
>
> (p. 14)

In short, antiracist praxis has always embraced actions and events that portrays racism in ways that elicits emotion and active response from viewers. Additionally,

antiracism challenges racism in its various forms (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Dei, 2005; DiAngelo, 2021; Kendi, 2019; Welton et al., 2018). One way racism has been historically challenged is through resistance. Rogers (2012) documented the extensive efforts of student activists during the 1960s to early 1970s to challenge racism. Organizers such as Dr. King (2016) offered radical sermons and movements to not only appeal to the moral conscious of America but vied for structural change. Such movements also helped the racially marginalized identify their own power within.

BIPOCs Viewed as Powerless

A central aim of producing and reproducing racism is the maintenance of power (Berman & Paradies, 2010; Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Brown, 2017; Du Bois, 2015; Du Bois, 2016; Feagin, 2014; Fleming, 2018; Kendi, 2016; Kendi, 2019; King, 2016; Jaima, 2021; O'Brien, 2007; Ohito, 2021; Roberts & Rizzo, 2021; Squire et al., 2018; Zamalin, 2019). However, Philippe Bénéton (2001) defined racism as nothing more than theories, opinions, or attitudes (p. 83). This would mean that scholars who assert racism is the root of racial inequity do little more than theorize about racial inequity. According to Bénéton (2001):

> He who, whatever he does, is presumed to be a victim, in this case a black American, loses all his own personality, he no longer defines himself except in relation to others' attitudes towards him. When the antiracist says to him: "You are not responsible," it also says to him: "You have no control over your own destiny." This discourse devalorizes those it intends to defend and runs the risk of degrading them by discouraging their own efforts and by putting them on a dangerous slope. (p. 85)

Kendi and other scholars have used antiracist work to raise consciousness of racial oppression that empowers the racially marginalized rather than accept a victim stance. "Every single person actually has the power to protest racist and antiracist policies, to advance them, or, in some small way, to stall them" (Kendi, 2019, p. 99). Bénéton (2001) failed to account for Black activist such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Marcus Garvey, Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, Sojourner Truth, Malcom X, bell hooks. Their scholarship and/or activism promoted self-empowerment, civil rights advocacy, and liberation for Black Americans while bringing awareness to the issues of race, racism, and racial inequity in America. Such activists realized they were not responsible for the creation of racist policies and racist ideas but took responsibility as democratic citizens to challenge structures that uphold racism.

Policy Change is Not Enough

Kendi's (2019) theory of antiracism supposes that racial equity is achieved through the implementation of antiracist policies (p. 16). He also argued broadly that "policies determine the success of groups" (p. 94). However, there are scholars who disagree and argued against focusing attention solely on policy. According to Walda Katz-Fisherman, Jerome Scott, and Ralph (2020):

> Policy changes do not change the content of the economic and political system – leaving intact the root cause. White supremacy and institutional racism are not just a 'policy' that can be changed or reformed. They are systemic and thus require system change. (p. 270)

What Katz-Fisherman et al. (2020) argued is that while racist policies function to keep structures intact, the focus on policy change is too simple. If Du Bois were alive

today, he would likely agree to an extent with this position. In 1904, Du Bois wrote an article titled "The Development of People." Du Bois (2015) recognized the rising attention toward the problem of race in the U.S. (p. 244). However, he cautioned suspicion against persons who simplified racial inequity to be singular issues. His position was that the problem of race was "as complex as human nature, and you do well to distrust the judgment of any man who thinks, however honestly, that any one simple remedy will cure evils" (p. 244). As such, he would argue that though racist policies may speak to one conduit of racial inequity, there must be consideration for the complexity of challenges that exacerbate this social and political ill.

Opposing scholars could contend that these scholars are not making the critical connections to understand the role of racist policies at a deeper level. For instance, Kendi (2019) stated that policy changes have, in fact, been effective in creating new social norms that lead to racial equity. He directs attention to the gradual support for desegregated schools and neighborhoods that took place in the 1950s and 1960s, growing support for interracial marriage, and growing support for the Affordable Care Act (otherwise known as Obamacare) (p. 145). Dr. King (2016) himself implored that there has not and will not be a single advancement in the fight for civil rights until there is legal and determined action (p. 131). So, while changes in culture are slow, history does reveal that cultures change as policies change.

Katz-Fisherman et al. (2020) maintained that the root of racial inequity requires systemic change, not just policy change (p. 270). Kendi (2019) asserted that "policymakers and policies make societies and institutions, not the other way around" (p.

152). This was echoed by Bonilla-Silva (2021) who noted that the foundation of racism is material and structural (p. 237).

Du Bois presented a reasonable argument that systems of oppression like racism are complicated beyond singular remedies. However, his position did not account for the damaging effects that some individual variables can have on issues like racism. For instance, microaggressions are covert forms of psychological harm directed at people from marginalized groups that can have damaging effects (Kendi, 2019; Sue, 2003). It's the perpetuation of social slights that undermine their abilities. So, while some can direct covert racist rhetoric that is hurtful toward another person, racist policies can be hurtful to individuals and communities' opportunities to attain health, wealth, and education. Therefore, from an antiracist perspective, antidiscrimination laws would at the very least prohibit the worst forms of overt discrimination (Mullings, 2005, p. 679).

Identifying Racism as the Root of Inequity

Some social scientists have argued that the idea that racism is the root cause of inequity is problematic. Simply put, some scholars believe racism is too basic of an argument to explain racial inequity (Niemonen, 2007; Schwalbe, 2008). Sociologist Michael Schwalbe (2008) argued that there are many moving parts when it comes to inequities, largely based on the context of the situation. He stated:

These arguments arise in part because history is inconsistent. Sometimes the exploitation of labor (i.e., a class system of sort) has preceded the creation of racist ideologies used to justify it. Other times, racist ideology based on myth or religion came first and made some people targets for exploitation. And, as noted, some scholars see patriarchy as the primal form of domination, in which case gender might seem more basic than race or class. (Schwalbe, 2008, p. 47).

Kendi (2019) argued that antiracists believe racist policies and racist ideas are the root of racial inequity (p. 18). However, Ray (2020) warned that this may be a source of contention with sociologists. This is because sociological research often finds that some racial inequalities can be explained as "maladaptive cultural traits" (p. 75) of BIPOCs, rather than racial discrimination.

Examples of maladaptive traits include one's ability to speak English, gain employment, or even adjust to the pace of American culture. Essentially, some folks rationalize racial inequity as the ability to assimilate. Individuals who support this position should consider that maladaptive traits may provide a rational explanation for an individual's inability to adjust to U.S. culture. However, maladaptive traits cannot be broadly applied to entire communities of people as it then becomes a racist idea.

Minimal Focus on the Relationship between Mental Health, Trauma, and Racism

In 1995, critical feminist scholar and activist bell hooks released *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*. One of her core critiques was that Black male scholars are given the most attention while their work often fails to draw attention to racism's effect on mental health. She contended that when literature is specifically about race, "there is still a tendency to defer to the words and writings of black men" (p. 140). As such, there is an

increased responsibility for Black men researching and writing about racism to address issues related to trauma and mental health. hooks (1995) stated:

> No doubt patriarchal black male fear that breaking the silences and making public the psychic pain of black folks would render us vulnerable to attack prevented such work from gathering momentum. Sadly, by now there should be an incredible body of psychoanalytical and psychological material, written from the progressive standpoint, about black mental health that looks at the connection between concrete victimization and mental disorders, yet this work does not exist. (p. 141)

Kendi (2019) briefly gave credit to Joy DeGruy for her work in *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* (originally published in 2005). He referred to her as "a hero for ushering the constructs of trauma, damage, and healing into our understanding of Black life" (p. 69). DeGruy's work has been widely referenced in explaining post traumatic slave syndrome (PTSS). According to DeGruy (2017)

> Hundreds of years of protracted slavery guaranteed the prosperity and privilege of the South's white progeny while correspondingly relegating its black progeny to a legacy of debt and suffering. It doesn't really matter today if any of us, black or white, directly experienced or participated in slavery. What does matter is that African Americans have experienced a legacy of trauma. (p. 101)

Although hooks' argument regarding the lack of focus on mental health was made just prior to the turn of the 21st century, there are growing works which explore the relationship between racism and trauma. According to renowned psychiatrist Bruce

Perry, trauma has three key components: the event, the experience, and the effect(s) on the individual(s) (Perry & Winfrey, 2021, p. 102). Again, trauma not only affects the persons directly involved, but trauma can be transmissible from one generation to the next (DeGruy, 2017; Mulligan, 2021; Perry & Winfrey, 2021; Winters, 2020).

One of the most recent works came from Mary-Frances Winters (2020) in *Black Fatigue: How Racism Erodes the Mind, Body, and Spirit*. She revealed that research has found that factors which predispose people to negative mental health outcomes include social mistreatment, racial inequities, lack of social support, and daily life events. In 2020 and 2019, Auburn University and Georgia State University, respectively, published results of studies on African Americans experiencing racial discrimination. They found that aging faster and chronically worrying about encountering racial discrimination places significant "wear and tear" (Winters, 2020, p. 75) on Black bodies. Thus, Black bodies are literally fatigued and eroded by racism.

Intersectionality

Kendi (2019) wrote that "all racial groups are a collection of intersectional identities differentiated by gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, skin color, nationality, and culture, among a series of other identifiers" (p. 132). As such, racial inequity is often compounded by a host of other inequities of marginalized identities. Fleming (2018) was sure to note that antiracism must integrate an intersectional approach (p. 165). With race serving as the basis of racial inequity, it could create a narrow focus for antiracist and social justice advocates.

Summary

Many historically racist policies still operate not just in society, but in higher education. With many racial inequities continuing to persist, there is a growing necessity for institutions to be more direct in their efforts to transform college campuses into racially equitable spaces- especially as students of color increasingly enroll in PWIs. As a theoretical framework, antiracism can help institutions deconstruct colonizing practices and discourses that reject change (Genao & Mercedes, 2021, p. 129). As university RECs work to decolonize institutions, this adds to the necessity of describing how these centers conceptualize antiracism and promote racial equity.

During a time when racial inequity threatens social and political progress, higher education must work more directly to challenge the racist status quo (Barabino, 2020; Patton, 2016). To begin, society and institutions must acknowledge that racism is a pervasive issue (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; DiAngelo, 2021; Fleming, 2018; Kendi, 2019) in which they are not immune. Just as institutions- particularly PWIs- have been grounded on racist policies, they must reconstruct themselves in a new direction to achieve racial equity. Anjalé Welton, Devean Owens, and Eboni Zamani-Gallaher (2018) contended that institutional members focusing on change must consider if the efforts in place are structural, procedural, or attitudinal (p. 10). Higher education must mature in its approach to identifying and uprooting the structural barriers affecting opportunities for BIPOCs. As a growing initiative is the establishment of university Racial Equity Centers, it is of scholarly importance to examine how university RECs are used to conceptualize antiracism and engage in racial equity efforts.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Since the 1960s, higher education has engaged in various movements concerned with race and racism. These include but are not limited to access and desegregation of schools (Chesler et al., 2005; Gelber, 2016; Rogers, 2012), the creation of Black Studies and other culture/ethnic studies programs (Patton, 2010; Rogers, 2012) and the implementation of cultural centers (Kasper, 2004; Patton, 2010; Rogers, 2012). In 2017, American University launched the Antiracist Research & Policy Center with the goal of addressing issues related to racism (Rucker, 2017, p. 6). Specifically, the student body elected its first Black student body president. After this historic event, the campus saw a spike in racist and bias incidents, including bananas being hung from trees. This contributed to the need to establish a center dedicated to combating racism.

Although American University, like other institutions, established its own REC, there is a gap in literature that explores these and other racial equity efforts in university settings (Case & Ngo, 2017, p. 215). Additionally, exploring how systemic racism is explicitly confronted is an understudied area in student affairs and higher education journals (Harper, 2012, p. 10). Therefore, there is a rising need for literature to explore racial equity centers in higher education and their role in transforming racial inequity.

Purpose of the Study

This single case study examined how one pioneering university REC conceptualized antiracism to engage in racial equity efforts. Because no prior literature exists, a university REC was defined in this study as an institutional unit engaged in efforts to identify and eliminate structural barriers which systemically affect people of

color. This case study advances scholarship that distinguishes how university RECs-particularly in PWIs- combat racial inequity in comparison to other diversity offices at the institution. As such, readers of this study are provided a benchmark of analysis for which other university RECs can compare their racial equity efforts.

Research Question

Central Question: How and in what ways does a pioneering university Racial Equity Center (REC) conceptualize antiracism to achieve racial equity in a PWI?

Sub Questions:

1. How is antiracism conceptualized in a university Racial Equity Center?

2. What is the mission and vision of a pioneering university Racial Equity Center?

3. How is one pioneering university Racial Equity Center structured regarding staffing and how does this structure support antiracism?

4. How does one pioneering university Racial Equity Center distinguish its work from other diversity units (i.e., multicultural affairs, culture and identity centers, etc.) across its respective campus?

5. How is the ontological nature of reality regarding racism and racial inequity explored by one pioneering university Racial Equity Center?

6. What practices does one pioneering university Racial Equity Center use to create racial equity?

7. In what ways are the mission, vision and conceptualization of racial equity by the university Racial Equity Center justified as antiracist?

8. In what ways do professional employees in a pioneering university Racial Equity Center personally identify as antiracist?

9. What is the understanding of the pioneering university Racial Equity Center's power position in the university and is power a basic question of racial equity?

10. What challenges has the pioneering racial equity center encountered while engaging in racial equity efforts?

A Deeper Dive into Antiracism as the Theoretical Framework

Qualitative studies rely on interpretive and theoretical frameworks that inform the purpose of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 35). The most common frameworks are feminist, racialized, critical, queer, and disability perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 121). Racial equity is the central phenomenon of antiracist centers in this proposed study. This prompts consideration of the usage of a racialized framework and how racial equity is viewed as a variable in the structure of organizations. However, critical theories are concerned with transcending barriers forced on minoritized social identities such as race, class, gender, etc. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Poth & Creswell, 2018). Antiracism is concerned with the efforts employed to create racially equitable conditions for human societies. Therefore, Kendi's (2019) conception of antiracism was used as the critical theoretical framework in this study as it is explicitly concerned with the practice of achieving racial equity.

The purpose of this case study is to examine how one leading university REC at a PWI has conceptualized antiracism and employed racial equity strategies in policy. A university REC is defined as an institutional unit engaged in efforts to identify and eliminate structural barriers which systemically affect people of color. According to Ray (2019) "seeing racialized relations as constitutive of organizations helps us better understand the formation and everyday function of organizations" (p. 30). Accordingly,

any theoretical framework applied to this study must not simply describe how university RECs serve the campus community through antiracist efforts but must also explore the processes of how antiracist centers identify racial inequities and the take actions taken to challenge racism and transform institutional practices.

Antiracism

Kendi (2019) defined antiracism as "the powerful collection of antiracist policies that lead to racial equity and are substantiated by antiracist ideas (p. 20). As such, it is Kendi's assertion that to realize racial equity, societies and organizations must enact antiracist policies that are substantiated by antiracist ideas. Antiracism has become, in many regards, a form of aspirational living (Zamalin, 2019, p. 11) for an ideal society. This has likely been sparked by COVID-19 revealing the extent of structural racism and health disparities in America between whites and people of color (Carethers, 2021; Peek et al., 2021) as well as public protests and demonstrations sparked by police brutality (Jones & Reddick, 2017; McCoy, 2020; Langford & Speight, 2015; South et al., 2020; Zamalin, 2019).

According to Zamalin (2019), antiracist efforts must be grounded in the context of the struggle for racial liberation (p. 12). Thus, those who actively participate in the struggle for racial equity must be capable of deeply understanding the depth of struggle to transform such situations. The praxis of antiracism must change the way societies see the realities of racism and take subsequent actions necessary to dismantle racism. In short, to transform the conditions of racism, the antiracist processes must aim to transform those conditions and the events and ideas surrounding such ideas. History is commonly used as the framework to guide antiracist practices (Fleming, 2018; Kendi, 2016; Kendi, 2019;

Zamalin, 2019; Sue, 2003). According to Kendi (2019), the struggle for liberation

through antiracism must be grounded in lucid definitions of antiracist policies, antiracist

ideas, and antiracist people. These concepts are defined below.

Antiracist Policies

According to Kendi (2019), an antiracist policy "is any measure that produces or

sustains racial equity between two groups" (p. 18). Such policies can be written or

unwritten laws, rules, procedures, processes, etc. that govern people. An example of an

antiracist policy is the Fair Housing Agreement (FHA) which prohibits discrimination in

all forms. According to Yearby (2018), the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban

Development (HUD) announced in March of 2018 that it would remove all anti-

discrimination language from its mission statement. That same year, Congress passed

legislation that voided the requirement for credit unions and banks to report racial data

related to home mortgages (p. 1118). When policies exploit the lives of racialized people,

it is a racist policy (Kendi, 2019, p. 107). Therefore, when policies are oriented toward

reducing racial inequity, or toward creating equal opportunity, they are antiracist (p.18).

Antiracist policies are substantiated by antiracist ideas. Antiracist ideas suggest

that racial groups are equals, and that racist policies are the cause of racial inequities

(Kendi, 2019, p. 20). According to Kendi (2019), antiracist ideas are difficult to

conceptualize because they go against the flow of this country's history (p. 17). As such,

the socializing nature of racism obstructs the realities of racial inequity. "Antiracist ideas

are based in the truth that racial groups are equals in all the ways they are different"

(Kendi, 2019, p. 18).

Antiracists

Kendi (2019) asserted that an antiracist is "one who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea" (p. 13). Antiracists are individuals from any racial or ethnic group who take personal and active roles in challenging racism (Fleming, 2018, p. 20). These individuals promote racial equality and racial equity and challenge the systems which perpetuate them (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; DiAngelo, 2021; Fleming, 2019; Kendi, 2019; Zamalin, 2019). In short, antiracist are active participants in transforming racial inequity.

Zamalin (2019) offered a contemporary example of antiracists such as Black Lives Matter activists who confront police brutality (p. 11). Rogers (2012) detailed the struggles of antiracists student activists during the BCM from 1965-1972. Broadhurst (2014) noted that Asian students and Latinx students became actively involved in race-related initiatives in higher education to improve the conditions of their respective communities (p. 9). These and other similar efforts would be considered antiracists as they engage in confront the racist status quo in the U.S. According to Kendi (2019), "to be an antiracist is a radical choice in the face of this history, requiring a radical reorientation of our consciousness" (p. 18). This means dismantling racial inequity means developing the capacity to critically examine racial inequity, and developing the ability to engage in critical action to transform racial inequity.

Worldview

Positionality

John Creswell and Cheryl Poth (2018) noted that researchers must consider what they bring to the research, including their personal history, views of themselves and

others, as well as ethical and political issues (p. 50). This is referred to as the researcher's positionality. First and foremost, I am a Black man. I have lived in impoverished communities, I have attended inner-city schools, I have lived in foster homes, and I have been racially profiled on several occasions in communities that are mostly Black.

At the time of this study, I oversaw a Black Cultural Center at a PWI. Part of the responsibilities of this role were assisting students and the university in responding to incidents of bias institutionally and politically. I have been a survivor of racism my entire life and I have helped Black college students navigate PWIs. The role I was in at the time of this study oriented me to assist a university in responding to racist incidents and other events that create and sustain racial equity. However, this was not the central focus of my position at the time. I recognized that there was a need for a study which would explore racial equity efforts at the university level more directly.

My worldview has also been shaped by my doctoral journey. As a History of Education major, I focused my research on Black student political movements, the history of African Americans in U.S. schools, and other oppressive conditions that have historically restricted educational opportunity for historically marginalized communities. I also completed an independent study on the history of student political movements in higher education. With the emergence of Black cultural centers as a manifestation of Black student activism, it led me to discovering the relatively new establishment of antiracism and racial equity centers.

Learning of the significance of antiracist centers in higher education helped me to become better informed of the many ways I personally engaged in antiracist efforts. I also recognize that such personal experiences bring a level of bias regarding how apt I am to

critique university antiracist efforts. For example, I have previous experiences as a diversity officer in a predominantly white university settings while serving on diversity committees. I have also facilitated professional development workshops on antiracism in university settings.

John Creswell & David Creswell (2018) stated that "good qualitative research contains comments by the researchers about how their interpretation of the findings is shaped by their background, such as their gender, culture, history, and socioeconomic origin" (p. 314). I was diligent in regulating my bias throughout this study.

Methodology

Single Case Study

This case study examined how one pioneering university REC conceptualized antiracism and engaged in racial equity efforts in a PWI setting. Therefore, a single in-depth case study was conducted. A case study is an in-depth process of exploring programs, processes, activities, individuals, or groups in a particular setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Yin (2018) noted that cases can also involve a variety of topics such as small groups, organizations, organizational learning, etc. (p. 63). Creswell & Poth (2018) detailed the structure of case studies. In case studies, researchers focus on issues or concerns and select one or more bounded cases to illustrate the issue (p. 157). The goal of this case study was to provide a detailed analytic narrative of one pioneering university REC in a PWI setting.

A university REC was defined as an institutional unit engaged in efforts to identify and eliminate structural barriers which adversely affect people of color. This study was conducted as part of my dissertation requirements for the completion of the

Doctor of Philosophy in Foundations of Education: History of Education. As such, this study was bounded in time by a period of three (3) months. This was to ensure that adequate time was available to collect data, complete data analysis, and present research findings at the dissertation defense in the summer semester of 2022.

Site

The site of the university REC in this study is the Student Success and Racial Equity Center (SSREC) at Midwestern State University (MSU). SSREC and MSU are pseudonyms as the center chose to be an anonymous participant in this study. Five racial equity centers were individually recruited to participate in this study. After five rejections, the SSREC agreed to participate as the site of study on the basis on anonymity.

MSU is a midsize (15,000 to 29,999 student enrollment) research-intensive public university in the Midwest. The Fall 2020 "Facts at a Glance" sheet showed an enrollment of 18,450 students. Roughly 69% of students were white, 22% were domestic students of color, five percent were international students, and roughly four percent did not indicate a race. Seventy-four percent of faculty and staff, respectively, were white. Twenty-two percent of faculty at the institution identified as people of color compared to 24% of staff identified as people of color. Four percent of faculty were from another country compared to one percent of staff being from another country. Less than one percent of faculty and staff did not indicate their race.

According to the center's webpage, the establishment of the center began as a partnership between the university's central diversity office and the Ethnic Studies Program (ESP) (pseudonym). This was done in response to recent student organizing and

racial awakening events on campus. For example, the local newspaper covered the story of a community protest led by students where the focus was on peace and reform in the criminal justice system. The following is the mission, vision, and services offered by the SSREC with some identifying language and information either altered or removed to increase anonymity:

Mission

As a unit of the Office of Equity and Inclusion (pseudonym), the purpose of the Student Services and Racial Equity Center is to:

- Partner with campus and community constituents to transform systems and develop programs to increase the number of students of color who graduate from the university.

- Improve educational conditions for students of color by fostering a campus culture where students of color are empowered to reach their full potential.

Vision

The Student Services and Racial Equity Center seeks to provide high-quality programs and services which foster a culture of academic excellence and affirmation where students are propelled to attain their educational goals, engage in the community, and develop as future leaders who will create a more just and equitable society.

Services

The Executive Team in the SSREC focuses primarily on resources and initiatives supporting students of color on their path to graduating and excelling in their

careers. The staff's work does not duplicate other offices on campus. The SSREC

concentrates on concerns that arise from the educational experiences of being

students of color attending a predominately white institution. The Center provides

assistance to students with:

- Academic support referrals

- Intrusive case management

- Advocacy

- Personal and academic problem-solving

- Cultural support and discussions

- Celebration of students' academic and personal successes

The Center aligns with the University's Core Values: Excellence, Student

Centeredness, Research and Scholarship, Professionalism and Leadership,

Diversity.

Partnership With Ethnic Studies Program

The Center partners with the Midwestern State University Ethnic Studies Program

to help students apply their knowledge of Ethnicity through community-based,

social justice learning experiences in the University and surrounding

communities.

Participants

Purposeful sampling of participants was used to identify individuals who could

best inform this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). What was

studied in this project was the conceptualization of antiracism by the SSREC, the

operations of the SSREC, distinguishing services of the SSREC from other diversity

offices on campus, as well as the challenges the SSREC encounters. It was believed that those who could best answer the research questions were the SSREC's Executive Team, the university's Director of the Office of Equity and Inclusion (OEI), the Director of the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (OMSA), and students receiving services from the SSREC. I hoped to interview the university's Vice President for Equity and Inclusion. However, the role was in an active search, the outgoing Interim VPEI declined to participate, and the VPEI who ushered in the SSREC did not respond to a request to participate.

The Executive Team of the SSREC provided the operative conceptualization of antiracism used by the Center, as well as described their efforts to achieve racial equity. Because the SSREC reports to the University's chief diversity office, the Senior Diversity Officer and Director of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion were recruited to address how the SSREC contributes to the University's strategic diversity plan, and how the SSREC differs from other diversity offices on campus. The Director of the OMSA distinguished the work of this particular office from the SSREC. Lastly, students receiving services from the SSREC added perspectives on their experiences receiving services from the center as well as how this Center enhanced their educational experiences.

Permission Procedures

Qualitative designs require gaining site permission to study at the location where the research will take place in addition to gaining approval of the plan of study from the institutional review board (IRB) (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth. 2018; Yin, 2018). This requires researchers to indicate the steps taken to gain IRB approval and discuss steps taken to gain entry to the site. A site permission letter was addressed to the

Director of the SSREC. The Director signed the letter and granted permission to study the SSREC under the condition of anonymity in the final version of the research document and presentation. Before receiving approval of the study plan, the IRB required the SSREC to sign a "Consent to Conduct Research." This document states that the site understands "the minimal risk the confidentiality can incidentally be breached either during or after the conclusion of the study."

University employees (i.e., the Student Success and Racial Equity Center, former Vice President for Equity and Inclusion, Director of Equity and Inclusion, and the Director of the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs) were invited to participate in this study via email. The invitation letters were sent directly to participant's work emails. Students receiving services from the SSREC were also recruited through an emailed letter that was distributed via the SSREC. The letters included information on the study details including how to get in touch with the researcher if students were interested in participating in the study. Students in the focus group ultimately informed the SSREC of their intent to participate in the study. The SSREC then worked with the researcher to coordinate the focus group interview.

Data Collection

This study engaged in various activities which were part of data collection processes. Activities and individuals within case studies revealed practical examples of how and in what ways the SSREC conceptualizes antiracism to engage in racial equity efforts in a PWI. The data collected included single and focus group interviews, fieldwork, and a review of relevant documents as suggested in case study research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Goodrick, 2020).

Data collection requires anticipating ethical issues involved in gaining permission to sites, sampling strategies, recording information, responding to issues as they arise in the study, and storing data (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 211). This study was considered to be low-risk, there were minimal ethical issues anticipated to occur in this study. Because the SSREC chose anonymity in the final publication of this study, the minimal risk anticipated was an accidental breach of anonymity by participants or me during this study or upon its conclusion.

Interviews

Semi-structured single in-depth interviews took place interviewing the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (OMSA) Director (Appendix C) and the Office of Equity and Inclusion (OEI) Director (Appendix D). A single focus group interview consisted of five students receiving services from the SSREC was also conducted. Interviews with the OEI and OMSA Directors took place via WebEx while the interview with the focus group took place in person at the site of the SSREC in a secure meeting room.

WebEx interviews were scheduled for 60-minutes. Each interview was recorded with a H4NPro recorder which was stored in a combination lock storage device when it was not in use. Audio from the H4nPro storage device was then uploaded to Microsoft Word via my University of Toledo account to use the free transcription feature for audio. Once the round of single interviews concluded, the in-person focus group interview with students receiving services from the SSREC took place (Appendix E). This took place the day of the first fieldwork/onsite visit of the SSREC. This took place in a secure meeting room located in the SSREC.

The focus group interview initially consisted of six student participants. However, one student exited the interview after roughly 30-minutes as they had a prior engagement. Because this student did not complete this process, their responses were omitted from the data collection.

The focus group interview lasted one hour and 45 minutes. Audio from the H4NPro storage device was sent to a paid transcriptionist who transcribed the audio. A transcriptionist was hired to transcribe the focus group interview to save time. Once the transcription was complete, audio from the original interviews were replayed while simultaneously reading through the transcribed documents to ensure transcription accuracy. Individual copies of the transcriptions with highlights were emailed to the respective participants. After participant validation via email, participants were informed that their participation in the data collection process was complete. At that time, transcriptions were added to NVIVO to be coded.

Fieldwork

Fieldwork is important in case studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Goodrick, 2020). Fieldwork consisted of seeing the physical location of the SSREC and its programming space. Pictures of the space and location were taken and stored on the storage drive that contained collected data. To avoid breaching anonymity, photos were not added to the appendices of this study as it would reveal identifying information. However, photos were shared with the research team to confirm their validity as data collected.

Documents

A total of seven documents were used in this study's data collection process. They came from the respective webpages on the University website, as well as a couple of external news articles. External news articles were used because this institution did not have a student-run newspaper. Documents included: the "About Us" webpage from the SSREC, the "Programs" page of the SSREC, the SSREC Dedication article, the OEI's Strategic Diversity Plan, the OEI's Racial Lexicon, as well as the OMSA webpage.

Lastly, relevant documents such as a questionnaire (Appendix B) from the SSREC, institutional websites (i.e., SSREC, Office of Equity and Inclusion, the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs, etc.), and public news stories were examined. Public news stories were used in place of a student news outlet as the university did not had a student news outlet. Pseudonyms for participants as well as pseudonyms for other identifiers (i.e., office names, event names, etc.) were added to enhance anonymity. Documents were uploaded and stored on a storage drive containing collected data which was locked in combination safe. The documents were also uploaded to NVIVO for coding purposes on a password protected Mac Book Pro. Identifying information was removed to assist in anonymity of the Center.

Storing and Organizing Data

This study had multiple storage drives that were password protected. One storage drive held research documents such as site information, informed consent forms, and a complete list of pseudonyms of participants for confidentiality when quoting participants in the study. The list of pseudonyms was destroyed as well as the identifiers collected for recruitment purposes after they were no longer need at the conclusion of the study.

The second storage drive held original interview recordings and transcripts, audio recordings and audio transcripts assigned with the appropriate pseudonyms. WebEx interviews were video recorded with WebEx software and audio recorded with an H4nPro audio recorder. Audio from the interviews were transcribed live via WebEx's closed captioning function. Audio from the WebEx interviews were then listened to and transcribed again to confirm the validity of participant responses. Audio from in-person interviews were recorded with the H4NPro audio recorder. The audio recorder was stored in a combination lock storage when not in use.

Bounded

Studies are bounded by time and the activities (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). This study was a partial requirement to complete the Ph.D. in Foundations of Education: History of Education by the summer of 2022. Thus, this study was bounded by a time of one academic year (Fall 2021 to Summer 2022) with the data collection process beginning in the spring term (February, 2022). This timeline provided enough time to complete all five chapters including the dissertation proposal, IRB approval, data collection, data transcriptions, data coding, analyzing of data, participant validity, and the dissertation defense.

Data Analysis

Coding

In vivo coding was used as the coding and analysis procedure in this study. In vivo coding uses exact words and phrases from the data collected to form the names of codes and code categories (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldaña, 2016). According to Johnny Saldaña (2016), In vivo coding is practical for beginning researchers who are learning to

code data (p. 106). As this was my first research project and this study was informative, in vivo coding was the most logical coding method to use. This is because, "In Vivo Codes capture 'behaviors or processes which will explain to the analyst how the basic problem of the actors is resolved or processed'" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 109). Lastly, because this study involved a topic which is sensitive to people of color in particular, it was an intentional choice to honor the authentic voice of people of color in this study by using a coding method that illuminated their authentic voice.

This researcher worked with the dissertation chair and methodologist to develop and confirm codes. Midway through the data collection process, this team met to confirm the validity of the research findings. A final version of the findings were shared with this team prior to the oral dissertation defense. This helped build trustworthiness and reliability of the data analysis. It also helped to make sure that definitions of codes were clear and did not shift throughout data analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 315).

Organizing Codes into Themes

Creswell & Poth (2018) shared strategies for exploring and developing themes. These include using memoing to identify emerging themes/ideas, highlighting noteworthy quotes during the coding process, creating diagrams which show the relationships among/between codes and concepts, and drafting summary statements of recurring or notable aspects of the data (p. 262). While there was a significant amount of data collected in this study, not all data collected was useful for the purpose of this informative study.

Winnowing the data was an important part of organizing the data in this study. Winnowing is the process of focusing in on some data while disregarding other parts that

do not add to the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Overall, the process of winnowing helped to aggregate the data into a minimum of two themes per sub-research question to provide a narrative response to each question. As Hays (2004) asserted, case studies are about answering research questions rather than painting a picture (p. 232). Therefore, it was important to focus on data which answered the central and each of the 10 sub-research questions to create a more clear and concise answer to each research question.

Organizing data was done by dissecting the text and qualitative information in order to identify themes, categories, and other dimensions of information (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 262). According to Saldaña (2016):

One method for initially organizing the array of In Vivo Codes is to list them on a text editing page and then cut and paste them into outlined clusters that suggest categories of belonging and an order of some kind (such as hierarchical, chronological, micro to macro). (Saldaña, 2016, p. 108)

Although the central phenomenon in this study was racial equity, the central site of this study is the university REC. Therefore, the SSREC's responses to research questions were prioritized in this study. So, each sub-research question was organized by codes which prioritize the SSREC's responses. This researcher then organized themes that were either repeated by participants in the study or offered a unique perspective- especially since the SSREC was only able to provide a questionnaire.

Interpreting Data

Interpretation of data involved making sense of what was learned through the collection and organization of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 264). There are several

procedures which took place. These included summarizing findings from the complete data, comparing findings in the study to literature, bracketing and bridling previous knowledge from findings, as well as stating limitations in the study and future directions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 312). These methods led to a narrative interpretation of the findings.

Reporting Findings

Researcher Patricia Hays (2004) asserted that the goal of case study research is to answer each study question, rather than paint a complete picture of the site being studied (p. 232). This study was not conducted to evaluate or assess the case in this study. Rather, this study was conducted to report how and in what ways using the framework of antiracism that the case in this study conceptualizes antiracism to engage in racial equity efforts. Although this case study had one central research question, there were 10 sub-research questions. The research findings were reported by answering each sub-question in this study individually. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018):

> The basic procedure in reporting the results of a qualitative study [is] to develop descriptions and themes from the data, to present these descriptions and themes that convey multiple perspectives from participants and detailed descriptions of the setting or individuals. (p. 317)

In chapter four, each sub-research question is presented individually (e.g. Q1: How is antiracism conceptualized in a university Racial Equity Center?). A table of themes with select quotes gathered during data collection are presented first. Following each table is an in-depth narrative description compiled of answers from interviews, the questionnaire, and other documents collected.

Validity and Reliability

According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), "qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures" (p. 313) not only in data collection, but in data analysis processes. Validity processes ensure that the data is interpreted correctly and reflects the views of study participants and data collected.

This study was validated by triangulating the collected data. When "qualitative researchers locate evidence to document a code or theme in different sources of data, they are triangulating information and providing validity to their findings" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 340). Triangulation converged data from the multiple sources (i.e., interviews, fieldwork, and documents). Each interview was triangulated against other interviews, as well as against documents reviewed in this study (i.e., questionnaire, SSREC website, OEI website, etc.). This helped identify consistencies as well as contradictions found in the collected data while coding and organizing themes. Thus, triangulation helped overcome any issues of bias to validate the research findings (Oppermann, 2000, p. 143). In short, triangulation was used as a checks and balances process to assure that the data was coded and assigned objectively.

Another step in this process was a peer debrief with the dissertation chair and methodologist. Peer debriefing consists of reviewing and asking questions about the qualitative study with other researchers so that the analysis and discussion sections resonate with readers (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Peer debriefers serve as a "devil's advocate" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 343). The peer debriefers asked critical questions about the codes as well as offered other helpful

suggestions related to the initial and final interpretations of the data. After completing the

data collection and initial coding, a virtual meeting was held with the dissertation chair

and methodologist. This process helped maintain objectivity in coding and organizing

themes.

The final and most important step in the triangulation processes was an accurate

representation of the data from participant's perspective (Creswell & Creswell, 2018;

Creswell & Poth, 2018). In short, interpretation of the data was central to reporting the

research findings. Participants in qualitative studies are critical to validating data

(Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 125). Therefore, one way of validating research findings

was member checking (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Sandelowski,

1995).

Rather than provide participants with the complete written document, the SSREC

was provided a 30-minute video presentation addressing the research questions, the data

collection, and research findings. The center was asked to confirm the validity of the

research findings. The following is the response from the SSREC:

Good Morning, Quatez!

My apologies for the delayed response. I was out of town last week.

I am sending this email to confirm your findings. Your study was very
informative. Your results did lead me to reflect on ways that we could push our
institution forward to address systemic issues through the work of the Center.

Again, Congratulations!

Once confirmation of validity of the study was received, the research study was

submitted to the dissertation chair and committee for final approval.

Study Limitations

Limitations in this study included finances, time, location, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, there was no external support for this study. Therefore, this study was funded through personal finances. Additionally, the researcher did not live in close proximity to the site of this study. As such, there was the inability to observe the site as a non-participant.

It is important to note that university RECs- as described in this study- are relatively new in higher education. Notably, the Race and Equity Center at the University of Southern California (USC) was established in 2017 under the guidance of Shaun Harper, Ph.D. who transitioned from the University of Pennsylvania (UP) in 2011 and led the center under a different name (About Us: USC Race & Equity). The Antiracist Research & Policy Center at American University (AU) was established in 2017 led by Ibram Kendi, Ph.D. who would eventually become the inaugural director of the Center for Antiracist Research at Boston University (BU) established in 2020. Lastly, the Center for the Study of Race, Ethnicity & Equity (CRE^2) was established at Washington University in St. Louis in 2020. Therefore, an extensive list of university RECs was unavailable for this study.

After five invitations were extended to universities with RECs, the SSREC at MSU agreed to participate in this study. One institution declined to participate and cited the newness of the unit as well as the continued growth as factors in their decision. Another institution declined to participate "formally" without stating a specific reason. However, they offered the opportunity to meet informally and ask questions about the work of this center. Multiple attempts to informally meet with center representatives

yielded no response. Lastly, the two remaining centers did not return any of the multiple calls or emails inviting them to participate as the site of this study.

In addition to the relative newness of university RECs, there are other possible explanations for the reluctance of RECs to participate in this study. For instance, the initial invitations identified university RECs as university antiracist centers. When reviewing the language used throughout centers and their websites, it was observed that not all of them specifically used the term "antiracist" or "antiracism." However, the vast majority of them did use combinations such as "race and equity," "racial justice," or "racial equity." The research team decided it would be better to embrace the concept of a university REC rather than a university antiracist center. Such a concept appeared to be more exacting at the time of this study- even if other centers were arguably engaging in antiracist efforts, but not using the term. Therefore, as a pioneering effort, university RECs are still defining themselves and their work.

Summary

There are no known studies which have explored university REC s- particularly those in PWIs. As more institutions incorporate these centers, it is necessary to examine how university REC s are conceptualizing antiracism and to report on how they are engaging in racial equity work. The significance of this study is that it provides literature which describes how one university REC answers the central research question in this study. Therefore, this case study provides a benchmark for other university RECs to compare the operations of their respective centers, as well as a launching pad to grow their racial equity efforts.

Chapter Four

Research Findings

This chapter reports findings from the central research question in this study: How and in what ways does a pioneering university Racial Equity Center (REC) conceptualize antiracism to engage in racial equity efforts in a PWI? This chapter answers the central research question by exploring 10 sub-questions. To begin, participant keys (Table 2 and Table 3) are used to introduce named participants in this study.

Table 2

MSU Employees Engaged in Diversity Work

	MSU Employees	
Name	Position	Office
Alex	Program Coordinator	Student Success and Racial Equity Center (SSREC)
Jennifer	Program Manager	Student Success and Racial Equity Center (SSREC)
OEI Director	Director	Office of Equity and Inclusion (OEI)
OMSA Director	Director	Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (OEI)

Note. Each participant's name is a pseudonym.

Table 3

SSREC Focus Group

	Student Participants		
Name	Year	Race	Major
Boosie Butt	First-Year	Black	Pre-Social Work
PW	Junior	Black	Nursing
Rocko	First-Year	Black	Chemical Engineering
Slender Man	First-Year	Black	Law and Social Thought
Swanton	First-Year	Black	Political Science

Note. Each participant's name is a pseudonym.

The Catalyst for the Establishment of The Center

Before presenting findings from this research, it is important to introduce why the

SSREC was established at MSU from the perspectives of participants in this study. All

participants were asked why the SSREC was established at MSU. The SSREC as well as

the Directors of the Office of Equity and Inclusion (OEI) and the Office of Multicultural

Student Affairs (OMSA) pointed attention to the murder of George Floyd at the hands of

the Minneapolis Police Department. This event occurred in May of 2020 when the video

recording went viral. The incident sparked global outrage at police brutality against Black

people in the United States. The SSREC reported that "The Office of Equity and

Inclusion established The Student Success and Racial Equity Center in partnership with

the Black Studies Program in response to student organizing and racial awakening in the

summer of 2020." According to the OMSA Director:

The uprising after the murder of George Floyd was a time for the entire country to look at the way that Black folks are being treated. And, you know, the university was not unique or left out of those conversations or revelations; whatever you want to say. And so, I think that that was a time really for folks to recognize and think about how we need to do more for this specific population.

Although the murder of George Floyd was a critical factor, this historical event was not the lone factor in establishing the SSREC. In the interview with the OEI Director and according to The SSREC's response to the questionnaire, there were multiple pre-existing factors which necessitated the development of the SSREC. The OEI Director identified a "chain of events going back" in the University's recent history. First, she stated that underrepresented minority students (URMs) retention and graduation rates have been historically low over the last six years. URMs refer to "Black or African American, Latin American or Hispanic, and Indigenous Americans." She also stated "in our attempt to be a student-ready university, we're trying to be proactive and ensure that we can provide the support that students of color need on a predominantly white campus." As such, being a "student-ready" suggests that the University recognizes that there must be consideration for racially marginalized students on a predominantly white campus.

The OEI Director and the SSREC also acknowledged that there was a growing need for the University to establish a space on campus designed around the Black student experience. Focus group interviews revealed some of the issues come from a lack of spaces on campus that are welcoming to students of color- particularly those who are Black. In the focus group interviews, PW stated that other pockets of campus feel like

"suffocating" spaces, which is why a space for Black-identified students is needed. When describing the need for a space expressly committed to serving Black students, PW said:

> Just knowing that I'm not going to be judged for the color of my skin, or just the comfortability of it. I'm not saying that necessarily white people make me uncomfortable, but, obviously, you know, I'm going to feel some type of way if I'm the only Black person in the room - even if I'm not doing anything, even if it's not a social event or a networking event if I'm just sitting there doing homework. I don't know how to explain it, but it's just different energy.

PW described the "white part" of MSU's campus as "suffocating." I asked her to follow-up to provide clarity on what she meant by suffocating. She said MSU's campus feels "unfamiliar" and has a "different energy" because of the significantly lower representation of Black students on campus. When I asked the other student participants if they agreed with PW's assertion that the University feels like a suffocating space to a Black-identified student, each participant nodded their head in agreement. Boosie Butt described the University library as just one example of a university space that feels suffocating:

> You see people have their friends at the library, but it's not a bunch of Black people. You see more people of other cultures and things like that, and then it's like you just see that one Black person alone, just getting stared at kind of weird.

The feelings of being looked at weirdly are consistent with the rising concerns that students of color have been treated differently on campus. The OEI Director stated that these issues were "in certain pockets around campus. Issues that students of color were having with student workers and their supervisors in different areas on campus, and

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students in their courses." According to The SSREC questionnaire, recent responses to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) also revealed that there was a low sense of belonging on campus among URMs. They also indicated that "a small group of African American administrators advocated for a centralized effort to address the historic low six-year graduation rate among African American students." As such, a rising concern from students of color at the University is the general lack of a welcoming environment for racially underrepresented students.

Overall, the murder of George Floyd was one catalyst for establishing The SSREC at MSU. However, there were other prevailing factors to establishing this center. These include a general lack of a welcoming environment for URMs at MSU reflected in the NSSE, as well as personal accounts from Black-identified students of being treated unfavorably. As OMSA Director stated, "we still have a lot of work to do as far as our enrollment retention, graduation rates, specifically of Black students. And so, you know, the time was right to create" The SSREC. In a university news story, the former Vice President for Equity and Inclusion stated, "like other universities throughout the country, the University recognized the need for a place to focus on racial inequity as well as the academic and belonging needs of our students."

Reporting Findings

This research was designed to be an informative rather than evaluative single case study. This chapter is organized with each sub-question of the case study being answered individually. Participant responses are shared here through In Vivo analysis, and a direct interpretation of the data for each sub-question. Data tables are offered which identify a minimum of two themes per sub-question. Themes are then followed by narrative

descriptions comprised of data collected in this study (i.e., interviews, documents, and fieldwork).

Although the SSREC does not use language that recognizes antiracism as the core of its purpose, the center expressly operates to advance racial equity. Ibram Kendi (2019) conceptualized antiracism to be the powerful collection of antiracist policies leading to racial equity which are justified by antiracist ideas (p. 16). As such, antiracism was used as the theoretical framework in this study. Additionally, a critical component of benchmarking the work of university RECs is to benchmark how antiracism is conceived by the SSREC. This will provide readers the opportunity to benchmark how antiracism and racial equity efforts are respectively conceived and advanced.

Q1: How Does the SSREC Conceptualize Antiracism?

Table 4

SSREC's Conceptualization of Antiracism

Themes	Direct Quotes
Theme 1: "A Form of Corrective Justice" through Action	**SSREC Response**: Corrective justice for MSU Black students to transform systems and develop programs to increase the number of URM graduates.
Theme 2: "Being Intentional" about "A More Just and Equitable Society for People of Color	**OEI Director**: You are either supporting current policies, and procedures, and laws, and practices that maintain the system as it stands, or you are working actively toward, and this is actively with your time, with your energy, with your money, in a direction that is moving our society into a more just and equitable society for people of color.
Theme 3: Antiracism Needs "to Have an Education"	**Swanton:** I do believe in order for people to not be racist, obviously, I feel like they need to have an education, and they need to understand the fact that racism is a social construct… They need to have a good understanding of critical race theory and be able to have discussions.

The first sub-question in this study was "how is antiracism conceptualized in a university Racial Equity Center" (Table 5). The SSREC officially adopted the conception of antiracism as expressed by the OEI which is also shared in the office's "Racial Lexicon." According to the "Racial Lexicon," antiracism is defined as "the work of actively opposing racism by advocating for changes in political, economic, and social life." The University's Racial Lexicon also states that "racism involves one group having the power to carry out systematic discrimination through the institutional policies and practices of the society and by shaping the cultural beliefs and values that support those racist policies and practices." Thus, racism is viewed by the SSREC as the perpetuation of racist policies and racist ideas that have adverse consequences for people of color. However, the questionnaire revealed no specific examples of racist policies that operate within the institution.

The SSREC shared its definition of antiracism. Their definition on antiracism is grounded as, "A unit of the Office of Equity and Inclusion." Therefore, the SSREC echoed that antiracism actively opposes racism through advocacy of changes to political, economic, and social life that affects racially marginalized people.

Three themes were identified in how antiracism is conceptualized by the SSREC, students receiving their services, and campus partners in the OEI, and the OMSA. These themes are summarized in Table 3. For this sub-question, themes were organized by order of the number of references to identified codes. These themes are as follows:

Theme 1: "A Form of Corrective Justice" through Action. The most observable theme identified in this sub-question was the number of references to the role of action as being critical to promoting antiracism. "As a unit of the Office of Equity and

Inclusion, antiracism is defined as the work of actively opposing racism by advocating for changes in political, economic, and social life." The OEI Director works in the Office of Equity and Inclusion which the SSREC reports to. They stated one's actions are "either supporting current policies, and procedures, and laws, and practices that maintain the system as it stands," or one's actions are dismantling that system "in a direction that is moving our society into a more just and equitable society for people of color." In saying this, the OEI Director suggested that if structural action is not taken now to dismantle such systems, racial inequities will continue to persist.

The SSREC stated that racial equity and thus antiracism are conceived within the context of higher education. This means that how antiracism and racial equity are engaged must consider the type of environment where the work is engaged. This contributes to the expectation of outcomes as well as provides context of how racial equity in such a setting would look. As such, the SSREC stated that the work of antiracism is a form of "corrective justice for MSU Black students to transform systems and develop programs to increase the number of URM graduates."

Corrective justice as the core of antiracism and racial justice stands out in this response. It is, first, the acknowledgement of the problems at the University that affect URM students. These problems include but are not limited to the low sense of belonging among URMs reflected in the NSSE, low graduation and retention rates among URMs, as well as a lack of identifiable spaces to support URMs. Secondly, the SSREC referred to corrective justice as actions which transforms systems and increase the number of Black graduates from the university. So, for these systems to be transformed and for there to be

an increase in the number of URM graduation and retention rates, there must be a move to actions which propel these outcomes.

University employees who participated in this study were able to provide confident definitions of antiracism and racial equity. However, antiracism was a struggle to conceptualize for students as they attempted to share their definitions. When asked how they would define an antiracist, PW and Boosie Butt initially struggled with this concept. They said they had never heard the term before prior to this interview. When I asked everyone if the term was used in the center, the students all shook their heads to suggest that the term antiracist has not been introduced to them. However, students were asked to do their best to define the term.

PW took some time to process the question before she went on to define antiracist as someone "against racism." Rocko defined an antiracist as "someone who isn't racist or someone who takes actions against racism." He noticeably struggled early in his response- even as he as his peers stated "take your time" as he took multiple pauses in trying to find his words. He continued by stating the significance of white people being antiracist as well. He said "I'd like them to take actions to help the Black community as well. So, like reaching out, just connecting and just being around."

Theme 2: "Being Intentional" about "A More Just and Equitable Society." Next to action, intentionality in antiracism was another observable theme. For the OEI and SSREC, antiracism is focused specifically on opposing racism. The Director of the OMSA and close collaborator with the SSREC adopted a similar position and added:

Antiracism, to me, is being intentional. I guess it really comes down to being intentional of doing a deep-dive analysis of the way that institutions, policies, and day-to-day life affects people differently. I mean, that's, you know, also from a sociological perspective, understanding that the way that society operates is set up to lead to inequities and inequalities. So, being intentional about calling them out, about trying to make change… I mean it's not enough to, you know, be against racism, right? It's about being intentional about doing something about it.

What the OMSA Director expressed in her response to the question was that the intentions of antiracist action must be rooted in change and challenging racism and racist acts. This is evidenced in her response to "being intentional about calling them out" and "trying to make change." The OEI Director echoed similar sentiments. She stated that antiracism is "a choice" and that people who are antiracist are working actively "in a direction that is moving our society into a more just and equitable society for people of color" with their time, their energy, and their money. In doing so, one would have to be intentional in being selfless and being in the struggle with racially marginalized people, rather than treating their efforts as charity.

The OMSA Director poignantly defined antiracism as "a value set." Thus, antiracism is not simply something one studies or even claims as a title. Antiracism, as argued by OMSA Director, is something that individuals engaged in this work believe is a core human principle. that should govern how people and societies achieve

In the focus group interview, the students brought attention to white people having their intentions in the struggle being directed in the right place. Swanton said:

I don't really want it so much where they have a hero complex because that can get… It can be like, like you said, it can be like people who are at the protests, they're cussing out racist people. That's good, but it can be so much where it kind of makes me think like, are they actually doing this for the betterment for all of us, or themselves?

Other students expounded on the ways that antiracist and racial equity movements tend be used for the interest of the institution rather than an institutional need. Boosie Butt shared that such actions can be used for "the betterment of their image." PW stated that participation in these efforts can be used for self-affirming reasons. "I'm not racist. I went to a protest. I'm not racist, my neighbor's Black…I'm not racist, I dated a Black man once." The Center and participants made it clear that the intentions of engaging in antiracist action must not be about the acts themselves, nor must they be for self-serving reasons. Antiracism must be for the purpose of creating an equitable society for people of color.

Theme 3: Antiracism Needs "to Have an Education." OMSA Director stated that antiracism "really comes down to being intentional of doing a deep dive analysis of the way that institutions, policies, and day-to-day life affects people differently." Therefore, the ability to investigate and understand the interconnectedness of how structural problems such as policies contribute to racial inequality is central to advancing antiracism. This is particularly relevant when understanding the concept of power as was discussed in chapter two.

The ability to create structural change that leads to racial equity is often in the possession of people with institutional and political power. The racial background of such

individuals is disproportionately white. This further complicates the challenge and even inability to understand the lived experiences of people from marginalized races. Therefore, what OMSA Director asserted was that critical to advancing antiracism is that those in positions of power regularly engage in learning opportunities which challenge their understanding of the world from a racialized perspective. As OMSA Director stated, this would be done by critically analyzing the ways in which institutions, policies, and general encounters with racially marginalized people are inherently designed to produce and reproduce racial inequity.

Slender Man stated that "having an open-mind, taking the time to go out and explore different cultures" is an important step. Other student participants in this study offered a few ways that individuals can educate themselves to be more effective antiracists. Swanton provided a detailed response as to what someone would need to be an antiracist:

> I do believe in order for people to not be racist, obviously, I feel like they need to have an education, and they need to understand the fact that racism is a social construct… They need to have a good understanding of critical race theory and be able to have discussions.

Q2: What is the Mission and Vision of the SSREC?

Table 5

Mission and Vision of the SSREC

Themes	Direct Quotes
Theme 1: To "Transform Systems" at MSU	**SSREC Response**: "Collaborate with campus and community partners to transform systems."
Theme 2: To Increase Recruitment, Retention, and Graduation of Racialized Students	**SSREC Website**: "To increase the number of URM MSU graduates."
Theme 3: "They're really focused on the academic side"	**SSREC Response**: "It concentrates on the special concerns that arise from the academic experiences of being African American on a predominately white campus."
Theme 4: "They Really do Cater" to Racialized Students and their Needs	**SSREC Response:** "Enhance educational experiences for racialized students fostering a campus culture where students of color feel valued, supported, and equipped to reach their full potential."

The mission and vision of the SSREC are inextricably linked to the establishment of the Center. Namely, a low sense of belonging among URMs at MSU, racialized students expressing unfair treatment on campus, and low recruitment and graduation rates among racialized students. Four themes were identified related to the mission and vision of the SSREC (Table 3).

Theme 1: To "Transform Systems" at MSU. The first half of the very first sentence in the SSREC's mission statement states that the aim of the Center is to "collaborate with campus and community partners to transform systems.…" Transforming systems at the University was a message that was duplicated by the Center in their questionnaire. Because I was only able to collect data directly from the Center via

a single written questionnaire, I was unable to follow up on what they specifically meant by transforming systems.

However, when asked about the Center's process for identifying racial inequities, the SSREC responded that "The Center's purpose is in response to systemic inequities in graduation outcomes." Therefore, it was interpreted that the SSREC aims to address systemic inequities which do not lead to equal outcomes in graduation rates. As such, "fostering a campus culture where students of color feel valued, supported, and equipped to reach their full potential" means addressing the pockets, practices, and policies where barriers to this goal exist."

As the SSREC stated in response to conceptualizing antiracism and racial equity, such definitions must be contextual. As colleges and universities often express themselves to be "student-centered," there must be consideration for which students are often the focus in university efforts. The OEI Director stated, "And I think we're in our attempt to be a student-ready university. We're trying to be proactive and ensure that, you know, we can provide the support that students of color need on a predominantly white campus." Being a "student-ready university" at MSU means factoring in the lived experiences and educational outcomes of URM students attending PWIs. As such, transforming the system also takes into consideration the enrollment to graduation process.

Theme 2: Increase Recruitment, Retention, and Graduation of Racialized Students. The SSREC stated repeatedly that they are an extension of the Office of Equity and Inclusion. Goal 1 of the University's Strategic Diversity Plan constructed in the OEI is to "Increase the recruitment and retention of underrepresented students (i.e., URM and

low-income students). One of the strategies identified in this plan is to "Develop a fall orientation program for new students." The SSREC houses multiple programs that support this goal. The OMSA Director introduced a couple of these programs:

> I guess part of what I think are our long-term goals of increasing enrollment, retention, and graduation rates of our students of color. So, we are specifically doing that- the center is- and I say "we" because we're all part of the same university, doing that through our Students of Color in Transition Program (SCiT), which is a continuation of a program that we've had the now rebranding of our Underrepresented Scholars Program, which is in partnership with our office. And then our Hope Scholars, which is a new thing in the past couple of years here. So, the continuation of developing those students who are part of those cohorts, and really providing them with a safe place with safe people that they can be their authentic selves. And so that's kind of the direction that things have been going lately. And our living and learning communities as well.

> According to the SSREC website, the:

Students of Color in Transition Program (SCiT) is designed to help high school students succeed in their academic, cultural, and social transition from high school to college. Our goal is to provide five days of educational and social workshops, leadership training, and peer mentorship to foster excellence for incoming students of color during the first-year experience.

- Feel Connected to Midwestern State University
- Identify opportunities for campus and community engagement

- Become more secure and affirmed in their identity as Black and Latin American students at the Midwestern State University

- Learn how to use campus academic and support resources

Another program offered through the SSREC is the Underrepresented Scholars Program (USP). According to the SSREC Website:

> Underrepresented Scholars Program (USP) is a six-week summer bridge program designed for first-year students to help them make the academic, social, and cultural transition from High school to college and inspire educational achievement in college-level courses. It gives preference to historically underrepresented students interested in engaging in a culture of academic success in an ethnically, religious, and gender-diverse student environment. May be required for some admitted students.

> The OEI Director stated that the USP has a successful track record for students participating in this program. She noted that first-year students in this program have a retention rate of 68-74%. She went on to note that some students in the program transition in the advanced years to becoming mentors. This was evidenced by several students in the focus group acknowledging that they will be mentors for the upcoming cohort of the USP and SCiT programs. The OEI Director fondly reflected on how proud she was of one student who went from being in the USP program to becoming a USP mentor. Having completed their undergraduate degree at the University, this student now serves as the GA for the SSREC.

Both the SCiT and USP offer students the ability to live on campus in a Living Learning Community (LLC). This community is known as the Students of Color Transitioning LLC. The SSREC's website states the:

> Students of Color in Transition Living Learning Community is a specialized community of students living and learning together in a dedicated residence hall area. This LLC helps new students understand campus academic and social expectations, participate in on and off campus cultural and social activities, and learn how to use their personal experiences, interests, and leadership skills to transform their communities. The SCiT LLC is open to commuter and residential students.

Lastly, the most recent installment of transition programs at the University which the SSREC now oversees is ASPIRING Scholars. According to the program's website, The ASPIRING Scholars program is designed to help all students across all communities gain equitable opportunities for a quality education. In a news story published by 13 ABC, the former VP of OEI is quoted as saying, "We realize just how critical that first year is, so each student will have their own success coach, designed to work with students their first year, an academic advisor, things of that sort." The key to these programs and their contributing to the recruitment of students is that these programs come with financial assistance. Students such as PW and Slender Man both noted that the promise of a substantial scholarship that offsets much of the cost of attendance was a factor in their decision to attend the University.

Theme 3: "They're Really Focused on The Academic Side." The website of the SSREC states that part of the Center's mission is to "to increase the number of racialized MSU graduates." This is done by providing "the highest quality of programs and services to foster an atmosphere of academic excellence and affirmation where students attain their educational goals…". Similarly, the OEI Director stated that the purpose of the SSREC is, "To provide support, academically, by nurturing the entire student, and feeding their desire for connection with individuals of like background." As such, the SSREC promotes academic success and degree completion among racialized students by promoting programs that increase their sense of belonging as members of racialized communities (addressed in Theme 4 of this section).

When asked about services that enhance their experiences at the University, Rocko stated the "Destress Fest" that occurs each semester. Boosie Butt described "Destress Fest" as an initiative to prepare students for exam weeks and to help students study. As part of the preparation for exams, the Center provides students with study kits. Study kits consists of items such as "notecards, pens, highlighters," and other items students typically need, according to Rocko. By providing these resources, the Center is not only encouraging students to prepare for exams, but they are alleviating some of the stresses of paying for study tools.

Summer programs also assist students in their academic transition to MSU. As identified on the Center's website, both the USP and the SCiT programs are designed to help students to succeed culturally, socially, and academically. The USP programs helps racialized students "Learn how to use campus academic and support resources." And the SCiT program is designed to "inspire educational achievement in college-level courses."

According to the OEI Director in delivering the program, "The whole purpose, well, one of the purposes of the program is to provide students with entry-level courses with faculty that understood and could relate with them and were at least culturally competent individuals." As a program designed for first-year students, the SCiT intentionally serves racialized students with the purpose of introducing students to the academic rigors of college.

Theme 4: "They Really do Cater" to Racialized Students. Lastly, part of the mission of the Center can found in the history as to why the SSREC was established. Namely, one reason the Center was established is because recent responses to the NSSE revealed that URMs show a low sense of belonging at the University. This has fueled their mission to foster a campus culture "where students of color feel valued, supported, and equipped to reach their full potential." The position descriptions reiterate these responsibilities as the Center employees are responsible for "the coordination of initiatives designed to support the recruitment, transition, and persistence of all historically underrepresented students." And their efforts concentrate "on the special concerns that arise from the academic experiences of being African American on a predominately white campus."

The Center website states that programs and services "foster an atmosphere of academic excellence and affirmation." Programs such as the USP program are designed to help racialized students "Feel Connected to Midwestern State University," "Identify opportunities for campus and engagement," as well as "Become more secure and affirmed in their identity as racialized students at Midwestern State University."

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For students, two words that were frequently used when describing their understanding of the purpose of the Center were "cater" and "comfortable." "Cater" was used to describe the support and services students received from staff. Boosie Butt stated that in comparison to other physical spaces on campus, "I think here we are more catered to than, for instance, being at the library. Like, you see people have their friends at the library, but it's not a bunch of Black people." Swanton stated, "it's a place where we get, like, catered to for our needs because, I mean, if you go to other spaces, I don't think they'll have, like, a full understand and have a good way to approach the situation."

Rocko described the SSREC as "just a place that we can be comfortable." Slender Man said "I'd like to agree. It's an overall place to come to. It's comfortable. You get to see friends. You get to see, you know, Ms. Alex and Ms. Jennifer." When describing how the SSREC creates a comfortable space, PW said:

> I feel like originally this place was, like, created for kind of the same things they were saying: just resources for Black students and to put on events that would cater to Black students, whether it was socially or educational-wise. But I feel like it involved way more than that. It's just overall a place of comfort that one can come to.

Adding to PW's understanding of the purpose of the Center, Swanton described the SSREC as:

> A space for people of color to come and see each other, get acquainted, network because I think you feel more comfortable when you're around more people that look like you. You're more relaxed rather than being in a space that's kind of – you feel like don't really have much in common.

Students continuously indicated that their sense of belonging at the University has been aided by the SSREC creating a comfortable space where they feel catered to. According to the OEI Director, the Center is growing in the number of racialized students who frequent the Center. "Since the Center has been open, you know, the numbers of students who are using this space is doing nothing but increasing. So, that's a good thing." Usage could arguably serve as evidence that SSREC has had a positive outcome on racialized student experiences as they are grounded in specifically serving the needs of racialized students.

Q3: How is the SSREC Staff Structured and What are Their Central Responsibilities?

Table 6

Staffing Structure and Responsibilities of the SSREC

Themes	Direct Quotes
Theme 1: "Provide Administrative Leadership" over Center Services	**SSREC Response:** "Provides administrative leadership for all aspects of Center's operations."
Theme 2: "Manage and Coordinate" Delivery of Programs & Services	**SSSREC Response:** "Managing and coordinating the Center's programs and services operations… The program manager is in charge of the implementation of all programs."
	SSREC Response: "Assisting in the coordination of Center's programs and services…The coordinator assists with program operations."

The SSREC functions as an extension of the OEI at MSU. Therefore, this center and its employees serve under the direction of the Vice President for Equity and Inclusion who is responsible for coordinating efforts to achieve the University's Strategic Diversity Plan. According to the Center, staffing personnel consists of the Director, Program

Manager, Program Coordinator, one Graduate Assistant (GA), and three (3) Federal
Work-Study Student Employees. The Center identified three core positions in the center
when it offered specific job descriptions. These positions are as follows:

- Director: Provides administrative leadership for all aspects of Center's operations,
  promoting the overall success of African American students at the Midwestern
  State University and assisting with the coordination of initiatives designed to
  support the recruitment, transition, and persistence of all historically
  underrepresented students (students of color, first-generation college students,
  LGBTQ+, low-income, etc.).

- Program Manager: Managing and coordinating the Center's programs and services
  operations, and assisting the Director with promoting the overall success of
  African American students at Midwestern State University and the coordination
  of initiatives designed to support the recruitment, transition, and persistence of all
  historically underrepresented students (students of color, first-generation college
  students, LGBTQ+, low-income, etc.). The program manager is in charge of the
  implementation of all programs.

- Program Coordinator: Assisting in the coordination of Center's programs and
  services and promoting the overall success of African American students at
  Midwestern State University and the coordination of initiatives designed to
  support the recruitment, transition, and persistence of all historically
  underrepresented students (students of color, first-generation college students,
  LGBTQ+, low-income, etc.). The coordinator assists with program operations.

Theme 1: "Provide Administrative Leadership" over Center Services. The Director of The SSREC is responsible for providing administrative leadership over this unit's functions. The Director also ensures that the services and delivery of programs are in alignment with the OEI and its Strategic Diversity Plan as The SSREC reports to this office. Strategizing with the OEI and members of other units which either report to the OEI or collaborate with this office is another important aspect of the administrative responsibilities. According to the OEI Director, the Director of The SSREC directly reports to the VP of OEI which also oversees the University's Women's Center. The OEI Director stated each of these offices usually meet on a regular basis, but this has been a recent challenge as the University was undergoing a national search for a new VP for OEI at the time of the data collection. When describing working together, the OEI Director said:

> We do talk about things like campus climate and current events and what's coming up in each of our areas. We collaborate on a newsletter that goes out. We try to do it quarterly, but it usually ends up being three over the course of the academic year. And then we collaborate on our office's Dialogues on Diversity.

> The OMSA Director also stated that the OMSA meets with leaders of the SSREC.

Particularly, they have been working together over the course of the current academic year to assist with the design and delivery of transition programs such as the Emerging Students Initiative and the URM program. "We meet a weekly basis to develop the curriculum and the agenda and figure out who's going to help serve as what we are calling Family Leaders and Peer Mentors," said the OMSA Director.

Theme 2: "Manage and Coordinate" Delivery of Programs & Services.

According to the SSREC, the Director supervises the Program Manager and Program

Coordinator. The Program Manager supervises the Program Coordinator. Both the

Program Manager and Program Coordinator supervise the GA and three federal work-

study student employees. While the Program Manager is responsible for the

implementation of all center programs, the Program Coordinator assists in delivering

program operations. So, as the Director is largely responsible for guiding the Center's

operations, it is the Program Manager and Program Coordinator who implement and

oversee the daily delivery of programs and services administered through the Center as

well as provide supervision of student employees in the Center. Specific programs and

services offered through the SSREC will be introduced in research question number four.

Q4: How Does the SSREC Distinguish Its Work from Other Diversity Units?

Table 7

Distinguishing the SSREC from other Diversity Units

Themes	Direct Quotes
Theme 1: Services Explicitly Serve URM Students	**SSREC Response:** "Promoting the overall success of URM students at the Midwestern State University."
Theme 2: Services Focus on Degree Attainment and Career Development of URMs	**SSREC Website and Response:** "[SSREC] Focuses primarily on services and programming for URM students to graduate and excel in their careers."
Theme 3: Services Advocate on behalf of URM Students	**SSREC Response:** "Advocate on behalf of students on an individual level and in response to systemic issues, specifically those that disproportionately impact students of color."

Themes	Direct Quotes
Theme 4: Services Enhance the Sociopolitical Development of URM Students	**SSREC Website:** "Provide the highest quality of programs and services to foster an atmosphere of academic excellence and affirmation where students attain their educational goals, engage the community and emerge as future leaders to create a more just and equitable society."

Theme 1: Services Explicitly Serve Racialized Students. The SSREC was asked how it distinguishes its services from other diversity units within the university. According to the Center's website, purpose of the SSREC is to, "Enhance educational experiences for African American students fostering a campus culture where students of color feel valued, supported, and equipped to reach their full potential." According to the OMSA Director:

I guess part of what I think are our long-term goals of increasing enrollment, retention, and graduation rates of our students of color. So, we are specifically doing that- the center is- and I say "we" because we're all part of the same university, doing that through our Underrepresented Scholars Program (USP), which is a continuation of a program that we've had the now rebranding of our Students of Color in Transition Program (SCiT), which is in partnership with our office. And then our Aspiring Scholars, which is a new thing in the past couple of years here. So, the continuation of developing those students who are part of those cohorts, and really providing them with a safe place with safe people that they can be their authentic selves. And so that's kind of the direction that things have been going lately. And our living and learning communities as well.

When interviewing students in the focus group, I observed that students repeatedly mentioned their experiences with the Program Manager, Jennifer and the

Program Coordinator, Alex. Specifically, they noted their ability to build relationships with students receiving services in the SSREC. According to the OEI Director:

> The meetings with the Program Manager and Program Coordinator across the hall from the [Center's] Resource Room. That is a resource as well because we're not talking about, "so, how are your grades? Oh, OK." It's "what can I do?" It's a different kind of connection that they create with the students. It's a bond, it's a rapport, and it's time consuming.

> Swanton stated, "I get their emails and their texts, and I can tell it's just like, 'I don't want you to stay distant. I just want you to know that I'm here – here to help.'" Boosie Butt said "I don't really come here that much for, like, homework and stuff. But I come here as an outlet to see my friends as well as speak with the Jennifer and Alex. So, it's really much of a safe space." Boosie Butt also said students "just call it the Jennifer and Alex's office."

The more students responded, the more it became clear that Jennifer and Alex have worked extensively to get students involved in programs and services to ensure that students are engaged in extracurricular activities. This has taken place over the entirety of the academic year. In reference to how consistent both Jennifer and Alex have been, Boosie Butt lovingly said:

> They text me personally, and they make sure I'm aware and I'm prepared. Like I said, when we were talking about how they text us personally and be like, "Be ready," I have like several messages in my phone of Ms. Jennifer saying, "We leave in 15 minutes. You better get up."

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Assuring students are aware of opportunities and events is just part of their personal touch. Building a rapport with students has also become part of the services their employees offer. According to Rocko:

Ms. Jennifer and Ms. Alex, they're great resources in just about every aspect. You can bring just about any problem you have to them. Even if it's something that they can't help you with, they'll either point you in the direction of someone who can, or they'll just be a listening ear so that you can talk about what you need to talk about.

Pointing students in the right direction was echoed by Swanton. She said, "Having Ms. Jennifer and Ms. Alex both being people of color, they have good insight and good just like… They just know what to do." As such, students of color are left with an added personal touch with the services they receive.

Theme 2: Services Focus on Degree Attainment and Career Development. According to the SSREC Website and questionnaire, the Center "Focuses primarily on services and programming for students of color to graduate and excel in their careers." This is done through programs and services such as: Academic Support Referrals, Intrusive Case Management, Advocacy, Personal and Academic Problem-Solving, Cultural Support and Discussions, as well as Celebration of Students' Academic and Personal Successes. Swanton reflected on an experience that stood out to her this academic year. She said:

I've been to Kalahari, Nets versus the Pistons game. They just really get me great connections with people that are like me, and people who can assist me on my journey. When I talked to them at Nets and Pistons, they were talking about business. I'm a Social Work major, but it still helped me widen my horizons and my thoughts and knowledge of things like that.

When asked about the markers of success, enhanced GPAs and graduation rates were mentioned by both Directors including increased retention rates by the OEI Director. The OMSA Director said:

My main thing would be academic success, so that they have strong GPAs, that they're being retained each semester, and then long term will be able to evaluate graduation rates of the students that have been impacted by the center.

Students affirmed that the Center has helped them grow to be academically persistent which should lead to degree attainment. Boosie Butt said, "They improved my GPA. They improved my professionalism skills." Slender Man said that the USP program was "a really good GPA booster." And Rocko said the Center "is a nice place to just come and hang out, and then most of the time it's quiet. So, I can get homework done if I need to."

Theme 3: Services Advocate on Behalf of Racialized Students and Their Concerns. According to the SSREC, the Center's Leadership Team primarily "concentrates on the special concerns that arise from the academic experiences of being African American on a predominately white campus." These needs can be racial, social, or educational. In a response to be asked what the purpose of the Center is, Rocko responded:

Ms. Gentry and Ms. Jasmine, they're great resources in just about every aspect.
You can bring just about any problem you have to them. Even if it's something
that can't help you with, they'll either point you in the direction of someone who
can, or they'll just be a listening ear so that you can talk about what you need to
talk about.

Boosie Butt added, "I come here as an outlet to see my friends as well as speak
with Alex and Jennifer. So, it's really much of a safe space." Slender Man stated "so,
like, if I have an issue, I'll talk to Ms. Jennifer with it, and Ms. Alex would talk to
someone or interpret my problems to someone else. It gets better from there." Swanton
noted that the staff members being people of color aids in their ability to assist students.
She said:

If you go to other spaces, I don't think they'll have, like, a full understanding and
have a good way to approach the situation. Because I believe there's a difference
where, like, if a non-POC student has a problem, and then like if a POC student
has a question. I think that there's different ways that you approach those.

Theme 4: Services Enhance the Sociopolitical Development of Students.
Lastly, the SSREC is committed to the sociopolitical development of URMs. According
to Roderick Watts, Derek Griffith, and Jaleel Abdul-Adil (1999), "Sociopolitical
development is the process that leads to and supports social and political action" (p. 256)
through cognitive processes largely grounded in Freire's conception of critical
consciousness (2000). As a theory, sociopolitical development leads to a critical
awareness of social inequity and the promotion of collective action which would
transform oppressive conditions. The SSREC stated that it seeks to, offer high-quality

programs and services "where students attain their educational goals, engage the community and emerge as future leaders to create a more just and equitable society."

One of the central ways the Center engages students through sociopolitical activities is group dialogue. Students in the focus group identified "Let's Talk" as a notable and positive experience. Slender Man said:

> Let's Talk is an actual thing where anyone can come in – could be anybody – and they talk about these situations and how they affect Black people, or how they affect us as a general body in the United States, etcetera.

Rocko stated that in the Real Talk discussions, "It's just a good place and sometimes the time for people to share their own opinions and get the opinions of others." Boosie Butt said, "It's more of educating each other and helping everyone understand things. So, I think that's pretty cool." Another discussion tool is the Book Club. Swanton said:

> We've read *The Underground Railroad* by Colson Whitehead. Now, we're reading *Passing* by Nella Larson. Those are two books that discuss issues that still have a chokehold on Black people today. It's really… We've gotten some really good discussions out of them, I do believe.

PW said that when reading books also have a movie or television series, it helps spark critical conversations. In reference to *The Underground Railroad*, she said "we would read the chapter watch the series, but we would also discuss it, just the show, the plot in general, and then how stuff from slavers can still be seen today." Thus, students are able to make connections to how elements of racism and other racist policies are

present in today's society. PW also spoke to the transformative impact that these conversations have had on her. She said:

> I can definitely tell you, like, the person I was not even like six months ago is a completely different person than I am right now, and I can owe a lot of that to the Center and the people within the Center. I think it gives power to the students to take change of their own future, and give them the feeling that they can do it, and give them the confidence that they need to go out on their own and fight these battles that we're fighting every day – whether it's in the classroom or just on campus in general.

Students in the SSREC are also supported through campus partners like the OMSA. This office engages in having critical conversations that introduces students to a multitude of controversial discussions. The OMSA Director stated that the OMSA offers "Munch Vibes." She said:

> It's really just having a meal together and talking about something culturally or socially relevant. Many times, we'll watch a video and then have a conversation… And then, of course, you think about what can we do to make things better in our country. Or if it's something specific related to campus and about what we can do, and…pointing students in the direction of who are the right resources and things either on campus or in the community.

The OMSA Director clarified that even though this program is hosted through the OMSA, students from the SSREC are invited. Particularly, she said "We also are big in making sure that the students who are part of the programs that the [SSREC] serves are, of course, part of our programming." So, "students can come to OMSA if they want to

engage more in dialogue around identity, and isms, and that educational piece." The OEI also works with the SSREC on conducting the Dialogues on Diversity monthly series (discussed further in question number 6).

Q5: How does The SSREC Ontologically Identify and Challenge Evidence of Racism?

Table 8

SSREC's Approaches to Identifying and Challenging Racism

Themes	Direct Quotes
Theme 1: "Faculty, Staff, and Students"	**SSREC Response:** Faculty, Staff, and Student identified racial inequities.
Theme 2: "Graduation Outcomes"	**SSREC Response:** "The Center's purpose is in response to systemic inequities in graduation outcomes"
Theme 3: "We Advocate"	**SSREC Response:** "We advocate on behalf of students individually and in response to systemic issues

Theme 1: "Faculty, Staff, and Students." On the questionnaire, the SSREC noted that there are two ways in which racial inequities are identified. One of them is by way of faculty, staff, and students. One catalyst for establishing the SSREC was responses by URMs on the NSSE indicating a significantly low sense of belonging among students of color. Thus, this signaled that those students of color at the University have not felt welcomed. Boosie Butt stated that when attending programs hosted by predominantly white organizations, she often "felt out of place." The OEI Director stated in responding to this same question that, "There also were some issues just in certain pockets around campus; Issues that students of color were having with- you know, whether it's like student workers and their supervisors in different areas on campus, students in their courses."

Slender Man and students in the focus group identified another issue on campus this past academic year that is causing a rift with students of color on color. He said, "There's a policy. The policy is if you don't have five active members in an organization it is on suspension for that whole year." They argued that the problem is that most of the Black student organizations- particularly those that are Greek- have fewer than five members because of racial demographics. As such, a policy being instituted that affects all students has the potential to adversely affect students of color. The OMSA Director acknowledged a similar concern with a potential change in housing. She said:

> We are currently, as an institution, in an RFP [request for proposal] for housing. So, we will be outsourcing Residence Life. I mean, not this semester with the timeliness, but for sure by next fall. Possibly by the summer, which is why myself, Jennifer, and Director met with our current Director of Housing to figure out how this is going to affect the Underrepresented Scholars Program specifically. Because basically with our current Residence Life, we were able to make a deal about how much we would be paying. And so that number will be quadrupled basically most likely, once we have outsourced housing.

With the new deal in place, students of color are likely, again, to be the most disadvantaged group by this policy. OMSA Director noted that this is because as an external company, their goal is to make money. According to OEI Director, The USP program is designed to be cost-friendly. "It's completely free to the students and their families. We house them for six weeks, feed them for six weeks- including most of the weekends."

According to Slender Man, there have been times in which he did not speak up about potentially racist incidents. He said:

There has been a time where I just, just when people do racist stuff - or not even racist stuff, when people act a certain way or act funny against the color of my skin. There are examples of when me and Rocko came to the door – me, Rocko, and PW, or just a Black group in general – and we get targeted. Like, I just undermine that situation.

Theme 2: "Graduation Outcomes." The SSREC stated in the questionnaire that their efforts in identifying racism within the University were two-fold. In no order, one part was by faculty, staff, and students identifying racial inequities. The second part was "in response to systemic inequities in graduation outcomes." A snapshot of the University's 2020-23 Strategic Diversity Plan (Table 9) reflects the six-year graduation rates as of the 2019 academic year.

Table 9

MSU's Six-Year Graduation Rates by Ethnicity

	Cohorts						
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013		
Ethnicity	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Avg.	Chg.
American Indian or Alaskan Native	20%	33%	33%	60%	50%	39%	30%
Asian	56%	66%	65%	63%	57%	61%	1%
Black or African American	18%	20%	14%	21%	26%	20%	8%
Hispanic/Latino	35%	37%	36%	36%	39%	37%	4%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	17%	33%	0%	50%	0%	20%	-
Nonresident Alien	63%	54%	58%	65%	64%	61%	1%

| | Cohorts | | | | | | |
Ethnicity	2009 2015	2010 2016	2011 2017	2012 2018	2013 2019	Avg.	Chg.
Race and Ethnicity Unknown	39%	35%	33%	50%	43%	39%	4%
Two or More Races	24%	37%	22%	25%	33%	28%	9%
White	52%	52%	53%	57%	59%	55%	7%
Total/Overall	42%	43%	42%	48%	51%	45%	9%
Underrepresented Minority Students	20%	24%	18%	24%	29%	23%	9%
Equity Gap	32%	28%	35%	33%	30%	32%	-20%

Note. Data is reflective of the 2020-23 Strategic Diversity Plan at MSU.

The Total/Overall Six-Year Graduation Rate as of 2019 was 51%. However, as of the same academic year, Black or African American students (26% six-year graduation rate) and Hispanic/Latino students (39% six-year graduation rate) fell behind significantly compared to the Total/Overall six-year rate. As a collective, Underrepresented Minority Students (URMs) had a six-year graduation rate of 29% at MSU as of 2019. The six-year graduation rate of URMs (29%) These percentages indicate that students of color attending MSU- particularly Black or African American and Latin Americans- are experiencing academic conditions that are adversely affecting their ability to graduate at the same rate as most non-Black or African American or Hispanic/Latin American students.

Theme 3: "We Advocate." The Center was asked, "In what ways has the Student Success and Racial Equity Center specifically responded to campus issues related to racism?" They responded, "We advocate on behalf of students on an individual level and in response to systemic issues, specifically those that disproportionately impact students of color (i.e., academic and financial aid policies, parking fines, etc.)." In response to his

own experiences, Slender Man said, "So, like, if I have an issue, I'll talk to Ms. Jennifer with it, and Ms. Jennifer would talk to someone or Interpret my problems to someone else. It gets better from there."

PW spoke of a personal issue at MSU where there was a concern of potential racial bias. She said, "So, I know they've been advocating for more Black Ras, business assistants, diversity advisors, and graduate assistants. I didn't get it." Her peers shockingly asked why she was not hired for the Resident Assistant (RA) position. Afterall, she is an 18-year-old junior in college who earned her Associates Degree already. She said:

> The first thing she did, obviously she comforted me. But the first thing she did was she called around, and she made sure that there were other students of color that were being hired and making sure that there were enough students of color Ras because that's important. It's not even just for the USP floor (which is what we did over the summer) and the SciT floor – the mainly students of color floors – we're talking about all floors. So, I really appreciate her for that because, you know, if not me, at least some other students of color.

Q6: What Practices Does the SSREC Engage in to Create Racial Equity?

Table 10

Creating Racial Equity in the SSREC

Themes	Direct Quotes
<u>**Theme 1**</u>: Collaboration with Campus and Community Partners	**SSREC Response**: "Collaborate with campus and community partners to transform systems and develop programs to increase the number of URM MSU graduates." **OEI Director:** "We do talk about things like campus climate and current events and what's coming up in each of our areas. We collaborate on a newsletter that goes out. We try to do it quarterly, but it usually ends up, three over the course of the academic year. And then we collaborate on our office's Dialogues on Diversity."
<u>**Theme 2**</u>: "Ms. Jennifer or Ms. Alex will Text me and Say 'You're Going to This.'"	**SSREC Response**: Enhance educational experiences for students of color fostering a campus culture where students of color feel valued, supported, and equipped to reach their full potential. **OEI Director:** "I know that they're working on is being the hub of pipeline programs into the University of Toledo. I know that that's a piece of what they envision their future to be."

Theme 1: Collaboration with Campus and Community Partners. Collaborate with campus and community partners to transform systems and develop programs to increase the number of African American MSU graduates. The OMSA Director said, she uses "we" because we're all part of the same university" when it comes to working with the SSREC. One of the ways in which they partner is the SciT program, which is a partnership between OMSA and the SSREC. The OMSA Director also stated that the OMSA, through their programming, "are big in making sure that the students who are part of the programs that the [SSREC] serves are, of course, part of our programming."

She said that while the SSREC largely works with students to address academic concerns, "Students can come to OMSA if they want to engage more in dialogue around identity, and isms, and that educational piece." This represents a more wholistic approach to serving the complete needs of URM students.

The OEI shared their collaborative efforts with the SSREC. They said:

We do talk about things like campus climate, and current events, and what's coming up in each of our areas. We collaborate on a newsletter that goes out. We try to do it quarterly, but it usually ends up three [issues] over the course of the academic year. And then we collaborate on our office's Dialogues on Diversity.

According to the OEI website, Dialogues on Diversity is a conversation series which started in 2020 after the murder of George Floyd. "Dialogues bring together students, faculty and staff, and community members to discuss hot-button issues relevant to our campus community and beyond." According to the website, Dialogues on Diversity have featured panel discussions such as "Deconstructing Antisemitism: Past and Present" and "Critical Race Theory, Explained."

Theme 2: "Ms. Jennifer or Ms. Alex will Text me and Say 'You're Going to This.'" The SSREC deferred to the mission statement when questioned on the practices it engages in to create racial equity. The Center stated that they choose to, "Enhance educational experiences for students of color fostering a campus culture where students of color feel valued, supported, and equipped to reach their full potential." This has been done by staff members personally reaching out to advocate on behalf of students as well as speaking directly with them. OEI Director stated:

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I know that the staff in the center are not hesitant to reach out to instructors on behalf of the students. I mean, even as much as student can't figure out how to navigate Blackboard or you know, it's or the instructors using a different platform than the student is used to using. I know of instances where they have reached out to the instructor, you know, to advocate for the student.

Advocating on student's behalf As the SSREC stated, the mission has been to foster an institutional culture where students of color feel valued, supported, and equipped to reach their full potential. According to students, the Center has delivered on these efforts. Several students stated that Alex and Jennifer reach out to them to either check on them or push for them to get involved.

PW said that both Alex and Jennifer "will text me and say, 'You're going to this'" when there are programs occurring on campus that may not be socially or culturally interesting to students of color on the surface. This approach, according to PW, is an effort to "push me to be the best person I can be." Boosie Butt stated that on her first day in her new position in the SSREC, Alex texted her to personally make sure she was aware and prepared for her the day. Each of the students acknowledged that the emails, texts, and group chat messages have been helpful to students getting involved and being aware of what is going on around campus or within the Center.

The appreciation for the SSREC staff has resulted in a name change of the Center by students. Boosie Butt said that students do not call it the SSREC, "you all just call it Jennifer and Ms. Alex's office." Rock said, "I would like to start with just guidance and mentorship from Ms. Jennifer and Ms. Alex…It's improved my experience on campus." He went on to say, "I'm here pretty much every day. So, I have opportunities to see Ms.

Jennifer and Ms. Alex and talk to them and have them tell me about these events that are coming up." A statement that sums up student feelings about Alex and Jennifer came from Slender Man: "I would not, you know, be where I am without both of them."

Q7: In What Ways are the Mission, Vision, and Conceptualization of Racial Equity by the SSREC Justified as Antiracist?

Table 11

Justifying the SSREC Efforts as Antiracist

Themes	Direct Quotes
Theme 1: "Actively Opposing Racism by Advocating for Change"	**SSREC Response:** "The work of actively opposing racism by advocating for changes in political, economic, and social life."
Theme 2: Catering Services to URMs as "Antiracist Discrimination"	**SSREC Response:** "Enhance educational experiences for URM students fostering a campus culture where students of color feel valued, supported, and equipped to reach their full potential."

Theme 1: "Actively Opposing Racism by Advocating for Change." The SSREC stated that "the work of actively opposing racism by advocating for changes in political, economic, and social life" serves as its definition of antiracism. In the context of education, the SSREC actively confronts racism by advocating for structural and cultural changes within the university. Kendi (2019) asserted that "an antiracist is someone who is supporting an antiracist policy by their actions or expressing an antiracist idea" (p. 17).

The SSREC advocates for change and racial equity through their "collaboration with campus and community partners to transform systems and develop programs to increase the number of African American graduates." As the OMSA Director stated, advocacy can look like petitioning for resources across the university in support of URM students, as well as "being able to help folks understand what the experiences of students

are really like." When students of color have expressed concerns related to their classroom experiences, SSREC staff "have reached out to the instructor, you know, to advocate for the student," according to OEI Director. And students in the study repeatedly noted how the Center's staff have assisted them in trouble shooting issues and things getting "better from there," as stated by Slender Man.

Theme 2: Catering Services to URMs as "Antiracist Discrimination."
According to the SSREC, the center serves to, "Enhance educational experiences for URM students fostering a campus culture where students of color feel valued, supported, and equipped to reach their full potential." As such, the central focus of the SSREC is to work within the university to build services explicitly designed to benefit students of color. These services would lead to increased retention, graduation rates, and overall sense of belonging among URMs. This is difficult in a society where many believe that race is no longer a barrier to success. However, Kendi (2019) argued that the most threatening racist movement today is the drive for race neutrality. He said, "The construct of race neutrality actually feeds White nationalist victimhood by positing the notion that any policy protecting or advancing non-White Americans toward equity is "reverse discrimination" (p. 15).

As Kendi (2019) went on to assert, "The defining question is whether the discrimination is creating equity or inequity" (p. 15). He also said, "The only remedy to racist discrimination is antiracist discrimination. The only remedy to past discrimination is present discrimination. The only remedy to present discrimination is future discrimination" (p. 15). As the SSREC and University have identified, URM students experience lower academic performance, their graduation rates are significantly lower

than white students, and URM students have indicated an overall lower sense of belonging compared to their white counterparts. As such, the SSREC is justified as antiracist as their services cater to the specific needs of URM students with the explicit intention of raising the academic performance, graduation rates, and sense of belonging of students of color to be on par with white students.

Q8: Do Employees of the SSREC Believe in the Need to Personally Identify as an Antiracist?

Table 12

Necessity of SSREC Employees Striving to be Antiracist

Themes	Direct Quotes
Theme 1: "It's what their job entails"	**SSREC Response:** "Yes, as employees of the SSREC under the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, we believe that employees must personally identify as antiracists because of our work to transform systemic barriers to success for Black Students."
Theme 2: "You need to be somebody who is at least understanding of the work"	**OMSA Director:** "You need to be somebody who is at least understanding of the work, and supportive of the work, and wants to engage in that way and be intentional about breaking down barriers and doing things equitably."

Theme 1: Yes, "It's What their Job Entails." The SSREC responded with a clear "yes" that it believes employees should personally identify as antiracists. More specifically, the Center said "we believe that employees must personally identify as antiracists because of our work to transform systemic barriers to success for students of color." This requires referring to the definition of an antiracist from the Office of Equity and Inclusion. An antiracist is defined as:

Someone who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or

expressing antiracist ideas. This includes the expression or opinions that racial

groups are equals and none needs developing. Antiracists support policy that

reduces racial inequity.

From the student perspective, being an antiracist means doing the work. The OEI

Director said that individuals are simply making a choice. She said, "I agree with Ibram

Kendi. And so, you are either supporting current policies, and procedures, and laws, and

practices that maintain the system as it stands, or you are working actively toward" what

she described as "a more just and equitable society for people of color." The OEI

Director also made a revelation as to one's ability to identify when racial harm has been

done, and how to assist students in being able to identify such incidents. She said:

> One of the things that we do when we're talking and mentoring with our students
>
> of color is help them to recognize situations where they are being
>
> harmed. Because sometimes we're on the receiving end of harm, and we're not
>
> even aware that we've been harmed, consciously. And so, if you're not aware of
>
> when harm is being done, you can't assist a student in recognizing when harm is
>
> being done.

From a student's perspective, PW said:

I do think they need to have a commitment because it's not just a job. It's what

their job entails. So, you have to, like, how do I put this? Your job is to fight for

racial equity for your students, and that means caring for your students. This is not

just a regular old desk job where you answer emails all day. You need to actually

be out there. You need to know what's going on in the students' life, what's going

on on campus, and how it's affecting the students. Because if you don't care, if you're just there for your nine to five and for your paycheck, then nothing's going to happen. There will be no change.

What the OEI, SSREC, and PW shared is that to be an antiracist requires frontline work where one's actions reflect their beliefs. As such, antiracists are people who simply make a personal decision to live in such a way that the lives of people of color are elevated in socially just ways. This requires folks to act in a way where they educate themselves.

Theme 2: Yes. "You Need to be Somebody Who is At Least Understanding of the Work." To transform systemic barriers at MSU, the OMSA Director stated that the efforts of the person's doing this work must be intentional. She said, "You need to be somebody who is at least understanding of the work, and supportive of the work, and wants to engage in that way and be intentional about breaking down barriers and doing things equitably." "I don't want someone to help me about how to deal with this microaggression and not even know what a microaggression is. So, yeah. I would definitely want someone to have an understanding and commitment."

Slender Man took a similar position. He said:

I totally agree with everyone here that I feel like you need to be out there. How are you going to be, I don't know, in a different perspective? How are you going to be a construction worker if you really haven't taken the time to actually go ahead and practice or put forth what you've learned or entitle what you're supposed to do?

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Q9: What is the understanding of the SSREC's Power Position in the Institution and Is

Power a Basic Question of Rracial Equity?

Table 13

SSREC's Power Position within the Institution

Themes	Direct Quotes
Theme 1: "As a unit of the Office of Equity and Inclusion"	**OEI Director:** "Normally, that role, the director of the center, reports to the Vice President of OEI."
Theme 2: "Advocacy leads to action and accountability"	**SSREC Response:** "We advocate on behalf of students individually and in response to systemic issues, specifically those that disproportionately impact students of color (i.e., academic and financial aid policies, parking fines, etc.)."
Theme 3: "Bringing us all together"	**SSREC Response:** "The Center assists students through: • Cultural support and discussions • Celebration of students' academic and personal successes"

Theme 1: The SSREC is "A Unit of the Office of Equity and Inclusion." The

Vice President for Equity and Inclusion (VPEI) is a member of the President's cabinet.

As such, the VPEI is the senior administrator responsible for overseeing the University's

equity and inclusion efforts. The OEI Director stated that, "Normally, that role, the

director of the [SSREC], reports to the Vice President of OEI." Therefore, the power

position of the SSREC is to report to and support equity and inclusion initiatives from the

OEI. This is reiterated in the SSREC's multiple references to being, "a unit of the Office

of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion" at MSU.

Theme 2: "Advocacy Leads to Action and Accountability." When asked what types of power the SSREC has in advancing racial equity at the University, the Center responded:

> We advocate on behalf of students individually and in response to systemic issues, specifically those that disproportionately impact students of color (i.e., academic and financial aid policies, parking fines, etc.). We believe advocacy on behalf of our students leads to action and accountability.

Therefore, advocating on behalf of students of color in response to campus and political issues adversely affecting students of color was conceived as a form of power by the SSREC. Notably, the Center identified a "belief" that advocating on behalf of students of color leads to change. They noted several ways in which advocacy takes in the Center: "Academic support referrals, Intrusive case management, Advocacy, as well as Personal and Academic Problem-Solving."

Additionally, accountability was identified as another form of power. Accountability occurs the Center collaborates with other units across campus by completing academic support referrals and assisting students with academic and personal problem-solving issues. According to Slender Man, these services have been personally beneficial. He stated:

> So, we have these little clubs and these little organizations and these little outlets with each other to feel safe and try to get other people who are in a position of power here on this campus up in that chain of command. So, like, if I have an issue, I'll talk to Ms. Gentry with it, and Ms. Gentry would talk to someone or interpret my problems to someone else. It gets better from there.

However, this power does have its limitations. The OMSA Director said "because we have both an Office of Equity and Inclusion and the Center as part of the overall Division of Equity and Inclusion, a lot of that type of work- the political issues response- comes out of the Office of Equity and Inclusion to more campus-wide." Additionally, according to the OEI Director, "As far as administration goes, it's not like the [SSREC] could send an email to the President and say something specific needs to happen on our campus." Therefore, the SSREC filters much of their responses through the Office of the VPEI.

Theme 3: "Bringing Us All Together." Students in this study offered an interesting perspective on the SSRECs power within the organization. Namely, the Center's power to empower students of color and build community. Boosie Butt said:

> I think the power that they have is honestly bringing us all together. I don't know where I would be without this Center. Like, I'm growing bonds with more people. Like, I'm making more friends, I'm making connections. I was just talking to the girl out there about being on e-board for BSU and things like that. It's just like, you don't know it while you're in the moment, like, the things and the knowledge you gain, but it's really beneficial for you at the end of the day.

Slender Man echoed similar sentiments. He said:

> Yeah, bringing us together, helping us… Bringing us together and letting the Black community get involved –or willing to get involved… I mean, look at us now. So, it's bringing us together, and it's giving us an opportunity to expand our power and expand our connections, to further our web of sources. I appreciate that. That's the type of power they have.

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Lastly, PW spoke of power related to the level of confidence that has been instilled in students such as herself. She said:

Just the power that I see within the students. The confidence. Like, I can definitely tell you, like, the person I was not even like six months ago is a completely different person than I am right now, and I can owe a lot of that to the Center and the people within the Center. I think it gives power to the students to take change of their own future and give them the feeling that they can do it, and give them the confidence that they need to go out on their own and fight these battles that we're fighting every day – whether it's in the classroom or just on campus in general.

Q10: What Challenges Has the SSREC Encountered While Engaging in Racial Equity Efforts?

Table 14

The SSREC's Operational Challenges

Themes	Direct Quotes
Theme 1: "Definitely Resources"	**SSREC Response**: "Our staff has no control over academic, admission, and financial aid requirements and processes, constrained budget resources, low numbers of faculty of color, and unaddressed racism in other examples of campus life.
Theme 2: "There's A Lot of Politics Involved"	**SSREC Response**: "Unaddressed racism in other examples of campus life."
Theme 3: "Most People Don't Even Know It Exists on Campus"	**Director 1OEI Director**: "Most people don't even know it exists on campus. And I'm not saying it's for lack of trying to get the word out. I'm not quite sure because they did a grand opening, there was a huge news article, but it seems like faculty are not aware."

Theme 1: "Definitely Resources." When asked about challenges advancing

racial equity, the OEI Director replied that it is "definitely resources. They said:

> The program coordinator position is an interim position- one-year interim
>
> position. We have reapplied for an additional year for reinvestment funds. In fact,
>
> the Underrepresented Scholars Program, Summer Bridge and SCiT are contingent
>
> upon that being approved. And that's for this coming summer. And each year in
>
> the past, because if you think USP's first summer was 2015, I came on for the
>
> 2018 year. So, in the past, every year, we would have to request the funds from
>
> the Provost's Office. It's not like there was an amount of money in the OEI
>
> operational budget to manage the Summer Bridge program. So, there are lots of
>
> things.

When asked about challenges, the SSREC to this back a step further and stated

that in addition to a constrained budget, "Our staff has no control over academic,

admission, and financial aid requirements and processes." Thus, because the Center has

no control over these areas, it is a challenge to advance racial equity to transform such

systems and experiences that would meet the needs of racially marginalized students at

MSU. The OMSA Director echoed similar sentiments in saying that being more equitable

in the University's financial aid practices would mean awarding racialized students with

"an automatic scholarship for students of color because they're students of color wanting

to attend here." When asked why providing racialized students with automatic

scholarships should be a racial equity practice, the OMSA Director said:

Because of the hundreds of years of no generational wealth that is a reality for white folks. And so, to me, closing an equity gap would be to recognize that, and to recognize that folks of color are not starting in the same place. So, I'm specifically referring to generational wealth because if we want to be inclusive and an inclusive campus community, diverse campus community, it means breaking down inequities that exist. So, I mean that's my simple answer is that, you know, like where are reparations for people, you know? So, that to me is an easy answer. You know, being intentional. Being intentional and putting money where our mouth is would be nice.

To be clear, the OMSA Director was suggesting a more radical antiracist idea for higher education to practice as opposed to directly challenging MSU's financial aid allocation process. The antiracist idea she proposed was an automatic scholarship to students of color. It is born of the acknowledgement that many racist policies have contributed to the accumulation of generational wealth in the United States that has historically benefited white people. Thus, a racial equity policy that would have widespread considerations for increased recruitment, retention, and graduation efforts of racialized students would be for institutions to vastly increase their financial support of students of color.

Students in this study recognized that financial support from universities does not simply come from a moral obligation to support students of color at the University. From their perspective, they noted that institutions need more tangible justifications to support efforts that would increase financial support of these programs. PW said, "in order to do the things we need to do, mainly – unfortunately – it's funding. In order to get funding,

we have to have certain criteria." Swanton stated in her support of more financial

support:

> The university speaks money. I think we need more members. We need more
>
> people. We need more representation. I know that we are – like, Black people –
>
> make up, what is it, 10 percent of the people on campus? But that doesn't mean
>
> that we should be funded less or we should get less recognition than the other
>
> predominantly-white organizations.

Offering racialized students more financial aid in the form of scholarships would

likely enhance the institution's enrollment of students of color. This is evidenced by the

students in this study. According to two of the five students in the focus group, they were

initially approached by university recruiters promoting full-ride scholarships as part of

the USP and SCiT programs. While another student did not specifically mention a full-

ride scholarship as a deciding factor, he did mention that in-state tuition played a

significant factor in their choice to attend MSU.

Even such programs have been hard to maintain because of a modest budget.

According to the OEI Director when speaking about the stagnant number of students who

can participate in the USP program:

> We've been at 30 students since 2015 because we can't afford, you
>
> know…Because it's completely free to the students and their families. We house
>
> them for six weeks, feed them for six weeks- including most of the weekends.
>
> Take them on outings on the weekends. Cover their 2-3 credit hour courses.

So, having enough resources to support the students currently attending the

University is just one piece of the struggle. The other piece of the struggle is growing the

capacity to serve more students. Rocko provided his perspective from the student side. He said:

> I think, at this point, it does come down to the University because Ms. Jasmine and Ms. Gentry, they do all they can. They work from the moment they get here until the moment they leave. Their schedules are packed every day. They're constantly in meetings, meeting with students, doing whatever they can – but there's only two of them. They can only do so much to get the information out while also continuing to do all that they already do. So, I feel like if there was outside help, that would make a big difference.

Therefore, as the Center and University seeks to advance racial equity, there must not only be a definite increase of resources, but there must also be an antiracist-based allocation of resources that results in the Center's ability to grow its capacity to serve students. As the SSREC noted, "low numbers of faculty of color" also make it difficult to serve students of color in the Center as they are limited to three fulltime staff. So, institutions must also consider their investment into hiring more faculty and staff-particularly those of color in a Center expressly committed to serving students of color. This not only helps to provide students with more people they can receive assistance from, but it helps to spread this work around.

Theme 2: "There's A Lot of Politics Involved." The challenge of controlling, or at the very least, contributing to the distribution of campus resources is just part of what makes it challenging to advance racial equity. This is particularly the case in a university setting. The SSREC also noted that "unaddressed racism in other examples of campus life" add to the struggle of advancing racial equity. Unaddressed racism on campus can

either refer to the complete dismissal of racist claims, the University attention to such events, or not enough movement when addressing the concerns. When it comes to understanding the role of a racial equity center- particularly in a higher education setting, what can be changed is often bounded by institutional leaders. When asked what role the SSREC has in responding to political issues related to racism, the OEI Director said:

> So, OK. So, Quatez, the issue that I'm having in answering the question is that there's a lot of politics involved. So, often times, I might know, and the VP of the office might know what needs to be said or what needs to be done. But because of constraints from perhaps Marketing and Communication, or the President's wishes, or general counsel, that can put severe restraints on what's possible for the VP of OEI to accomplish. To be fully transparent.

As stated in the Office of Equity and Inclusion's "Vision and Purpose" statement, the Office strives to "cultivate a safe, diverse community and want to harness its power to change cultures." However, the OEI Director's response indicates that some of this power to change institutional culture and even address racial inequity is in the hands of offices that control institutional messages, as well as the direction of the University President. The OMSA Director stated that in her Office's work, sharing with faculty and staff "what students are actually experiencing and helping them understand what it's like to be a student in 2022, and especially being a student of color" is how their office contributes to creating racial equity.

 Theme 3: "Most People Don't Even Know It Exists on Campus." I completed fieldwork for this study after I completed my interviews with the Directors. I noted during the interviews and the review of transcripts that both Directors noted that the

location of the SSREC being separate from spaces such as the Student Union (SU) created concerns. During my tour of campus, I was able to walk the halls of the SSREC. In being over in the SU, you could see how active this space was. There was a food court and a Starbucks, the OMSA was in this building, the Dean of Students Office, the Campus Activities Office, and other student resources. There were also student organization suites. It was very apparent that this space was dedicated to promoting student engagement and enhancing their sense of belonging on campus.

At the end of my tour of the SU, I decided to walk over to the SSREC from the SU. With emails from the Center's staff, interviews, as well as the website, I was aware of what building and floor where the Center was located. I entered the building on the ground floor and took the elevator to the second floor. Once I got off the elevator, I began looking to my left and right before just walking. As I began walking down a long hallway, I began to be concerned that I may have gotten off on the wrong floor.

At one point, the researcher turned around to make sure he did not pass the Center. As he kept walking, he continuously looked to the left and right for any markings for the SSREC until he saw office signs outside the door center. He then walked inside to see four students seated in the waiting area and was greeted by the Program Manager. As someone new to visiting the Center, locating their space was an issue. This was also identified as a challenge by the OMSA Director:

> Their location, in my opinion, is a barrier. I guess that could have been listed
> under barriers as well as being located in a building that is mostly with classrooms
> and offices; that's not like a gathering space, not a real gathering space with
> students.

The location was identified as one of their challenges. Institutional awareness that the Center is operational was another barrier. When I interviewed the OEI Director, she said:

> Most people don't even know it exists on campus. And I'm not saying it's for lack of trying to get the word out. I'm not quite sure because they did a grand opening, there was a huge news article, but it seems like faculty are not aware.

Part of this issue may be contributed to this student-facing unit being in an administrative and academic building that shares a space with an ethnic studies program. Therefore, outside of the students who frequent this space, the Center is may only be known to the academic departments and administrators whose offices are located within this building. This makes it difficult for students- especially commuters- to be aware that this Center exists and where it is located. The location of the Center as well as the minimal University branding also lessens the opportunities that campus visitors and the general campus community would even stumble upon the Center space. This also brings into question whether the Center is part of the campus tour process for students interested in attending MSU. From Boosie Butt, the SSREC is not part of the tour:

I'm a tour guide, so when I have Black students, they gravitate more towards me, and I'm bringing them into the Resource Room (pseudonym). I bring them to talk to Ms. Alex and Ms. Jennifer about SCiT because I feel as if it's... Not going to say "my duty" or anything, but I feel like it would be wrong if I didn't because it would be hindering them and neglecting their needs from when they do decide to come here. So, yeah. That's why I decided to become a tour guide and things like that. But over the summer, you don't have those people. They're showing you the flatlands and what you're going to do at the President's barbecue. That ain't even no barbecue!

The OMSA Director mentioned that one of the challenges with the SSREC is not having built enough social and political capital on campus to establish a presence on campus yet. When asked if she had any ideas of how to do this, she responded:

I think for sure having more of a presence. I'm thinking about what it means for me personally is that I am on a bunch of different committees that people know OMSA and they know what we what we're doing. So, yeah. Maybe that's a good place to start is like being on different committees, then maybe it's going to different types of meetings, a meeting with different folks from across the institution.

What the OMSA Director shared here was that she has helped build the social and political capital of the OMSA office by serving on various committees around campus. This directly contributes to the OMSA office having voice around campus when it refers to institutional decisions- regardless of the level- that directly affect marginalized students. Being involved in committees around campus provides opportunities for the

OMSA to share their story as well as initiatives they are working on. According to Rocko:

> I guess, in a way, I think it falls more on the… Like, at fault by the students than the university because I do believe that if every Black student on campus went out to these events and actually showed up and showed that they were there and that they cared, the university would do more as of funding and, I guess, advertisements or recognition. But, the truth is, the Black students on campus, they don't show up to these events. Like we said before, the BSU events, you'll have like 15 people, and 9 of them will be the e-board itself. So, the university can't help the people who don't care about the cause. So, sure, all of us show up here every single day, but they're only going to help as much as we may need or as they see that these 10 students may need. They're not going to help the entire student population if the entire student population seems as if they're doing fine on their own. Because the university's like, "They're doing their own thing." They don't see that as their own problem. So, I guess, before the university comes into play, I think the students themselves need to be more present.

Rocko brought forth an interesting perspective on some of the challenges of advancing antiracism and racial equity on a college campus. Namely, he said the responsibility is equally on students as well; students must do their part to show up to student of color specific events which shows they care and support each other. What Rocko is posing is that it cannot reasonable to expect the University to support such events, if the students are isolating themselves from the rest of the campus community. However, Swanton brought attention to some areas that illuminate why some students of

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color may not get as involved. When asking students how the SSREC has enhanced their experiences at the University, she said:

> Here's the thing. I don't really think it has, and that is on my part because I'm a very, like… I'm kind of, like, I wouldn't say I'm quiet, but just kind of like introverted. Yeah. I'm kind of an introvert. I think I could do more to connect more to Ms. Alex and Ms. Jennifer. Because, like, everything I have here, like my job upstairs, I found that myself. Also, I think, also being a commuter. Even though I'm here every day, I don't feel like I'm involved. I don't feel like I'm involved enough, and that is something that I definitely want to change. I do believe I should take more advantage of what we have here at the Center.

Slender Man stated something similarly to Rocko. Slender Man said, "I would blame MSU, but I also would blame ourselves. Like, in a way that we should come out of our shells and stop being isolated, and actually get out and help other people." Rocko and Slender Man brought awareness to a reasonable concern that students of color are not supporting their peers of color in programming, nor showing up for their programs. From their understanding, students of color are also responsible for building the social and political capital needed for the University and its officials to be pressed to invest more financially and otherwise in such efforts.

However, Swanton shared why this may be the case- at least for her. As a first-year student who is a commuter and is transitioning directly from high school, she identifies as more of an introvert. Living off campus, she has had to balance transitioning to this PWI as someone who does not live on campus, thus she is not totally immersed in the life of the college. Additionally, Swanton was part of the summer group of students

who participated in the SCiT program. Even though students were part of this six-week program that assisted in promoting their academic, social, and cultural transition to the University, this could call attention the summer program's efforts to encourage students to attend in-year programs by students.

Another explanation is the way that events on campus are marketed, and which programs are promoted. I asked students how the Center communicates with them about events. Swanton raised concerns about which programs the University itself promotes events. She said:

> Just how they just go about everything. It's not catering to diversity. Like, the only time I've ever gotten an email from the University of Toledo in the newsletter about something diverse was during Black History Month. Never anything else. Never.

Both Rocko and Swanton acknowledged that students of color attending and supporting events promoted by students of color is part of enhancing their visibility on campus. To their understanding, this is critical to the University financially supporting such efforts- including the SSREC. Students are also required to sign-in as they enter the SSREC to track attendance. Slender Man said, "I tell people to sign in all the time. Half those kids don't sign in. They just come in and out…without those numbers being signed in and without those members being recognized, they're not going to get funds." Boosie Butt offered that a simple response is for the University to promote the space more often:

> The University should be putting it out more, helping kids who are commuters understand more. It was just a sophomore – no, junior – girl who was just in there

like five seconds ago who didn't even know about SCiT. So, the university needs

to broadcast and network for the people of color here.

Summary

This chapter reported findings from a case study which explored how and in what ways the Student Success and Racial Equity Center (SSREC) conceptualizes antiracism to engage in racial equity efforts. This case study took place at Midwestern State University (MSU), which is a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). Among the data collected were single interviews with multiple employees as well as a single focus group interview with students. Additionally, documents were reviewed and analyzed, and a site visit took place. In chapter five, the findings are discussed in further detail with implications for practice and considerations for future research.

Chapter Five

Discussion

The central question in this research study was how and in what ways does a pioneering university Racial Equity Center (REC) conceptualize antiracism to engage in racial equity efforts in a Predominantly White Institution (PWI)? The central question in this study was broken down into 10 sub-questions, including:

1. How is antiracism conceptualized in a university Racial Equity Center?

2. What is the mission and vision of a pioneering university Racial Equity Center?

3. How is one pioneering university Racial Equity Center structured regarding staffing?

4. How does one pioneering university Racial Equity Center distinguish its work from other diversity units across its respective campus?

5. How is the ontological nature of reality regarding racism and racial inequity explored by one pioneering university Racial Equity Center?

6. What practices does one pioneering university Racial Equity Center use to create racial equity?

7. In what ways are the mission, vision and conceptualization of racial equity by the university Racial Equity Center justified?

8. In what ways do professional employees in a pioneering university Racial Equity Center personally identify as antiracist?

9. What is the understanding of the pioneering university Racial Equity Center's power position in the university and is power a basic question of racial equity?

10. What challenges has the pioneering Racial Equity Center encountered while engaging in racial equity efforts?

Q1: How is Antiracism Conceptualized by the SSREC?

I did not provide participants in this study a definition of antiracism. I chose this approach because the SSREC never espoused to engage in antiracist work. Therefore, I wanted to know, without a prompt, how they conceived of antiracism. I wanted to use this data to highlight the consistencies, contradictions, and new learnings from their perspective.

The SSREC conceptualized antiracism as "the work of actively opposing racism by advocating for changes in political, economic, and social life." Therefore, the SSREC viewed antiracism in the context of higher education as the work of actively opposing racism through the practice of advocating for changes that alter the political, economic, and social climate of the institution. As the SSREC wrote in their response to the questionnaire, "We believe advocacy on behalf of our students leads to action and accountability." It is their belief that advocacy in a university setting on behalf of students of color lead to institutional responses that remedy the issues causing the racial inequities.

Kendi (2019) defined antiracism as a powerful system of antiracist policies that produce racial equity. The core difference between the SSREC and Kendi is that the SSREC viewed antiracism as advocating for structural changes that create racial equity as opposed to Kendi viewing antiracism as whole systems operating under antiracist policies that lead to racial equity. It's the difference between the journey versus the destination of racial equity.

The SSREC also noted that racial equity is a form of corrective justice. Corrective justice is explored more in-depth later in this chapter. However, corrective justice

theoretically refers to taking the responsibility for rectifying harm that one has done to another (Zipursky, 2002, p. 695). In the context of higher education, to take responsibility for rectifying harm from an antiracism standpoint is to institutionally take ownership for the structural issues which produced those racial inequities. It is to acknowledge that the deficit is not on any racial category, but the system itself.

This is the very essence of the OEI Director asserting that antiracism is a choice. It is a choice to address the system or perpetuate the system. This means choosing to construct reconciliatory measures that heal racial harm or choosing to continue with the maintenance of such policies and practices. Choosing to implement policies that provide an equitable opportunity for all students to thrive or choosing to perpetuate the same types of policies that have maintained the racial status quo at institutions like MSU where there is a 30% equity gap in graduation rates alone among students of color (Table 11).

It was glaringly obvious in the data collection process that the center does not use antiracism or antiracist in its language. Students notably struggled in defining the terms. I eventually asked them to share as best as they could.

Students focused on individual's being active in the process of change, educating themselves about racial injustice, and learning about other cultures as antiracists. This was in addition to a focus on antiracist's intentions. The concept of intent rather than impact stood out because as an experienced DEI educator, it is common for facilitators to focus on impact rather than intent. While expressing one's intentions can certainly be beneficial, addressing the impact one has on other's is at the core of DEI work.

Intent stood out because it brings attention to the core work of antiracism, which is racial equity. PWIs have been intentional about adding Ethnic Studies Programs and

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courses. These programs and courses are relatively standard across PWIs today. PWIs have been intentional about engaging in DEI efforts. It is now common for PWIs to have offices, positions, or some type of student-facing services that serves as a resource to students from marginalized communities-particularly students of color. If PWIs want to experience the level of racial equity they espouse, there must be greater intentionality behind racial equity efforts.

For example, the OMSA Director dreamed of "automatic scholarships" for all students of color. "I wish we had an automatic scholarship for students of color because there are students of color wanting to attend here." Three of the five students in the focus group indicated they chose MSU because of scholarship money or affordability. The OMSA Director was asked why scholarships should automatically be offered to students of color. They stated that acknowledging the gap in the accumulation of generational wealth for centuries would also "recognize that folks of color are not starting in the same place" financially. Thus, an automatic scholarship for students of color would be an intentional measure to bridge the wealth gap that could lead to greater outcomes in access, opportunity, and achievement for students of color.

Q2: What is the Mission and Vision of the SSREC?

The OEI Director stated that part of the catalyst behind the SSREC was the university's effort to be "student-ready." This was framed by the low graduation rate among Black and Latin American students (Table 11), as well as the low sense of belonging indicated by the NSSE reports. Some of the issues of belonging were reiterated by focus group participants. Namely, the rarity of any space at the institution where students see other Black-identified students or cross-cultural engagement. With the

diversity efforts that previously existed at the university and the maintained racial status quo, advocates at the university championed for a new and pioneering effort to specifically address the needs of Black-identified students.

According to the SSREC, the center's mission statement is twofold: (1) "Collaborate with campus and community partners to transform systems and develop programs to increase the number of URM MSU graduates" and (2) "Enhance educational experiences for URM students fostering a campus culture where students of color feel valued, supported, and equipped to reach their full potential." It is the center's vision, "To provide the highest quality of programs and services to foster an atmosphere of academic excellence and affirmation where students attain their educational goals, engage the community and emerge as future leaders to create a more just and equitable society."

A powerful statement was made by Kendi (2019). He said, "before we can treat, we must believe…Believe in the possibility that we can strive to be antiracist from this day forward. Believe in the possibility that we can transform our societies to be antiracist from this day forward" (p. 164). It is not clear if the institutional leaders at MSU believe in the SSREC as a viable resource to create racial equity. As the OEI Director stated:

> Most people don't even know it exists on campus. And I'm not saying it's for lack of trying to get the word out. I'm not quite sure because they did a grand opening, there was a huge news article, but it seems like faculty are not aware.

Faculty awareness of the center is low. The SSREC is located in an academic building that is also home to the Office of the President, as opposed to a student-facing office. At the time of data collection, there were no marketing brochures. Even Boosie

Butt stated that as a tour guide, she sometimes spontaneously took students of color to the

SSREC because the center is not on the tour schedule.

So, it must be said that belief in university RECs cannot solely come from the

people directly employed to do this work. Belief must come from each institutional leader

in a position of power. Each leader must collaborate with the REC to identify

opportunities to structurally and socially advance racial equity within that respective area

of their responsibilities. Just as financial support is currency, so, too, is institutional

support. If leaders with institutional power are not investing in the university's REC, it is

not reasonable to expect the rest of the campus community to invest interest in the center.

Nor is it reasonable to expect racial equity to advance in

Q3: How is the SSREC Staff Structured and How Does this Structure Support

Antiracism?

Staffing within the SSREC consists of seven people. Three professional staff

members (Director, Program Manager, and Program Coordinator) and four student

employees (one GA and three federal work study). The SSREC noted that Center is

responsible for, "promoting the overall success of URM students at Midwestern State

University and assisting with the coordination of initiatives designed to support the

recruitment, transition, and persistence of all historically underrepresented students

(students of color, first-generation college students, LGBTQ+, low-income, etc.).

The Director has the primary responsibility of developing strategies which

support the mission and vision of the SSREC which is critical to advancing the

University's Strategic Diversity Plan. The Director also oversees the implementation of

the SSREC's mission and vision while supervising the Program Manager and Program

Coordinator. The Program Manager assists the Director by managing program services and operations. Lastly, the Program Coordinator assists with the direct delivery of programs and services offered within the Center. This structure supports antiracism by providing URM students with special services and resources to support their transition to MSU as well as their graduation from the institution. This is especially important as URMs have a 30% six-year equity gap (Table 11) when it comes to graduation rates.

Readers should consider staffing of centers and its relation to sustainability as well as how staff can effectively meet their goals and objectives. As I stated in the positionality statement, my job at the time of completing this project was overseeing the day-to-day operations of a Black cultural center at a midsize institution with roughly a thousand Black-identified students. In this position, I had no professional direct reports. This made it extremely challenging to be effective in this role and meeting the collective needs of Black-identified students as I was the only person hired to address the needs of this specific demographic of students. While my center was able to hire two undergraduate students (each working between 10 to 12 hours per week), institutions should not expect undergraduate students to do the type of work or provide the type of services someone with a graduate degree was hired to provide them.

Institutions with student-facing RECs must strategically hire an appropriate number of staff to meet the needs of the center and the students they serve. Staffing must take into consideration the mission and vision of the center in addition to who the center is designed to serve. While the SSREC predominantly serves Black-identified students, its services are open to the entire campus community- including other racially

marginalized communities. A reasonable question is if three professional staff members are enough to advance racial equity at a midsize university?

Institutional leaders often tout that diversity efforts at the institution are everyone's responsibility. While this statement is true on the surface, the reality is often contradicted in practice. According to Williams (2013):

It is much harder to change the curriculum or admissions policies of the institution, invest seriously in new retention programs and scholarships, appoint a CDO who leads a portfolio of critical campus offices and units, or require faculty members to engage with issues of diversity in their teaching and mentoring. (Williams, 2013, p. 177)

Institutions must be realistic about the ability of staff in RECs to meet institutional goals and objectives related to racial equity and to what extent. Big dreams of transforming racial inequities combined with other pioneering efforts and a small team is a sure way to undermine what those teams can do. This is not how university RECs fail, but how institutions fail and reproduce the racial status quo in higher education. So, instead of assigning staff based on a budget that is often conservative (remember, higher education is still a business), we have to move beyond conservative practices that have shown they do not work. Institutions must work backwards and build a budget of resources including staff that more accurately accounts for what it takes to achieve the level of success they aspire to have when engaging in racial equity efforts.

As participants revealed in sub-question 10, one of the biggest challenges facing the SSREC was resources. Resources are not just financial. Resources also refer to the number of people hired to work in these centers. Better staffing means more individual

attention to the campus community. Better staffing means more sharing of innovative ideas from individuals trained in antiracism and racial equity. Better staffing means a better campus reach in these efforts. Better staffing means a healthier staff as these individuals will not be as stretched to do this work.

Q4: How does the SSREC Distinguish its Work from Other Diversity Units on Campus?

The SSREC is distinguished from other diversity units in four primary ways: (1) Their services expressly serve Black and other URM students; (2) Services focus on degree attainment and career development of Black and other URM students; (3) Services advocate on behalf of Black and other URM students, and (4) Services enhance the sociopolitical development of Black and URM students. It is worth noting that the SSREC partners with an ethnic studies program. The website stated that the partnership is, "to help students apply their knowledge of the respective Ethnic Diaspora through community-based, social justice learning experiences in the community and surrounding areas." However, participants in this study did not speak to this partnership, nor was there additional information on the "Programs" webpage.

I posed the sub-research question in this section because of the growing number of diversity efforts in higher education, yet the documented persistence of racial inequity. McNair et al. (2020) stated that in the context of education, "diversity is an understanding of how individual and group differences contribute to the diverse thoughts, knowledge, and experiences that are the foundation of a high-quality liberal education" (p. 6). This is part of the diversity fabric at institutions like MSU. In reference to the services offered

through the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs, the OMSA Director said they have four key pillars

> We're focused on education which is achieved through some of the different trainings and workshops and other types of things that we do. Community building is really critical. We know that students need to have a community and have that sense of belonging in order to be successful both in and outside the classroom. Our retention specific initiatives. So, we do have a new position in the office specifically working on retention. So, some things that we do specific to that. And then of course, celebrating diversity is a big part of what we do here. History and heritage months- those types of things.

MSU's Office of Equity and Inclusion's goals and services contribute to increasing diversity in representation while fostering a sense of belonging on campus that benefits every member of the institution. Kendi's conception of diversity is not as much a focus on representation of diverse backgrounds. Kendi (2019) stated the following when defining diversity:

> The logical conclusion of antiracist strategy is open and equal access to all public accommodations, open access to all integrated White spaces, integrated Middle Eastern spaces, integrated Black spaces, integrated Latinx spaces, integrated Native spaces, and integrated Asian spaces that are as equally resourced as they are culturally different. (Kendi, 2019, p. 125)

In Kendi's definition of diversity, he centered on open access to integrated spaces along racialized and non-racialized communities as a core charateristic. Racialized communities refer to racial groups that have been historically oppressed. However, there

is one issue with Kendi's definition which can reveal why the SSREC has a particular focus on Black students in addition to other URMs at the institution.

Kendi stated that spaces that are as "equally resourced as they are culturally different" (p. 125) is a key component of diversity. However, the core phenomenon of antiracism is equity among races. Equity-driven initiatives should compensate for the policies and practices that present greater challenges for certain groups in order to create relatively equal outcomes. As observed in Table 11, Black and Hispanic/Latin American students graduate at significantly lower rates than their racial counterparts, even though the university has services and resources for all racialized groups. This indicates that MSU is failing to adequately serve Black and Hispanic/Latin American students. Thus, these spaces should be as equitably resourced as they are culturally different in order to produce equal outcomes.

So, if institutions are to become more racially equitable, they must become more innovative in the ways that the institution structurally integrates URM students-regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds. Student participants in the focus group indicated that their sense of belonging was increased because of the SSREC. The center specifically creates programs and personalized touchpoints to enhance outcomes among Black-identified students. As students like Boosie Butt stated, they have gained leadership opportunities as well as built greater relationships among Black-identified students as a result of the SRREC.

The SSREC has experienced some early success with Black-identified student experiences that has led to increased confidence and persistence. However, readers should caution against an overreliance on university RECs as the central university unit

to address racial inequities and serve racialized communities. As previously stated, diversity and racial equity efforts are everyone's responsibility. However, this has not been the practiced reality in higher education or else there wouldn't be the persistent issue of racial inequity. The broader campus community utilize university RECs in consulting capacities as well as professional development opportunities to enhance racial equity across the institution.

Additionally, there is an opportunity for university RECs to add to scholarship racial equity. Both the OEI and OMSA Directors noted either plans for the SSREC to engage in scholarship or expressed a need. As an institution that has historically struggled with racial inequity in educational outcomes, MSU sought to engage in their racial equity efforts through student-facing services. The SSREC can pioneer research which explores the complex issues of race, racism, antiracism, and racial equity in U.S. higher education. To date, the SSREC is the only university REC I observed explicitly concerned with student-facing services and Black students in particular. The SSREC can position itself to produce extensive research on racialized student experiences and outcomes in higher education with wider implications for policymaking and policy analysis.

Q5: How does the SSREC Ontologically Identify and Challenge Evidence of Racism?

Ontology refers to concepts as they exist, are becoming, or their reality. As such, the aim of this question was to explore how a university REC explores the nature of racism and racial inequity as they currently exist, and/or concepts and problems in these areas as they are emerging. This is helpful to readers in developing and/or enhancing their strategies in identifying the problems and racism and racial inequity.

There are two ways in which the SSREC identifies racism and racial injustice within the university. First, faculty, staff, and students bring attention of these concerns to the university and/or the SSREC. This is not always done by direct contact with the offices. Student data via the NSSE has revealed rising concerns of sense of belonging from students of color. Secondly, as a unit committed to the academic success of students of color, the SSREC uses institutional data reflective of six-year graduation rates to address concerns. The SSREC addresses these concerns by then advocating to transform these issues. The advocate by directly intervening or sending referrals to the appropriate campus partners.

The SSREC has relied on faculty, staff, and student narratives in addition to graduation outcomes and NSSE data to identify the reality of racism and racial inequities within the institution. As such, the SSREC waits to receive a lot of this information. Kendi advocates for taking more of a proactive approach. As such, he believes in employing teams that will proactively identify racism and racial inequities as they exist, as well as holes in ideas they are looking to propose.

For university RECs such as the SSREC, this work must be proactive. In the SSREC's defense, this was their first year in operation. Much of what they are doing and are looking to do is a process under construction. However, it still serves a purpose for the SSREC to be proactive in their efforts- especially as they are in a place to be proactive in piloting antiracist policies related to students to analyze their potential in educational spaces.

Q6: What Practices Does the SSREC Engage to Create Racial Equity?

The SSREC engages in two ways to create racial equity: (1) collaborating with campus and community partners and (2) enhancing the educational experiences of URM students. As a unit of The Office of Equity and Inclusion, the Center, and its staff partner across the institution to put on events and programs that support URM students. The Center also advocates directly on behalf of students for changes within the institution that enhance Black and other URM student outcomes.

The SSREC has a director who oversees the administrative and strategic responsibilities of the Center. These responsibilities are designed to address racial inequities. The program manager and program coordinator then oversee the coordination and implementation of programs and services, as well as supervision of student staff. In short, the SSREC hires a staff that is centrally focused on designing and delivering programs and services that address racial inequities.

Lastly, the SSREC focuses on enhancing Black and URM student experiences at MSU as a bridge to racial equity in relation to sense of belonging as well as academic outcomes. Students used the word "suffocating" to describe how it feels to be on campus as a Black student. They shared experiences of being in the university library and not feeling welcomed or looking across campus and not seeing very much cross-cultural interactions. The OEI Director shared that the SSREC has assisted with trouble-shooting issues of belonging on behalf of students.

In the focus group interview, students spoke about the one-on-one attention they regularly receive from Alex and Jennifer of the SSREC. Students receive phone calls to remind them of upcoming events, text messages to check on them, and the environment

that has been created in the center makes them want to visit and be part of the center. Therefore, a critical takeaway is the importance of care as a racially equitable practice. This is addressed further in the Practical Implications section.

Q7: In What Ways are the Mission, Vision and Conceptualization of Racial Equity by the SSREC Justified as Antiracist?

The SSREC frames racial equity in the context of education. Accordingly, they define racial equity as "corrective justice for MSU Black students through the collaboration with campus and community partners to transform systems and develop programs to increase the number of URM graduates." As such, their mission is to (1) collaborate with campus partners to transform systems that lead to a higher graduation of URM students, and (2) enhancing experiences at the institution where URM students encounter a culture where they can reach their full potential.

Therefore, the mission, vision, and conceptualization of racial equity are justified as antiracist because the center's efforts actively collaborate with campus partners with the specific intent to transform systems in ways that will lead to more Black students and other students of color graduating in higher numbers. Lastly, the center caters their services to Black and other students identifying as URMs. The services are catered to these students to reverse MSU's six-year graduation rates (Table 1).

Q8: Do Employees of the SSREC Believe in the Need to Personally Identify as an Antiracist?

Participants indicated a belief that individuals who work in a university REC must have a personal commitment to antiracist action and self-education. This is because for individuals to work to transform a system and systemic outcomes, one must acknowledge

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their roles as members within the system. Secondly, having higher levels of understanding not only racial equity, but the systems which reproduce and sustain racial inequity is important. As the OMSA Director stated, when someone has an understanding of racial equity work and they inherently support it, it leads to more intentional practices which are expected to produce the intended outcomes.

Only one person spoke to the variable of race as an antiracist. Rocko said, "I'd go as far as to say that they wouldn't even have to be Black" when it comes to who can be an antiracist. Especially, "because there are white people – or even other people of color – who are raised in similar environments or the same way as some Black people." This acknowledges that while certain communities of color and some white people can live in environments similar to Black people, systemic inequities do not affect all racial groups the same.

Kendi (2019) said very simply, "before we can treat, we must believe" (p. 238). "Treat" refers to the work of antiracism and antiracist power. As Kendi (2019) said:

> The antiracist power within is the ability to view my own racism in the mirror of my past and present, view my own antiracism in the mirror of my future, view my own racial groups as equal to other racial groups, view the world of racial inequity as abnormal, view my own power to resist and overtake racist power and policy. (Kendi, 2019, p. 216)

The very first treatment one must give is the treatment of critically reflecting on one's actions and their positioning in the fight for racial equity. This is a constant process that does not start nor end with the workday. As the OEI Director stated, "There's no off switch for you because this is what your mind is thinking about it. Every experience is

going to bring your mind back to the theory that you just read about the other day."

Whether or not minds are being brought back to a specific part of antiracism theory or simply personal beliefs of racial equity, antiracist efforts can only evolve to their greatest and most intentional outcomes when these measures personal.

Q9: What is the Understanding of the SSREC's Power Position in the Institution and is Power a Basic Question of Racial Equity?

The SSREC is a unit that reports directly to the Office of Equity and Inclusion-specifically the Vice President of this office. As such, they are responsive to the VPEI and guided by the University's Strategic Diversity Plan. This includes carrying out responsibilities as identified by both the VPEI and the Strategic Diversity Plan, as well as assisting with addressing issues of racism and racial inequities. This is reflective of their responsibility to advocate for institutional responses of radical inequities grounded in the belief that such issues can and will be transformed.

From the student's perspective in the focus group, the SSREC's power resides in the Center's ability to empower students of color. As students of color historically have been challenged to build community at this PWI, they have been empowered by the Center's ability to bring students of color together. As students of color in this community have found it difficult to be engaged on campus, focus group students indicated their appreciation for a Center such as the SSREC helping them to build connections. And lastly, the Center has empowered student persistence by instilling confidence in the students who participated in this study.

When I first posed the question of power, it was without Kendi's conception of power. What I was initially concerned with was the university RECs role in the

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institution in changing policies. I address this further in the next section, but power is conceptualized by Kendi (2019) as either racist power or antiracist power (p. 15). I address this concept further in the next section. However, the SSREC is an antiracist power within the institution.

Antiracist power is the collection of antiracist policies and antiracist policymakers (Kendi, 2019, p. 15). However, this must be contextualized as the SSREC is part of an institution of higher education. The Center is filled with employees who are dedicated to working with campus partners to transform the system and educational outcomes of students of color. As such, power is a basic question of racial equity because if antiracist power is not operating, then racist power is operating. If racist power is operating, racial inequities will persist.

Q10: What Challenges Has the Pioneering Racial Equity Center Encountered While Engaging in Racial Equity Efforts?

When it comes to engaging in racial equity efforts, the SSREC primarily faces three challenges: lack of resources, bureaucracy, and institutional presence. Participants conveyed that a lack of resources is reflective of a lack of financial support which limits their ability to serve students currently in the Center as well as the ability to grow their efforts. "The lack of resources leads directly to diminished opportunities for learning" (Kendi, 2019, p. 73). Kendi (2019) asserted that, "To be an antiracist is to champion resource equity by challenging the racist policies that produce resource inequity" (p. 180).

Patton (2010) argued that, "Whether under the auspices of academic affairs or student affairs, culture center staff often find themselves competing with other units for

funding and resources in a political environment that may only give lip service to the value of diversity" (p. 16). As McNair et al. (2020) stated, "sustainability is dependent on dedicated resources, including personnel and institutional resources that will continue to support equity goals and provide accountability structures" (p. 97). In short, the SSREC needs more resources to fully realize its potential to create racial equity as well as be a sustainable and grow their services.

In regards to institutional bureaucracy, the Center must navigate multiple University offices- including the Office of Equity and Inclusion, University Marketing and Communications, as well as the President's Office when either addressing political issues of racism or engaging in racial equity efforts. This is not to say that bureaucracy in institutions is a problem. It is a democratic necessity to have multiple leaders who can collectively discuss issues prior to making decisions that affect everyone in an organization. Keeping in line with Kendi's language, it is not bureaucracy that is the problem. It's about power- racist power as opposed to antiracist power.

Broadly, the racial status quo in higher education has historically operated in ways that racial inequities have continued to persist (Patton, 2016, p. 326)- particularly in PWI settings. This signals that generally, the self-interest of PWIs has been served rather than all racial members of the institution. Kendi (2019) asserted that the root problem of racism, "has always been the self-interest of racist power" (p. 42). As such, people who benefit from this self-interest are those Kendi referred to as racist powers and those seeking racist power. They benefit from maintaining the racial status quo through their silence, their denial, their minimizing of racial inequities, and their engaging in practices that on the surface engage racial inequity, but fails to get to the root of racial inequities:

racist policies. In general, bureaucracy often operates to the extent of self-interest of PWIs, which is racist power. The final solution, Kendi (2019) argued, is a world of racial inequity that is unseen and uncontested (p. 54).

Lastly, the SSREC is not visible to the greater campus community. Thus, most faculty, staff, and students are unaware that the Center exists. Again, the Center is in its first year of operation, so it is building capital in addition to the services it can offer. Visibility has to be a proactive measure in building a university REC in PWIs. This must be done through constant blasting of information from the center, as the OMSA Director said, joining committees across campus is how the OMSA continues to be well-known. Another way of getting involved is through innovative programming that tackles some of the most pressing political topics.

One reason a university REC may not be well-known at a PWI is that it may be a campus that does not have a culture or interest in antiracism or racial equity efforts. Thus, no one may be looking for such centers. The other reality is that these centers-because of the very nature of the work they do-are likely to cause discomfort amongst the white population of the campus community. The OMSA Director stated that even though the MSU campus hasn't had much resistance to the SSREC, such tension is likely to arise at some point. This speaks to the rather normative issue in higher education of outright avoiding the issues of racism and racial inequity or doing patchwork. As such, university REC staff must be prepared to work around this issue and develop proactive measures to engage the campus community.

One way to be proactive is by locating and working alongside antiracist power within the university. The OMSA Director stated that they are on multiple committees

across the university. This helps to advocate for marginalized students, but it also helps to get the name of the Center across campus. If members of the community have interest in programming or bringing discussions to campus related to social justice, etc., the OMSA is a known resource. The same opportunity exists for the SSREC and other university RECs. Interested readers and leaders of university RECs should actively seek out opportunities to join committees- especially those with antiracist power.

Practical Implications

Antiracist Power Must Advance Racial Equity through Corrective Justice

The SSREC asserted that racial equity in an educational space is corrective justice. The concept of "corrective justice" requires a deeper exploration to be understood in an educational setting. Mills (2017) detailed this concept in Black Rights/White Wrongs as framed by Thomas Nagel. Nagel asserted that corrective justice is "an attempt to rectify the residual consequences of a particularly gross violation in the past of the first principle of equal rights and liberties" (p. 140). Benjamin Zipursky (2002) argued that corrective justice theory is simply the idea that when one individual (or group) is harmed by another individual (or group), the offender is responsible for making the harmed party whole (p. 695).

There is a longstanding history of disadvantages people of color have endured in higher education-particularly in PWIs. This is reflected in disparities such as sense of belonging, opportunity, and educational outcomes. It is a basic antiracist idea that racist policies are the root cause of racial inequities (Kendi, 2019, p. 18). Therefore, antiracist policies must be enacted to ensure racial equity.

For the sake of creating racial equity, it is important to remember that racist policies are created by people in positions of power to create such policies. People who have the power to create such policies. Thus, racial inequity is constructed. So, for racial equity to be achieved in higher education, leaders in positions of power must own the responsibility of structurally correcting the harm people of color have endured in these settings. This is the central to the objective of corrective justice. Corrective justice is not about blaming any one person or group for harm that One way to do so is for universities to elevate employees in university RECs to positions where they have power to structurally create opportunities for racialized people to be successful.

A critical question considers where such centers and their employees should be placed on the organizational chart. In the case of the SSREC, the center reports to the Office of the Vice President for Equity and Inclusion. Williams & Wade-Goldman (2013) identified arguably the biggest myth of the chief diversity officer (CDO) position in higher education. Namely, the belief that CDOs (among other diversity officers) are directly responsible for fixing diversity, equity, and inclusion issues at the institution. In reality, "only the president, provost, faculty, and other senior leaders can prioritize diversity in a manner sufficient to create deep institutional change" (p.251). Therefore, for university RECs to report directly to academic leaders in power positions. This especially makes sense as the SSREC, in particular, is charged with enhancing the academic experiences and outcomes of Black and other URMs.

Advocacy is Only Part of Transforming Systems

Part of this study's purpose was to report how the SSREC engaged in racial equity efforts. The center is seated within the Office of Equity and Inclusion. Much of the

center's power is practiced through collaborating across the university and advocating on behalf of Black and other URM students. However, advocacy refers to reporting concerns on behalf of students of color to those who have the power to . However, advocacy has its limitations.

Williams (2013) stated that at times, "committed advocates have grown frustrated with incomplete implementation, lack of overall success, and misdirected efforts across campus" (p. 202) in diversity efforts. This is magnified when considering Patton's (2016) argument that higher education has maintained the racist status quo (p. 326). Thus, educators must realize that being an advocate for change is only part of the equation. The power to change systems comes from the powers that be in such systems.

One of the core purposes of the SSREC is to "collaborate with campus and community partners to transform systems" at the university. Kendi (2019) critically asserted, "policymakers and policies make societies and institutions, not the other way around" (p. 155). In *The Chief Diversity Officer*, Damon Williams and Katrina Wade-Goldman (2013) identified a significant obstacle for diversity offices in higher education. Namely, diversity officers are shoveled the responsibility for fixing institutional issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The reality is that, "only the president, provost, faculty, and other senior leaders can prioritize diversity in a manner sufficient to create deep institutional change" (p.251). These institutional leaders directly construct and reconstruct policies that shape culture and opportunity within the academic community.

Educators with decision-making power-administrative or faculty-must do their part to understand the issues being presented and take responsibility for transforming the issue(s) at-hand. I previously stated in chapter four that advocacy is part of the "conveyor

belt of change." As advocates present problems and (hopefully) proposed solutions to people with decision-making power, decisions and policies must then be made to critically transform the root of the problem(s). Thus, advocacy is simply a part of transforming systems. Leaders in positions of power must do their part to engage in change efforts beyond hearing concerns. Educators must learn to listen to the racially oppressed as well as their advocates, which is reflected in their actions.

"Catering" to Students of Color in a PWI is a Racially Equitable Practice

Students overwhelmingly stated that the Program Manager and Program Coordinator in the SSREC have been very helpful in their experience at the institution. Students consistently stated that these staff have routinely checked in on individual students, have made the space in the SSREC welcoming, and have advocated extensively on behalf of students to the greater campus community. More than once, the term "cater" was used to describe how these individuals have cared for URM students. This brings to attention to just how important caring for URM students is as an institutional practice of racial equity.

Remember that a low sense of belonging among URM students was a key factor in establishing the SSREC. As such, it is critical for universities-especially those engaging in racial equity efforts through RECs-to move beyond looking at institutional climate studies to inserting practices and policies that enhance a sense of belonging among URM students across all departments. This requires a checks and balances approach to racial equity that begins with each area and faculty asking how they are doing when it comes to providing services to students of color. What data is being

collected to support their understanding and what actions are taking place to enhance those services?

Institutional Resistance

Although participants in this study did not indicate current resistance to the SSREC (likely due to minimal awareness the Center exists), resistance is likely to occur at some point. For one, resistance is a natural occurrence of denial. Additionally, antiracism and racial equity efforts strategically disrupt the racial status quo. Institutions must understand that experiencing resistance can be an indication that RECs are doing work that is making a difference within the institution.

Williams (2013) stated that "a clear sign that an institution is doing something meaningful occurs when diversity opponents and their sponsoring organizations emerge to fight it" (p. 191). Resistance to antiracism and racial equity efforts in the context of higher education can take place in various ways including opponents using counterclaims such as "reverse racism" to challenge antiracist policies. Opponents could resist by actively seeking out loopholes embedded in antiracist policies that still benefit non-racially marginalized students. Lastly, opponents-especially those with protected status (i.e., tenured faculty)-could become outright be non-compliant.

How institutions and leaders respond to institutional resistance is a reflection of their commitment to racial equity. It communicates very plainly to people of color and the greater campus community that there is a genuine commitment to racial equity. An institutions response also builds into the campus culture. Thus, senior administrators and faculty must develop measures to keep the campus community accountable at levels of the institution. The institution must also work to remain committed to RECs.

Institutions Must Build University RECs by Investing in Them

In this study, the most common challenge faced by the university REC was financial resources allocated to the Center. Of course, financial resources are not a new challenge faced by any institution or department. However, institutions show their hand in terms of how much they value diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts through their allocation of funds to these areas. As a professor taught me in my Master's program, "if you want to know what an institution values, don't look at the mission statement, look at the budget."

As a university racial equity effort, institutions must be intentional about the financial resources allocated to these Centers in comparison to other departments across campus. OEI Director noted that the financial challenge they have encountered is not just the ability to adequately serve the roughly 30 students through programs such as the Underrepresented Scholars Program. The problem is that the Center is unable to grow these programs and the number of students they can reach because of their modest (at-best) level of funding. As such, institutions must critically focus on the concept of equity in their financial allocation of resources. A critical question to ask is "how much of the percentage of funding is allocated to direct services and programs to support students of color?" Based on what we then know, the question becomes "what outcomes can reasonably be expected and how will this likely affect students, faculty, and staff?"

"Bravery is Really Related to Sacrifice."

I chose to close the discussion section by quoting a powerful statement made by OMSA Director. I asked each participant if there was anything they believe readers should know about advancing racial equity? OMSA Director said that a lot of this work

has to do with being brave. When I asked why being brave was so important to this work, she responded:

> Because our society is not where it needs to be. Because it's easier to do things status quo. It's easier to do things the way that things have always been. It's easier to not make change. It's many times less costly and there are many different aspects of cost. Being brave is really about going against the traditional ways of doing things, and being innovative. It takes bravery to be innovative as well. And knowing that there will be sacrifice, that's what it comes down to as well. Bravery is really related to sacrifice. Too often, higher education has seen

Sacrifice is the true nature of antiracism. Racial equity cannot occur if there is not an authentic commitment to sacrificing some level of privileges and processes that have historically benefitted white people. It is an act of bravery on any given occasion to commit oneself, and in this case, the institution, to sacrificing ease for racial uplift and racial equity. Higher education needs brave leaders to complete this work.

Study Limitations

Newness of the Center

As stated in chapter three of this study, I contacted four other university racial equity and antiracist centers to be potential sites of this study before the SSREC accepted the invitation. One of the central reasons behind contacting the other centers was how long those centers have been in operation on their respective campuses. To date, the oldest REC that was approached for this study is now more than a decade old. Other centers are in between two to six years of operation. As such, these are centers that have

navigated the initial stages of being established on campus, to growing their services, resources, as well as their campus and local community impact.

The SSREC was opened to students and the campus in the summer of 2021. As this study was conducted in the 2021-2022 academic year, most of the data collected and initiatives explored were in their infancy stage. As such, I was unable to study how many of the programs and services have developed over time. And as the study largely took place in the middle of the spring semester, I was unable to raise other critical questions that would be helpful for interested readers, such as important lessons learned while operating a university REC. So, while I am grateful for the opportunity to have studied the SSREC, I would recommend that others interested in conducting a similar study to aim for university RECs that have more experience in operation.

Exploring Human Emotions in Racial Equity Work

Sociologist Sam Binkley (2016) stated that antiracism invokes empathy. Empathy is needed to cultivate the capacity to understand and co-experience the social and political suffering of those who are othered by society (p. 185). As such, human emotions cannot be separated from the work of antiracism. Therefore, human emotions cannot be ignored in antiracist research. Educator and political scientist Tanetha Grosland (2019) asserted that effective anti-oppressive pedagogy must offer insights on the emotionality of antiracism in classrooms in relation to adult learners (p. 302). Likewise, there should be future scholarly consideration in describing emotions of engaging in antiracist work.

The Role of the Ethnic Studies Program

The SSREC website states that an Ethnic Studies Program (ESP) is part of the programming in this Center. However, there was no information added from the Center

regarding how the ESP collaborates with the SSREC. Additionally, there was no data collected which would add narrative to how this partnership adds to racial equity.

University Leadership Participation

As stated in chapter two, many studies of antiracist efforts take place in K-12 educational settings. As such, literature on these efforts at the post-secondary education level is limited. There are, however, studies on antiracist initiatives that take place in college courses and programs. Again, another limitation is that studies do not explore these efforts at the University level. This case study studied a Center that is directly supervised by the Vice President for Equity and Inclusion. Although there were multiple attempts to interview former VPEIs at MSU because the Center was conducting a national search at the time, no one was available. As such, I was unable to offer narrative as to how the SSREC is supervised and supported by the VPEI.

Recommendations for Future Research

Measuring the Success of University Racial Equity Centers

One of the reasons this study was conducted qualitatively is because it was the first known study of its kind to explore the functions of a university Racial Equity Center. Therefore, research methods suggest that pioneering studies be conducted qualitatively (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). While this study was conducted largely to inform readers as to how a university REC engages in antiracist and racial equity efforts, there must be future considerations for how effective these efforts are and as well as identifying markers of success. While this study was able to provide readers with a benchmark for how this work is done at one university, future research can

evaluate racial equity efforts, compare racial equity efforts across university RECs, as well as build tools to measure the success of university RECs.

The Emotional Impact of Working in a University Racial Equity Center

Students in this study extensively noted that staff in the SSREC catered extensively to their needs. One student particularly noted how packed their schedules are from the time they arrive to work to the time they need. This shows how taxing working in a university REC can be. As such, self-care is an important factor to engaging in university REC efforts. OEI Director said:

> Self-care is so important. And I'm telling you I'm not doing it. I'm gonna get better. Because there's no off switch for there's no off switch. There's no off switch for you because this is what your mind is thinking about it. Every experience is going to bring your mind back to the theory that you just read about the other day.

"There is no off switch" certainly resonates with many challenges of working in higher education. However, this can especially resonate with administrators working in student-facing offices that primarily serve racially marginalized students with, at-best, modest office budgets and resources. When you factor in the context of a predominantly and/or historically white serving institution, this complicates the situation as employees in these Centers are often people of color who are also enduring, not uncommonly, racially toxic environments. Environments that can contribute to racial battle fatigue as outlined in publications such as *Racial Battle Fatigue: Exposing the Myth of Post-Racial America* (2014).

Future research should explore the emotional impact of working in a university REC. Scholarship in this area will contribute to literature by identifying specific stressors related to working in these settings-some of which are created by the respective university itself (i.e., low budget allocation, disproportionate hiring of staff to community, campus resistance, etc.). This research will thus describe the emotional (and likely physical) toll this work has on its employees. As the SSREC and its counterparts have acknowledged, racial equity is a collaborative effort. Part of collaborating on such efforts is exploring ways to create healthier working conditions for educators working in these spaces.

Intentionality of Intersectionality in Antiracist and Racial Equity Efforts

The central focus of this study was to explore how one pioneering university REC conceptualizes antiracism and describe how they use their conception of antiracism to engage in racial equity efforts. The central focus of antiracism is racial equity. And while scholars tend to agree in principle that antiracism void of intersectionality is not antiracism, antiracist literature does not always make this stance explicitly clear when exploring the history of antiracist efforts. The recent publication of *Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted on Equality for All* (2020) by historian Martha Jones offers a history of Black women navigating racism and sexism to secure political power.

Future research should explore intersectional antiracist efforts in these centers and the importance of this approach to lifting entire communities of racially marginalized. Such a study could identify the complexity social and political power and its role

achieving racial equality. Such a study could also make a case for intersectional antiracism as a truly humanizing effort.

Research in Racial Equity Centers

Both Directors of the OEI and the OMSA indicated that research should be part of the university RECs. As such, it is of scholarly importance to explore what research questions are being studied and how these studies add to antiracism and racial equity scholarship. Such a project can illuminate what important research questions are emerging. This research can also uncover problems with how antiracism research is being explored.

Additionally, this study was solely concerned with how and in ways the SSREC, as a university Racial Equity Center, conceptualized antiracism to engage in racial equity efforts. The purpose of the study was to informatively report on the answers to the research questions as opposed to assessing the efforts of the center itself. Antiracism is grounded in transforming structural issues (i.e., policies) that create racial inequity (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Kendi, 2019). However, the SSREC was centrally focused on engaging in practices as opposed to policy efforts. If this is the approach of university REC, future research should analyze and assess the practices employed by university RECs and if these practices lead to racial equity.

Conclusion

This single case study examined how one pioneering university Racial Equity Center conceptualized antiracism to engage in racial equity efforts. What was learned is that the case in this study conceptualized antiracism, contextually, to be the work of actively opposing racism which is manifested in the form of racist policies and racist

practices. Racist policies and racist practices are deemed to be the catalysts of racial inequalities in educational outcomes such as graduation rates and overall sense of belonging for URM students. The SSREC opposes racism within the institution by working with campus partners to advocate on behalf of URM students. The Center also coordinates academic programs which cater to the educational needs of students in addition to enhancing their sense of belonging.

I discussed the major findings from this study and their implications on future practice and research. The SSREC being in its first-year of operation provided a practical framework for how this Center engages in racial equity efforts. Whether university RECs are 10 years removed from their founding or readers are interested in starting one, this groundbreaking study provided considerations for ways to improve and achieve racial equity.

What was also learned in this study are the ways in which this study's findings contextually inform antiracism theory and racial equity. Specifically, antiracism theory must consider the settings in which the theory is being applied. There would be general overlap with concepts such as racial inequity, opportunity, and outcomes. However, antiracism as a theory helps to explain in specific ways how differing fields are actively working toward racial equity or maintaining the racial status quo. It takes an entire campus community to effectively advance racial equity. This was reiterated by the OMSA Director when they said, "I say 'we' because we're all part of the same university."

The SSREC stated that they do not have power over policies such as resource allocation, admissions policies, etc. One way to empower REC staff in is not by simply pushing REC staff to be on more and more committees, but by giving staff decision-making power that structurally leads to racial equity. This is what antiracist power would look like in these centers. The OEI Director said that the university is in its "attempt to be a student-ready institution" in relation to serving Black-identified and other students of color. Being student-ready means identifying the areas in which the university is particularly struggling to serve students of color, and then identifying & implementing effective strategies that directly target those issues.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Your New IRB Research has been approved
Date: Wednesday, February 9, 2022 at 12:21:17 PM Mountain Standard Time
From: irbsupport@utoledo.edu
To: Scott, Quatez Bernard, Snauwaert, Dale

Greetings,

Your IRB study application entitled "A Pioneering Antiracism Effort in Higher Education: A Single Case Study of a University Racial Equity Center (REC) at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI)" has been approved.

Please review your approval letter here, under "attachments" in the left side menu: Initial Application Submission

Stamped versions of your approved documents can be found under the "study-site attachments" here: 301293-UT

Regards,
The IRB Team
Staff Contacts

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Appendix B: SSREC Questionnaire

Center for Racial Equity and Black Student Excellence
1. What events led to establishing the Center for Racial Equity and Black Student Excellence?
2. How does the Center for Racial Equity and Black Student Excellence define antiracism?
3. How does the Center for Racial Equity and Black Student Excellence define racial equity?
4. What is the mission of the Center for Racial Equity and Black Student Excellence?
5. What is the vision of the Center for Racial Equity and Black Student Excellence?
6. How is the Center for Racial Equity and Black Student Excellence structured regarding personnel?
7. What are the respective job responsibilities of employees in the Center for Racial Equity and Black Student Excellence?
8. In what ways does the Center for Racial Equity and Black Student Excellence distinguish its work from other diversity units (i.e., multicultural affairs, cultural and identity centers, etc.) on campus?
9. What is the process through which the Center for Racial Equity and Black Student Excellence identifies racial inequities?
10. In what ways has the Center for Racial Equity and Black Student Excellence specifically responded to political issues related to racism?
11. In what ways has the Center for Racial Equity and Black Student Excellence specifically responded to campus issues related to racism?
12. What specific campus challenges can you identify that make it difficult for the Center for Racial Equity and Black Student Excellence to address racial inequity?
13. What specific campus challenges have made it difficult for the Center for Racial Equity and Black Student Excellence to address racial inequity?
14. Are there responsibilities the Center for Racial Equity and Black Student Excellence does not have that you believe other racial equity centers around the country should have to advance racial equity?
15. Are there other important items readers interested in this study should know about advancing racial equity?
16. How does the Center for Racial Equity and Black Student Excellence define an antiracist?
17. Does the Center for Racial Equity and Black Student Excellence believe that its employees must personally identify as antiracists? Please support your answer.
18. What steps does the Center for Racial Equity and Black Student Excellence use to enact antiracist policies?
19. What type(s) of power does the Center for Racial Equity and Black Student Excellence have in advancing racial equity?
20. Are there other important items readers interested in this study should know about advancing racial equity?

Appendix C: OMSA Director Interview Questions

Personal Background
1. Tell me a little about yourself.
2. How did you arrive at this university?
3. What inspired your interest in diversity work?

Student Success and Racial Equity Center
1. What events led to establishing the racial equity center?
2. In your own words, what is the mission of racial equity center?
3. In your own words, what is the vision of racial equity center?
4. How does the racial equity center specifically fit into the university's diversity plan?
5. What features of the racial equity center distinguish it from other diversity units on campus such as your own?
6. How does your office provide support to the racial equity center?
7. From your standpoint, what are markers of success for advancing racial equity in the racial equity center?
8. What are specific examples of your office responding to political issues related to racism?
9. What do you believe is the racial equity center's responsibility in responding to political issues related to racism?
10. What are specific examples of your office responding to university incidents related to racism?
11. What do you believe is the racial equity center's responsibility in responding to institutional incidents related to racism?
12. What specific institutional barriers have you been made aware of that create challenges for the racial equity center to address racial inequity?
13. How would you define an antiracist?
14. Do you believe it should be a requirement for racial equity center employees to identify as antiracist? Please explain your response.
15. What type(s) of power have you observed with the racial equity center and its ability advancing racial equity?
16. Are there other responsibilities you believe the racial equity center could advancing racial equity?
17. Are there other important items readers interested in this study should know about advancing racial equity?

Appendix D: OEI Director Interview Questions

Personal Background
1. Tell me a little about yourself.
2. How did you arrive at this university?
3. What inspired your interest in diversity work?

Student Success and Racial Equity Center
4. What events led to establishing the racial equity center?
5. In your own words, what is the mission of racial equity center?
6. In your own words, what is the vision of racial equity center?
7. How does the racial equity center specifically fit into the university's diversity plan?
8. What features of the racial equity center distinguish it from other diversity units on campus?
9. How does your office provide support to the racial equity center?
10. What are the markers of success for the racial equity center?
11. What are specific examples of your office responding to political issues related to racism?
12. What do you believe is the racial equity center's responsibility in responding to political issues related to racism?
13. What are specific examples of your office responding to university incidents related to racism?
14. What do you believe is the racial equity center's responsibility in responding to institutional incidents related to racism?
15. What specific institutional barriers have you been made aware of that create challenges for the racial equity center to address racial inequity?
16. How would you define an antiracist?
17. Do you believe it should be a requirement for racial equity center employees to identify as antiracist? Please explain your response.
18. What type(s) of power have you observed with the racial equity center advancing racial equity?
19. Are there other responsibilities you believe the racial equity center could advancing racial equity?
20. Are there other important items readers interested in this study should know about advancing racial equity?

Appendix E: Focus Group Interview Questions

Personal Background
1. Tell me about yourselves including your name, your class status at the university, and your major.
2. Why did you choose to attend this university?

Student Success and Racial Equity Center
3. Why do you believe the university established the racial equity center?
4. In your own words, what is the purpose of the racial equity center?
5. What services have you received from the racial equity center?
6. How do you receive communications regarding upcoming events sponsored by the CREBSE?
7. Do you have experience receiving services from other diversity offices on campus? If so, please identify which diversity offices you have received services.
8. If you have received services from other diversity offices on campus, how do the services in the racial equity center compare to the services in other diversity offices?
9. From your viewpoint, what should racial equity centers do to achieve racial equity?
10. What are specific examples of the racial equity center responding to political issues related to racism?
11. What are specific examples of the racial equity center responding to campus issues related to racism?
12. What specific campus challenges can you identify that make it difficult for the racial equity center to address racial inequity?
13. How would you define an antiracist?
14. Do you believe it should be a requirement for racial equity center employees to personally identify as antiracists? Please explain your response.
15. What type(s) of power have you observed with the racial equity center advancing racial equity?
16. Are there other responsibilities you believe the racial equity center could advancing racial equity?
17. Overall, share how the racial equity center enhances the college student experience?
18. Are there other important items readers interested in this study should know about advancing racial equity?