

Women of Color Chief Diversity Officers: Their Positionality and Agency  
in Higher Education Institutions

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**Abstract**

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Colleges and universities are seen as sites for harnessing for the common good the challenges and opportunities associated with diversity. Research supports the link of diversity experiences with a range of individual, institutional, and societal benefits. Contemporary models of operationalizing diversity on college campuses focus on the integration of diversity goals with the overall educational mission in ways that maximize the benefits of diversity for all. A growing number of institutions have created Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) positions to procedurally and symbolically centralize diversity capabilities.

The study of CDO positions is a relatively new focus in diversity and higher education literature, with research to date addressing commonalities and distinctions in organizational structures, portfolios, and strategies. This qualitative study builds on existing literature by examining through semi-structured interviews and document analysis the ways that five women of color CDOs experience their roles, the impact of race and gender on their experiences, how

they exercise personal agency in their work, and factors that mediate their positionality in integrating diversity functions in their institutions. The conceptual framework incorporates Critical Race Theory, Critical Race Feminism, positionality according to social identity and institutional structure, and human agency.

Four major findings emerged from the study: social identities matter for women of color serving as CDOs; barriers to retention exist for women of color CDOs; CDO work provides opportunity for the exercise of agency but carries the potential for co-optation; and CDO leadership serves as a form of resistance to hegemony and oppression. A framework of agency and self-efficacy is very useful for the CDOs to understand and enact the complex responsibilities with which they are charged. These findings highlight the need for institutions to understand the complexity and challenges of CDO positions when they create them. Colleges and universities must resource the CDOs appropriately, in the form of budget, personnel, and, most importantly, the investment and imprimatur of institutional leaders. Institutional leaders should also facilitate the access of CDOs to mentors, affinity networks, and professional development opportunities.

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## **Vita**

Monica Nixon's work in higher education spans a wide variety of administrative and student affairs roles at four institutions. She received her Master of Education in Counselor Education in 1999 and Bachelor of Arts in English in 1995 from the University of Virginia. In 2013 she earned a Doctor of Education degree at the University of Washington in the College of Education's Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Program.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction and Research Problem**

In this study, I examine the positionality and agency of women of color serving as Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs) in colleges and universities. In the past decade, no fewer than 40 institutions have established a new executive-level CDO position to centralize diversity functions, improve inclusion, and integrate diversity more fully (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). A growing body of research has examined commonalities and distinctions in organizational structures, portfolios, and strategies (Green, 2008; Leon, 2010, Pittard, 2010; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007).

Women and people of color hold the majority of these roles (Jaschik, 2008; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). National data are not available about women of color who are CDOs, but we know from other research that women of color in academia encounter marginalization based on the intersection of their race and gender (Hune 1998; Harris & González 2012; Sulé, 2011; Turner, 2002; Turner, González, & Wong, 2011). We do not yet know how women of color CDOs experience their roles. This study seeks to develop that understanding and fill this gap in the literature about Chief Diversity Officers and women of color in higher education.

### **Diversity in Higher Education**

An introduction to diversity in higher education and how CDO positions have evolved is useful in articulating the research problem.

For decades diversity and higher education have been linked in the minds of the public, policy-makers, and those on college and university campuses (Smith, 2009). Universities have become an important testing ground for those wanting to advance or scale back diversity policy and practice with regard to race, sexual orientation, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, nationality, citizenship status, and other identities or groups (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006). The

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link between diversity and higher education has its roots in historical and contemporary issues of access and inclusion, knowledge production, and the acceleration of social change. Colleges and universities are sites for harnessing these challenges and opportunities for the common good. As well, a growing body of research supports the link of diversity experiences with a wide range of individual, institutional, and societal benefits (Chang, 2005; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Hu & Kuh, 2003; Roper, 2004; Shaw, 2009).

Most college and university mission statements indicate a commitment to diversity, inclusion, global citizenship, or social justice, furthering “a historical mission of universities – the education of all students in order for them to be good and productive citizens” (Bollinger, 2003, p. 433). Despite the inclusive rhetoric in contemporary mission statements, colleges and universities in the U.S. were established to educate White, upperclass men to assume leadership as religious and political leaders (Thelin, 2004). The more recent addition of diversity to the mission of higher education has been informed by civil rights movements involving people of color, women, those with disabilities, and queer and transgender communities, as well as by federal anti-discrimination mandates and a broad societal commitment to educational access (Roper, 2004). A national Ford Foundation Campus Diversity Initiatives Survey, conducted in 1998 with 2,011 registered voters, demonstrated overwhelming support for the role of higher education in cultivating new areas of knowledge and preparing people to function well in a more diverse society and economy (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006, p. 10). The changing demographics of students, faculty, and staff and the impact of environmental influences such as the economy, state legislatures, and the federal government have placed colleges and universities at the front line of diversity-related movements (Barceló, 2007; Kezar, 2008), factors that require colleges

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and universities to demonstrate “the capacity to thoughtfully manage our historic and contemporary missions, concurrently” (Roper, 2004, p. 51).

### **Evolution of CDO Positions**

As higher education institutions have managed these concurrent missions, colleges and universities have generally moved from a focus on access and persistence of underrepresented groups to integration of diversity throughout the learning enterprise (Williams & Clowney, 2007). In order to take full advantage of the potential benefits of diversity, an increasing number of institutions are putting into place structures that embed diversity both symbolically and procedurally in the organization through CDO positions and units. The CDO position in higher education has existed in some form since the 1970s – the University of Washington, Indiana University-Bloomington, and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute have had these positions for some time – but the recent proliferation of new positions calls attention to what motivates these more recent adopters of the CDO structure.

Higher education diversity literature is coalescing around a common definition of what kinds of positions are considered to be CDOs, due in large part to the influence of a national research project, The Chief Diversity Officer Study in Higher Education, sponsored by the Center for the Advancement of Racial and Ethnic Equity and the American Council on Education. This study generated data through a national survey of 2,500 institutional diversity officers, 70 interviews, site visits, and document analysis (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007, p. vii). The researchers employed the following criteria in deciding whom to analyze as a CDO, yielding 110 respondents who fit these guidelines: 1) self-identification in this role; 2) direct reporting relationship to the institution’s president and/or provost; 3) senior-level administrative

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title such as vice president, vice provost, special assistant to the president, or dean; and 4) reference to diversity in their title (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). These criteria have been used in subsequent CDO dissertation research (Green, 2008; Leon, 2010; Lowery, 2011; Pittard, 2010) and articles (Fleigler, 2006; Smith, 2009; Stuart, 2010; Turner, González, & Wong, 2011), and in order to situate my study in the current literature, I also used these criteria in developing my sample<sup>1</sup>.

Important questions to consider in the context of diversity leadership and higher education include how CDO positions have come to have currency, their impact on diversity-related goals, and the experiences of the people serving in these roles. Assuming that colleges and universities want their diversity efforts to be successful and want to recruit and retain qualified and effective CDOs, it is important to examine these matters critically. These questions are at the center of this exploratory study about the experiences, positionality, and agency of CDOs.

### **CDO Positionality and Agency**

CDOs' status, influence, and capacity to advance diversity issues depend on the intersection of their social identities, institutional placement, and orientation to change. Research about status, influence, and power in groups highlights that "status is a position in a group based on esteem or respect" (Lucas & Baxter, 2012, p. 51) and that status determines influence. Groups make judgments about status based on expectations about one another's

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<sup>1</sup> I understand that use of these strict criteria may miss the emergence of other diversity capacities, including those working in faculty advancement, in individual colleges within a university, or in national associations, such as the Association of American Medical Colleges, which has its own CDO. Complicating the question of who is a CDO is the existence of hybrid roles, which oversee diversity initiatives along with other high-level institutional responsibilities. However, a common definition of a CDO is helpful for analyzing literature, comparing findings across studies, and maintaining a reasonably-sized research population.

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competence to contribute to group goals, and they use a variety of status characteristics to make such determinations, such as race, gender, expertise, and educational level. Those with higher levels of status in a group are solicited to perform more frequently and receive more positive feedback when they perform. Status is self-reinforcing, with high-status members being valued because they are high-status and are assumed to make more meaningful contributions to the group, regardless of their actual effectiveness. The processes by which people determine status, influence, and positioning operate largely non-consciously.

Gender and race affect determinations of status and positionality in American society, with contributions from White men being overvalued and those of women and people of color being undervalued or ignored (Christman & McClellan, 2008; Harris & González, 2012; Lucas & Baxter, 2012). “Status research ... finds that women tend to resist taking leadership positions and that when women do attain leadership based on their own merits, their positions are often not seen as legitimate” (Lucas & Baxter, 2012, p. 54). Evidence of these dynamics is reflected in literature about the experiences of women of color faculty and leaders (Harris & González, 2012; Turner, 2007). Those in lower-status groups are less likely to have access to powerful positions (Lucas & Baxter, 2012), which we see in the lower hierarchical levels that women of color occupy in higher education institutions when compared with men and people of color (Ryu, 2010). Research about positionality is important to consider when examining the experiences of women of color CDOs, who encounter marginalization through an intersection of status characteristics related to race, gender, and role in the institution.

The majority of CDOs are people of color and women serving in roles in which they are accountable for enhancing inclusion of those who have experienced marginalization, often those

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with identities similar to their own (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). On the vast majority of college campuses, women of color in CDO positions are likely to be “extreme tokens” (Turner, González, & Wong, 2011, p. 9) as both racial and gender minorities, thus balancing the centralization of their function with marginalization in terms of identity.

Questions of agency are also important to weigh in the context of diversity leadership and the potential for CDOs to affect organizational culture in meaningful ways. The psychology of human agency posits that individuals “are producers as well as products of their life circumstances” (Bandura, 2006, p. 165). People are not just passive receptors of their environments; rather, they have a role in enacting those environments toward inclusive or exclusive ends. People’s capacity to institute change depends in large part on whether they believe they have the efficacy to do so (Bandura, 1982).

Change is an inherent component of CDOs’ intended mandate; institutions establish these positions to galvanize, advance, and systematize diversity-related change efforts (Barceló, 2007; Fleigler, 2006; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2006, 2007, 2008). Although some research about CDOs has examined their change efforts (Leon, 2010; Pittard, 2010), these studies have applied political and leadership lenses in their framing. Research regarding CDO leadership has not explicitly integrated considerations of agency or self-efficacy. In their dictate to move higher education institutions toward inclusive ends, leaders with a commitment to change to should take into account agency on personal and collective levels, as well as organizational structures that constrain agency. The agency orientation of CDOs and the degree to which they feel their institutions facilitate their agency are important and under-studied questions for the CDO literature.

### **Research Problem and Questions**

As yet unexamined in CDO literature are questions regarding how CDOs experience their roles, the impact of social identities on their experiences, and how they exercise agency in their work to integrate diversity functions cross-institutionally. My exploratory study about the experiences, positionality, and agency of CDOs centers these questions.

Assuming that colleges and universities want their diversity efforts to be successful and want to recruit and retain qualified and effective CDOs, it is important to understand these questions in a deeper way. In their study of 110 CDOs, Williams and Wade-Golden (2007) reported that 87% were people of color, 58% were women, and 98% worked in Predominantly White Institutions; 72% had been in their positions for under five years, and three-quarters of their offices had existed for less than 10 years (pp. 37-38). Most executive-level CDO positions are less than a decade old, and tenure in the roles tends to be brief. A recent survey of 94 CDOs found that 48% planned to leave their positions within three years (Jaschik, 2011), nearly one-third for another leadership role in the field and 28% for another opportunity beyond the diversity field. The quantitative survey did not yield additional information about why CDOs anticipate leaving their positions, which could include career advancement, higher pay, seeking a more supportive climate, avoiding burnout, or a host of other reasons. With what is known at present about CDO experiences, we can only speculate regarding these findings.

CDO positions offer the potential for exercising agency to counter hegemonic practices in historically exclusive organizational contexts. Research regarding the influence of personal agency and identities such as race and gender in the lives of faculty, senior leaders, and other diversity practitioners demonstrates that the exercise of agency presents both opportunities and

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risks in terms of career longevity, community, and health for those with marginalized identities (Baez, 2000; David, 1998; Moyer, 1992; Turner, 2002). CDOs may find themselves facing similar challenges as their institutional colleagues when it comes to leading in a complex organization, with the additional pressures of coordinating the institution's diversity and inclusion efforts, overseeing integration of marginalized perspectives – often including their own – and shifting organizational climate but perhaps lacking the status, influence, resources, and support to do so.

Theoretically complicating issues of tokenism related to identity is the potential marginalization of the role of the CDO as a tokenized diversity specialist peripheral to the institution's core functions. As women of color in diversity-related roles, they risk becoming diversity “mascots” or the singular face of diversity for their institutions (Niemann, 2012; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2008). In addition to their marginalization as numerical tokens, the culture of higher education demands a degree of conformity with the dominant ideologies that underpin educational systems in the U.S. (Collins, 2000; Montoya, 1994). CDOs who are women of color must negotiate personally and publicly with how much to conform with or oppose these ideologies and the degree to which they choose to express or subjugate their identities. These tensions have relevance to the capacity with which CDOs can exercise effective agency in their efforts to effect transformational diversity change.

The following research questions guided this qualitative study's focus on the experiences and practices of CDOs:

1. How do women of color CDOs experience their identities as women and as people of color? How do their experiences influence their work as diversity leaders?

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2. How are women of color positioned as CDOs? How do women of color CDOs navigate complex institutional contexts to create diversity change? How do they shift their positionality to maximize their influence?
3. What factors influence the ways that women of color CDOs exercise agency in their roles and institutions? What forms does their agency take? How does the exercise of agency influence CDOs personally and professionally?

Feedback from CDOs, their positionality in colleges and universities, and the importance of diversity on campuses today all highlight a critical need to learn more about the experiences of CDOs in leading their institutions. Current conceptions of CDO work and campus diversity leadership will benefit from an elaboration of agency and positionality, with a focus on understanding factors that mediate the capacity of CDOs to become agents of change in their institutions. The increasing currency of the CDO model in institutions of higher education must be informed by deeper understanding of whether the leaders in these positions have the resources to accomplish a wide range of functions. Further knowledge about their experiences will yield insights for CDOs to apply in their work, as well as information for colleges and universities regarding alignment and support of CDO positions, in the interest of enhancing effectiveness of institutional diversity efforts.

In the next chapter, I review the literature to discuss the ways that diversity has been framed, studied, and operationalized in higher education, the emergence of Chief Diversity Officer roles in higher education institutions to address the opportunities and challenges associated with transformational diversity leadership and engagement, and CDO positionality and agency.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This literature review will explore diversity and diversity leadership in higher education, the evolution of CDO positions in colleges and universities, the functional and symbolic roles of CDOs, and their positionality. These issues are important to consider as diversity leadership evolves in higher education to balance traditional emphases on access and climate with newer imperatives to integrate diversity into the core learning mission of colleges and universities.

### **Higher Education Diversity Goals**

The diversity goals of colleges and universities have changed over time and continue to evolve in the current era of affirmative action rollbacks and increased global interconnectedness. One theme that has emerged in different forms since the time of Harvard's founding in 1636 is a tension between access and quality as priorities (Richardson & Skinner, 1991; Roper, 2004; Shaw, 2009; Sulé, 2011). Although it is possible to balance both quality and access, historical circumstances nudge institutions and governments to favor one over the other in policy implementation (Richardson & Skinner, 1991).

Affirmative action policies and practices, for example, initially focused on providing access to higher education via admissions and financial aid as a means of redressing the societal effects of discrimination. Legal action opposing these policies hinged on the argument that “quality” or “merit” – often defined quantitatively according to grade point average and standardized test scores – should override the concern with access. After U.S. Supreme Court Justice Lewis Powell's 1978 ruling in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, colleges could no longer justify their race-conscious admission policies according to their remedial benefits. Instead, colleges were within the law to give modest consideration to applicants' race

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“so long as they were motivated by a desire to attain the educational benefits of diversity” (Schmidt, 2008, p. A1). During the 1990s public universities’ affirmative action practices in admission and financial aid came under increased legal scrutiny as discontented members of student, alumni, and external constituencies sued to dismantle access-based programs (Thelin, 2004). The U.S. Supreme Court upheld the essence of Justice Powell’s reasoning in its 2003 decisions in *Grutter v. Bollinger* and *Gratz v. Bollinger*, both involving the University of Michigan’s admission practices, affirming the educational benefits of a diverse student body (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006; Schmidt, 2008). The debate still persists, however, as the Supreme Court revisits the precedents it established in the *Bakke*, *Grutter*, and *Gratz* decisions. The Court heard oral arguments in October 2012 in the case of *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin*, which questioned the affirmative action admission policy of the University of Texas.

The question of how to balance quality and access continues to challenge institutions. In one university’s survey of student attitudes and perspectives on diversity, “a common theme in students’ responses was a tendency to describe diversity and quality as polar and competing priorities” (Roper, 2004, p. 49). One set of responses reflected a fear that the quality of students’ education, and therefore its marketability, might decline if the institution continued its focus on diversity. In addition, other students hoped that working toward inclusion of underrepresented students would not mean leaving behind those whom the university had historically served. The contested legal and philosophical ground on which colleges and universities find themselves necessitates development and promotion of “responses to diversity that communicate to society [institutional] recognition of changes taking place in society” (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006, p. 18).

### **Impact of Diversity in Higher Education**

Higher education literature is replete with examinations about whether diversity enhances or detracts from educational excellence and the conditions under which it is possible to achieve the former (Chang, 2005; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Hu & Kuh, 2003; Roper, 2004; Shaw, 2009). One framework proposed by Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, and Allen (1999) described four interconnected elements influencing the campus climate for racial and ethnic diversity: 1) the institution's historical legacy of inclusion and exclusion as reflected in its mission, policies, and actions; 2) its structural diversity, represented in the numerical representation of diverse groups who are recruited and retained; 3) the school's psychological climate of group perceptions and attitudes; and 4) the behavioral dimension of campus and classroom intergroup relations. Milem, Chang, and Antonio (2005) introduced a fifth element to address an organizational dimension that considers the degree to which benefits for some groups have been embedded in the institution's curriculum, reward structures, hiring and promotion policies, budgeting, and decision-making practices. Much of the research focused on diversity outcomes for students uses elements of the Hurtado et al. framework, because structural diversity on its own has not been shown to bring about the benefits associated with a diverse student body (Chang, 2005; Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005). Campus interventions are needed to "create a rich and complex social and learning environment that subsequently can be engaged as an educational tool to promote all students' learning and development" (Chang, 2005, "The benefits associated with racial diversity," para. 3). Rather than focusing on a static notion of diversity itself as the outcome, Milem et al. (2005) conceptualized diversity as a process of campus engagement that influences educational outcomes.

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A growing body of literature supports the link between diversity experiences and a wide range of individual, institutional, and societal benefits, including critical thinking, intellectual engagement, interactional diversity, vocational preparation, and civic engagement (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Gurin et al., 2002; Hu & Kuh, 2003; Sulé, 2011). Researchers have used qualitative and quantitative designs to ask students, faculty, staff, and campus leaders about their experiences with diversity and their perceptions of campus climate. Some have focused on particular roles in the institution, such as Kezar's (2008) study of how 27 university presidents navigated politics in advancing diversity agendas or Williams and Wade-Golden's (2007) quantitative and qualitative research with 110 chief diversity officers. One summary of extant research on the educational benefits to undergraduate students of racial and ethnic diversity highlighted that "the vitality, stimulation, and educational potential of an institution are directly related to the composition of its student body, faculty, and staff" (Milem et al, 2005, p. 6), a conclusion drawn from studies of student interaction and learning based on psychological, cognitive, behavioral, and learning theories. A critical level of demographic diversity was correlated with the ability of an institution to create diversity learning opportunities. As well, a comprehensive, visible, and clear institutional commitment to diversity was more likely to contribute to students benefiting from that diversity, according to cross-sectional and longitudinal studies that examined, among other measures, racial climate and tension, grade point averages, personal motivation, student involvement, and friendships (Milem et al., 2005).

Turner, González, and Wood (2008) analyzed more than 250 publications from the past 20 years about the status and experiences of faculty of color. They found that some research topics stood the test of time, including isolation and marginalization, discrimination, tenure and

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promotion, mentorship, lack of diversity in the academy, and intersections of race/ethnicity and gender. Other issues, such as different ways of knowing and analyses by particular fields, have arisen more recently in research about faculty of color (Turner, González, & Wood, 2008).

A wide range of initiatives in place at colleges and universities that provide opportunities for structured cross-group engagement and address the psychological and behavioral dimensions of climate on campus result in positive outcomes for students (Chang, 2007; Hurtado et al., 1999; Milem et al., 2005). In order to be most effective, however, these programs must be “linked to establishing a nonracist culture or climate, which includes altering the legacy of exclusion, revamping organizational culture, and seriously rethinking the psychological and behavioral climate of the campus” (Chang, 2007, p. 29). In their ideal form, diversity leadership and CDO roles focus on these important dimensions of campus climate. Transforming institutions in ways that achieve inclusive excellence for all students, faculty, staff, and administrators depends on questioning the past, undoing systems of privilege and oppression, and encouraging diversity leadership at all levels of the institution (Williams, 2007).

### **Organizational Context for Diversity Leadership**

Diversity in higher education must be understood in an organizational context, because colleges and universities function as complex organizations, with groups of people filling roles and operating in a structure based on patterns of behavior, attitudes, values, and institutionalized identities (Witherspoon, 1997). Institutional cultures, comprised of beliefs, myths, ideologies, and day-to-day policies and practices, are created by their members and represent the values of the various groups represented in the organization, with considerable influence from the environment (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006). Colleges and universities operate as open systems,

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with permeable boundaries and high levels of interaction with the surrounding environment, which may include accrediting institutions, other colleges and universities, and new technologies, resources, and ideas (Berger & Milem, 2000; Birnbaum, 1988; Eckel & Kezar, 2003). Unlike organizations with a well-defined relationship between inputs and outputs, in higher education organizations, inputs are difficult to assess and control, and outputs may not be simple to measure (Birnbaum, 1988). Berger and Milem (2000) noted higher education's focus on client service over profitability, the qualitative nature of its delivery systems, its dominance by professionals in specific and varying fields, and its high degree of environmental interaction and vulnerability as additional distinguishing characteristics. Further, colleges and universities function as loosely-coupled systems with traditions and silos that create a variety of campus micro-cultures, competing values, and belief systems (Tierney, 1997). Higher education institutions "embrace a large number of conflicting goals," many of which cannot be "satisfactorily quantified into an educational 'balance sheet'" (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 11).

Diversity initiatives, therefore, must be comprehensive, taking into account complex structure, goals, culture, and traditions, and they must focus on the long-term, with sustainable commitment, resources, planning, and monitoring (Hurtado et al, 1999). Given the reality of colleges and universities as complex organizations with a tendency toward maintaining equilibrium through formal and informal self-corrective measures (Birnbaum, 1988), the potential for diversity-related change thus depends on institutional context, systemic perspectives, and the degree to which organizational members understand their engagement in a common enterprise.

### **Operationalizing Diversity in Colleges and Universities**

Institutions have employed different approaches to operationalize diversity, to recruit and retain students, faculty, and staff, and to engage this compositional diversity in meaningful ways. Richardson and Skinner (1991) presented a three-stage model of institutional adaptation to increased student diversity. The earliest stage involves reactive and “discrete responses to pressures for greater participation by minority students without any systematic planning effort” (p. 41) and may include initial recruitment and financial aid strategies. The second stage entails more strategic change through comprehensive and coordinated interventions such as outreach, mentoring, advising, and opportunities for social engagement like residence halls and gathering spaces. The third, or adaptive, stage addresses faculty involvement and changes in academic practice in order to shift the organizational culture.

The history and current practice of how colleges and universities have responded to internal and external mandates to increase access mirror these stages. Early emphasis on increasing compositional diversity often led to pressure to provide space and opportunities for meaningful interaction. In some cases these pressures came in the form of student protest, with demands for cultural centers, inclusive curricula, and attention to recruiting and retaining diverse faculty and staff. On many campuses, these initiatives may have felt disconnected from one another, absent a strong institution-wide coordination of diversity efforts, resulting in inconsistent diversity engagement (Milem et al., 2005). A perpetual challenge for institutions has been the move from reactive to adaptive change that integrates diversity goals with the overall educational mission, maximizes the educational benefits of diversity, and sustains commitment over the long term (Milem et al., 2005).

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In a more recent examination of organizational diversity, Williams and Clowney (2007) presented three diversity models currently operating on college and university campuses, each of which frames diversity differently, focuses on distinctive goals, and employs varying strategies, organizational capabilities, and program targets. The Affirmative Action and Equity Model emerged during the 1950s and 1960s in response to shifting laws, policy, and social movements. It focused on increasing the compositional diversity of faculty, staff, and students and eliminating overt discriminatory practices through affirmative action programs and plans, nondiscrimination clauses, and diversity training programs. The model did not address, however, exclusionary campus cultures that were not designed with people of color, women, and other federally protected groups in mind (Williams & Clowney, 2007). Campus social protests and shifting legal policies in the 1960s and 1970s launched the Multicultural Model, which provided services to help ethnically and racially diverse students, women, and other social identity groups thrive in institutional contexts that often resisted their presence on campus. Students, faculty, and staff experiencing academic and social alienation on campus created counterspaces, or “ethnic enclaves that offer shelter from the psycho-emotional harms of racial microaggressions” (Harper & Hurtado, 2007, p. 14). Multicultural affairs units, cultural centers, ethnic and gender studies, and bias response systems were created under this model. The late 1990s and 2000s saw the emergence of the Diversity Learning Model, which linked diversity with academic excellence and the intellectual mission of colleges and universities. Curricular diversity requirements, intergroup dialogue programs, and holistic admission processes developed in this model encompass all members of the campus community, inclusive of identity and background. Strategies that focus explicitly on undoing structures that perpetuate exclusion

and oppression are not well-articulated in any of these models. Each of the models has its strengths and limitations, and integrating them to create structural, institution-wide commitment to diversity and equity is the emerging goal of many campuses (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007).

### **Diversity Leadership**

Smith (2009) emphasized the role of broad leadership in creating diversity change. Although commitment from the president and senior leadership is essential, on its own it is not sufficient to deepen and sustain investment in diversity. Given the reality of brief presidential tenures in higher education, commitment to diversity must permeate through the organization so as to continue beyond one particular person (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006). This requires “a multidimensional effort [that] exists in many different locations in the institution – all requiring leadership” (Smith, 2009, p. 265) that is distributed vertically and horizontally in the organization. Complicating this need for broad leadership engagement is the reality that status and influence play out differently according to positionality in the academy, with role, race, gender, class, and other factors affecting perceptions of leaders and constituents (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006).

Developing sustainable diversity leadership requires an investment of financial and human resources to cultivate new understanding, knowledge, skills, and attitudes, to support the efforts of those already engaged in campus diversity initiatives, and to bring on additional expertise to propel new or coordinated efforts (Williams & Clowney, 2007). This investment must be consistent over the long term, especially when examination of the diversity climate reveals rifts to be addressed. “Diversity in leadership is essential for building institutional

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capacity for diversity. Yet it remains one of the least successful areas, even as it becomes an increasingly urgent issue facing college campuses” (Smith, 2009, p. 137). Bolstering the work of those already engaged with diversity is critical, because these areas are often underfunded, stretched beyond capacity, and located in parts of the institution, such as student affairs, that have limited social and political capital in the organization (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006).

Institutions may need to make new hires in key leadership roles among administrators, staff, and faculty, and they certainly need to invest in the support and learning of their current personnel.

An effort at the University of Connecticut illustrates the challenge and promise of building capacity in diversity leadership. The university hosts “Conversations on Diversity,” an ongoing series for the president, provost, deans, and vice presidents, who hear from prominent scholars and leaders about diversity issues and then discuss implications for the institution. The goal of this series is to help those in administrative and academic leadership develop new mental models to understand diversity priorities (Williams, 2007), especially critical in order to sustain diversity commitment during times of budget retrenchment and competing strategic priorities. Aguirre and Martinez (2006) emphasized the need for “leaders in higher education ... to undergo the same personal transformational changes that students and faculty are expected to undergo as they pursue diversity initiatives on campus” (p. 81), a key focus of the University of Connecticut program.

### **Presidential Commitment**

Although presidential leadership on its own may not be sufficient to move an institution’s diversity agenda forward, it is an essential ingredient: “Diversity progress will depend upon the courage, the commitment, and the determination of the institution’s [Chief Executive Officer]”

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(Michael, 2006, p. 23). A study about the influence of 27 university presidents in advancing diversity agendas illustrated the need for presidents to understand “diversity as a political position” (Kezar, 2008, p. 409). The presidents described the necessity of relying on political strategies, such as building coalitions, taking the political pulse, anticipating resistance, using data, showcasing success, and understanding conflict, and the importance of including diversity in strategic planning, budgeting, rewards and incentives, curriculum, and board priorities. Kezar (2008) found that “leadership is perhaps the most important factor in ensuring institutional transformation and institutionalizing a diversity agenda” (p. 407). Presidents must work with other institutional leaders, including boards of trustees, faculty, and diversity specialists, to articulate a compelling agenda for diversity, a challenging task given the almost paralyzing complexity that can come with reconciling numerous diversity definitions and paradigms (Williams & Clowney, 2007). However, the presidents in Kezar’s study urged their peers to engage with the politics of diversity, rather than remaining in what they characterized as the safe zone of visioning and strategic planning.

### **Political and Symbolic Action**

Diversity leadership relies on an awareness of power, group dynamics, politics, and values (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006; Kezar, 2008; Witherspoon, 1997), making Bolman and Deal’s (2008) political and symbolic frames particularly useful in understanding the strategies and processes those in such leadership roles may employ. The political frame emphasizes the influence of interest groups, shifting coalitions, and scarce resources in organizational activity, all of which become more pronounced as organizations increase in diversity (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Sources of political power include positional authority, control of rewards, coercion,

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expertise, access to information, reputation, referent power, alliances and networks, access and control of agendas, and control of meaning and symbols. In the political frame, a skilled leader must develop an agenda, map the terrain, balance relationships with allies and enemies, and negotiate conflict, alliances, and compromises (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

The symbolic frame focuses on how people and organizations make sense of complexity and ambiguity and how they navigate and create organizational cultures through myths, values, stories, rituals, and processes. Viewed from the symbolic frame, organizational processes and structures such as strategic planning, performance assessments, and exercise of power assume theatrical meaning, reflecting stated and unstated myths and expectations (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Organizational structures often are “less a reflection of the technical tasks of an organization than they are codified myths that legitimize the espoused purposes and functions of the organization” (Berger & Milem, 2000, p. 294). Embedding diversity in the “symbolic and cultural fabric of the institution” (Williams, 2007, p. 12) through traditions, stories, and processes can serve as a powerful way to communicate commitment to diversity, so long as it is paired with meaningful action.

### **Co-Optive v. Transformational Diversity Leadership**

Questions of politics and power are integral to diversity leadership, which must address the realities of inequity and differential access to opportunity for diverse populations in colleges and universities (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006). In some ways, the focus on diversity in higher education has been based on a co-optive paradigm built around the dominant group’s cultural foundations, interests, and views about change (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006; Hurtado et al., 1998). For example, educational benefits of diversity may be characterized in relation to what privileged

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groups will learn from marginalized groups, and diversity-related change described as a numerical increase among historically underrepresented groups or reduction of intergroup conflict (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006; Chang, 2005). These approaches suggest the notion that diversity must somehow be managed or controlled, and they also presume conflict and scarcity – that is, when one group gains, another group necessarily loses. A transformational orientation, on the other hand, seeks to make deep and pervasive changes to the organization’s underlying values and assumptions, harness the energy of all of its members, and develop its ability to adapt (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006; Eckel & Kezar, 2003; Witherspoon, 1997).

Aguirre and Martinez (2006) distinguished between co-optive and transformational diversity leadership strategies. Co-optation explains the process by which organizations absorb potentially threatening elements into leadership or policy-making structures, in order to maintain their stability (Selznick, 1949). A primary method of co-optation is to convince potential threats to come on board and make changes from within. Often in this process, the threats become acculturated to the organization – sometimes without realizing that this is happening – and change focus, tone down their rhetoric, or abandon the original change goals entirely, thereby shifting diversity to serve the interests of those in power and restricting the participation of marginalized groups into proscribed roles (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006). Several kinds of diversity programs and approaches have been co-opted by higher education institutions, including affirmative action hiring, mentoring programs, and diversity trainings (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006), without necessarily resulting in substantive changes to the organizational culture. These co-optive strategies act as buffers to protect the existing organizational culture, allowing the institution to claim diversity success without having to adapt or change.

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In contrast to co-optation, transformational strategies “promote leadership practices that seek to change the organizational culture to incorporate diversity by challenging the dominant group’s resistance to diversity” (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006, p. 57). Transformational leadership focuses on self-fulfillment of organization members, achievement of higher-order goals, such as liberty, justice, and equity, and the collective interests of leaders and followers (Burns, 1978; Witherspoon, 1997). One study of transforming institutions (Eckel & Kezar, 2003) found a reliance on five primary strategies: “senior administrative support, collaborative leadership, flexible vision, staff development, and visible action” (p. 17). These core strategies are all referenced in the literature about higher education diversity leadership.

Diversity leadership challenges existing modes of leadership and the organizational culture of higher education by requiring a fundamental restructuring of roles, practices, and orientation to change. This presents a significant dilemma because diversity continues to be viewed as a freestanding issue that is marginal to the academy, rather than as a “social force that signals the need to broaden the boundaries of the mainstream to be more inclusive” (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006, p. 43). Those working to promote diversity leadership in colleges and universities must navigate the tricky terrain of working from within the organization without being co-opted by it. This may present particular challenges for leaders who have been mentored or groomed in normative ways through programs and structures that function to socialize diverse groups to assume roles in the organization. Higher education institutions are structured in ways that restore equilibrium when the power of privileged groups is threatened or when change processes introduce fear or uncertainty (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006; Eckel & Kezar, 2003). Transformational diversity leadership goes beyond fitting diversity into the organization,

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focusing instead on changing the organizational culture to incorporate diversity and equitably distribute access, power, and social capital across groups (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006; Eckel & Kezar, 2003). In this paradigm, diversity leadership positions diversity at the core of an institution's functioning in such a way that it builds capacity and competence among all members, supports innovation, creates new knowledge and understanding, and contributes to societal progress.

Contemporary models of campus diversity capabilities focus on the integration of diversity goals with the overall educational mission in ways that maximize the educational benefits of diversity. An understanding of politics, symbolism, power, and group dynamics is essential in this critical work. Transformational diversity leadership depends on long-term investment of financial and human resources to broaden campus capacity for diversity engagement, alter co-optive systems of privilege and oppression, and encourage leadership and innovation at all levels of the institution.

### **History and Evolution of CDO Positions in Higher Education**

Colleges and universities aspiring to embed diversity into the learning enterprise and to integrate diversity-related responsibilities into a coherent structure have created Chief Diversity Officer positions and units in increasing numbers (Banerji, 2005; Fleigler, 2006; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). Though seemingly one of the newer senior leadership positions to gain relevancy in higher education, organizational predecessors for this kind of diversity-focused role have existed for some time. Demographic shifts in student populations in the 1970s, particularly enrollment by African American students, prompted creation of positions such as "vice president for minority affairs" to produce access- and retention-focused services (Lowery, 2011; Pittard,

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2010; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). In addition to minority affairs positions, other units such as multicultural affairs offices, ethnic studies departments, women's centers, disability services offices, gender and sexuality centers, and international student services offices have impacted inclusion efforts for underrepresented groups (Lowery, 2011). These kinds of units continue to exist on college campuses, particularly those operating in an affirmative action or multicultural model (Williams & Clowney, 2007). CDOs represent a continuing evolution of diversity-focused programs and services on campuses, building on compliance, recruitment, and retention efforts to address curriculum, climate, and policy-making (Stuart, 2010).

The study of CDO positions is a relatively new focus in diversity and higher education literature, and historical information about the number of institutions with administrators in these roles prior to the 1990s is difficult to find. An examination of websites of institutions regarded as pioneers in terms of long-time presence of a CDO yielded virtually no details about the creation and evolution of these roles on those campuses.

CDO positions have existed for some time in private industry, federal and state agencies, and school systems (Pittard, 2010), with a strong focus on legal compliance and affirmative action. The private sector in particular has influenced the spread of CDO positions in higher education, as colleges and universities look to businesses and corporations that have prioritized positioning and hiring in a global and interconnected world. Other external pressures on higher education that have contributed to the adoption of CDO positions include demographic shifts, international conflicts, inequitable access to educational, social, and political capital, the emergence of an information-based economy, and the educational-benefits justification for admission and financial aid decisions (Williams & Wade Golden, 2007). As one long-time

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CDO stated, “leadership positions are appearing because equity so far has not” (Fleigler, 2006, p. 60).

In addition to external pressures, internal influences have prompted the creation of CDO positions in colleges and universities. Banerji (2006) posited that CDO positions have come about partly because of the “reality of operating in a laissez faire post-affirmative action environment” (p. 38), where diversity is presumed to be a component of a quality education but institutions lack clarity in terms of how to effect an inclusive climate. Despite considerable progress in higher education over the past several decades in terms of expanding access for historically underrepresented groups, “institutions fall short of reaping the benefits that diversity brings to the college environment” (Leon, 2010, p. 5). Presidents and provosts who want to leverage diversity in a strategic learning model may look to a CDO to move an institution forward (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). This is not always the case, of course. Some positions have emerged from controversy or crisis and may function as damage control to appease offended groups. Harvard University, for example, hired its first Senior Vice Provost for Faculty Development and Diversity following President Lawrence Summers’s contentious and highly-publicized remarks in 2005 about women in the sciences.

In a content analysis of the institutional and diversity mission statements of colleges and universities with CDO positions, Antonio and Clarke (2010) found that the vast majority of the mission statements affirmed an ongoing commitment to racial access and diversity. This ran counter to their initial hypothesis that the creation of CDO positions signaled a retreat from racial equity issues. Instead, the statements indicated an aspiration to attend to traditionally underrepresented groups and also to broaden diversity engagement. A primary distinction

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between the newest generation of CDO positions and other current or earlier diversity capabilities is the CDOs' institution-wide focus to create policy and infrastructure that integrate diversity at the core of the learning enterprise (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2006, 2007).

Also impacting understanding of the CDO role has been the rising profile of the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE). Established in 2006 with 111 charter members, the association now boasts 175 institutional members, among them public and private schools, two- and four-year schools, state systems, and several national associations (NADOHE, 2013). Creation of the NADOHE followed several years of informal regional and national gatherings, culminating in meetings coordinated through the American Council on Education to establish a formal national organization to serve "as the preeminent voice for diversity officers in higher education" (NADOHE, 2013). NADOHE began publishing the quarterly *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* in 2008, hosts an annual conference and semi-regular webinars, and recognizes newly-forming state chapters. The organization's development from informal to formal in less than a decade represents an example of a normative framework that reinforces a sense of identity, professional formation, and standards of practice among CDOs.

Prior to the past several years, research about diversity-focused personnel in higher education studied cultural center, minority affairs, or multicultural student services directors, affirmative action officers, or those charged with increasing faculty diversity (David, 1998; Moyer, 1992). As the number of executive-level CDO positions has grown in the past decade (Fleigler, 2006; Stuart, 2010), so has study of the roles and those who hold them. In the past four years, a national study, numerous journal articles, and at least five dissertations have explored

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the role of executive-level CDOs. The literature about CDO positions addresses commonalities and distinctions in organizational structures, portfolios, and strategies, with several dissertations employing qualitative designs (Green, 2008; Leon, 2010; Lowery, 2011; Pittard, 2010) and one national study using a mixed methodology (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). CDOs employ a combination of educational, entrepreneurial, accountability, symbolic, communication, and research strategies, but little in the literature speaks to how they experience their roles or understand their success. Pittard (2010) came closest to doing this, asking five African American male CDOs to reflect on their personal backgrounds, professional experiences, and organizational realities.

### **Functional and Symbolic Roles of CDOs**

Although specific executive-level CDO structures may differ from institution to institution, several commonalities persist across CDO responsibilities, including leadership of strategic diversity planning efforts and building institutional diversity infrastructure (Barceló, 2007; Stuart, 2010; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). CDOs serve as catalysts, educators, and persuaders in their organizations (Green, 2008). In its ideal implementation, a CDO position elevates, integrates, and centralizes diversity functions in an institution (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). Because of the complexity of this charge, the CDO serves in a facilitative capacity, rather than as the sole responsible party for moving forward an institutional diversity agenda (Pittard, 2010). In a case study of an institution with a new CDO position, the provost stated that the structure created around and by the CDO communicated symbolic group accountability, beyond the individual in the position: “There’s the CDO work, but it really is our work. . . . We probably need to keep circling back to that. It’s all of us doing that work” (Nixon,

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2011, p. 19). Just as a university's Chief Academic Officer (CAO) and Chief Information Officer (CIO) do not "own" the entire academic and technological enterprises, respectively, nor should a CDO have to shoulder the expectation of owning diversity. However, CAOs operate within a fairly well-understood sphere comprised of the curriculum, faculty, and classroom, and when institutions create CIO positions, they typically understand the need to invest in technology infrastructure and determine discrete outcomes against which to measure progress. In contrast, many CDOs are carving out new space, are under-resourced (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007), operate with ambiguous expectations, and their institutional charge "could almost be seen as 'organizationally' overstepping boundaries" (Pittard, 2010, p. 41). Fear of the potential transformation of the academic landscape can introduce uncertainty among the very people with whom CDOs must work in order to advance diversity issues.

Williams and Wade-Golden (2007) described three archetypes of the CDO position, each with varying levels of resources and structure: the collaborative officer model (represented by 45% of CDO respondents), the unit-based model (38%), and the portfolio divisional model (17%) (p. 18). The collaborative officer model is characterized by limited staff support, lack of authority to hire, terminate, or evaluate performance, and initiatives that rely on lateral coordination and partnerships. Unit-based models include more robust staffing and budget resources centralized in an office or department to support lateral relationships and coordination. The vertically-integrated portfolio divisional model is the rarest form on college campuses and also the most organizationally complex. CDOs in this model have direct reporting units that might include a cultural center, ethnic and gender studies, equity and compliance, research and assessment, faculty recruiting and retention, prospective student outreach, and community

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outreach. The role of the CDO and the diversity infrastructure built around the person are shaped by institutional context, diversity priorities, and individual characteristics of person in the position (Leon, 2010), which may change in a dynamic and rapid fashion (Green, 2008). Green (2008) noted a “pattern of transition and change” in the CDO positions in her study; of note, the three CDOs she interviewed had all experienced significant realignment of their responsibilities, even though two of the positions were fewer than three years old at the time of her research.

CDOs must address decentralized structures, institutional resistance to change, co-optive pressure, and traditional ways of operating; additional challenges may include an exclusionary institutional history, rocky community relations, and disparate “cultures and micro-cultures of the campus” (Leon, 2010, p. ii). Generally, CDOs lack formal authority to reward or punish individuals and units based on degree of diversity progress. “As a result, their source of ‘power’ is often grounded in status, persuasion, and symbols” (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2006, “Leading Through Status and Influence,” para. 1). The political and symbolic frames described by Bolman and Deal (2008) articulate a range of strategies that are available to CDOs, including mapping the terrain, developing an agenda and planning structure, balancing relationships with allies and enemies, integrating performance assessments, and negotiating conflict, alliances, and compromises. These political and symbolic strategies may facilitate and focus institutional attention to diversity issues.

Unlike other senior-level leaders, CDOs as individuals may be understood as functionally and symbolically representing the issues they are charged to address. Many are hired into new roles and may come from outside the organization, thus having few existing relationships and experiencing isolation in the institution (Jaschik, 2011; Leon, 2010; Pittard, 2010). They may

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also be seen as an instrument or even a pawn of the senior leadership, which limits their ability to develop relationships and initiatives. In his research, Leon (2010) that “the CDO can not only be a symbolic figure that represents the commitment of the leadership, or that serves to please sectors of the campus that show discontent in regards to campus climate” (p. 187). In one study (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007), 74% of CDOs identified as African American/Black, 3% as Asian American/Pacific Islander, 10% as Latino(a)/Hispanic, 13% as White, and 0% as Native American; further, 42% were men, and 58% were women (p. 37). The majority of CDOs are people of color and women. Their charge focuses on systematizing a commitment to diversity, even as they experience marginalization themselves, a set of concerns that is arguably most salient in institutions of higher education where predominantly White faculties and staff serve a predominantly White student population.

### **CDO Positionality in Colleges and Universities**

The positionality of CDOs depends on a constellation of factors related to their organizational placement, the contexts in which they interact, and their social identities.

#### **Institutional Positionality**

The diversity movement in higher education “still struggles for legitimacy” (Barceló, 2007, p. 7), raising questions about whether adoption of formal CDO structures is intended primarily to serve ceremonial purposes or to facilitate deeper attention to diversity challenges. Organizations commonly look to upgrades in management and structure in order to improve processes and bring about change (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Green, 2008). Creating a position can provide a way to symbolically embed issues in an organization, but this approach simultaneously may function to sideline issues and groups by situating responsibility in one person, rather than

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the community, and by symbolically conveying action without making instrumental changes to the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008). This latter outcome may not result from intention or malice, but rather from what is communicated in the structure of the position through resources such as reporting lines and budget allocations. In the case of CDOs, Williams & Wade-Golden (2007) found that only 17% oversaw a broad portfolio of direct reporting units with technical and administrative support, contrasted with 45% of CDOs who operated with little or no staffing and limited influence on hiring, evaluation, and resource allocation (p. 18). In the absence of dedicated diversity capabilities, the authors noted that institutions were at risk of experiencing organizational resistance, dissonance, and misalignment of resources.

CDOs typically lack the power to sanction behavior; rather their capacity for effectiveness rests in how they influence others to value diversity, create concomitant change, and maintain momentum even when encountering resistance. Experiences of marginalization may emerge from the unique location and function of the CDO as a senior leader without key sources of power that are valued in institutions of higher education, such as reporting lines, budgetary resources, and hiring authority. They have a title that communicates power but that in many cases does not include actual authority. This poses challenges, because a primary source of CDOs' influence is their executive-level positioning (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). In some ways CDOs serve as the institution's conscience (Fleigler, 2006; Pittard, 2010) with regard to equity and inclusion, which injects a moral and values-based dimension of right and wrong into an organizational culture that prizes autonomy and academic freedom. Williams & Wade Golden (2008) cautioned that CDOs may function as a "diversity messiah," with the expectation

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of solving an institution's diversity challenges, and simultaneously as a "lightning rod for criticism" from all sides when difficult decisions must be made (p. B44).

In some ways, establishment of CDO positions may serve as "diversity theater." Paralleling the notion of "security theater," which describes measures intended to provide a sense of improved security but doing little to increase actual safety (Schneier, 2008), establishing CDO positions potentially engenders the feeling of increased focus on diversity, even if these roles do little to move institutional targets forward. One CDO described living the challenge of being "easily 'invisibilized' when we function in the interests of the order, as well as ostracized when we speak out in some way" (Nixon, 2010, p. 17). CDO work can be isolating, given the challenges of serving in a visible, high-ranking role and addressing complex issues, often with an infrastructure that is vulnerable during challenging economic times (Hernandez, 2010; Pittard, 2010; Stuart, 2010). The CDO's lived paradoxes of simultaneous visibility and invisibility, high rank and low resources, and recognition and tokenism can result in marginalization achieved not through sidelining or sweeping under the rug, but in essence by hiding the CDO in plain view, by creating window dressing without substantive resources or support (Nixon, 2011). This raises a critical question about the personal and professional costs of this kind of isolation, a gap in the research about CDOs.

### **Identity-Related Positionality**

Given that the majority of college and university CDOs are women and people of color serving in Predominantly White Institutions (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007), it is relevant to examine how social identities may impact their understanding and experience of their role. Although the influences of personal agency and social identities such as race and gender have

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received attention in literature about faculty and senior leadership (Baez, 2000; Harris, 2007; Hune, 1998; Kezar, 2008; Stanley, 2006; Turner, González, & Wood, 2008; Waring, 2003), little exists in the way of “research that allows women of color to voice the experiences they confront within institutions of higher education” (Lloyd-Jones, 2011, p. 10). The impact of social identities on experiences has not been explored in the CDO literature.

Smith (2009) and Baez (2000) described some of the ways that presidents, provosts, and faculty with tokenized identities encounter greater leadership challenges than leaders with majority identities, because they face the additional pressure from underrepresented communities to present evidence that they have not “sold out” (Smith, 2009, p. 267). “Diverse communities in higher education often expect more from diverse leadership than it can deliver” (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006, p. 83). The same dynamic may impact CDOs. When *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education* (“Ask the Chief Diversity Officer,” 2010) asked six CDOs what made their jobs difficult, they described feeling like second-class citizens, being tokenized as racial and gender minorities, lacking support, resources, and authority, and balancing unrealistic expectations from other people of color on campus. Leaders with underrepresented identities must negotiate a balance between a commitment to their own community and a demonstration that they are also invested in the success of other groups. They may find that they are visible as representatives of their identity groups but invisible or hypervisible as individuals (Smith, 2009). Navigating these tensions can potentially lead to isolation and burnout for CDOs, key considerations for institutions that are committed to retaining healthy diversity leadership.

**Multiple Marginality.** Research about multiple marginality indicates that the challenges experienced by CDOs may be heightened for women of color serving in these positions (Turner,

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2002; Turner, González, & Wong, 2011; Ward, 2004). Intersecting target identities can create a situation of multiple jeopardy that marginalizes women in cumulative ways and that limits their access to informal networks, decision-making arenas, and mentors (Bass & Faircloth, 2011; Sulé, 2011; Turner, González, & Wong, 2011; Ward, 2004). Women of color may become invisible because “members of minority groups are perceived primarily through standards exemplified by the men of their group, and women of color are typically judged by standards that are tailored to White women” (Dovidio, 2012, p. 115). The experience of multiple jeopardy can result in tokenism along racial and gender lines, manifesting itself as:

being more visible and on display; feeling more pressure to conform, to make fewer mistakes; becoming socially invisible, not to stand out; finding it harder to gain credibility; being more isolated and peripheral; being more likely to be excluded from informal peer networks, having limited sources of power through alliances; having fewer opportunities to be sponsored; facing misperceptions of their identity and role in the organization; being stereotyped; facing more personal stress. (Turner, 2002, p. 76)

The more one differs from the White, male, heterosexual, upper-middle-class norm in higher education, the more one’s interactions may be negatively affected and the greater cumulative disadvantages one may face in various contexts (Harris & González, 2012; Hune, 1998; Mitchell & Miller, 2011; Turner, 2002; Turner, González, & Wong, 2011). The academy privileges, sanctions, and socializes newcomers to enact “norms and values rooted in white, male, western ideology” (Mertz, 2011, p. 45), with success requiring a high level of alignment and collusion with the characteristics and behaviors of this dominant culture (Collins, 2000; Mitchell & Miller, 2011; Montoya, 1994). Those who are presumed not to align with the culture of the institution

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are subjected to stereotypes, microaggressions, threats, and discrimination (Harris & González, 2012).

The privileged culture of higher education exerts a powerful and co-optive pull on White women and men of color, who have experienced a relative degree of success in higher education, sometimes at the expense of other groups, whose continued oppression White women and men of color may actually support (hooks, 1984). Institutional racism and sexism confer advantages on these two groups, however relative the advantages may be within the system. Compared with men and White women, women of color experience a reduced range of options or deeper incongruity with the institutional culture because they embody multiple identities that are outside the norms of the academy (Harris, 2007; hooks, 1984; Mertz, 2011). In fact, in order to persist in their positions, women of color leaders may find themselves working and acting in ways that conflict with their own beliefs and values, “thereby creating a sense of ‘lived contradictions’” (Bass & Faircloth, 2011, p. 221). They must resort to using “survival strategies in a system designed to help [them] fail” (Harris, 2007, p. 61), and they face decisions about whether to accommodate, resist, or perform in accordance with the institution’s culture as a means of surviving and potentially thriving. Although use of survival strategies may be perceived as a compromise of integrity, others see these strategies as essential to survival, resilience, and success (Harris, 2007; Mitchell & Miller, 2011; Montoya, 1994). Negotiating these contradictions consumes time, energy, and personal resources that others in higher education institutions do not have to expend.

**Masking.** Many women of color have developed outer personas or masks as a strategy to navigate these tensions. “Assuming a mask is comparable to being ‘on stage.’ Being ‘on stage’

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is frequently experienced as being acutely aware of one's words, affect, tone of voice, movements and gestures because they seem out of sync with what one is feeling and thinking" (Montoya, 1994, p. 197). The mask is a key part of controlling one's presentation to others, facilitating the simultaneous engagement in and resistance of gendered, racialized performances. It also serves a protective function that allows women of color to maintain a core part of themselves (Mitchell & Miller, 2011; Montoya, 1994). Montoya (1994) notes the universal condition of masking in higher education; everyone wants to exercise control over the impressions they make. However, for women of color, the masks they must wear are "inherently self-loathing" (p. 196) because they implicitly devalue one's identities and experiences in favor of the dominant ideology. Women of color also have a narrower range of masks from which to choose, constrained by stereotypes and expectations from dominant groups (Montoya, 1994). Developing a public persona may "require [women of color] to subjugate their very being to achieve success" (Mitchell & Miller, 2011, p. 194), resulting in dissonance, trauma, and isolation. Montoya characterized as "a crazy-making endeavor" (p. 209) the internal negotiations that women of color endure when deciding how to speak up about issues of race and gender. These endeavors can detrimentally affect the physical, emotional, and psychological health of women of color, who may suffer from hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and depression as a result of the chronic stress associated with impression management and performing their roles and identities (Harris & González, 2012).

**Women of Color in Leadership Positions.** These disadvantages may be even more acute for women of color in positions of leadership. Women of color comprise only 8.6% of full-time college and university administrator positions of all levels (Ryu, 2010), and the

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American Council of Education reported in 2007 that among senior administrators, people of color and women were more likely to hold Chief Diversity Officer roles than any other position (Jaschik, 2007). (See Table 1 for race and gender demographics of selected senior administrator groups.) Despite modest increases in numbers of women of color among the faculty, they continue to be underrepresented in institutional leadership; as institutional hierarchy levels increase, the percentage of people of color decreases compared with White people (Ryu, 2010). Women of color leaders, therefore, are likely to be pioneers in the roles they occupy in the academy. For example, Montoya (1994) noted that Latinas “are now represented in virtually every college and university. But, for the most part, we find ourselves isolated. Rarely has another Latina gone before us” (pp. 190-191). As a lone example or one of just a few on a given campus, women of color leaders serve as the model for behaviors and attitudes, exacerbating the hypervisibility that Turner (2002) described.

Women of color are subjected to the effects of tokenism by virtue of their extreme underrepresentation, resulting in isolation, loneliness, role encapsulation manifested as assignments related to diversity, stereotyping, and being viewed as representative of their distinctive groups (Niemann, 2012). “Their failures, in particular, are seen as reflective of their demographic group, while their successes are considered exceptions to the rule or stereotype about their group” (Niemann, 2012, p. 473). They very likely lack trusted mentors with similar identities from within or outside the institution who can help them navigate organizational culture, politics, and idiosyncrasies or understand how and when to speak out to oppose oppression (Harris & González, 2012; Holling, Fu, & Bubar, 2012; Montoya, 1994). Harris & González (2012) described a particular mentoring challenge for women of color who have been

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Table 1

*Senior Administrator Demographics*

	Executive Vice President	Provost/Chief Academic Officer	Academic College Dean	Chief Student Affairs Officer	Chief Diversity Officer
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>					
White	79.8%	90.5%	85.8%	79.7%	17.6%
Black	12.3%	5.0%	7.2%	13.3%	59.0%
Asian American	1.9%	1.9%	2.8%	0.8%	4.5%
American Indian	0.0%	0.2%	0.5%	0.4%	3.9%
Hispanic	6.0%	2.4%	2.4%	5.4%	13.2%
Other	0.0%	0.0%	1.3%	0.3%	1.7%
<b>Gender</b>					
Female	31.0%	38.0%	35.5%	45.4%	55.6%
Male	69.0%	62.0%	64.5%	54.6%	44.4%

*Note:* Adapted from “Next Generation President,” by S. Jaschik, 2008, *Inside Higher Ed*.

recruited by liberal White supporters who then treated the women in a patronizing manner, bragged about their role in the women’s success, cast them in the “role of charity recipients” (p. 12), and turned on the women when they expressed divergent opinions. For women of color recruited by White male presidents to serve as CDOs, this dynamic of benefactor/charity case could be present.

**Outsider-Within Positionality.** Despite these numerous disadvantages, literature about women of color also highlights that negative experiences with marginality can facilitate the development of skills and self-efficacy to maneuver diverse settings and transcend barriers (Baez, 2011; Sulé, 2011; Turner, 2002). hooks (1984) describes a “particular way of seeing

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reality” (p. ix) for those who exist at the edges of society but move through it and who therefore must understand how both the margins and the center function. Those who occupy the center do not and perhaps cannot understand the outskirts. The capacity to perceive and navigate the whole system, encompassing the center and the edges, provides an “oppositional world view” (hooks, 1984, p. ix) that serves as a source of strength for those who experience multiple marginality. The worldview and lived experiences of women of color in academia create “outsider-within positions” (Collins, 2000, p. 12), which in turn facilitates “a distinctive wide angle vision on these intellectual and political entities” (p. 12).

The strategic approaches, persistence, and resilience that women of color develop in overcoming barriers become useful tools in their leadership repertoire (Jean-Marie, 2011). Bass & Faircloth (2011) noted that “successful women of color are not only confident in their ability to perform, but are also able to understand and successfully navigate the terrain in which they work” (p. 227), an understanding that is informed by their distinctive positionality in universities. Yosso (2005) labeled as “navigational capital” the skills that people of color acquire to maneuver institutions not created with them in mind. As higher education institutions come to realize the wide range of capabilities needed to be successful in leadership, including adaptability, ability to balance multiple demands, and sensitivity to diverse perspectives, women of color who currently occupy marginal institutional spaces may find themselves in high demand for senior-level positions (Hamilton, 2004), making the study of women of color Chief Diversity Officers an even more important area of focus.

The majority of CDOs are people of color and women serving in roles in which they have management responsibility for creating programs and services that redress historical, structural,

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psychological, and behavioral legacies of excluding people with identities similar to their own (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). As women of color in diversity-related roles, they risk becoming “diversity mascots” or the face of diversity for their institutions (Niemann, 2012). In addition to their marginalization as numerical tokens in institutional leadership, CDOs who are women of color must also negotiate personally and publicly with how much to conform with or oppose dominant ideologies that underpin educational systems in the U.S. (Collins, 2000; Montoya, 1994). All of these tensions influence the capacity of CDOs to exercise effective agency in their efforts to effect transformational diversity change.

### **Notions of Agency**

The psychology of human agency posits people are not just passive receptors of their environments; rather, they have a role in enacting those environments toward inclusive or exclusive ends (Bandura, 2006). The agency literature presents differing perspectives about the degree to which individual actors in organizations can mediate the connections between gendered and racialized structures and the resulting patterns of inequality (Baez, 2000; Britton, 2000). From an agentic perspective, organizations are not static entities, but are enacted according to the images, beliefs, and values of their members (Middlehurst, 1997).

Agency operates at three levels: individual, where people influence their own functioning and environment; proxy, where individuals influence others to secure desired outcomes; and collective, where people pool their knowledge and resources to shape a shared outcome (Bandura, 2006). Individuals cannot control all of the conditions that impact their lives, so agency is constrained in some ways by social structures and access to knowledge, skills, and resources (Sulé, 2011). However, social constraints may be negotiable and reveal a complex

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interrelationship between structure and agency (Baez, 2000; Baez, 2011; Sulé, 2011). “Agency is constrained but not determined in advance. ... Structures, therefore, remain structures only through their being reinstated as such, and because they must be reinstated to remain efficient, they are vulnerable to subversion and redefinition” (Baez, 2000, p. 385). The structures that comprise an organization must be repeated in order to become embedded as institutional demands; this also means that the structures are dynamic and potentially susceptible to change (Baez, 2000; Middlehurst, 1997).

Baez (2000) considered questions of power and structural constraints in defining “critical agency” as “‘purposeful’ (or ‘deliberate’ or ‘designed’) action that resists hegemonic practices which ensure and justify the social domination of some individuals by others” (p. 385) and that provides opportunities to redefine and reframe these practices. For example, the balance of service, scholarship, and teaching introduces particular challenges for faculty of color, who may feel internal and external pressure to engage in race-related service (Baez, 2000; Turner, González, & Wood, 2008). However, Baez found that this kind of service provided faculty of color with political and personal benefits such as interpersonal support, a sense of contributing to their racial or ethnic communities, connection with faculty of color in other departments or institutions, and validation regarding their experiences. “By choosing to engage in race-related service despite understanding the risks of doing so, the faculty members were exercising an agency that appeared to contest the predominant definitions of faculty work” (Baez, 2000, p. 382). In addition, race-related service presented an opportunity for faculty to negotiate the constraints that characterized their experiences, a finding that also emerged in Sulé’s (2011) study of 14 tenured Black women faculty, which focused on professional trajectory, mentoring,

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collegiality, scholarship, career success, and the tension between institutional structure and participants' agency. Baez (2000) and Sulé (2011) emphasized the agency that marginalized faculty can exercise in reifying or redefining social constraints. Renegotiating institutional assumptions and practices around merit, scholarship, and diversity provided an avenue for critical agency, although Baez cautioned that social structures imposed constraints on agency that could make its exercise particularly challenging for some groups.

A core mechanism of human agency is self-efficacy, or the belief that one can produce desired effects through one's actions. Research has demonstrated the cross-cultural generalizability of the effects of self-efficacy on a sense of optimism or pessimism, goals and aspirations, self-motivation, perseverance in face of adversity or challenges, outcome expectations, how opportunities and obstacles are viewed, quality of emotional life, vulnerability to stress, and decision-making (Bandura, 1982; Bandura, 2006). "The stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the higher the performance attainments" (Bandura, 2006, p. 175). Efficacy operates at the collective level as well, with organizations with a high sense of efficacy innovating and adapting more flexibly to changing circumstances (Bandura, 2006). Self-efficacy and related concepts, such as resiliency, self-mentorship, persistence, and self-referent thought, have received increased attention in literature about the experiences of women faculty of color (Baez, 2011; Bass & Faircloth, 2011) and women administrators (Christman & McClellan, 2008).

In the next chapter I describe the research design and conceptual framework for this study.

### **Question 3: Methodology**

This literature review has explored diversity and diversity leadership in higher education, as well as the evolution and positionality of CDO roles in colleges and universities, issues that are important to consider as higher education diversity leadership evolves to balance traditional emphases on access and climate with newer imperatives to integrate diversity into the core learning mission of colleges and universities.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this research about the experiences and agency of CDOs:

1. How do women of color CDOs experience their identities as women and as people of color? How do their experiences influence their work as diversity leaders?
2. How are women of color positioned as CDOs? How do women of color CDOs navigate complex institutional contexts to create diversity change? How do they shift their positionality to maximize their influence?
3. What factors influence the ways that women of color CDOs exercise agency in their roles and institutions? What forms does their agency take? How does the exercise of agency influence CDOs personally and professionally?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The potential for CDOs to encounter organizational isolation, identity-related tokenism, and co-optation demonstrates the need for a conceptual lens that incorporates an understanding of race, gender, power, and marginalization. Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race Feminism (CRF) provide such a theoretical foundation.

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CRT emerged in the mid-1970s as legal scholars and activists sought to develop new theories and strategies to combat subtle forms of racism that were gaining traction following the height of the Civil Rights Movement (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Yosso, 2005). CRT examines the relationship among race, racism, and power, positing that racism is ordinary, rather than aberrational, and that White people in power do not make change related to racism or discrimination unless their own self-interests converge with those of people of color. CRT elevates narratives, because critical counterstories from people of color can offer powerful remedies to embedded myths and the silencing of marginalized voices. Narratives also highlight challenges experienced by those who “exist at an intersection of recognized sites of oppression” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 51) because of their marginalized identities and provide a means of understanding multiple consciousness as an asset. CRT is an important theoretical foundation for this study, because it centers social justice and the experiences of marginalized voices in an interdisciplinary framework that considers historical and contemporary contexts (Yosso, 2005). CRT also addresses the notions of interest convergence, co-optation, and homeostasis, recognizes the nature of microaggressions, incorporates human agency through an understanding of the social construction of realities, and offers a critique of working within the system to achieve incremental, step-by-step progress (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Jones, 2011; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Sulé, 2011).

Critical Race Feminism adds to CRT “a gendered intersectional epistemology” (Sulé, 2011, p. 144) that places the intersectional experiences of women of color “at the center rather than in the margins or footnotes of the analysis” (Wing, 1997, p. 948). CRF recognizes similarity – although not homogeneity – of experiences and issues of concern for women of color

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in higher education organizational contexts (Collins, 2000; Sulé, 2011; Turner, González, & Wong, 2011) and thus offers an appropriate lens through which to view the experiences of women of color serving as Chief Diversity Officers. CRF also recognizes the connectedness of all forms of oppression. “Since all forms of oppression are linked in our society because they are supported by similar institutional and social structures, one system cannot be eradicated while the others remain intact” (hooks, 1984, p. 35). Addressing oppression in its many forms underpins the progression of CDO positions, which have evolved to address not only issues of racial inclusion, but also a host of other social identities and the integration of diversity across the academic enterprise (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). CRF provides a framework to describe, analyze, and understand this work.

Core tenets of CRF are its grounding in the lived experiences of women of color and its focus on opposing social injustice (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1984). A critical feminist consciousness emerges from how women of color navigate and make meaning of oppressive, exploitative social circumstances that result in multiple marginalization. Women of color are “situated knowers” (Collins, 2000, p. 19), based on the meaning they make of their everyday experiences (hooks, 1984). CRF is grounded in lived realities, and its aim is to oppose and undo the social forces that create those realities. A commitment to justice grounds CRF and other critical social theories (Collins, 2000).

Because they are navigating multiple subordinated group identities in organizational contexts in which they are likely to be both racial and gender minorities, women of color CDOs may encounter difficulty being recognized or represented, which is a distinct form of intersectional oppression (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). This intersectional invisibility may

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result in misrepresentation and disempowerment, but it also provides a platform for the exercise of critical agency. Intersectionality offers women of color possibilities to work across and around barriers and boundaries (Cole, 2008). “Fundamentally, the idea of agency invites interrogation beyond the legacy of racism and sexism in higher education to how [women of color] alter and contribute to those institutions” (Sulé, 2011, p. 145). CRF and CRT both aim to dismantle systemic oppression through centering the experiences of those on the periphery and facilitating their exercise of transformative agency.

Multiple marginality models generally align with one of two paradigms, additive or interactive (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). In the additive paradigm, reflected in Turner (2002) and Harris (2007), individuals with two or more target identities experience a summative form of oppression based on accumulating the distinctive forms of oppression associated with each identity (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). In contrast, interactive paradigms propose that “each of a person’s subordinate identities interact in a synergistic way. People experience these identities as one, and thus contend with discrimination as a multiply marginalized other” (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008, p. 378). Viewed from the interactive paradigm, women of color CDOs would not experience discrimination as women *and* as people of color (in addition to other subordinated identities such as class, immigration status, disability, etc.), but rather they would experience oppression based on the synergistic intersection of these marginalized identities. The interactive paradigm informed my approach to the current study.

In a critical framework, narratives provide an important strategy for meaning-making and for exercising agency. “Personal narratives ... are more than stories. They are an important site of resistance” (Montoya, 1994, p. 210). Narratives provide opportunities for self-definition and

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validation, rejection of one-dimensional presentations of marginalized experiences, challenges to hegemonic discourses, and development of an oppositional worldview (hooks, 1984; Montoya, 1994; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Sulé, 2011). The discursive nature of critical theory, with its focus on meaning-making, supports a methodological focus on narratives and interviews as a primary data collection strategy.

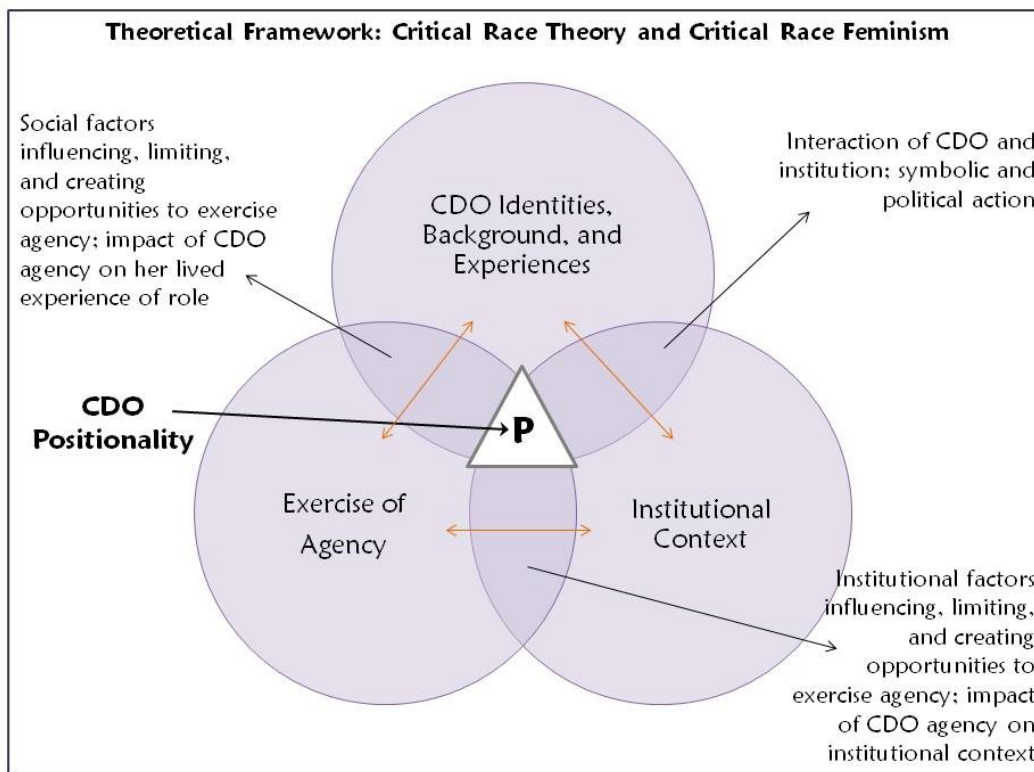
### **Conceptual Framework**

Figure 1 illustrates this study's conceptual framework, which demonstrates the main research foci and relationships among them (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This research is situated in an organizational context of higher education diversity leadership and the theoretical frameworks of CRT and CRF, which integrate the intersectionality of race and gender, the tension between institutional structure and human agency, and recognition of organizational and identity-related positionality. The intention of this study was not to essentialize concepts of race, gender, or identity onto specific individuals, but rather to understand ways in which the positionality of CDOs with subordinated group identities affected their perspective, consciousness, agency, and capacity to influence institutional culture.

At the center of the conceptual framework is the personal and professional positionality of the CDOs, which is influenced by the dynamic intersection of the CDO's identities, backgrounds, and experiences, her institutional context, and the manner and impact of her exercise of agency. Questions that arose from this framing of the interaction between the CDO and institution included: How does the institutional context shape the work of the CDO, and how is the context reciprocally shaped by the CDO's work? What kinds of political and symbolic action are enabled in the institutional context? How does political and symbolic action

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represent the exercise of agency? As campuses attempt to make progress with regard to inclusion and equity, how do CDOs, many of whom are people of color and women, experience their personal and professional positionality on college campuses? What explains the nature of their experiences and perceptions? How does the exercise of agency impact the institution and the positionality of the CDO?



*Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Higher Education Chief Diversity Officer Study*

### Framework Constructs

In this conceptual framing, several constructs interact to influence the positionality of the CDO. I describe the constructs of the framework in more detail below.

**Institutional Context.** A primary motivation for colleges and universities to create CDO positions is to enable strategic responsiveness to the challenges and opportunities of diversity.

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CDOs enter institutional contexts with wide variations in commitment to diversity goals, resources, budgets, leadership support, and access to allies, mentors, and community, and they may experience dissonance or consonance with the institutional culture. CDOs may come into newly-established diversity leadership roles, or they may follow others who have overseen some or all of their portfolio. These institutional factors likely influence how CDOs experience their roles, the degree and quality of interaction between the organization and the CDO, and the CDO's capacity to exercise agency. The ways that the CDO exercises agency in turn affects the institution and her experience of her role.

**CDO Identities, Background, and Experiences.** A nearly limitless interaction of identities and experiences likely influences the capacity of CDOs to exercise agency and diversity leadership. The intersectionality of identities such as gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, immigration status, sexual orientation, and ability can create or limit visibility and access to relationships and resources. CDOs' longevity in their institutions and in diversity-related work may also affect how others view their leadership and effectiveness. For example, has the CDO served previously in a different role in the organization, and if so, what reputation does she bring into her new position? What real or perceived expertise does she bring as a result of her earlier work in the institution or elsewhere?

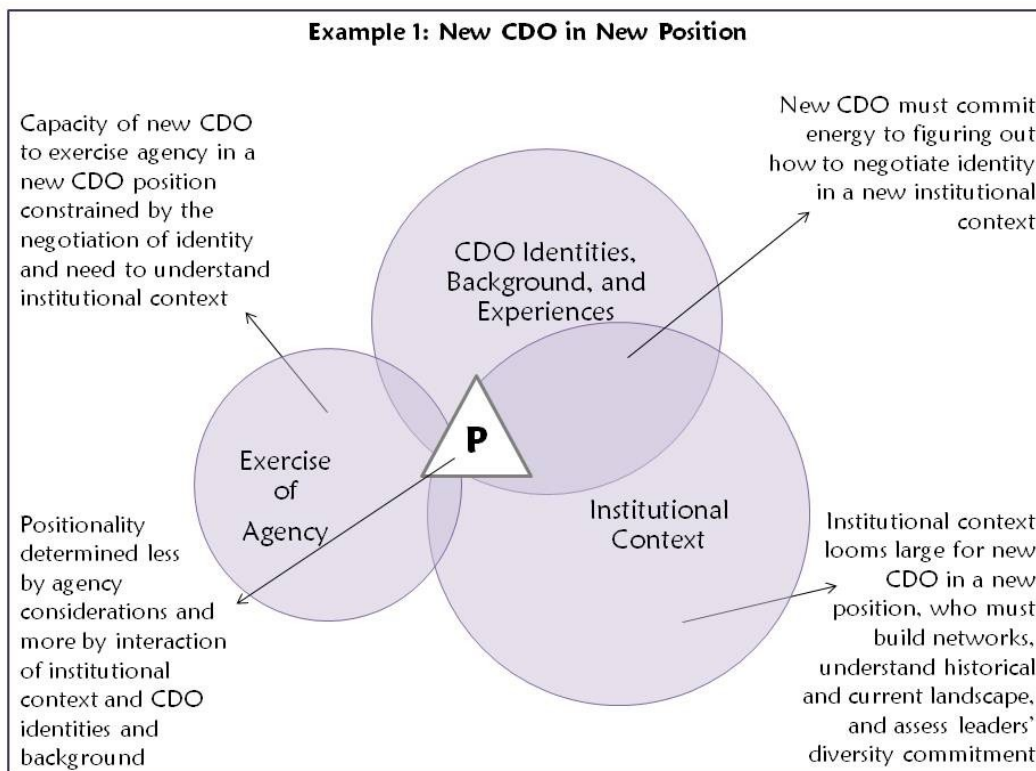
**Exercise of Agency.** The exercise of agency – and of critical agency in particular – is central to this study because the construct of agency ties together individual experiences and organizational structure. Agency presents the opportunity for negotiating institutional contexts with an understanding of how personal and professional identities and experiences affect access to political and symbolic power. Self-efficacy is a core mechanism of human agency, and

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research demonstrates that higher perceptions of self-efficacy lead to higher levels of performance (Bandura, 2006). To provide an example, the more a CDO believes that she can change the climate of a university, the more likely she will be to do so. The belief in her agency, however, is tied to her own experiences, messages she receives from her institution, and the responsiveness of the university to her agency.

### Dynamic Nature of Conceptual Framework

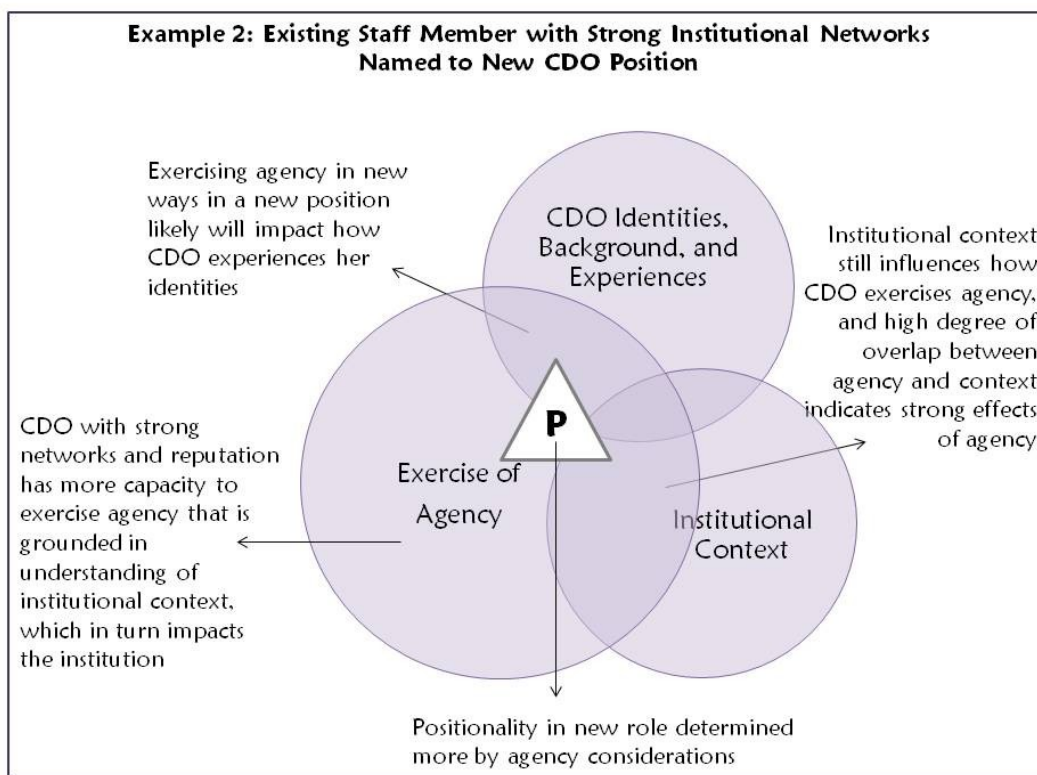
The above illustration of this study's conceptual framework is a static representation of how the three constructs might interact. In the following illustrations, I describe hypothetical examples of the relative impact of each construct on a CDO's positionality.



*Figure 2.* Framework Constructs for New CDO in New Position

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The CDO in the example illustrated by Figure 2 is a woman of color been hired from outside the institution into a newly-established CDO position. She must learn how to navigate the institutional context, build relationships with her supervisor, the Cabinet, and other stakeholders, and understand the historical and current landscape for diversity leadership. She also has to learn about the campus climate and how she will be perceived in this particular institution as a woman of color. In this example, the CDO must rely on her own sense of self-efficacy in order to exercise agency, because she does not yet have a record of success in the university on which to build proxy and collective agency among others. Lack of understanding



*Figure 3.* Framework Constructs for Existing Staff Member with Strong Institutional Networks Named to New CDO Position

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of the institutional context and campus climate constrains her capacity for agency in the short-term, though she can still exercise leadership in her role.

The CDO illustrated in Figure 3 has served in a diversity-related capacity in her institution for some time and has been appointed to a newly-created CDO position. She is a known entity, entering her position with a strong understanding of the institutional context and networks that allow her to exercise a high degree of agency from the beginning. Although she understands the institution, she still must learn to navigate relationships from a new position, so context and identity are still important considerations in her positionality.

These examples demonstrate the dynamic nature of the constructs that serve as the foundation of this study's conceptual framework. Institutional context, identity, and agency interact with one another to influence CDO positionality, and these constructs shift with time, accrual of experiences, reputation, and perceptions of success and failure. The dynamism of the constructs is an important element in the framing of the research design, which I describe next.

### **Research Design**

Several considerations in this research made it ideal for qualitative study. The research was exploratory in nature, with a sample of five women of color in CDO positions. The researcher served as the primary instrument in data collection and analysis, which yielded rich descriptions regarding CDOs' understanding, interpretation of experience, and process of meaning-making (Merriam, 2009). The conceptual framework demonstrated an interpretive orientation to the research, which "assumes that reality is socially constructed, that is, there is no single, observable reality. Rather, there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event" (Merriam, 2009). Interpretive researchers look for a complexity of views and try to

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understand the social and historical construction of those subjective meanings. Gaining insight into these constructed meanings required the deeper level of interaction facilitated by qualitative inquiry (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

In addition to meaning-making, qualitative research provides an opportunity to account for the relationships between human agency and social structure. “People are active, creative beings who *act*, not merely behave. They attempt to solve problems in their lives and worlds. As researchers, we need to learn how, when, and why participants act” (Charmaz, 2005, p. 523). This is accomplished through a dynamic process of analysis in which early analysis focuses further data collection and focused data refines emerging analyses (Charmaz, 2005). An iterative process of data collection and analysis informed the current design.

### **Research Sample and Rationale for Selecting It**

Patton (2003) advised that the key issue in selecting one’s unit of analysis is “to decide what it is you want to be able to say something about at the end of the study” (p. 229). Sampling decisions should emerge from the conceptual framework, with attention to the feasibility and ethics of the sampling plan, as well as the likelihood that phenomena will appear and will elicit believable descriptions and explanations (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Miles & Huberman (1994) described cases defined by roles, and the role of the college or university CDO defined the cases of my research project. In order to understand CDOs’ experiences, it was important to hear in their own words how they describe their goals, day-to-day realities, strategic decisions, concessions, and challenges. The purposeful selection of information-rich cases (Patton, 2003) yielded in-depth understanding of factors that influence how individual CDOs experience their positions. More specifically, given the desire to

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understand positionality according to social identity, focusing the research on women of color in executive-level CDO positions provided portraits of the CDO experience in situations of maximum potential marginalization by race, gender, and role.

Sampling involves decisions about setting, people, time, and events (Patton, 2003). Participants in the study were women of color serving as executive-level college or university CDOs, selected with attention to creating a sample that included variation in representation by race/ethnicity and CDO archetype. The intention of this sampling strategy was to facilitate comparison of CDO experiences across different contexts, in order to understand a range of factors that may impact positionality and the exercise of agency.

I employed existing networks to contact potential participants, asking colleagues to facilitate introductions to CDOs with whom they worked. Convenience also figured into sampling decisions. The study design relied on interviews as a significant data source, because of the focus on individual lived experience (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), so I prioritized participants working in geographical locations that I could access with relative ease for in-person meetings.

### **Data Collection**

This study investigated the experiences of five women of color serving as college and university CDOs, employing a questionnaire, interviews, and archival sources to corroborate and amplify interview findings.

Table 2 displays participant and institutional pseudonyms, the CDO organizational archetype, and their tenure in the CDO position at the time they participated in the research interview. (In order to provide a measure of confidentiality, I used the generic title “Chief

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Table 2

*Participant Profiles*

Pseudonym	Institution	CDO Organizational Archetype	Tenure in CDO Position	Race
Melissa	Cooke University 45,000 students	Portfolio divisional	6 years	African American
Frances	Hayden University 25,000 students	Unit-based	10 years	Latina
Jacqueline	Baxter University 37,000 students	Portfolio divisional	7 months	African American
Donna	Sage University 16,000 students	Portfolio divisional	6 years	Black
Sabrina	Monitor University 28,000 students	Unit-based	2 years	Latina

Diversity Officer” or “CDO” for all of their titles. The word “diversity” does appear in all of their actual titles.) Jacqueline is newest to her position but served in a similar role at another university prior to coming to Baxter less than one year ago. Frances has served longest in her role, having recently signed a new five-year contract after her decade at Hayden University. Donna and Melissa had worked in diversity-related roles at their present institutions before being appointed into CDO positions. Sabrina was hired two years ago as Monitor University’s first CDO. Only Melissa came into an existing CDO position at the vice-presidential level. Sabrina, Jacqueline, and Frances were preceded by special assistants to the president with some responsibility for diversity issues but in a more limited capacity in terms of portfolio, resources, and visibility. The participants serve in executive capacities, reporting directly to the president

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(and jointly to the provost in the cases of Jacqueline and Melissa) and sitting on the president's cabinet, as stipulated in the research design.

All five of the universities where these CDOs work offer undergraduate, graduate, professional, and doctoral degrees and engage in high or very high research activity, according to their classifications from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. They range in size of the student population from Sage University's 16,000 to more than 45,000 at Cooke University. Cooke, Baxter, and Monitor are public universities, and both Hayden and Sage are private institutions. Four of the five are situated on urban campuses, and the fifth is located in a college town less than 30 miles from an urban center.

**Questionnaire.** I asked the participants to complete a 20-minute online questionnaire to provide a foundation for our interviews. Questions focused on respondents' professional and educational background, gender, race/ethnicity, and age, structure of the CDO position, and institutional data. The questionnaire is included as Appendix A.

Only three of the five participants completed the questionnaire, which reduced the utility of this data collection strategy. Two responded well ahead of the time we were scheduled to meet for our interview, which allowed me to use their responses to shape the interview protocol. I ended up asking many of the questions from the survey during the interviews. In addition to the three who completed the online questionnaire, another participant shared responses to most of the questions by email following her interview.

**Interviews.** I conducted one interview with each participant, lasting between 75 and 120 minutes. To guide the interviews, I used a semi-structured protocol with questions about experience, behavior, opinions, values, knowledge, and background. Use of a semi-structured

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interview protocol ensured that similar lines of inquiry from the conceptual framework were addressed with each participant, but it left room to explore particular subjects spontaneously or more deeply and to establish a conversational style (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2003). Document analysis and information from the participants' questionnaires, when available, also led to lines of inquiry in the interviews. Drawing from the conceptual framework, questions focused on roles and responsibilities, organizational structure, impact and progress, personal agency, positionality, and identity. See Appendix B for the interview protocol.

Interviews were digitally-recorded and transcribed, and handwritten notes facilitated recall of key responses, nonverbal communication, emotions, and transitions (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Merriam, 2009). Following each set of interviews, I reviewed notes, typed memos with reflections, hunches, and initial interpretations, and analyzed for additional lines of questioning to incorporate into a revised protocol for subsequent interviews (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2003).

**Documents and Online Sources.** Documents and artifacts provided another data source for this study, given their potential to stimulate “paths of inquiry” (Merriam, 2009, p. 141). Website research for each institution represented in the interview sample examined the institution’s strategic plan, diversity strategic plan, CDO annual reports, diversity-focused institutional websites, public statements about diversity, organization charts, and news accounts from the student and local newspapers. These documents provided opportunities to engage the participations in questions related to positionality, agency, accomplishments and setbacks, and institutional diversity goals.

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### **Data Analysis**

In qualitative research, data analysis occurs simultaneously with data collection as well as following it (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2003), providing opportunities to develop new lines of questioning, member-check themes, and refine the conceptual framework. Initial data analysis involved open coding, with an emphasis on noting the participants' own words rather than on making initial interpretations or limiting the number of codes (Charmaz, 2005; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Research memos captured initial speculations (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Merriam, 2009).

Focused codes emerged from the interviews, memos, research questions, and conceptual framework and were organized into categories, which then were used to re-code interviews and documents, surfacing patterns and themes (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Merriam, 2009). Data matrices helped to organize findings, compare and contrast perceptions, and provided a foundation for an analytic story line that responded to the research questions (Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Turner, González, and Wong (2011) noted the research challenges of isolating the impact of gender versus race when working with women of color participants. Experiences that describe race and ethnicity are affected by gender, and gendered experiences are interlaced with race and ethnicity. In intersectional research, "all of the voices represented explicate the intersectionality of gender and race/ethnicity" (Turner, González, and Wong, 2011, p. 5). In keeping with the critical theoretical framework of the study, unless the participants referred specifically to their gender or race or other social identity, I assumed that what they shared reflected CRT and CRF simultaneously. Though the participants shared identities as women and

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people of color, I tried to resist the temptation to homogenize the experiences of the women in the study, instead comparing and contrasting the ways that they described their lived realities. I also assumed the relevance of race and gender and the impact of oppression, even if participants did not mention them explicitly, because the critical framework required analysis of the data within a larger context of structural inequality (Bowleg, 2008).

### **Data Quality and Limitations**

Issues of trustworthiness, data limitations, and researcher positionality were important considerations in the design and implementation of this qualitative research study (Merriam, 2009).

**Trustworthiness.** Attention to credibility, which addresses the plausibility and integrity of the study, was a constant throughout the design, data collection, and analysis stages (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). Credibility was facilitated through triangulation, member checks, and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). The data collection timetable provided opportunities to follow up with participants on ideas and to probe regarding differing characterizations of experience. Triangulation of data sources occurred through comparing findings from different participants and incorporating interviews and archival data in the research design. Member checking occurred in an iterative fashion during data collection, with revised questions and opportunities to test emerging ideas and constructions with participants. I shared selected findings with the participants, and all offered feedback to clarify their intentions and experiences. Finally, peer debriefing with experienced qualitative researchers and those familiar with the research topic informed coding processes and the development of emerging hypotheses and story lines.

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Considerations of trustworthiness also included transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), as well as grounding in the theoretical framework of the study. The question of transferability depends on providing rich descriptions of participants and contexts such that readers can determine the extent to which their own contexts align with the research settings and make informed decisions regarding transferability of findings (Merriam, 2009). With regard to dependability and confirmability, where appropriate, I have described my research and analysis processes in the report, based on an audit trail that included a detailed account of my methodological strategies, decisions, and shifts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). Drawing from the critical theoretical approaches, trustworthiness also included representation of marginalized perspectives, identification of power dynamics, and attention to multiple consciousness (Sulé, 2011).

**Design Limitations.** Potential design limitations included the sample size and demographic composition, primary reliance on interviews, and confidentiality of participants.

This exploratory study relied on the perspectives of five women of color serving as executive-level Chief Diversity Officers. After trying to identify women representing various racial and ethnic backgrounds, I arrived at a sample with two Latinas and three Black/African American women. I did not interview any Asian American, Pacific Islander, or Native American women. According to Williams & Wade-Golden (2007), these groups are underrepresented among CDOs, with Asian American and Pacific Islander male and female CDOs comprising 3% of the total and Native Americans less than 1% (p. 37). In presenting findings from my sample of women of color, I recognize that it does not include some important perspectives that should be the focus of future study.

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I understand that broad generalizations will not be possible using the data generated from these five women, but this does not reduce the value of their voices and experiences. The power of qualitative research comes in the ability to learn and convey a deep and nuanced understanding of the phenomena in question. In qualitative research, the size of the sample is often less important than the qualities it includes (Patton, 2003). This study fills an important gap in the research CDOs and leadership by focusing on the experiences of women of color working in a relatively new area of administrative leadership.

The primary reliance on interviews could be viewed as a shortcoming, because interviews provide second-hand accounts of dynamics-in-action. However, data of all types are “reconstructions of experience; they are not the original experience itself” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 514). The research questions in this study focused on individual lived experiences and how participants made meaning of their positionality and agency. Interviews are “the primary strategy ... to capture the deep meaning of experience in the participants’ own words” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 55). Document and archival data supported findings that emerged from the participants themselves.

A reliance on interviews as the primary data source necessitated attention to trust-building and sensitivity to ethical issues, particularly given the focus on the negotiation of identities that have been marginalized in the academy and society (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Pilot interviews with CDOs highlighted the challenge of moving respondents beyond superficial acknowledgement of the impact of social identity (Nixon, 2010, 2011). This may have been attributable to the ways I asked questions, and it may also have been possible that psychological mechanisms related to oppression resulted in subjects

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minimizing the challenges and disadvantages associated with belonging to identity groups (Bowleg, 2008). The pilot interviews demonstrated that asking a direct question about positionality (i.e., “When have you experienced marginalization according to race or gender?”) may be less effective than probing for concrete examples (i.e., “Please describe a specific situation that turned out differently than you had hoped.”) or introducing the issue in more oblique ways (i.e., “What leadership qualities are valued in your institution?”). The pilot interviews also made clear that asking questions from an additive paradigm that separated identities (i.e., “When have you experienced marginalization according to race or gender?”) yielded additive responses. Although I did not harbor a positivist illusion that there is one perfect way to ask questions to unlock someone’s lived reality (Bowleg, 2008), framing questions in ways that assumed intersectionality aligned more closely with the critical and intersectional theoretical framework of this study.

Questions about positionality, tokenism, and marginality may potentially cause distress or result in “a partial, sanitized view of experience, cleaned up for public discourse” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 525). I needed to be attentive to cues that signaled discomfort, though participants were relatively open to discussing the impact of identity and positionality. One participant initially declined to have me record her interview, saying that she worried she would be more circumspect if she knew a recording of her words would exist. She later assented to recording and commented that she forgot the recorder was being used.

Confidentiality was an important concern for me and the participants, given the relatively small community of diversity leaders in higher education. Fontana and Frey (2000) say that our responsibilities as researchers proceed in this order: subjects, study, and ourselves.

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Holding all three of these concerns simultaneously was challenging, as I found myself wanting to prioritize the study and the questions I posed, while at the same time maintaining my commitment to the participants. The names, titles, and geographic locations of the participants have been changed, so external readers should not be able to deduce individual identities. However, “at the local level, it is nearly impossible to protect the identity of either the case or the people involved” (Merriam, 2009, p. 233), which may result in undue stress, negative impact on reputation, and unwanted attention. I gave careful attention to describing specific situations in general terms that reduced the likelihood of discerning the identity of the participants. I also shared these descriptions with the participants for them to revise as they saw necessary in the interest of accuracy and confidentiality.

**Researcher Positionality.** In qualitative research, the researcher is the data collection instrument. Familiarity with the phenomenon and setting being studied and a strong conceptual interest are assets for qualitative researchers (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Because qualitative research is interpretive research, the background, perspectives, and biases of the researcher must be clarified (Merriam, 2009).

In addition to their utility for higher education leaders, questions about CDO positions also have personal relevance. Multicultural organizational change has been a professional and scholarly focus for some time. For more than a decade, I have served in multicultural affairs positions on college campuses, so I have an interest in where and how diversity is situated organizationally. Although I have not worked directly with a CDO, three of the institutions where I have previously worked have created such positions since 2000.

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I bring my personal commitment to and professional interest in organizational diversity to my scholarship as a graduate student, where my research has focused on CDO positions. I have also worked for more than a decade in multicultural affairs positions on college campuses. In my current position as a university Director of Multicultural Affairs, I function as a CDO of sorts, not on the institutional level, but in the Division of Student Affairs. In this role, I have worked for five years to develop the division's professional development, assessment, and accountability structures related to the multicultural competence development of student affairs staff. This effort has required consistent cultivation of divisional leadership, attention to buy-in from staff, assessment of training and development needs, and creation of structured accountability measures, all with very few tangible resources and yielding outcomes that are difficult to measure and sustain. Broadening the scope of these changes to an institutional level only magnifies the inherent needs and challenges of sustaining a systemic commitment to diversity.

Given these personal experiences, I profess a degree of skepticism that the creation of a CDO position in and of itself can change organizational culture in university settings, where deeply-engrained power structures exert a strongly co-optive influence on those with a transformational orientation. I have experienced this co-optive tug myself. Despite these misgivings, I continue to find myself drawn to diversity work in universities because of these institutions' capacity to generate knowledge and develop leaders who can influence social justice policy and practice in local, national, and global settings.

My professional experiences have been affected by my social identities as a woman and a mixed-race person of color with a bicultural upbringing in a lower middle class Chinese and

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Euro-American household. As a young person, I constantly negotiated educational and social environments in which I felt out of place, sometimes because of overt discrimination and more often because of how I internalized a bewildering array of messages about what it meant to be Chinese, American, and a woman. Academia and community activism provided me with language and tools to understand, integrate, and even reject many of these messages. This is an ongoing process, because even after 18 years working in colleges and universities, on many days I still find myself taken aback by the ways in which the inclusive rhetoric of our missions so often outpaces everyday realities characterized by the exclusionary use of power. My work in higher education is driven by a desire to create institutions where students, faculty, and staff feel valued in bringing their whole and complex selves to the learning enterprise.

This personal information is offered to serve as guide when considering this research project. I have been influenced by my experiences, resulting in cautiously optimistic views about multicultural organization change. Though I believe in the potential benefits of CDO positions, I have concerns about institutions rushing into the establishment of these roles without due consideration of organizational culture, appropriate resourcing, realistic expectations, and attention to the experiences of the CDOs.

The next chapters present findings from the study participants, examining professional identity, institutional positionality, impact of social identities, and the exercise of agency.

## **Chapter 4: Professional Identity**

### **Interest in Higher Education Diversity Work**

Threads related to agency and social identity emerged in the CDOs' responses to what initiated and sustained their interest in diversity work on an institutional level. They talked about being motivated by the rewards of changing their institutions, a desire to make a difference on a systemic level, and institutionalizing effective practices. Several also said they were motivated by the possibility of making a positive difference in the lives of students, faculty, staff, and those impacted by their institutions.

All of the women had been engaged in diversity-related work throughout their careers, based on their personal experiences of marginalization in education systems. None of them aspired to a CDO role but rather came to it as a "natural progression" of their diversity work, to use Frances's words. She shared, "I always felt that because as a minority student, I was always told I was never going make it, and I thought now that I'm doing this work, I'm going make sure that I reach as many young people as possible." She also described putting to positive use the access she had gained in the interest of transforming institutions. This echoed Melissa's comments that student success depends not just on providing access, but also on making educational experiences available equitably to all students by helping the institution recognize the necessity of creating socially just structures.

Prior to becoming CDOs, the respondents all had long professional track records in higher education of establishing innovative programs to facilitate underrepresented student access and persistence, expand undergraduate and graduate student recruitment, diversify faculty and staff hiring and retention, and improve campus climate. Even when they were not working

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in roles directly related to diversity, these issues became an area of focus. They came into diversity work through a variety of pathways. One of the CDOs has been a faculty member, one progressed through student services and general university administration, and a third has a background in higher education admission, retention, and student persistence. Two of the women are attorneys. The career of one of these attorneys has taken her in and out of higher education, community non-profit organizations, and international NGOs, and the other has worked in university human resources, affirmative action, and business development.

Those who are serving in their institutions' first CDO positions articulated high interest in laying the groundwork for the integration of diversity and equity work at an organizational level. Sabrina said, "I want to be here to take care of the foundation of a much stronger diversity program," and Jacqueline expressed being "intrigued by the challenges and figuring out ways to address them." She described the CDO enterprise as rewarding "frontier work." A sense of creation also motivated Melissa, though her institution has had a CDO position for decades, because when she was hired, the CDO organization was isolated physically and functionally from much of the campus. Over time she has been able to negotiate relocation to a building in the university's geographic core and to engage her staff in the work of the overall institution, effecting what she described as a "culture shift for the organization ... as a vital and vibrant place for people to work."

Building a foundation was important, but the motivation of these CDOs was sustained by seeing the tangible impact of their leadership. Donna recounted the numbers of women and people of color who had been hired in senior leadership positions and minority- and women-owned vendors involved in two major campus construction projects. Melissa described the

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positive results of a pilot program her office had designed to research the impact of inclusive pedagogical tools in biology classrooms; the pilot was so successful that other departments were adapting the tools in their programs. Twice during her interview, Sabrina stated that she did not come to Monitor University to serve as “window dressing,” but rather to make substantial change in the organization’s outreach and climate. Frances, who had recently signed a third five-year contract as CDO, said she wanted to see initiatives through to completion. The CDOs all expressed the desire to change their organizations – and even more broadly, education systems – in substantial, concrete ways.

### **Professional Engagement and Growth**

Jacqueline characterized the CDO position as “a newer enterprise, trying to figure out how best to move the institutional mountain.” Although some institutions such as Cooke University, where Melissa works, have led with these positions for a long time, many more have created CDO roles during the past decade (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). Four of the five women in this study serve in the first CDO positions in their universities, and only Jacqueline had been in another CDO role prior to her current appointment. These CDOs are groundbreakers in their professional circles, institutions, and the higher education diversity field, which presents challenges and opportunities for their professional development, access to mentors and role models, and sense of community.

All of the CDOs are involved locally, regionally, and nationally in a variety of capacities. Frances noted, “We don’t just do our work inside [the institution], we do our work outside.” They serve on commissions, task forces, and boards, which becomes a primary way for them to connect with community, influence policy, and broaden their diversity work beyond their

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universities. This engagement also connects external organizations with the institution. For example, Sabrina's office funds summer programs on campus for community groups, which introduces the institution to students and families who might not otherwise consider attending Monitor. Sabrina understands her role "as presence in the community, for a voice in the community, representing [Monitor University], representing our students and faculty who have historically been underrepresented."

The CDOs try to stay current with diversity trends and literature related to higher education, organizational behavior, and leadership. Four of the five women shared that the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE) is an important resource. NADOHE helps them connect with colleagues and peer mentors, influence diversity issues on a broad scale, learn about best practices, and understand current research and trends. Jacqueline called the association "a lifeline" for her. Because of budget-related travel restrictions over the past three years, Melissa has been unable to attend the NADOHE annual conference and feels somewhat disconnected from the organization, though Cooke University maintains its charter membership in the association. Donna has been involved with NADOHE since its inception, and Jacqueline and Frances are also engaged with the organization's programs and policy decisions. Frances, who increased her involvement with NADOHE in order to focus more broadly on public policy, said, "We can't just change our institutions. We have to look at the broader context and work to change policy in general" in areas such as financial aid, immigration, K-12 education pathways, and affirmative action.

Jacqueline and Melissa noted that it is challenging to develop a systematic way to keep up with the information and data needed to be effective, in part because it comes from a variety

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of sources, including business, legal, higher education, and public policy journals, meetings, and conferences, and in part because of where CDOs come from in terms of their professional areas of expertise. For example, one of the CDOs has been a faculty member and psychologist for decades, and the transition into this position represents a change in profession for her in some ways. In addition, Melissa said she finds that many professional development workshops are directed to entry- and mid-level administrators. Fewer senior-level opportunities exist, and they tend to be very costly.

The CDOs all talked about the importance of mentoring, but they differed in how effectively they had been able to identify and cultivate mentors who could assist in their professional development. Among the characteristics they sought in mentors were broad understanding of complex universities, rapport, a balance of challenge and support, confidentiality, humor, and shared identities. Connecting with mentors in their own institutions presented difficulties, since the issues they wanted to discuss sometimes involved colleagues or the president and other senior leaders. Frances has begun to establish mentoring relationships with a few presidents from other universities; she did not mention race and gender as important in identifying mentors, but rather professional competencies and experiences. Two of the CDOs rely on colleagues or former supervisors from institutions where they used to work, and one said that NADOHE helps to connect her with prospective mentors. On questions requiring a particular area of expertise, Jacqueline reaches out to consultants for advice. Cultivating mentors requires an investment of time and energy of both parties in the relationship, and Sabrina shared that she does not want to “burden” potential mentors in her community, particularly because the pool of mentors of color is so small. Additionally, she said tight relationships and local politics

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make it risky to be too transparent with a mentor from the community. “The higher up you go in your career, the harder it is to get a mentor,” she stated. Sabrina’s experience resonates with literature about the challenges that women of color in academia face with identifying mentors whom they can trust (Harris & González, 2012; Holling, Fu, & Bubar, 2012). Frances described her disappointment when she approached a mentor from her early career with a challenge, and he responded, “All I could do is support you and hold your hand. You’re dealing with things that are so beyond my leadership experience. You are beyond me now. That was a very sad day for me.” The experiences of the CDOs with accessing mentors can result in the sense of isolation that Frances conveyed: “So many times we’re carrying all this around with us, trying to navigate it by ourselves.”

### **Balance and Wellness**

For these CDOs, making structural change at an organizational level required close attention to concerns related to personal wellness and balance in roles that could easily become all-consuming. Only Donna described a successful balance of work with her personal life; the other four women struggled with establishing or maintaining boundaries and balance, and one mentioned health-related challenges, in keeping with literature about the experiences of women of color in higher education (Harris & González, 2012). Frances noted that other Latino leaders she knows suffer from diabetes and gout, and she stated, “I don’t want to go down that road.” Donna works out every day, meets regularly to socialize with senior leaders who are women or people of color, and finds outlets for fun through travel and dance. In sharp contrast, Melissa described herself as lacking balance, and she has been diagnosed with stress-related medical conditions. Frances walks every day for exercise but said she feels as though she is “always on

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call.” She recalled a recent case when questions arose about a situation that she thought had been resolved:

It didn’t matter that I was on a family vacation, that I was with my family, unless I wanted to see everything I just worked for go down the drain. We were at the beach. I had to run back and make the call, participate in the teleconference, send the email, call my staff, and say, “send this report ASAP.” I mean, you’re always on.

Although Frances emphasized the need to unplug, she only described scenarios in which she found it impossible to do so.

When asked about balance, both Melissa and Jacqueline described themselves as tending toward being “workaholic.” Jacqueline did not find this to be particularly troubling, because she said she considers herself fortunate to engage in stimulating work that she enjoys. However, for some of the women, the shadow side of this strong sense of investment in the diversity work of their institutions manifested itself as difficulty in creating distance between their professional and personal selves. All of these CDOs have a high-touch orientation to their work. Delegation does not come easily to them, and in one way or another, they all described feeling accountable to their constituents, particularly students, staff, and faculty of color, to be present and visible. This accountability may sometimes exhibit itself as an obligation to be present or inability to stay away. It took direct feedback from the president for Melissa, who has struggled with her health, to begin to ask herself what she could delegate, automate, or eliminate among her duties. She also reprioritized exercise and meditation and abbreviated her work schedule during the summer as a means of bringing her best and healthiest self to the institution.

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Several of the women described the strong support networks they had in their families and colleagues. Jacqueline's partner also works as a higher education administrator, and she values the understanding and perspective he offers. Melissa's husband has provided encouragement in her efforts to approach work with a greater level of balance. For Frances and Sabrina, their experiences as mothers grounded their work, gave it meaning, and helped them keep their work in perspective. Sabrina shared, "I do try to take time with my family and to reflect on what's truly important. That's where I get my energy. My ... children, I have to live for them." Donna, Jacqueline, and Sabrina talked about the importance of finding professional and social support among colleagues, particularly with people who understand and are committed to diversity and inclusion work. Where they seek these networks may differ – Donna meets regularly with senior women leaders and senior managers of color from within her institution, and Sabrina is in close contact with colleagues in similar roles in other universities – but the networks provide similar opportunities for candor, confidentiality, perspective, and comfort and serve as important wellness resources to these women.

## **Chapter 5: Institutional Positionality**

This chapter examines the positionality of CDOs with regard to their institutions and their work.

### **Structure of CDO Position and Office**

All of the CDOs have focused on establishing structures to systematize diversity engagement. Frances honed her systematic approach over the course of her career. When she described her early diversity-related work in institutions, she talked about seeing a problem and immediately implementing a solution. She created as she went. Several years after she left one institution, she saw several former students at a funeral, and they had dropped out. She wondered if she had left enough support in place to help students after her departure. Although she had to create much of the structure of the CDO position at Hayden, her approach has been much more strategic and focused on long-term sustainability than the ways she described her earlier work:

Because diversity officers come and go, create structures that, after you're gone, will stand on their own. You systematize, you build it into the structure in everyday life, so that when you go, it doesn't go. And I think for me, that was the hardest thing when I walked into the job. They might have had two people in the job before it, but there was no structure. There was nothing that I could put my hand onto that was done. I had to start from scratch. I don't want anyone to have to walk in this position after I leave and have to start from scratch. Then that's not sustainable.

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Frances wants to be sure that her successors and the university have structures in place that outlast her tenure in the CDO position, so she has focused on institutionalizing sustainable systems, which has required what she described as a “slow and steady” approach.

Similarly, Sabrina shared that although she does not know how long her tenure will be, she has several medium-range goals to accomplish in order to lay the foundation of a “much stronger diversity program than they started with. . . . I can then hand it over to somebody else, and then they can more easily, hopefully, take it from there.” Sabrina does not believe that she can address all of Monitor’s diversity issues, but she wants to create enough momentum that her efforts can continue into the future. “It’s chipping at the ice. It’s not going to be all of a sudden, it’s not going to be today, it’s little by little by little,” she stated. Other CDOs also characterized their ways of working using language about incremental, step-by-step progress and near-term compromise in the interest of long-term strategy. They spend time assessing the university environment, climate, readiness, culture of leadership, ways of working, and obstacles before deploying energy and resources.

The structure of the CDO office and how it has evolved over time impacted organizational positionality and relationship-building. Melissa came into a robust portfolio divisional CDO structure that has borne budget-related cuts of almost \$1.5 million over the past three years. Even with the cuts, more than 100 full-time staff work in the CDO units, which include student recruiting and outreach, pre-college programs, academic advising and support services, a cultural center, faculty advancement, research and assessment, an instructional center, graduate school and professional preparation programs, and several federally-funded programs, which account for about 60% of her \$20 million budget (personal communication, January 8,

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2013). Donna worked in a compliance capacity prior to her appointment as Sage University's first senior level diversity officer. She has created a unit-based CDO structure, with a strong focus on affirmative action, investigation of discrimination complaints, contracting and procurement, faculty hiring, diversity planning and programming, and training. Her five-person office provides a central touch point for disparate areas of the institution, including student affairs, academic affairs, university advancement, and facilities.

The other three women were preceded by a special assistant to the president who had created some institutional foundation for diversity work. When Frances began her work at Hayden University, she operated in a collaborative officer model, with limited human resources and a budget of \$90,000; over the ensuing 10 years, she has built a unit-based model with seven staff, including an assistant vice president, harassment investigator, programmer, trainer, operations manager, and administrative assistant and a budget of more than \$600,000. She said, "Every budget year I ask for more money. Some years I get it, sometimes I don't, but I don't give up on that. You just keep building and building upon what you have." After starting virtually from scratch, Sabrina has also built a unit-based CDO office with an executive director, two compliance staff, a community liaison, executive assistant, and administrative assistant. All but one of the six people Sabrina hired is new to the university. Jacqueline's portfolio divisional model brings together several diversity-related units, primarily serving students, that were formerly dispersed in the university. Combining the units into a cohesive structure has not been without its challenges, and Jacqueline admitted that initially she was not excited to have units report to her. "What's complicated here is, in some ways, the units ... are kind of an accident of history. It's not like this is all the diversity units, so there's a little bit of haphazardness here."

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For example, the LGBT center reports through academic affairs because at the time the center was created, student affairs did not want to supervise it. Soon after she arrived, Jacqueline coordinated a retreat for the staff in her units to strategize about shared values and mission, opportunities for collaboration and streamlining, and planning. As the units have begun to work together more strategically and effectively, Jacqueline said she now sees these departments and their staff as important resources and key supports.

In all cases, other diversity units exist at these institutions that do not report through the CDO structure. Frances indicated that she would prefer to have these other diversity-focused areas report to her, particularly those in student affairs and academic affairs, because the current reporting structure results in working at cross-purposes at times. She said she has gone to the respective vice presidents in those areas when departments in their areas lag. “My responsibility is to the institution, and I’m not for people who don’t want to be innovative and move with the times. Sometimes I have to move this institution without their buy-in.” Sabrina described a slightly different challenge at Monitor University. She sees other diversity units on campus as allies and partners, and they have been open to and appreciative of the support they have received from her office. She said she would like to have some supervisory responsibility for these units, perhaps a dotted line relationship, so that she can support them more fully, particularly for those whose current supervisors are not very enthusiastic in their support of diversity. “It’s hard for some of these individuals to be devoted to our goals, when they have a boss who they have to report to who may not be as committed. So it’s really hard for them. Because they want to do this.”

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Melissa and Jacqueline said they support having diversity units in other areas with their own reporting structures, and they commit considerable energy to developing partnerships with these units. Melissa aspires to have the CDO office serve as a hub for diversity, where ideas are surfaced and shared, collaborations developed, and resources deployed as effectively as possible. The “centralized-decentralized model” that she described would result in broader engagement and visibility across the institution for initiatives related to equity and inclusion. Jacqueline agreed that it makes sense to locate academic diversity-related units, such as a program focused on retention of students of color in engineering, in individual colleges. “If it’s only happening in my office, it’s not really happening,” she stated. Similar to Melissa, Jacqueline understands her role as CDO to include bringing together disparate diversity units so that resources are deployed effectively. Her ideal organizational structure would include cultivating a broader cohort of people on the ground across the institution; she said that if she received a windfall of financial resources, she would buy out time of leaders in each school, college, and division to collaborate with her office to focus on diversity in ways that would meet their particular needs. In the meantime, she has created a program to provide diversity and inclusion grants to seed creative ideas in other areas of the university. Sabrina created a similar program at Monitor University.

Several of the CDOs shared the structural limitations of their roles. Although they all understand their positions as serving the interests of the entire university enterprise, there are areas where they realize they have less influence, especially with regard to curriculum and faculty hiring. None of the women in this study has a faculty appointment in her current institution, though Jacqueline served on the faculty at her previous university. According to

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Williams & Wade-Golden (2007), only 38% of their survey respondents had tenure, and less than half were resourced to assist with hiring faculty (p. 31).

When Sage's president launched a campus-wide diversity initiative, he appointed the provost and CDO to lead the effort and created several focus areas around curricular change, co-curricular enhancement, and community engagement. Anticipating that the curricular change working group would present significant challenges, Donna and the provost focused on that area. Donna stated, "The curricular change group was the most contentious, the most difficult, and the most challenging," and its work required "a lot of gut-wrenching dialogue." Despite the contention – or perhaps as an outgrowth of it – the provost later voiced strong and public support for attention to diversity in faculty hiring. This has not necessarily resulted in consistent practices, however, as departments continue to manage their own searches, sometimes not engaging the CDO office effectively. Jacqueline shared that a history of tension exists at Baxter with regard to faculty hiring and that a part of her role is to strengthen the diversity of faculty through recruiting and retention, with support from the provost and president. She anticipates challenges, but she feels that curricular issues are more intractable at Baxter than questions related to hiring. "Curriculum just feels like it's on another planet.... To have any say-so is going to be much more complicated.... It's a very big university, and everything, of course, is done by committee, faculty committees." In the context of departmental autonomy and consensus decision-making, university-wide changes to faculty hiring and curriculum are difficult to achieve. Understanding the limitations of their roles allows the CDOs to focus their efforts in areas where they are more likely to have an impact.

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### **Institutional Leadership**

The CDOs agreed that commitment from the president and senior leadership is essential in order to sustain institutional investment in diversity. Without direct prompting, the five CDOs all discussed their relationship with the president and shared how critical it is for the president to assume a leadership role in institutional diversity efforts. This supports research about the critical role of the president (Kezar, 2008; Michael, 2006). The five CDOs report to the president and serve on the president's leadership team. Four of the five presidents are white men, and the fifth is a man of color who is of a different race than the CDO. The tenures of the presidents range from 11 years for the Sage University president to just one year for the new president of Cooke University; Hayden's president has served there for eight years, Monitor's for four years, and Baxter's for two years. Melissa and Jacqueline also jointly report to their provosts, both of whom are women in their first year at their institutions. Donna described the most positive relationship with the president among the study participants. Sage's president created the CDO position six years ago after Donna was recruited for similar positions at two other institutions. He has been a strong advocate for diverse hiring, contracting, and student programming and has included Donna in his inner leadership circle. Frances also enjoys a relatively productive relationship with Hayden's president. When her institution revised its strategic plan, some members of the university community recommended eliminating diversity as a theme because the institution had made significant progress since the last plan was written. The president, however, made sure that diversity remained a top priority in the new plan.

Jacqueline, Melissa, and Sabrina are all navigating newer relationships with their presidents. Sabrina spoke least favorably about her president. She shared that she did not know

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whether his public and private commitment to diversity aligned. She had, however, recently disagreed with him on a decision, and this may have colored her feedback at the time. Melissa, on the other hand, praised her president's handling of a situation involving racially- and religiously-motivated vandalism on campus:

In the past, that would be something where [the CDO] office ... would have been the only one outraged about it. But now our president, our provost issued a letter to the university community and said this is just not part of who we are as a community, it's not acceptable ... So it comes definitely from the top.

Melissa noted that when he speaks to off-campus groups, her president tends to emphasize messages about access for low-income and first-generation students over access for students of color; she said she hopes he comes to integrate messages about students of color as consistently as he does for other underrepresented groups. She prepares briefings, data, and talking points about access and equity issues for him to use in a variety of settings in order to increase attention to concerns for students of color. Similarly, Frances shared, "My job is to put [the president] out in front, to have him say the right things when it comes to diversity, to get it, to know it, to understand it, to be able to answer it." Her investment has paid off over time. Hayden has no free-standing diversity strategic plan; instead, diversity is a prong in the institution's overall plan. Frances has been at Hayden long enough to experience the life cycle of two university strategic plans, and diversity has continued to be an important focus in both, with the president's imprimatur.

All of the CDOs described the vice presidents and other senior leaders as their immediate colleagues. Among the vice presidents and senior leaders, Melissa is the only person of color

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and one of six women; Frances is one of two people of color and one of eight women; Donna is one of two women and is the only person of color; Jacqueline is one of two people of color and one of four women; and the majority on the Cabinet with Sabrina are women, though she is the only person of color. There has been significant turnover in the senior leadership at Monitor and Baxter, where Sabrina and Jacqueline are in newly-created CDO roles, resulting in a situation that Sabrina described as cabinet members “all trying to establish ourselves in the organization.”

The CDO’s influence depends on leveraging the influence of the president and senior leaders. Jacqueline called this the “reflective power” of the president and provost, which helps her efforts to convince, educate, and collaborate with her colleagues throughout the institution. This is reminiscent of referent power in Bolman & Deal’s (2008) discussion of tools available in a political frame. According to Sabrina, “if the leader and leaders of the organization do not make [diversity] a priority, it will not trickle down. It will never trickle down.” Frances affirmed:

There has to be buy-in from the top levels, the Board of Trustees, the president, the provost. Diversity officers – we’re facilitators. We recommend what needs to happen, but we can’t make it happen. And so our leaders have to be the model for what diversity is.

Several of the CDOs described that a critical component of their work is to educate the president and their colleagues, as Melissa did when she shared “diversity pride points” for her president to use in his public remarks. This education may also entail disagreeing with their colleagues if they propose a course of action that undermines the institution’s stated values, principles, and commitment to diversity.

### **Navigating Middle Spaces**

The challenges of navigating disagreement arose from several of the CDOs, who find themselves in the space between institutional leaders and those at other levels of the institution or in the community. The CDOs must communicate up, down, and across institutional units, while at the same time preserving collegial relationships with senior leaders and maintaining confidentiality with regard to sensitive information. “There’s a way in which as CDO, I have to really be on the ground, listening, paying attention to the impact on the ground, and not just listening to what my boss or bosses want,” Jacqueline described. Sabrina said she does not want to appear “disrespectful or insubordinate,” which requires careful strategizing about how to voice differences in approach or principle. She shared that it took a year and a half to move her Cabinet colleagues to a point at which they could engage in facilitated dialogues about White privilege. When she raised this possibility early in her tenure, the reactions from the other vice presidents indicated that the group needed more time to prepare for deep conversation about the impact of privilege.

The middle space occupied by the CDO becomes complicated because she may receive blame if the institution falters in some way with regard to diversity. Frances stated:

If the president makes a mistake, a diversity mistake, I get blamed, because I wasn’t doing my job. If the provost makes a diversity mistake, the diversity officer gets blamed, because, ‘Weren’t you advising them? Weren’t you telling them? Weren’t you...?’ And it’s interesting. We can advise and recommend – it doesn’t mean that the leadership will take those recommendations ... We’re one voice of the many voices that they consult. And it doesn’t always go the diversity officer’s way. But when a decision has those

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kinds of diversity dimensions, and brings conflict, then a lot of that onus gets placed on the diversity officer.

At different points during their interviews, the CDOs placed themselves along a spectrum that ranged from serving as an officer of the institution at one end to the institution's conscience at the other. They did not articulate these roles as stark contrasts, but rather as a complicated tension, reflecting the ways that CDO literature describes the complexity of diversity officers' work (Fleigler, 2006; Williams & Wade Golden, 2008).

Blame may accrue to the CDO by virtue of her position, but it may also be self-imposed as a result of feeling accountable to those who experience marginalization. Frances described a particularly challenging situation that continued to influence the institution more than two years later. She was not involved in the decisions that created the controversy; however, as CDO, she became the lightning rod for the collective pain of many of the individuals affected by it, accepting responsibility on behalf of the institution, as well as serving as a primary public presence in discussions and responses to this situation. She stated:

I took on the fault of the whole institution. ... I'm trying to figure out how to deal with some of this in my life now. Because that wasn't healthy for me. It's not like once I did that, I just got over it. I carried it with me for a year.

Frances questioned whether her approach was a positive one for her, given its impact on her health and sense of balance. Carrying the burdens associated with challenging diversity work can result in feeling overextended and drained.

Several of the CDOs also talked about the isolating impact of the confidential nature of much of their work. Frances shared, "There's so much isolation around the profession, because

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we have to be silent, all the things we deal with are confidential. ... So many times we're carrying all this around with us, like trying to navigate it by ourselves." Donna concurred, half-joking, "I know where all the bodies are buried," which can introduce a chilling effect on relationship-building. In some ways this secrecy is endemic to their senior-level positions; many of their Cabinet colleagues are also privy to sensitive information by virtue of the issues that rise to that level. However, the CDOs raised a few distinctive concerns. First, more than many senior-level administrators, the CDOs address concerns related to almost all areas of the institution, including hiring and firing decisions, discrimination complaints, and curricular questions. Frances and Sabrina stated that only the president and provost have a similar breadth of influence. If the relationship with either of these individuals is new or uncertain, as Jacqueline, Melissa, and Sabrina described, the CDOs may not be able to approach other senior colleagues with questions or concerns. Second, CDOs witness behind-the-scenes discussions that may not align with public presentations of diversity commitment. At times they may serve as the public face for decisions with which they disagree and then become targets for frustration from the community, as Frances and Jacqueline both described in situations involving faculty and staff retention. They were not able to share all of the relevant information with those who were most impacted by the institution's practices and decisions, often communities of color.

Navigating these tensions requires clarifying their role with the president, colleagues, and campus community. To some extent, all of the women shared that a critical part of their role is to remind their colleagues about the institution's commitment to diversity and to point out when they were not living fully into that commitment. Distinctions from the CDOs emerged in terms of where and with whom they would share disagreements. During a meeting with faculty of

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color following a controversial institutional decision, Frances walked a narrow path. She had to clarify her position as an officer of the university, communicating the official statement of the institution, yet also mediating among the various factions and decision-makers. She stopped short of defending the decision, but her path required apologizing to those who perceived they were harmed. She participated in lengthy and often contentious discussions with Cabinet colleagues and the president beforehand, but she could not share the content of that process with stakeholders. Frances shared:

So it's a fine line to walk with your integrity and your values, to know that you've done everything you can in a certain situation to provide the most information, and then to live with whatever decision is made. And one thing that I can always say is, I never regret, I always say what needs to be said. If the decision is made, then I find a way to make it work.

Frances advises honestly behind the scenes but in public supports her colleagues and the institution.

Jacqueline and Sabrina described different approaches. Jacqueline said she does not see it as necessary to follow in the president's footsteps if he is out of step with the institution's values and that she would feel a responsibility to state publicly how issues and decisions do or do not align with the principles of the university. "I wasn't hired to be the mouthpiece for the president's point of view," Jacqueline said, though she acknowledged that the tension of reporting to the president and also pushing back at times may be "tricky." One example she described related to whether the university should allow a vendor with explicitly exclusionary practices to operate on campus. She said that if the student newspaper called, she would feel

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obligated to share that she believed the university had made the wrong decision in permitting the vendor to remain. She acknowledged that “I think that’s a tough spot to be in, but I think that’s what I’m paid to do.” Sabrina agreed that she would find it “troublesome” to have to advocate visibly for a position with which she disagrees. She said she has the best interests of the organization in mind in her decision-making and thus feels obligated to voice when the institution is moving in a direction that does not serve its own interests. “I will not put my integrity behind...And if any employer would ask me to sell my integrity so that the organization could hear something different, I couldn’t do it.”

Research about the influence and leadership of women and people of color demonstrates that they can “increase their standing in groups by making it clear that their recommendations and performances are carried out with the best interests of the group in mind” (Lucas & Baxter, 2012, p. 56). For the CDOs, couching their disagreements in such terms had the potential to increase their standing, even if they were expressing views counter to the institution’s leaders. The two CDOs who were newest in their roles, Sabrina and Jacqueline, described themselves as least willing to support a position with which they dissented, and longer-serving CDOs, including Donna and Frances, used language related to compromise and long-term agendas when they talked about navigating disagreement.

In a role such as Chief Diversity Officer, where progress depends on partners and collaborations, overly combative incumbents risk alienating stakeholders; on the other hand, CDOs who do not stand on any principle cannot do their job with integrity. In the situations the CDOs described, this middle ground changes depending on context and actors, making it a

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“middle on the move” that they must learn and re-learn. Frances described as the middle ground that she has found for herself:

There’s a difference between survival and suicide. And somewhere in the middle is that grace. Because if you’re too vocal, and you fight every decision, and you’re very combative, no one will work with you, and you won’t survive that position. And then we see the ones who are just on survival mode, you know, who go on to get along, they don’t want to fight back. And then somewhere in the middle is where you learn to do these things, right? To live by your values, navigate, negotiate, collaborate, work with your stakeholders, convince.

Frances does not “go on to get along,” but neither does she engage every fight. Several of the CDOs used language evocative of fighting: doing battle, fighting battles, warrior, endure, taking it on. Their battles were ones of strategy, negotiation, tension, conflict, and convincing, which took a toll on many of the CDOs. Sabrina shared, “You’re fighting battles, emotional battles and others ... Most of the time, it’s not enjoyable.” Emotional endurance emerged from the CDOs as a characteristic essential for navigating navigate middle spaces and engaging effectively over the long term.

### **Cultivating Partnerships and Alliances**

In the interest of cultivating collaborators, all of the CDOs have either created or re-envisioned university-wide diversity councils, incorporating feedback loops to vice presidents and focusing the groups on high-level visioning and accountability. At Monitor, Sabrina has worked with a diversity committee to develop specific metrics related to retention and graduation, curricular infusion, community engagement, and other goals. Melissa has facilitated

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a different approach at Cooke University. Rather than creating a detailed plan, the diversity council has outlined priorities for a diversity framework; these priorities include graduate student recruitment and graduation, diversity-related research, and faculty recruitment and retention. Melissa has met with the deans of all of the schools to share the priorities and to ask for their commitment to make progress on at least one priority, based on “where they think they can make the most impact, given what’s important for their college.” She has also offered resources from the CDO office to help with research, data collection, and identifying possible resources from the university and community. “I come with intellectual resources and connections that can help them do their work. And it’s been really well-received by the deans and by the senior leadership.” This process aligns with the Cooke University culture, in that it grounds ownership for diversity in the colleges and divisions of the institution.

Similarly, because of Frances’s longevity at Sage, she has been able to share leadership with an institutional diversity council that she has been able to develop over time. She chairs the council but rotates leadership among the members. Systematic university-wide attention to diversity is a much newer venture for Monitor, so Sabrina is creating a structure that she believes will lay a foundation for future work. For Jacqueline, the diversity council is an important resource in making progress on an institutional diversity strategic plan that has languished through leadership transitions of much of the senior administration at Baxter. Embedding diversity into institutional strategic initiatives serves as a broad reminder that diversity is an university-wide commitment that belongs to everyone, rather than the focus of a few specialized departments or targeted groups. At both institutions where she has served as CDO, Jacqueline has come into the role after a diversity strategic plan has been written, and one of her primary

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functions has been to implement the plan. “People were really anxiously awaiting the CDO to come in and make it happen,” because not much progress had been made in the several years of the Baxter University plan’s existence.

For the most part, the CDOs shared that they initiate outreach to colleagues and potential collaborators, rather than waiting for colleagues to approach them. Frances stated that a CDO “makes things happen through other people, so we need that broad support.” She cultivates support through personal outreach. She shared an example of pulling together a task force to advise the president. She volunteered to take the lead to create the group, and in one-on-one meetings, she asked each person if he or she wanted to chair the task force. Each person declined and suggested that Frances would be the most effective in the chair role. Frances actually wanted to lead the group, and by the time she had pulled together the group, that was the unanimous recommendation to the president by all of the members. Her efforts take time, “but in the end, I get more buy-in and ... a better output.”

Jacqueline stated that CDO work depends on relationships, so she has inserted herself into areas and matters where people may not expect to see the CDO. She shared:

Building a relationship is really the key. ... I need to be delivering things that add value in a way that makes sense to them. That’s a critical part of being seen as or being a real contributor and asset, and being called on and leaned on.

Making meaningful contributions facilitates a more effective relationship, which in turn leads to deeper partnership. Melissa described her delight when a dean came to her with an idea because it represented a shift away from perceptions of the CDO office as “the diversity police” and because it signaled that her consistent outreach was yielding fruit.

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This kind of relationship-building takes time. Jacqueline admitted that her eight months at Baxter had not provided enough time to create the effective partnerships that she had at her previous institution: “I’m not there yet in this context, but that’s certainly the aim.” Donna also described the time needed “to really build credibility” through trust and relationships. She felt that continuity among senior leaders had facilitated her effectiveness, sharing, “It takes time for that to really sink in, for people to embrace that, and then for it to manifest itself. . . . Ultimately, that’s part of what has been a legacy” at Sage University.

In addition to building collaboration-focused relationships, Melissa also talked about cultivating allies to facilitate sharing diversity messages, especially in settings where those messages may not be received positively. One of her Cabinet colleagues in particular, a White man who serves as the chief student affairs officer, serves as a sounding board prior to and following Cabinet meetings. She asks for his feedback in terms of framing issues and his vocal support if he agrees with her. She also talked about “letting your ego go” in advancing a diversity agenda. Jacqueline noted that despite the structure of direct reports, in the context of the large university enterprise, “I’m not really the boss of anyone . . . but somehow I need to influence, collaborate with, cajole, needle, educate.”

All of the CDOs mentioned the power of celebrating successes, particularly when they emerge from areas where support has been lukewarm in the past and when they increase visibility of diversity efforts. Recognizing incremental successes helps to sustain a sense of collective engagement, especially when outcomes may be years in the making. The women in these roles employed a variety of political and symbolic tools to move forward their agendas and initiatives. They simultaneously serve as influencers, facilitators, consultants, educators,

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conveners, fighters, connectors, critics, and celebrators, balancing a complex spectrum of roles and institutional needs.

Much of the work of the CDOs takes place behind the scenes, building allies and influence, negotiating strategies, and engaging in trade-offs and compromises. One of Donna's roles concerns approving waivers for faculty candidates whom schools want to hire without a search. She granted approval for a White, male candidate who one of the deans wanted to hire, and two years later she went back to that dean when the provost identified an African American candidate for a vacant position. She said that the skill of "being able to know when use that kind of give-and-take" is important in the interest of implementing long-term agendas. In this particular situation, Donna said she shared public credit with the dean for his leadership in hiring the African American candidate. "You're willing to share and don't take responsibility yourself for everything, but make sure that people are aware there's a collaborative effort." Donna's characterization of sharing credit differed from how Melissa and Frances described the many ways in which their CDO work is uncredited:

I don't need credit. I just need the work to happen, which is detrimental to me if people do not see me personally as having done anything, because I am like, "I don't need credit, the work just needs to happen." (Melissa)

I give all the credit and take very little. But that's because I want everyone to think it was the collective. We did this, you know, thanks to your efforts. You're the engine that drives the car. So I talk in very "we" terms, and thank everyone for their work. And so that's the style that I live by. I'm not sure it's right. (Frances)

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Both Frances and Melissa questioned whether their strategy of giving credit to others came at the cost of their own professional reputations in the institutions and reinforced territoriality, and whether it was a worthwhile price to serve the interest of relationship-building and forwarding the university's diversity agenda.

### **Encountering Obstacles**

In spite of their commitment to cultivating partnerships and alliances, the CDOs inevitably encountered obstacles, and they responded in a variety of ways. In some cases, the CDOs could not afford to write off individuals whom they perceived as initially unsupportive. Jacqueline described an early encounter with one member of a committee she chairs about inclusive faculty search processes. Most committee members supported examining current and best practices, but a White, male faculty member challenged her repeatedly during the meeting. Jacqueline realized that it would be imprudent to engage publicly or in an adversarial manner with this man, and she also knew that she could not dismiss his concerns. After soliciting advice from an African American female colleague, Jacqueline met one-on-one with the faculty member. She went into the meeting with two agendas – to understand him and to win him over – and she said she felt better following the meeting, though she continued to question whether he would have raised his concerns similarly to another man or a White person. Jacqueline's desire both to understand and to win over this colleague speaks to a leadership style that sees obstacles as potential opportunities, rather than as barriers.

Several of the CDOs shared similar situations in which they needed to decide how to work with colleagues who challenged them personally or presented obstacles in the work of their offices. In one particularly challenging interaction during a Cabinet meeting, Sabrina said she

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threatened to resign when another vice president intimated that the president had not expressed diversity as a priority and that Sabrina's request to have a discussion about the impact of White privilege consequently was not important. She shared:

That turned into a stormy conversation. ... I probably became emotional about it – well, I did – but I think it was important for them to hear where I stood on that, that I did not come here to be a window dresser. And so there was silence, and then after the meeting, two of my Cabinet member colleagues apologized for that individual, the whole group.

And they were respectful about it.

In this situation, Sabrina stepped directly into the conflict and expressed herself emotionally, at what she described as significant personal and professional risk. She felt this risk was worth taking because her colleague called into question the core of what Sabrina saw as her role.

Though she did not plan the interaction, she made headway with some of her colleagues because she shared how much the conversation affected her. In general, Melissa said she prioritizes creating and maintaining partnerships over fighting with people. Rather than dwelling on intractable situations, she talked about waiting for future opportunities to engage more productively.

Although in some cases the women were caught off guard by an interaction, such as the one Sabrina encountered, the CDOs discussed the work they do ahead of time to anticipate, counter, and redirect resistance. Melissa talked about shoring up vocal allies before she raises contentious questions or ideas. Jacqueline said she resists the urge to jump in to solve every issue that comes to her attention, but rather asks questions, directs inquiries, and tries to connect people to the appropriate resources. Frances said, "You always have to be kind of negotiating,

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navigating, planning the next move. It's kind of like a chess game." She plans ahead of time for potentially challenging interactions by preparing data, anecdotes, briefing papers, and bringing community pressure or media exposure. She also said she did not hesitate to work around people who impeded progress or to approach their supervisors, often her vice presidential colleagues.

### **Symbolic Role of the CDO**

In addition to their functional roles, the CDOs shared that they fill a symbolic role, in many ways representing the issues they are charged to address. Jacqueline stated:

There are expectations that go beyond the job description. I mean, people might expect whoever's sitting in this role to do the job, and, yes, take our strategic plan in diversity and implement it. But there's more, there's this sense of, I'm a symbol, potentially.

This differentiates their experience of the CDO role from what they understand about how their colleagues experience their own respective positions. Jacqueline was careful not to diminish her colleagues' work, because they also have "tough jobs" in "important positions," but the CDO experiences a distinctive set of pressures, according to several of the women in this study.

Jacqueline described that in addition to their "back office roles," CDOs have a ceremonial role. Failure to deliver results or make good on promises potentially diminishes hard-won credibility.

Of her partners around the institution, Melissa expressed, "Sometimes I think, oh my God, I don't think I can deliver on all of the things they want me to help them on." When Frances apologized on behalf of the institution for a decision with which she had disagreed vehemently behind closed doors, she had to publicly operate and continue doing the important work of diversity in a climate that was mistrustful of the institution's decisions and motives. In her role as CDO, she positioned herself on a tightrope as the symbol of both the institution's perceived

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wrongdoing and its attempted restitution. Whereas the work of some senior leaders can take place almost entirely out of public view, there is a spotlight on the CDO and her work, which takes on a ceremonial significance with a higher degree of visibility and scrutiny.

The degree to which the CDOs experienced this symbolic role as a burden differed and may have had to do with particular pressures they were encountering when I interviewed them. At the time of her interview, Melissa was navigating health issues and exhaustion, but she still spoke with obvious pride about the impact that initiatives from her office were having on the experiences of underrepresented students. Although Frances described a degree of divergence between her public and private personas, she also shared her joy at being approached by graduating students of color and their families during Commencement, when she sits on the stage with the other university leaders. Similarly, Donna talked about the significance of her visibility on the stage for students and families who attend Commencement ceremonies and award programs. She also shared her satisfaction at resolving conflicts on behalf of employees who encounter bias. “You really feel a certain level of satisfaction that you’re really trying to make a difference, almost one person at a time, in addition to the institutional problem that you’re trying to change.” Much of the work of the CDOs takes place on a broad and highly visible, university-wide platform, but the impact of their leadership on individual students, faculty, and staff also brought a high degree of reward for all of these women.

### **Chapter 6: Impact of Social Identities**

Social identities affected how each of the CDOs experienced and enacted their roles. The life experiences of the CDOs, particularly with regard to underrepresentation and marginalization in educational settings, influence the approaches they take to their work. For all of these women, the work that they have chosen to do and the ways they enact their roles are highly personal.

#### **Viewing Findings Through CRT and CRF Lenses**

When asked about identity, the CDOs described the impact of gender, racial, and ethnic identity most frequently, which may have had to do with how I articulated the focus of my research. They tended to use an intersectional perspective when answering questions about their experiences as women of color; in other words, they typically did not separate these identities in the stories they shared. If they did isolate the impact of race or gender, they described examples related to race more often than those related explicitly to gender. Moffitt, Harris, and Berthoud (2012) saw similar results in their study of women of color faculty, who tended to regard their gender as a given and focused more of their attention on racial and ethnic identities. In the current study, Jacqueline stated, for example, “It’s easier to be marginalized because I’m a woman of color.” Later, however, when she talked about the CDO’s symbolic role with underrepresented constituencies, she talked only about the importance of race. She did not describe the importance of being a woman in representing the hopes of marginalized communities. As noted in the research design, unless the CDOs explicitly isolated the impact of one of their social identities, I assumed they were using an intersectional lens and describing the entwined impacts of race and gender. When they spoke of one identity in particular, I described that in the findings.

### **Professional as Personal**

The ways that these CDOs came to their work in colleges and universities connected with how they had navigated education as marginalized “others.” Sabrina and Frances identify as Latina, Jacqueline and Melissa as African American, and Donna as Black. All of the women have faced discrimination, isolation, and low expectations, and these experiences have served as a springboard for engaged political and social activism. Frances shared, “I always felt that because I was a minority student, I was always told I was never going to make it.” She said that this helps her to understand and empathize with the experiences of students, faculty, and staff of color. Jacqueline also connected her early educational experiences with her interest in understanding the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, from both a research and administrative perspective. Sabrina described witnessing and experiencing discrimination, and she stated directly, “I don’t like it.” She followed up that she does not want her children to have to experience a continuing cycle of oppression that marginalizes students of color. She and Frances talked about wanting to create better educational communities for their children, with Sabrina adding, “it’s not just about my children, but the children in our respective communities.”

In some way, all of the CDOs have been a “first” or “only” in their educational and professional environments. Donna immigrated to the United States with her family as a teenager, experiencing for the first time that “all of a sudden, you’re a color. And here your color defines so much.” Her immigrant identity continues to be critical for her; though she has been advised to do so by others, she said she has intentionally not diminished her accent or changed her hair. Although she was one of few immigrant students in high school, college, and graduate school, she “competed with the best of them” and drew on her experiences to open

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doors for other students. During graduate school, Donna and three other Black students approached the dean to ask why there were so few students of color in the doctoral program. They expected the dean to argue with them, but instead he asked if any of them would be interested in assisting him with outreach and recruitment. Donna took the opportunity and ended up working with the dean to recruit underrepresented graduate students for almost four years. She channeled her own feelings about racial and ethnic underrepresentation into active engagement to change the system.

Jacqueline helped to integrate her high school racially and her university in terms of gender. She shared:

In many ways, I see being a CDO as a kind of direct line from that, from my own experiences of marginalization, based on race and gender and class to some extent, and from my professional interest in creating healthy organizations and communities, and educating people to be culturally competent.

Serving as a diversity officer linked the personal experiences and professional passions of the CDOs.

### **Negotiating Microaggressions and Stereotypes**

A particular pressure that the CDOs encounter in their roles involves the navigation of racial and gender stereotypes and microaggressions. In particular, several of the women discussed how they come to terms with whether or not to address microaggressions, comprised of common, everyday messages and slights that communicate humiliation and exclusion (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). They all described microaggressions that they encounter, although only Jacqueline and Frances used that term to

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name the kind of interaction that served to invalidate their ideas or presence. One challenge that microaggressions present is that recipients are left to wonder if the interactions were benign, unintentional, or intentional and if the insults or invalidations had something to do with a marginalized identity (Sue et al., 2007).

The CDOs shared that they find themselves in a dance of sorts, internally questioning their colleagues' motives and playing out the risks of addressing or not addressing interactions. For example, Melissa shared the frustration she feels when her ideas receive less credibility from her senior colleagues, and she wonders if that has to do with her race, her gender, her lack of faculty standing, or the ideas themselves. Both Jacqueline and Frances commented that more often than not, they opt not to address microaggressions, in part because of their frequency and in part because of potential political consequences. Jacqueline stated, "I don't think I'm naïve, but I don't freak out at every microaggression. I don't. I just couldn't do my job. I just can't get all caught up in every microaggression or I'm just stymied."

Jacqueline shared several specific examples of microaggressions. One involved a conversation with a White, female senior academic colleague, in which Jacqueline introduced the possibility of receiving faculty standing, to complement her CDO appointment. She has a strong publication record and taught for almost two decades at her previous institution, but that university did not grant tenure. In this discussion with her colleague, Jacqueline said that she felt immediately dismissed, which she attributed to dynamics of race, gender, institutional elitism, and, to an even greater degree, the focus of her scholarship on African American women, diversity, and qualitative methodology. Rather than pursue the conversation with this individual, Jacqueline shared, "I decided for political reasons that I didn't want to do that, I didn't want to

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say, ‘I think you’re writing me off.’ Because I decided it didn’t make sense to do that.” In this instance, Jacqueline internalized the interaction as a microaggression and made an active decision not to address it for political reasons.

Reflecting a related but slightly different orientation, Frances said that she typically gives people the benefit of the doubt, rather than assuming that they intended to disrespect, because in the context of challenges she faces, microaggressions are not where she wants to place her energy: “I fight issues. I fight for people. I’m not going to fight that you didn’t call me ‘Dr. [Last Name],’” even when other colleagues are addressed according to their earned degree. Addressing every microaggression would consume energy that Frances would rather direct toward systemic change that helps others. This strategy is a form of resistance that comes at an emotional cost, but she has determined that the potential of influencing the larger context outweighs that cost for her.

An example from Sabrina illuminates the personal cost of addressing microaggressions. She worked with several of her Cabinet colleagues to convene a meeting with students of color. One of her colleagues was misinformed that Sabrina could not attend and sent an email indicating that the meeting would go on without her presence. This first-of-its-kind meeting between students and senior administrators was very important to Sabrina, who had taken the lead in coordinating it, and she was insulted that her colleague would presume that her presence was not necessary. She felt that it was necessary to respond to the email. Unlike what Frances and Jacqueline described, *not* responding was not an option for her, although the response took a toll:

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I had to write an email back in response, but I had to, I had to ... it took me an hour to write this email that had to be super-friendly and kind, right? But yet say, "Don't worry, I have to be there, I'm going to be there." It literally took me an hour to write this email in a way that I wouldn't be perceived as threatening or demeaning, rude or bitter. And I was bitter, by the way. It took me an hour. I think the individual is very condescending to me, saying, "Don't worry, you don't have to be there." What? Of course I have to be there! What are you thinking? And if you found out I couldn't be there, then you would reschedule, right? Okay. But of course, I couldn't say that in that tone or that fashion. I could not be myself and express my frustration because I would be deemed as threatening. So instead it took me a whole hour to write an email. I must have revised it a hundred times, right?

Sabrina said four times that it took her an hour to write this email, and her tone, words, and body language indicated a high level of ongoing frustration even after she chose to address this microaggression. Sabrina's description of this situation reflected the ways Montoya (1994) characterized being on stage: "being acutely aware of one's words, affect, tone of voice, movements, and gestures because they seem out of sync with what one is feeling and thinking" (p. 197). Sabrina understood that her colleague might potentially feel threatened at having this situation called out, so she invested precious time and energy into conveying her meaning directly but in a way that would not burn any bridges with this particular person. She felt that she could not fully be herself or express her genuine emotional responses of frustration and bitterness. She took into account not only how she might be perceived given her CDO role, but also how her identities could affect how her message would be received. She noted, "Even if a

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Caucasian person says the same thing and the same style as a Brown person, quite often the Brown person is perceived as threatening. So I have to work even extra hard to make sure that the receiving party ... doesn't assume that I'm being threatening."

In keeping with what Sabrina described in this situation, several of the other CDOs reflected on dynamics associated with how others perceive them based on stereotypes about women of color. Melissa attributed her workaholic tendencies in part to "not wanting to be seen as sort of stereotypical." From a young age, she said she worked actively to counter stereotypes of "the poor Black kid who is going to get pregnant and drop out and all of that sort of stuff." She credited her career success to working hard and demonstrating reliability, a good work ethic, and positive attitude, all of which countered the potential of being viewed as "that sort of angry Black woman." She described behavior that in some ways overcompensates for the effects of potential stereotyping as either lazy or angry, including long hours and a willingness to "work with anybody," which could also manifest itself as difficulty in saying no to anyone, particularly White people and men. She also maintains a positivity that could feel false at times, especially when she encounters microaggressions and exclusion. When asked if she felt like she had to be the bigger person in these kinds of situations, she said, "All the time, because I have to include everyone even when they don't include me. ... You know, I am going to be inclusive even if other people are not." She described distancing herself from what happens to her in her role so that she does not take it personally and find herself "going down the road of just feeling bitter and disenfranchised." In the context of the health challenges Melissa described, there would seem to be a connection with how she feels she needs to perform her role. This connection with health concerns is supported in literature about women of color in higher education (Bass &

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Faircloth, 2011; Mitchell & Miller, 2011). Melissa commits considerable emotional and psychological resources to anticipating and responding to “what if” scenarios, such as what might happen if she displays her frustration to her colleagues. In essence, as a means of resistance to microaggressions, she “pre-responds” to these potential scenarios, adjusting her behavior to avoid being perceived as fitting in with stereotypes of Black women. The women in these CDO roles navigate potential personal and professional landmines in negotiating stereotypes and microaggressions.

### **Working from the Middle**

In addition to the impact of stereotypes and microaggressions, the CDOs negotiate tensions regarding perceptions of themselves as women of color in diversity leadership. All of the CDOs talked about a complex balance of expectations from others in their institution, including which side they should take in a given situation, whether or not they should advocate for a position, and their reasons for acting in certain ways. Jacqueline described:

It’s always complicated. You know, when you’re the Black woman and you sit in a room and you mention things about people of color, about women, it’s not necessarily going to be heard in the same way as the non-Black, non-female person articulating the same concerns. It can always look as if it’s self-serving, or it’s playing the race card, or playing the gender card. So I’m always kind of aware of that – you know, when do I say something, when do I not, what battles do I fight?

If a CDO’s social identities align with those of groups for whom she advocates, she risks allegations that she is acting in her own self-interest. Melissa said that when she raises questions, her concerns are not taken as seriously as they should be because of an assumption

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that women and people of color care about diversity in some sort of knee-jerk capacity and that they raise alarm bells even when concerns are not warranted.

In order to counter this kind of reaction, Melissa and Donna talked about identifying White, male sponsors to carry the diversity banner for certain causes. The leadership and voice of colleagues with a higher degree of social privilege “casts a different kind of impact, than if I uttered it. People would expect to hear it from me because that’s my role. But from [him], they take notice. I mean, it’s unfortunate, but that’s the reality,” Donna shared. White colleagues are lauded when they assume diversity leadership, and Jacqueline noted that others presume these White leaders also demonstrate “actual, real competence, because why else are they doing this?” White colleagues lend credibility to the CDOs’ diversity efforts. Women and people of color are not heard, or they are dismissed or accused of self-interest when they bring attention to diversity. On the other hand, Jacqueline said people of color may be credited with the capacity to engage diversity issues, even when they do not have those skills. In some ways, this results from a devaluation of diversity leadership skills in institutions of higher education, especially when displayed by people of color and women (Lucas & Baxter, 2012).

As Jacqueline characterized, “CDO-ing is seen as a colored thing,” resulting in “double-triple marginalization, by gender, by ethnicity, and by virtue of one’s work.” Already marginalized as women of color serving in Predominantly White Institutions, diversity work further isolates these women of color CDOs, in particular because it is viewed as the expected purview of those with marginalized identities and because diversity work is sometimes seen as feminine work (Niemann, 2012). Sabrina stated, “This kind of job tends to pigeonhole a person in their career. And because people will only see you as a diversity expert, they won’t see any of

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your other skill sets as quickly or ever.” The challenges of these realities are compounded by the expectation that it is the CDO’s job to take leadership regarding issues related to underrepresented groups, marginalization, and diversity. Speaking up risks claims of self-interest, but not speaking up – or not being acknowledged for leadership – may result in perceptions of not doing one’s job.

Complicating these tensions is the actuality that all of these women are engaged in diversity work as an outgrowth of their personal experiences with marginalization; they do care about diversity issues at least in some part because they want their institutions to be more inclusive of people like them. Their work will benefit people of color and women, so there is an element of self-interest at stake. That is not the totality of their focus, of course, but it is one part of the equation. For example, Frances’s experiences affected not only why she chose a path in diversity-related work, but also how she enacts the role with an intentionally inclusive leadership style. Frances said she actively solicits input from others, especially the staff who work for her, rotates facilitation of meetings in order to develop others’ voices, encourages dialogue, and pays attention to who has or has not spoken in meetings and workshops. Rather than speaking for marginalized groups, she tries to engage these groups in establishing their own agendas. In sharing the strategies she has developed to navigate higher education, Frances is passing on her accumulated knowledge as a form of cultivating resistant capital in others (Yosso, 2005). “So who I am and my cultural identity, and gender identity, is very infused in the work that I do,” she stated. She resists assimilation into the style and culture of a structure that has excluded her personally and that continues to exclude those with underrepresented identities.

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The expectation that these CDOs automatically will care about issues affecting people of color does not come just from those with privileged identities. Other people of color also assume that the CDOs will align with them when difficulties arise. Jacqueline articulated the tension of “we-them situations,” in which the CDO is “them” by virtue of position in the institution and potentially “we, also, in part because of skin color.” (This was an example of isolating the impact of race from gender.) Jacqueline described a contentious series of campus meetings concerning workers’ rights among staff in housekeeping and trade areas, where there is a higher concentration of people of color than in other areas of the university. She attended one of the meetings as a listener to learn what people were saying. She heard questions afterward about why she had only observed but had not spoken, so she asked to have time on the agenda at the next meeting.

But it’s a difficult situation. ... I did feel some pressure that what they would’ve want me to do is to say, “This racist institution is going change tomorrow, and I’m going make it do that.” Yeah, we absolutely do have racism here, the university needs to change, but what I said, which probably wasn’t very popular, I said, “I think this is really wonderful that you’re having these forums, and people are talking about those experiences, you’re shining a light on these problems.” But I said, “I think somehow the situation’s become unnecessarily adversarial.” ... It feels like there’s a disconnect, and it’s not that it’s all of that group’s fault. I think the administration, we haven’t done as great a job, reaching out. ... Certainly no one cheered when I sat down, but I feel like I have to kind of be true to what makes sense to me. So what I said really did make sense to me.

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What Jacqueline shared was not an official university viewpoint, but rather her read on a messy situation. She was not sure how she was received during the meeting; however, later that week, two African American trades staff came to her office to share more about their experiences, which indicated to her that they trusted her. She attributed this trust at least in part to her identity as African American. “I shouldn’t say it wouldn’t happen, it could’ve happened, if I were some other ethnicity, but it’s less likely.” In the campus meetings, Jacqueline felt pressure from people of color to align herself with them against the institution. She resisted this pressure, which placed her in the challenging role of conveying a personal perspective that she realized could be read as the institution’s stance. She could not share all of what she knew about the university’s response, because some of it involved confidential personnel proceedings. She managed to find a middle ground in this situation from which she felt like she could respond with integrity, respect multiple perspectives, and preserve effective relationships.

This middle ground can be challenging to find. Frances stated, “For some people, not all people, there’s a faction here of people who think, you know, I’m a sellout, that I just do what the administration says. It’s a very small faction, but there is a faction.” This faction of individuals perceives that Frances is more “them” than “we,” which introduces challenges in terms of relationship-building and credibility, particularly with underrepresented groups who might be considered natural allies for the CDO. Because of the complexities of their roles, the CDOs simultaneously may be embraced by and cut off from communities of color, which is reflected in literature about women of color in higher education (Mitchell & Miller, 2011).

The women all shared the importance of their visibility as people of color in predominantly White institutions. In fact, Jacqueline stated directly that her capacity to fill the

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symbolic aspects of the CDO position depends on her being a visible person of color. “If the [CDO] is not from an underrepresented group, they can’t provide that kind of symbolic leadership.” Donna noted that at many events, particularly those for senior administrators, she is the only Black woman in attendance: “And so I find myself showing up at a lot of things, and being a visible presence, because if I’m not there, nobody else is going to be there.” Sabrina echoed that “there is no way I’m going to miss this opportunity to be with the people who I advocate for.”

Jacqueline and Melissa noted that a White person in a CDO role might come to be admired or beloved, but unless that person represents some other minority group, such as a religious or sexual minority group, he or she will not serve the same symbolic capacity as a person of color. Even though Jacqueline does not have a high degree of student contact, she has heard from African American students that they appreciate her presence and leadership. Frances mentioned that following a panel, several people approached her to ask if she was angry because her brow was furrowed during the question-and-answer portion of the program. She said she realized then how much staff, faculty, and students, particularly those who are underrepresented in the institution, watch her reactions as a gauge of the university’s position:

It really dawned on me what a symbol I am. I can’t get tired. I can’t say no, I’m not going to go to this event, I’m not going to be on the stage. My own inclination is to be more humble, that I’d rather be in the audience than on the stage. But they look to me to say, “Is the person who represents me there?” And so I’ve been grappling with that now, that public persona, and then my private persona, which is more private and more humble. I don’t always want to be in the spotlight ... You always have to be on. But I

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realize that they're looking for me to be there, and so I have to put whatever I want aside and ... psych myself up, be there, even when I'm tired.

Because of the social identities she shares with others who feel marginalized or excluded in her institution, Frances feels compelled to be "on" more often than the degree to which she is comfortable with this expectation.

In a similar vein and moving from a half-joking tone to a more serious one, Jacqueline commented,

None of this is in the job description, right? It certainly doesn't say on the job description "be a beacon of light for African American students or be a beacon of light for students of color, or you know, provide a sense of hopefulness to the staff of color." It doesn't say that. But I can feel it. And I understand that, that that's part of the job, it's part of what people need and expect, and I'm good with that. You know, I'm not particularly resisting it. I realize that's real, that's part of what people look to me [for].

Jacqueline understands that her symbolic role is an integral part of the ways she serves the university community.

Jacqueline and Melissa discussed the paradox of having instant credibility among communities of color and simultaneously knowing that at that some point, they likely will disappoint these communities. Melissa stated:

I'm given a pass in many ways by the African American communities, but still challenged by them to do more for Black students. But they trust that because I am a Black woman, that I will be watching for the Black kids. In fact, they actually assume that I am doing more than I do. ... They're holding my feet to the fire, too, but there is a

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certain level of trust that I am going to listen to them and work with them, whereas I noticed with the Latino community, they were not even sure that I was listening or would listen to their concerns. And so just having to constantly be out there, building those alliances and building trust.

African American communities assume that Melissa is focused on the success of Black students and, in fact, may even credit her with more than she is actually doing. In spite of this “pass,” she feels like she is watched closely by the African American community for evidence that she cares about their students. She also hears directly from members of the community when individual students experience challenges. Even though Melissa identifies as a person of color, she feels she has to earn credibility among the Latino community, having to prove that she is focused on Latino student success. Jacqueline also described the dynamic of having “a certain street cred because you’re Black or Brown, and so that helps.” In the situation with the two African American staff who came to her, she attributed their willingness to meet with her to her shared racial identity. However, in the campus forum, she experienced pressure to be a vocal and supportive presence, and she was uncertain how they received her more measured response.

### **Isolation**

Dynamics related to isolation affected all of the CDOs, sometimes in similar and sometimes in distinctive ways. All but Donna talked about feeling isolated as a member of the institution’s leadership team. Among senior leaders, all of the CDOs are numerical minorities by race; Donna, Melissa, and Sabrina are the only people of color on their Cabinets, and Jacqueline and Frances serve with one other person of color. Most serve with other women, and in fact

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Frances, Melissa, and Sabrina serve on leadership teams where women are in the majority. All are the only women of color on the Cabinet.

Donna described a strong level of support from her president and a presence among his inner circle of advisors, which perhaps lessened the sense of isolation by social identity. Sabrina seemed to feel this isolation most acutely:

What is most challenging is the White privilege attitude at the highest level of the organization. Starting with the president. That is the most challenging. And I was not expecting that kind of challenge before taking the job. And once I got here, I realized that the White privilege attitude is very thick, at the very top, in the Cabinet, and by the leader of the Cabinet. So that's what's most challenging, I think.

This response was Sabrina's first to the question, "Where do you experience challenges?" She went on to describe the impact of White privilege on her relationships with her Cabinet colleagues, relationships that ranged on a narrow spectrum from explicitly stormy to privately supportive. Three times during her interview, Sabrina affirmed that she did not intend to serve as "window dressing" to represent the university's diversity message without making substantive change. She did not share any examples of open support from the senior leaders. Although none of the other CDOs described hostile relationships, lack of a sense of collegiality and trust emerged in some of their responses. They shared strategies and descriptions evocative of maneuvering, posturing, and microaggressions.

The symbolic role of the CDO carries with it the potential for isolation and tokenization. Institutional colleagues may not choose to spend time with the person who is perceived, in some measure, as the institution's conscience with regard to diversity. Several of the CDOs called

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their roles “lonely.” Sabrina stated clearly that CDOs must expect opposition and must assume that others will be threatened by their presence and work. Adding to this potential for isolation and opposition, Jacqueline, Frances, and Sabrina were hired from outside the institution, so they have had to develop relationships from the ground level. Over her decade at Baxter, Frances has developed relationships that facilitate her effectiveness. Jacqueline and Sabrina were in the earlier stages of that relationship-building in the institution. Jacqueline appeared to approach her status as a new CDO with equanimity, acknowledging that relationships would develop with time. After two years, Sabrina still seemed isolated within the university, though she has a stronger community network because of her earlier work in the same city. The challenge of building strong allies and supporters within the institution is compounded by the complicated nature of the situations which CDOs must enter or facilitate.

By virtue of their positions in the institution, in some ways the CDOs are cut off from their own communities, which resonates with literature about women of color in academia. Mitchell and Miller (2011) shared that professional and social loneliness is one of the unwritten realities of the academy for women of color. Women of color should “be careful about whom they trust and what information they share” (p. 203.) They experience more limited access to mentors, invitations for collaboration, and participation in the social fabric of the institution (Mitchell & Miller, 2011). Frances noted that “so much of what women and people of color do is in isolation,” which diminishes their awareness about whether they are working in the best ways possible. For example, Frances said that she did not know whether her emotional investment in institutional missteps was common or effective. She had no commonly accepted standard against which to gauge her behavior as CDO, and she also lacked women of color role

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models and mentors who could help her figure out these questions, consistent with Montoya's (1994) experiences as an isolated "first" Latina in her work as a faculty member. The need expressed by the CDOs to guard their vulnerability and to take care with sharing information may detrimentally affect their effectiveness and their longevity.

### **Multiple Consciousness**

Literature about faculty women of color discusses the "duality in the identity of women of color in academia" (Mitchell & Miller, 2011, p. 213), encouraging these women to value their perspective advantage and their ability to thrive in multiple spheres, rather than focusing on the dissonance they experience (Collins, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Mitchell & Miller, 2011). hooks (1984) challenges women of color to "recognize the special vantage point our marginality gives us and make use of this perspective to criticize the dominant racist, classist, sexist hegemony as well as to envision and create a call for counter-hegemony" (p. 15). The ability to maintain an insider and outsider perspective simultaneously requires a complex multiple consciousness that facilitates meaning-making in the face of oppression.

All of the CDOs have developed strategies to navigate, resist, and, in some cases, shift structures that oppress and marginalize. To some extent, they all talked about resisting assimilation into the system, upholding their integrity in all of the spheres in which they must enact their role. Some did this in more public ways, but in all cases, they advised and led in ways that were true to their sense of justice and to their own experiences. The CDOs consistently spoke of the relevance of their personal experiences as a touchstone for understanding marginalization. Frances shared,

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Everything I do now, it's because I was marginalized, I was left out. I've experienced everything that students and staff of color feel, and so I see it through that lens. And I say, "How do I not replicate?" I don't want to assimilate and become that structure, that person that excludes. How do I lead in a way that takes that experience into account, realizing that other people are having that experience?

Their experiences as outsiders helps them see their institutions in ways that their colleagues cannot. The stories the CDOs shared run counter to the dominant narratives of the institution. By holding tightly to their personal experiences and using them as motivators, the CDOs situated their marginalization as a source of strength and agency.

Jacqueline considers it important to maintain what she called an "outsider perspective" on the institution because total immersion in the system diminishes one's capacity to be a critic. She stated, "I think that's how many women of color have been effective in academia, because we've held on to an outsider perspective." This stance facilitates appraisal and critique informed by knowledge of the institution's history, culture, and capacity for change. It also helps to make possible the exercise of agency in complex organizations, which is the focus of the next chapter.

### **Chapter 7: Exercise of Agency**

The psychology of human agency posits that individuals both produce and are producers of their life circumstances (Bandura, 2006). People play a role in enacting their environments toward inclusive or exclusive ends. “They are partial authors of the past conditions that developed them, as well as the future courses their lives take” (Bandura, 2006, p. 165). To illustrate, Frances shared, “I always believed that I was more than my environment, that I can shape my environment by my reaction to it. So it wasn’t just what was happening around me, but it was how I reacted to things that made all the difference.” For these CDOs, reframing their own experiences of marginalization as women of color in education systems provided a foundation for exercising agency and creating change in these systems. Frances said she is known for characterizing her work as follows: “I always believed that I had to change what is to what ought to be.”

The women all responded positively to the frame of agency and efficacy as a means of characterizing their work, although their familiarity with the concept varied. During the interviews, I first asked the CDOs about their backgrounds, professional paths, and the challenges and rewards of their work, before I framed human agency. All of the CDOs articulated agentic experiences prior to my sharing a definition of and asking direct questions about human agency. Throughout the interviews, they described sources of agency, self-efficacy beliefs, how they met challenges and interacted with their environments, and the ways they nurture individual, proxy, and collective agency, toward the end of creating more inclusive organizations.

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### **Sources of Agency**

The CDOs shared several different and overlapping sources of agency that inspire and sustain their diversity work.

### **Overcoming Early Adversity**

A core theme of meeting the challenges of early adversity in education systems ran through most of the CDOs' narratives. Frances described being the only Latina in an all-White Catholic school. "I went to a high school where I ate lunch alone for four years ... so I know what it's like, very intimately, to be oppressed, or to be different, or to be singled out." Her understanding of oppression clearly had an intimate, personal dimension, which resonated with how Donna, Jacqueline, and Melissa also described their high school experiences. When Donna immigrated to the United States as a teenager, her parents placed her and her sister in a mostly-White private school, where they were among a handful of students of color. U.S. race relations and stereotypes were new for her and conflicted with the sense of possibility her family had instilled in her. This experience tapped her competitiveness and determination to outshine her classmates. Jacqueline had significant experience as a token by virtue of race and gender during her education and pursued sociology as a career as a means of "thinking about, wrestling with, things related to identity and race, what does it mean to be included or excluded, and how do you understand that." Melissa chose to prove potential detractors wrong by rising above negative stereotypes of Black students. She developed what she called "a strong identity as a hard worker." Rather than letting their experiences with exclusion define them, these women articulated how they rose to exceed expectations by excelling academically.

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### **Family**

For Donna, her family served as an important influence in the development of an agency orientation. Families that model and reward the exercise of social influence are more likely to produce offspring with a disposition for social action (Bandura, 1982). Donna's father immigrated to the U.S. to pursue his doctorate, and after he earned his degree, Donna, her sister, and their mother joined him. She shared that her family "came here with a sense of no barriers and no boundaries. You can do whatever you want. . . . And whatever you wanted to be, you can accomplish that." This modeling, as well as the emphasis her parents placed on education, played an important role in reinforcing her sense of possibility to transcend any limitations imposed by the social construction of race in the U.S. Donna's parents modeled and rewarded action and accomplishment, which became a form of familial capital (Yosso, 2005) that she took with her into her educational and professional experiences.

### **Educational and Career Success**

The early graduate school and career successes that the CDOs each experienced reinforced a desire to continue to enact change. They all talked about how they had initiated change efforts after witnessing or experiencing exclusionary practices. In most cases, their initiatives were well-received. According to agency literature, for those who meet with success in their efforts to create change, subsequent encounters with detrimental conditions become motivating, rather than discouraging (Bandura, 1982). Donna described her surprise when the dean that she and other graduate students approached invited them to be a part of creating outreach programs. She ended up working with him for several years and made significant improvements in terms of diversifying the graduate school student population. Melissa was

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brought into the CDO area and eventually into the CDO role in part because the president and provost wanted her to institutionalize a promising practice that she had implemented in the School of Science and Engineering to increase numbers and visibility of women and people of color among students and faculty. A clear pattern emerged of early and ongoing practices of asking questions of their institutions, accepting offers to engage in solution-making, and experiencing success in their efforts to diversify.

In some cases, the opportunities that arose for the CDOs resulted from fortuity. For example, as a doctoral student, Frances created a diversity strategic plan for human resources, and when a position came open, university leaders “said there’s only one person that could do it, she wrote the plan. And so they asked me to interview, and I did.” However, fortuity alone did not advance the careers and efforts of the CDOs. They actively nourished their interests and competencies, and as such, they were ready to take advantage of opportunities that arose unexpectedly.

### **Self-Efficacy Beliefs**

The belief in personal efficacy is the foundation of human agency. “Unless people believe they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to act, or to persevere in the face of difficulties” (Bandura, 2006, p. 170). Efficacy beliefs affect a sense of optimism or pessimism, goals and aspirations, self-motivation, perseverance in face of adversity or challenges, outcome expectations, how opportunities and obstacles are viewed, quality of emotional life, vulnerability to stress, and decision-making (Bandura, 2006).

Without exception, the CDOs described a strong sense of personal efficacy. They did not accept exclusionary circumstances as they are, but rather believed deeply that they could and

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must change those circumstances. Frances described her diversity-related work as a “moral mandate” to make improvement. She said, “I always believed, maybe naïvely so, that I can transform whatever environment I was in.” Donna said she has a “very high” sense of self-efficacy, adding:

I see us as really being in charge of our destiny and in control of our destiny. And I think if we have a vision of what it is you want to accomplish, then putting into place the building blocks to make it happen, we have to do that.

Her statement carried with it a similar sense of duty and urgency as Frances’s. For both, if they see that change is possible, they believe they must work to create it. Melissa shared her “strong belief that if I come to whatever challenge with a positive, can-do, we’re-going-to-work-through-this-together attitude, that we can.” She believes that her own approach is a key part of creating group change and shifting organizational culture.

Jacqueline described a more modest sense of efficacy, tempered by a recognition that organizational change is beyond the scope of what “any one person can do or certainly no one person can sustain.” She added, however, that she believes she possesses the capacity to make a difference and that she feels energized by a “sense of hopefulness about the capacity to ... create change.” Similarly, Sabrina expressed that she has been able to move her institution in terms of its diversity commitment, but that “many efforts at the same time” are necessary to change the organizational culture. Even with this more humble sense of capacity to shift an entire organization, both Sabrina and Jacqueline remained engaged and committed in their efforts, which demonstrates strong self-efficacy.

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Self-efficacy beliefs are influenced through the ways that environments respond to attempted change. Those with high self-efficacy who do not achieve positive outcomes do not necessarily stop acting. Instead, they may intensify their efforts to change or, if they experience high resentment, they may choose to leave the context due to environmental unresponsiveness (Bandura, 1982). For the most part, these CDOs expressed commitment to continuing change efforts, even when they encountered resistance. Melissa talked about her active self-work to preclude bitterness, and Frances discussed avoiding withdrawal over defeats. Instead, they either swallowed their negative emotions or they redirected their strategies. Sabrina may have expressed the highest degree of frustration and resentment among this group of CDOs, particularly because of some ongoing challenging interactions with her university's president and Cabinet members about the institution's commitment to diversity. However, she remained engaged in her change efforts.

In keeping with literature about self-efficacy, the CDOs demonstrated a sense of optimism that helped them maintain resilience in the face of challenges. When the CDOs shared stories about efforts that fell short of their goals, for the most part, they said they remained focused on achieving their outcomes, finding different ways to accomplish them. Frances stated unequivocally, "Adversity is never an excuse for not reaching your best. If anything, it should make you stronger in your resolve." She talked about the ability to "flip [adversity] into a positive. It makes me strong. It makes me very strategic."

The CDOs shared examples of transforming adversity to their strategic advantage. When Sabrina initially raised the prospect of discussing the impact of White privilege with her Cabinet colleagues and the president, she realized that the group was not ready. She continued to ask

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questions to prepare the group and eventually hired a facilitator and prepared a framework for productive conversation. For Melissa, she knew that having the CDO units located centrally on her campus would advance her organization's work and integrate diversity more effectively. Even though it took longer than initially planned to effect this change, she continued to advocate and negotiate until it took place. Frances talked about giving her best each day, even when she felt frustrated or tired. "The good work, the new initiatives, the exciting things will keep you going. The bad, the conflict, and some of the negativity of the job will always be there. You've got to focus on the good, not on the bad." She credited her optimism to the ways she learned to adapt to her early experiences with marginalization:

In order to get to a more equitable system, we have to work at it. It's not just going to happen. And I believe that leaders, visionaries, people working together can achieve that. I think I got it from those experiences, and how I adapted to them, and my own survival mechanisms. And I guess because I'm a positive person. If I was a negative personality, maybe it would've turned out differently, but because I'm so positive I just found a way to use it, to galvanize my energy as a catalyst for something else. And, you know, it served me well. I think it's served the people I serve well.

Frances indicated that her positive personality helped her channel her negative experiences into positive social change, that her optimism is the reason for her efficacy. Agency literature proposes that the relationship goes in the opposite direction and that high efficacy leads to optimistic, self-enhancing ways of thinking (Bandura, 2006). Regardless of the directionality of the relationship, optimism and efficacy correlated strongly among the CDOs. A strong sense of

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efficacy allowed these CDOs to approach challenges as opportunities, rather than as insurmountable obstacles.

Throughout their careers, the CDOs actively pursued professional opportunities, even when those seemed just beyond their current reach. Before she became a CDO, Frances did not doubt her capacity to be effective in creating student, staff, and retention programs, even though she had not engaged formally in that work previously. Jacqueline expressed excitement about the challenges inherent in navigating a new context and organizational culture, after a long-time career at another institution where she had established credibility and a record of achievement:

It was good work [at her previous institution], but I wasn't on my toes anymore. I kind of had mastered it, if you will, I think I did a reasonable job. But this is really challenging, in part because it's frontier work. ... It's a newer enterprise, trying to figure out how best to move the institutional mountain. And I like the challenge, I like trying, needing to learn and read and understand. So that's actually very rewarding for me.

Continual learning and accomplishment are motivators for Jacqueline, in keeping with how self-efficacy and occupation are discussed in agency literature. "Those of high self-efficacy influence the course of their occupational self-development, are receptive to innovations, and make their work life more productive and satisfying by restructuring their occupational roles and the processes by which their work is performed" (Bandura, 2006, p. 176). These women shared the reward they experienced when they restructured their divisions and universities and instituted new processes and practices.

They also all talked about the evolution of the CDO role over time, as well as newer understandings of diversity. Frances stated:

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In diversity work, you've never arrived. There's always more to do, and you always have to innovate, and you always have to be creative, and you always have to say, "What's the next challenge, what's the next structure, or problem or issue that we have to address?" And so I'm not afraid to say I don't know something, or to learn something new, or to continue to innovate. I'm not going to just sit on what we've done. And I think that for me, that's tremendous power, right? And a tremendous blessing.

None of the CDOs indicated that they had mastered all of the knowledge and skills that they needed in order to be effective. For some who had been engaged for decades in diversity-related work, race and ethnicity were a primary focus earlier in their career. Those areas continue to be important foci, but the CDO portfolio now encompasses a broader range of identities, along with the expectation to influence the university learning enterprise. The CDOs found this development to be an invigorating opportunity for continual self-renewal.

### **Properties of Agency**

In addition to self-efficacy, human agency literature presents several core properties of agency, including intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, self-reflectiveness, resiliency, self-mentorship, persistence, and self-referent thought (Bandura, 1982; Bandura, 2006; Bass & Faircloth, 2011). These properties intersect with one another. For example, intentionality and forethought entail forming and implementing action plans and strategies with a future orientation. The capacity to envision long-term change, to create adaptive structures to achieve goals, and to focus in multiple directions simultaneously emerged in the ways the CDOs described their facilitation of diversity strategic planning and implementation. Sabrina noted, "Many efforts at the same time" are required to change institutional culture. The CDOs all

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referred to diversity-related change as a long-term effort, with incremental progress measured through short- and medium-range outcomes.

In a way, the CDOs function with a sense of delayed gratification, understanding that processes and practices they enact today will, they hope, come to fruition in the future. They are actors, but they draw energy from the vision they are actualizing, even if it outpaces current realities. These women believe in the stated goals of their universities, and they understand diversity commitment as critical to achieving those goals. “I want this organization to be excellent at what it does,” Sabrina stated. Frances shared her commitment to making sure her institution, as well as higher education more broadly, facilitates the pipeline to educational access and success. “I’m not going to let someone else do it. I’m going to be responsible for making that happen,” she shared, even though she may not witness the eventual outcomes of her efforts. The long-range nature of their work proved motivating for these women, rather than debilitating, and they spoke of resiliency and persistence to accomplish their objectives.

Self-reactiveness encompasses the ability to regulate behavior and to engage in “multifaceted self-directedness” (Bandura, 2006, p. 165). Self-reflectiveness and self-referent thought involve evaluating one’s behaviors and the accuracy of self-perceptions (Bandura, 1982). Those with too many misgivings about their efficacy risk diverting attention from their agency efforts toward concerns about their own failings. On the other hand, people with an overinflated sense of self-efficacy may not prepare for tasks because they do not believe they need to invest in learning (Bandura, 1982). Frances shared her tendency to engage in self-evaluation, asking herself, “Did I do the right thing? Am I perpetuating some kind of exclusionary system or some institutional racism?” This questioning was not inspired by self-

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doubt, but rather by her desire to serve as positive model and to create change: “I’m trying to move this massive organization. And if I don’t get the tone and tenor right, then what?” She has high expectations for her own learning and development, similar to those that she has for her institution. She demonstrates a balance of high self-efficacy with a capacity for learning that is informed by reflection and feedback.

### **Modes of Agency**

Agency operates not just on the individual level, where people influence their own actions and immediate environments, but also on proxy and collective levels. Proxy agency emerges when individuals influence “others who have the resources, knowledge, and means to act on their behalf to secure the outcomes they desire” (Bandura, 2006, p. 165). Collective agency marshals the resources and skills of a group to work toward a common future (Bandura, 2006). Given the positionality and resources of the CDOs, they understand that institutional diversity progress requires harnessing both proxy and collective agency. They all shared strategies for cultivating allies, in some cases to make changes that were beyond the purview of what they could do from their role as CDO. This was particularly the case with issues involving curriculum and faculty hiring and retention.

Frances stated, “The Diversity Officer makes things happen through other people, so we need that broad support. You know, I’m saying we are going to do this, and if everyone’s not behind me, it’s not going to happen.” She shared frankly that even if she wants to put into place an initiative, on her own she does not have the political capital to make that happen. Her success depends on other people, so she commits considerable energy to expanding her capital through others. Donna echoed this approach:

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In some cases you have to be able to find people who may share our common view, our common vision, and use those individuals as your allies to collectively make it happen.

There are some things that you can do on your own, although I think you need some help. And being able to persuade people to join with you to make it happen, and then you just lead the charge, and then accomplish whatever that task might be at that time.

Donna demonstrated confidence that she could persuade potential partners to join her and that together they would accomplish their goals. Melissa shared a similar agentic belief that she could institutionalize change and move from theory to practice in terms of diversity engagement. “What does that mean and how do you implement that? For me, that means getting everybody involved. So I had some confidence, some self-confidence that if I can get everybody involved, we can move the needle on things. And we have.”

The CDOs certainly engage politically in the process of cultivating allies, but their strategic approaches did not come across as manipulative. Their exercise of agency and resistance incorporated the ways that they have learned to lead effectively as women of color in higher education institutions, in order to be recognized, to make meaningful contributions, and to sustain themselves and their work. Even when they described the variety of strategies they employ to cultivate collaborators or to counter or redirect resistance, their efforts were directed toward the institutional outcome of integrating diversity. Frances identified the emphasis she places on relationship-building as a primary way of “how women lead and how people of color lead. I think that kind of style is very much of a person who has learned how to adapt and survive.” She characterized her leadership as “circular,” stating, “It’s one of our coping mechanisms. We don’t hit [problems] head-on. ... It’s like we circle around ... to get more buy-

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in.” Circling around represents a leadership style developed to adapt to the marginalizing environment in which this leadership and agency are exercised.

The CDOs are enacting agency in complex, interlocking systems, and often they are hired to leverage the collective agency of the institution toward long-term diversity outcomes (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). The five CDOs in this study all work at research universities, which “embrace a large number of conflicting goals” (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 11). Outcomes and strategies that serve the interests of one area of the institution may not have the same impact in other areas. The framework that Melissa developed through Cooke University’s diversity council recognized this reality. By developing a set of cohesive priorities and asking divisions and schools for commitment to at least one priority, Melissa has allowed each area to choose and manage how it will make progress. The element of choice is critical, given Melissa’s understanding of her university’s culture. “Achievement of collective efficacy requires cogent means of relating factional interests to shared purposes” (Bandura, 1982, p. 145). Cooke’s vice presidents and deans have agency over where they will direct their efforts, but this process of self-determination for the units still takes place within a coherent framework of shared institutional commitment to equity and inclusion developed by Melissa and the allies whose energy she has marshaled and focused.

In describing their leadership of diversity efforts, the CDOs talked about enacting and cultivating agency for the sake of community, not for themselves. Frances explained:

My challenge – and I think that goes to the self-efficacy – has always been how can I disseminate that to as many people as I can, and to help as many people as I can?

Holding that to myself, you know, I got mine and so I’m great – no! If I can’t use that

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knowledge, use that power to transform and help others, then for me all of what I accomplished is for naught, it's not important, because it's how you change the world for the better.

The CDOs articulated a strong sense of responsibility to community and to the future, which provided motivation for their continued leadership and agency.

### **Chapter 8: Discussion, Implications, and Conclusions**

In this chapter I will present interpretations of the findings, suggest implications for practice, suggest future research, and draw conclusions. This chapter interprets the major themes that were discussed in the findings, relating them to the research questions that guided this study:

1. How do women of color CDOs experience their identities as women and as people of color? How do their experiences influence their work as diversity leaders?
2. How are women of color positioned as CDOs? How do women of color CDOs navigate complex institutional contexts to create diversity change? How do they shift their positionality to maximize their influence?
3. What factors influence the ways that women of color CDOs exercise agency in their roles and institutions? What forms does their agency take? How does the exercise of agency influence CDOs personally and professionally?

The study population consisted of five women of color serving as executive-level Chief Diversity Officers at five different four-year institutions, all classified as research-intensive, located in or near major cities, and offering undergraduate, graduate, and professional degrees. I used pseudonyms for their names and institutions. Attempts to diversify the institutional types were not successful, though the resulting pool was representative of the majority of institutions with executive-level CDO positions (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). The CDOs all reported to the president and served as a member of the Cabinet. The CDO structures included unit-based and portfolio divisional models, with one example of a transition from a collaborative officer model to one that is unit-based. At the time of their interviews, the CDOs' tenure in their current

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positions ranged from seven months to 10 years, and all had been involved with higher education or nonprofit diversity leadership for at least two decades.

I first share a summary of the findings before moving to application of the conceptual framework and discussion of themes, implications, and conclusions.

### **Summary of Findings**

#### **Professional Identity**

All five of the CDOs had worked in higher education for decades, in a variety of capacities relating to diversity and inclusion. Although their individual paths differed, they all shared experiences of marginalization in education systems, which served as a foundation for their engagement with diversity-related work. Their motivation to remain engaged in this work resulted in part from their personal experiences, from their commitment to improving inclusion and institutionalizing effective practices, and from the ways they continued to learn how to navigate institutions of higher education as women of color. The CDOs shared challenges and strategies related to professional growth, accessing mentors, and maintaining balance and wellness.

#### **Institutional Positionality**

This chapter focused on how the CDOs understood and navigated their institutional structures and roles. They all focused on creating a framework to institutionalize sustainable diversity engagement, taking into account organizational history, existing structures, and limitations of their positions. Consensus emerged from the CDOs about the critical need for commitment from the president and senior leaders in order to generate and sustain momentum for diversity-related initiatives, though the actual level of commitment they saw from the senior

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leadership differed. The CDOs found themselves in middle spaces between institutional leaders and those at other levels of the institution or in the community, navigating difficult situations, balancing expectations from various groups, and deciding when and how to engage conflict. Because their work depends on the engagement of others, the CDOs spent considerable time cultivating partnerships and alliances. They also invested time in anticipating, countering, and redirecting resistance and obstacles. In addition to their functional responsibilities, the CDOs talked about the symbolic capacities they fill by virtue of their diversity-related roles and shared identities with marginalized communities. Their work takes place under a high degree of scrutiny.

### **Impact of Social Identities**

The CDOs described ways that their race and gender affected why they pursued diversity work and how they experienced their roles. For several, their early experiences in education helped them view academic success as a means to counter low expectations, stereotypes, exclusion, and discrimination. The effects of stereotyping continued to have an impact in their work, as the CDOs worked to counter perceptions of them based on race and gender and negotiated how to respond to microaggressions. Similar to the ways that CDOs found themselves in the middle in terms of institutional positionality, they also navigated a middle space in balancing expectations from others, determining when and how to take controversial stands, and understanding their visibility as women of color in predominantly White institutions. Dynamics of isolation affected all of the CDOs, and they used descriptions evocative of maneuvering, posturing, and battling. Despite these challenges, the CDOs also spoke of the critical perspective

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they bring by virtue of their positioning as outsiders in the academy, which facilitates their ability to offer critique and create solutions that insiders may not see.

### **Exercise of Agency**

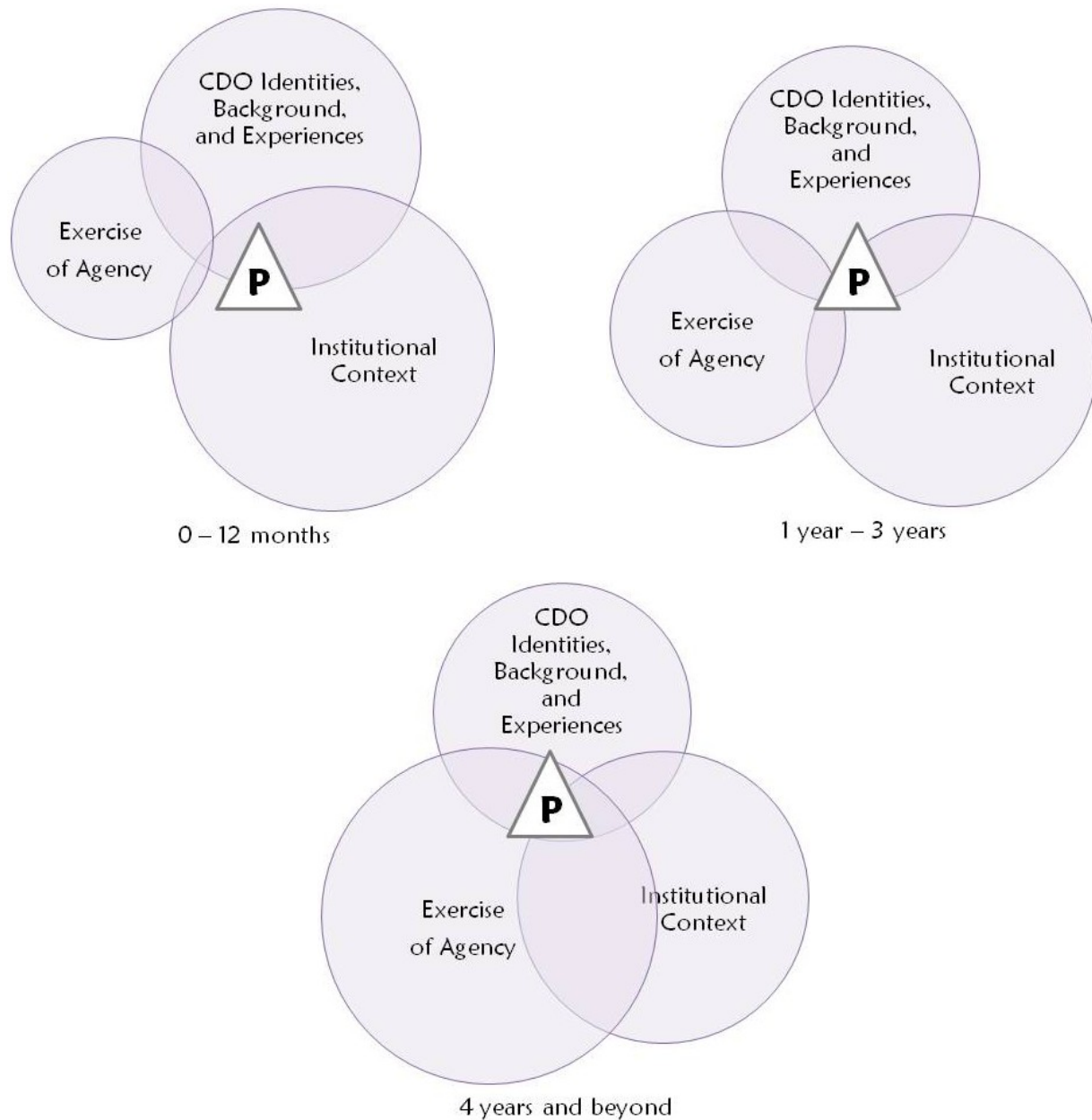
All of the CDOs responded positively to the frame of agency to characterize their work. They shared examples that demonstrated self-efficacy and understanding of how agency operates on individual, proxy, and collective levels. Sources of agency included overcoming early adversity, messages and examples from family, and achieving earned successes in graduate school and throughout their careers. Without exception, the CDOs articulated a strong belief that they can and must work to alter systems of exclusion and oppression. This strong sense of self-efficacy allowed them to remain resilient in the face of challenges and the long-term nature of effecting diversity-related change. Given their institutional positionality and allocated resources, they understood the need to harness both proxy and collective agency to advance their diversity goals. They work in complex, interlocking systems, and their core function involves leveraging the collective agency of their organizations toward long-term outcomes.

### **Application of Conceptual Framework**

In my discussion of the conceptual framework in Chapter 3, I presented several examples of hypothetical relationships between the framework's constructs of institutional context, exercise of agency, and CDO identities, background, and experiences. Figure 4 represents a conceptual model for CDO positionality based on my findings, examining the framework constructs according to length of tenure in the CDO role and degree of impact of agency.

Based on how the participants in this study described their experiences, I suggest that the capacity for agency increases the longer a CDO who is a woman of color serves in her position.

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*Figure 4.* Conceptual Model for CDO Positionality According to Length of Tenure in Role and Impact of Agency

Her identities, backgrounds, and experiences continue to affect her positionality, but the relative impact of that construct decreases as the CDO understands and begins to have a positive effect on the campus climate. Institutional context plays a critical role in the CDO's positionality,

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particularly early in her tenure. A key focus for CDOs is to understand the tangible and intangible resources that are available in their institutional context. Tangible resources include budget, human capital, and organizational structures such as affirmative action plans; intangible resources include presidential commitment and relationships with other stakeholders. This understanding of the institutional context facilitates the ability of a CDO to leverage her resources effectively. In the conceptual model, the increasingly higher degree of overlap over time between the circles representing agency and context demonstrates the greater impact of the CDO's agency.

I believe that this conceptual model captures the current realities of the CDOs in this study, given the spectrum they represent in terms of length of tenure in their positions. Jacqueline is newest to her role, which is new in the institution. Sabrina has served for two years, also in an inaugural CDO position. Donna and Melissa have served as CDOs for six years, and each worked in her institution in a different diversity-related role prior to being appointed CDO. Frances has been the CDO for ten years, and she came from outside the institution into a newly-created position. This model serves both as a current snapshot of these five CDOs according to their tenure, as well as a developmental depiction of different moments in time for the longer-serving CDOs.

### **Discussion**

Based on literature and the findings of my study, I identified four themes that respond to the research questions. Although I present them separately, they relate to and interact with one another.

### **Social Identities Matter in How CDOs Experience Their Roles**

In keeping with literature about other women of color in academia, for CDOs, their race and gender affect how they conceive, enact, and experience their roles. Although other research about CDOs has noted the demographic representation of people in these roles, and Pittard's (2010) study examined the experiences of five African American male CDOs, the intersectional salience of race and gender has not been addressed specifically in CDO literature. All of the CDOs in this study are "extreme tokens" (Turner, González, & Wong, 2011, p. 9) as women of color in most of the places where they interact on campus, and they must manage others' impressions regarding behavior, competency, and expectations in order to fulfill both their functional and symbolic roles.

Montoya's (1994) description of masking and of being on stage resonates with the ways the CDOs characterized the complicated dance of navigating microaggressions, inconsistent expectations, and the public v. behind-closed-doors nature of their work. Montoya noted that her own masking was "a holistic experience: I do not have separate masks for my female-ness and Latina-ness. The construction of my public persona involves all that I am" (p. 197). Generally the CDOs also described and presented themselves holistically as women of color in the myriad spaces in which they must perform their role, although they noted times when their race appeared to take precedence in terms of how they were perceived. The examples the CDOs shared about managing impressions and stereotypes most often concerned intersectional perceptions of themselves as women of color. For example, Melissa talked about overcoming the stereotype of "the poor Black kid who is going to get pregnant and drop out," which obviously relates both to her gender and race. She also shared examples of how she counters being viewed as an "angry

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Black woman” by working long hours, internalizing frustration, and presenting a positive mien when she encounters microaggressions. Frances and Sabrina both described situations when they became emotional, and they thought strategically about how their race and gender would affect the ways others would view them in those interactions. Sabrina acknowledged the risk that comes with expressions of strong emotion from women of color, who may be perceived as hysterical, overly sensitive, or angry. These internal negotiations are certainly strategic ones, but there is also a “self-loathing” (Montoya, 1994, p. 196) quality to them in the inherent devaluation of identities that are core to who they are.

Several of the CDOs mentioned feeling as though they had to prove their competence in ways that a White person in a diversity-related role would not have to do. This aligns with literature about positionality and status (Lucas & Baxter, 2012). The CDOs countered this racial positionality by strategically identifying White “sponsors” for diversity initiatives because these colleagues would enhance credibility of diversity initiatives. Many of the people with whom the CDOs must interact and establish credibility are White males, and the CDOs found that they had to be particularly sensitive to how these potential partners might perceive them. They frequently gave credit to others, subordinating their own accomplishments and minimizing their leadership in order to cultivate diversity engagement, particularly if it came from unexpected places. The ego boost they gave to others sometimes came at the cost of their own reputations.

Though the CDOs understood that likely they were hired in part because they are women of color, they also encountered microaggressions, resistance, and presumptions about their competence, sensitivities, and decisions because of these identities. Research about status and influence demonstrates that people with lower statuses are assumed to act in their own self-

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interest, as opposed to the interests of the community, which tends to be attributed to those with high status (Lucas & Baxter, 2012). The CDOs were assumed to be acting in their own self-interest or out of anger if they raised concerns related to marginalized groups, although this is a key element of their functional role. They found themselves in the bind of being judged if they acted and judged if they did not. Jacqueline described a “double-triple marginalization, by gender, by ethnicity, and by virtue of one’s work.” She stated, “CDO-ing is seen as a colored thing,” and I argue that it is also gendered.

Acker (1990) noted the reproduction of gender identity along occupational lines, with men generally characterized as actors and women as emotional supporters. On college campuses, occupational gendering usually favors masculine, corporate roles with greater prestige, pay, and credibility. Diversity work may be seen as softer, less rigorous, not as central to the core functions of the institution, and therefore as more appropriately feminine. Certainly, by virtue of their gender and race, women of color in the academy frequently experience role encapsulation, which occurs when tokens become encapsulated in roles to control their interactions and keep them away from the mainstream (Niemann, 2012). The literature abounds with examples of the encapsulation of women of color in diversity-related roles, such as advising students of color, serving on diversity committees, and teaching courses related to historically underrepresented groups (Baez, 2011; Collins, 2000; Niemann 2012; Sulé, 2011). Sabrina noted this dynamic in describing the ways that diversity work can pigeonhole women of color such that the breadth of their skills and experiences is ignored.

Dynamics related to race and gender affected the CDOs’ relationships with White colleagues in the institution. The two CDOs who were newest in the roles at the time of the

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study, Jacqueline and Sabrina, assumed that they were entering institutions with a commitment to inclusion and diversity. The current presidents had created both of their positions, yet even after two years, Sabrina could not say with confidence that the president and senior leaders supported diversity as a strategic goal for the university. When this tension came to a crescendo during a Cabinet meeting and Sabrina voiced her strong concern that the CDO position not be mere “window dressing,” she received no vocal support in the meeting. Afterward, two White Cabinet members apologized for the behavior of their colleagues, but in the meeting itself, Sabrina was on her own. Jacqueline described a dismissive interaction with a White female colleague who was unreceptive to Jacqueline’s question about a possible faculty appointment to complement her CDO position. In many situations that the CDOs described, they had to decide whether to confront colleagues about microaggressions and outright inappropriate behavior. Inherent in these decisions was the question of the cost of speaking up versus the cost of silence. They did not employ a rote formula in these decisions, but rather applied a complicated arithmetic that depended on the dynamics of each encounter, predictions about future impact, and expenditure of social capital. Describing the ubiquity of these encounters, Montoya (1994) stated, “Sometimes it seems that every interaction requires that I overlook the terms of the discourse or that I affirmatively redefine them” (p. 209). Montoya (1994) noted that speaking out requires practice and may mean leaving the relatively protective safety of silence. Speaking out can be messy, as Sabrina described in the interaction with a colleague about a meeting between students of color and institutional leaders, but the messiness may be outweighed by the benefits of claiming space and voice.

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Their identities as women of color also had an impact on their relationships with people of color. Some perceived the CDOs as having sold out to the institution by virtue of their willingness to serve as the face of diversity and because the CDOs could not share information related to confidential matters that disproportionately affected communities of color. These dynamics are reflected in Niemann's (2012) lessons for women of color; she cautioned women of color that institutional leaders may identify a singular, exceptional woman of color as an "official pet or mascot" for diversity (p. 12) to pit against other people of color. In some ways, women of color CDOs may unintentionally serve as an institutional diversity mascot, showcased as an example of diversity commitment and subjected to unreasonable pressures to perform. For example, Sabrina described representing Monitor University in the community, even as she felt some doubt about the institution's depth of commitment to inclusion. She remarked several times that she wondered if her hire was mere "window dressing" designed to convey commitment without real substance.

More often than this more negative kind of dynamic, however, the CDOs identified their capacity as people of color to serve as what Jacqueline called a "beacon of light" for other people of color. None of the CDOs talked about inspiring this kind of hope in other women, one of the few consistent examples in the interviews of isolating the impact of their racial/ethnic identity. Serving as a beacon of light might bring additional capital in terms of relationships and credibility. However, it also entailed the CDOs shouldering the burden of following through to make a positive impact on communities of color, when the CDOs did not control all of the inputs or outputs that could make that happen.

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Several of the CDOs talked about the outsider perspective that they bring to their role. They were insiders by virtue of their positions in the organizations, but outsiders as tokenized women of color. Jacqueline believed that her success depended in part on holding onto an outsider-within stance and avoiding total assimilation into the organizational culture. Her distance from the center of the organization facilitated informed appraisal and critique. Making meaning of simultaneous insider and outsider experiences requires a multiple consciousness that Ladson-Billings (2000) describes as “a transcendent position allowing one to see and understand positions of inclusion and exclusion – margins and mainstreams” (p. 260). hooks (1984), Collins (2000), and Ladson-Billings (2000) lift up as a strength the wide-angle perspective that women of color can bring to their institutions, because it can prompt action, agency, and transformation informed by deep understanding of what it feels to be excluded.

### **Barriers to Retention Exist for Women of Color CDOs**

Given the complexities of CDOs’ functional, political, and symbolic roles, institutions wishing to effect change benefit from retaining CDOs over a period of time that facilitates sustained agency and attention to diversity initiatives. The women in this study described several particular considerations concerning retention for women of color in CDO positions, including combating isolation, accessing mentors, and attending to health and balance.

Tenure in CDO positions tends to be brief, with about a third having served for less than two years, another third for three to five years, 17% for six to 10 years, and 11% for more than 10 years (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007, p. 38). In addition, almost half of CDOs plan to leave their current appointments in the next three years, according to a recent survey (Jaschik, 2011). Several women in the current study are among outliers in terms of lengthy CDO tenure. Melissa

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and Donna have served in their roles for six years, and Frances has been at Hayden University for more than a decade. Sabrina shared that she did not know how long she would remain at Monitor, particularly given consistent challenges that caused her to question the university's commitment to diversity. Donna discussed the importance of longer tenures in CDO positions, because it takes time to gain traction and have the right people in place to create change. Institutions that want to make diversity progress may be better served by attending to strategies that avert burnout and build resilience among CDOs.

Four of the five CDOs described the challenges of finding communities of support and trusted confidantes. They sought these resources, but this happened on a case-by-case basis through their own initiative because no systems existed to help them navigate newer or even familiar institutional contexts. The CDOs were left to figure this out on their own, navigating landmines, cultivating allies, and battling isolation, not an unusual place for women of color in academia to find themselves. Mitchell & Miller (2011) presented unwritten rules that emerged from their study of 11 women of color currently or previously employed as faculty, who described a reality of professional and social loneliness for women faculty of color. The faculty in that study warned against trusting and sharing too much, because "being honest about their perceptions and struggles can cast them in a negative light and leave them ostracized" (p. 203). Navigating these kinds of dynamics felt isolating and secretive for several of the CDOs, and it took them a long time to identify and tap into communities of support.

The challenges of isolation were exacerbated by the reality of shouldering diversity burdens for the institution and figuring out how to lead in complex, sometimes painful circumstances. A clear example came from Frances, who felt the collective pain of the

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community in an incredibly complicated situation and who assumed responsibility on behalf of the institution, although she had little role in creating the situation itself. In fact, behind closed doors, she advised leaders to reconsider the decisions that led to the controversy. She wondered if her assumption of responsibility served her or the university, and she also described her frustration at working in such isolation as a woman of color and as a CDO.

Accessing mentors could help in these situations, but the CDOs articulated challenges in identifying mentors who could serve a wide range of needs, including similarity in identities, understanding of the scope of their responsibilities, and the need for confidentiality. Literature about women of color in academia emphasizes the critical importance of mentoring (Bass & Faircloth, 2011; Harris & González, 2012; Sulé, 2011), as well as the challenges of accessing mentors (Holling, Fu, & Bubar, 2012; Hune, 1998; Mitchell & Miller, 2011). For CDOs, the challenges of whom to trust as mentors reflect even greater complexity than for other women of color higher education institutions. None of the CDOs in this study worked with another woman of color on the Cabinet, and given the confidential nature of much of their work, they were not be able to approach women of color at other institutional levels for advice. These colleagues might be able to serve as sources of collegial support, but they could not offer specific, critical feedback about particular situations. In some cases the CDOs wanted advice about interactions involving senior leaders. As a consequence, some of the CDOs looked outside their institutions for mentors, such as presidents and provosts from other institutions and other CDOs if they knew how to tap into these networks. These mentors were not necessarily women of color, but they could provide insight and advice about functional responsibilities. The CDOs described more challenges than successes in accessing mentors, which exacerbated their isolation.

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Questions of balance also contributed to the challenges of sustainability for these CDOs. Several described 60- or 70-hour work weeks and feeling on call at all times. “You’re always on,” Frances shared. In some ways, this level of investment may be self-imposed, with the CDOs feeling accountable to underrepresented communities to be present and highly visible. However, the CDOs also described situations when their institutions required their presence at times outside a typical work week. For example, Frances recalled a case of having to coordinate a teleconference, send emails, and work with her staff to send a report, all while she was on vacation with her family. This kind of pace is unsustainable over the long term, as Melissa learned when she was diagnosed with several stress-related medical issues and had to take more drastic measures to cut back on her work commitments. Melissa’s health issues reflect literature about the detrimental physical and psychological effects of isolation, burnout, and trauma among women of color in academia (Harris & González, 2012).

### **CDO Work Provides Opportunity for Agency But Carries Potential for Co-Optation**

The psychology of human agency understands humans as both products and producers of their environments. People do not just passively receive their environments; rather, they have a role in enacting those environments (Bandura, 2006). CDOs exercise agency in myriad ways and at individual, proxy, and collective levels. The women of color CDOs in this study aspire to exercising critical agency, which I described to them during the interviews as purposeful action that resists hegemony and counteracts oppression (Baez, 2000). From a critical race theoretical framework, however, their incremental orientation and experiences of co-optation offered limited means to radically transform the universities in which they work. As Delgado & Stefancic

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(2001) presented, “everything must change at once, otherwise the system merely swallows up the small improvement one has made, and everything remains the same” (p. 57).

The CDOs were focused on transforming their institutions toward what Sulé (2011) called an “epistemology of inclusion – one that is rooted in the understanding [by women of color] of marginalized social identities” (p. 154). All of the CDOs articulated an agentic orientation to their work that was informed by their experiences of marginalization in education, so their leadership had a personal dimension of creating institutions more welcoming than the ones they had experienced themselves. They wanted to be part of dynamic, evolving organizations and to assume leadership in that evolution. As Sabrina stated, “I want this organization to be excellent at what it does,” and she understood inclusion as foundational to that excellence.

The CDOs had a high-touch orientation to their work. When Sabrina coordinated a first-ever meeting between students of color and the university Cabinet, she stated, “There is no way I’m going to miss the opportunity to be with the people I advocate for.” Although all of the CDOs described a potential wellness-related cost to their high visibility and consistent presence, they also experienced a sense of accomplishment and community, reminiscent of the ways that Baez (2000) found that faculty of color could reframe role-encapsulating, race-related service in beneficial ways.

The CDOs all shared examples of individual, proxy, and collective agency. In structuring or restructuring their positions and offices, each of the CDOs initiated realignments that expanded her reach and in some cases the scope of her position. Consistently these realignments emerged from the individual agency of the CDO, rather than from an institutional change in

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diversity commitments. Generally it appeared that universities established the CDO positions to create, implement, and manage the larger diversity structure. The CDOs served in a facilitative capacity, in keeping with CDO literature (Nixon, 2011; Pittard, 2010; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2006). Rarely did they describe situations in which they were vested with the authority to effect a sudden change in direction or to create something out of thin air; instead they asked questions, cultivated relationships, developed structures, such as diversity councils and strategic plans, inserted themselves into institutional dialogues, and invested in the agency of others with the power to “move the institutional mountain,” as Jacqueline articulated. They did not wait for the mountain to come to them – in fact, their stories indicated that waiting would have been lonely and unsuccessful – but rather they initiated outreach. Their success depended on reading and navigating complex terrain, such as Melissa’s understanding that in her university, any successful diversity strategic plan would need to incorporate elements of choice for powerful deans and administrators accustomed to serving as decision-makers. Her coalition-building strategy merged “diverse self-interests in support of common goals” (Bandura, 1982, p. 144), a key element in facilitating collective agency.

The social construction of identity and levels of relative privilege and power affect the capacity of participants to alter structures they navigate (Baez, 2000). The exercise of human agency occurs within structures that constitute and constrain possibilities. These structures are not permanent but instead are enacted by the individuals who participate in them (Bandura, 1982; Bandura, 2006). Scholars of critical agency propose that agency must be situated in a context informed by social identity, access to power and privilege, and the durability of the structure, but even within contextual constraints, people can make choices that either affirm or

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transform the system (Baez, 2000; Baez, 2011; Sulé, 2011). The CDOs all articulated a desire to move their institutions beyond concerns with access and compositional diversity, instead directing their exercise of agency toward the goal of systemic transformation. Even so, they shared examples of co-optation, of times when they spoke up behind closed doors but publicly aligned with the institution, or when they attributed credit to others for successes and accepted as a reality that they would serve as scapegoats for missteps, or when they strategically opted not to confront microaggressions. I saw a pattern of those newer to their institutions as less willing to compromise their personal stance and longer-serving CDOs as more willing to negotiate a middle ground in favor of a long-term agenda. These strategies were usually couched as a means to the CDOs' desired end of eventual institutional transformation. Although there was a correlation of length of service and willingness to compromise, it was not clear whether these instances served as examples of co-optive assimilation or political pragmatism. It would be interesting to speak again with Jacqueline and Sabrina after they have worked for a few more years in their current roles to discern any differences in their feelings about compromise, politics, resistance, and co-optation.

Although higher education in the U.S. has served in some ways as a social equalizer and a means of economic advancement, the history of colleges and universities has most often been one of White supremacy, patriarchy, classism, heteronormativity, and other forms of exclusion (Allen, 2012; Harris & Gonzalez, 2012; Valverde, 2011). Higher education institutions are oriented toward stability and equilibrium (Birnbaum, 1988), and they exert a strongly co-optive pull on those who attempt to challenge the status quo (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006). Women of color in senior leadership roles, whose difference from the dominant groups in higher education

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marks them as extreme tokens, may experience the temptations of co-optation more so than others with a relatively wider range of options in the system, such as White men, men of color, and White women. Without a doubt, all of the women of color in this study have attained an extraordinary measure of success by accessing the uppermost echelons of the institution. Their primary area of responsibility, however, is not an historical core focus of higher education; diversity is a more contemporary and contested addition to the mission of colleges and universities (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006; Roper, 2004). The CDOs have an insider status by virtue of title and a seat at the leadership table, but their social identities and area of professional focus isolate them as outsiders, marginal to the core of the institution (Lucas & Baxter, 2012). Diversity progress largely seems to be left to the CDOs to define, which leaves room for their agency but also may indicate lukewarm institutional commitment to transformation (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). Valverde (2011) articulates:

The success by women of color is primarily the result of their own efforts to overcome three major social ills: gender bias, racism, and white privilege, and more, to turn these external negatives into internal positives. As a result, the burden of higher education institutions to change their actions and policy has been lessened. Consequently, these destructive forces of evil have been slow in coming and weak in effort in higher education, resulting in superficial improvement at best. (p. 51)

One potential outcome of the effective exercise of agency by these women of color CDOs has been to let their institutions off the hook, so to speak, for creating the changes that the institutions have been unwilling to make or slow to implement. In many ways these CDOs are in

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untenable positions, and the stories they shared of pain, isolation, frustration, and humiliation were disheartening.

However, their strong self-efficacy and agency orientation helped them to reframe these experiences and served as a wellspring of resilience (Bandura, 1982). The CDOs all described a long-term orientation, and they spoke of effecting incremental progress, changing things “little by little by little,” as Sabrina described. Although incrementalism falls short of transformation according to classic critical race theorists (Bell, 1994; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Yosso, 2006), critical race feminism provides a more nuanced understanding of the realities and opportunities available to women of color who experience intersectional oppression and extreme tokenism in colleges and universities. These women are doing battle, and in their stories, they described elements of their work as fighting battles, taking it on, becoming warriors. Their battles involved tension, conflict, exclusion, and betrayal – and yet they endured. The women of color in this study have entered “spaces defined not only by their absence but also by the perversion of their race and gender difference” (Sulé, 2011, p. 153), and they are using their difference and agency to stimulate change and encourage their universities to reconsider exclusionary access, practices, and policies.

### **CDO Leadership Operates as a Form of Resistance**

The women of color in this study all knowingly chose careers in which they understood that they would at times be marginalized, tokenized, and excluded. They may have been surprised at times by the sting of microaggressions or the depth of prejudice, but in many ways they knew what they were taking on, because they had experienced marginalization and oppression throughout their own educational and professional careers. Of her chosen profession,

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Sabrina shared, “Most of the time, it’s not enjoyable.” In the context of battle and oppression, many have carved out a leadership style that integrates resistance. They exercise leadership that allows them to bring more of themselves into the institution, as a means of resisting dominant leadership narratives characterized by White supremacy, masculinity, and autonomy (Niemann, 2012; Turner, 2007; Yosso, 2005).

Frances characterized her leadership style as circular, describing how rather than hitting a problem head-on, she circles around the problem to build relationships and gain buy-in. She clearly identified this leadership style as a “coping mechanism” adapted to marginalizing environments and associated it with “how women lead and how people of color lead. I think that kind of style is very much of a person who has learned how to adapt and survive.” Frances’s leadership style is patient, strategic, and relational, which resonated with how the other CDOs in this study described their ways of leading. They prioritized presence and visibility in their leadership, in some ways because they knew how meaningful their presence would be for others who experience marginalization. They also worked ahead of time to anticipate, counter, and redirect resistance, and they employed an eclectic array of strategies to accomplish their goals. Sabrina shared an example of facing resistance early in her tenure when she pointed out to her Cabinet colleagues the need for them to discuss White privilege. Rather than plowing ahead or, alternatively, dropping the question altogether, she spent the next year introducing White privilege more generally to the campus by bringing a speaker and developing a dialogue framework for the Cabinet that she introduced to them just before she and I met for our interview. She was not entirely satisfied with the pace or even depth of the Cabinet dialogue, but she understood it as progress on which she planned to build with further opportunities for

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engagement. Frances shared a chess-playing analogy to describe the need to plan ahead several steps and to respond flexibly when circumstances change.

The CDOs navigated contexts permeated by power and privilege. Sabrina, for example, described as “very thick” the attitude of White privilege that permeates the institution at all levels, starting with her president and the Cabinet. Melissa shared the ways that she sees her male colleagues taking credit for the work of others. The CDOs shared examples of negotiating interlocking systems of privilege according to race, gender, institutional function, area of scholarship, class, and language. They experienced their institutions as exclusionary, yet they were tasked to alter systems that are resistant to change and that oppress them and people like them. To do so, they developed, nurtured, and honed their navigational and resistant capital in the service of transformation (Yosso, 2005).

They conceived of their leadership and work as helping the institution integrate diversity holistically, through hiring and promotion of faculty and staff, recruiting and graduating students, teaching and service, and curricular and cocurricular learning. These elements related to one another, as Melissa shared in describing the work of her office to train faculty in inclusive pedagogies that have yielded higher student success and satisfaction. She also wanted to see underrepresented students take advantage of opportunities such as internships, study abroad, and leadership roles. “When you have disparities in students taking advantage of those things, then providing access is not enough” she said, demonstrating an orientation toward Williams & Wade-Golden’s (2007) Diversity Learning Model.

All of the CDOs in this study understood their work through the Diversity Learning Model, which links diversity with the intellectual and academic mission of higher education.

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They wanted all students to benefit from diversity. Donna shared, “We want to make sure that our students are leaving to become more culturally competent, so that they go out into the world and be able to relate to anybody.” She wanted cultural competence to be a hallmark of a Sage University education. The CDOs characterized diversity as an asset, with diverse perspectives contributing to a more critical educational experience for students, more relevant teaching, service, and research from faculty, and better capacity for their universities to achieve their mission. The inclusivity embedded in how they framed their work counters limiting narratives about diversity as deficit or diversity that is focused on singular superstars, and it aligns with literature about the benefits of diversity (Harris & González, 2012; Jean-Marie, 2011).

The CDOs engaged this broad, important work without very many tangible sources of authority to change the university’s course, so they incorporated political and symbolic sources of power in their leadership. Of the sources of political power that Bolman & Deal (2008) described, the CDOs spoke most frequently of expertise, control of rewards and agendas, access to information, referent power, and alliances and networks. They demonstrated political skills such as mapping their terrain, balancing relationships with allies and enemies, and negotiating conflict and compromises. In the symbolic frame, they employed strategic planning, stories, values, and strategic exercise of power most often in order to embed diversity into the organizational culture. Specific strategies included highlighting stories of students of color on the university website, creating diversity councils, sharing information as transparently as possible, gathering and disseminating data, building relationships within and outside the institution, and transactional tools such as approving diversity hires and creating diversity grant programs. Most importantly they focused diligently on leveraging the referent power of the

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president and provost by providing information and feedback and developing strong relationships with these two key individuals. Relationships were the primary strategy both to understand and to navigate dynamics of power and privilege in the exercise of CDO leadership.

In addition to relationships, the CDOs learned to develop thick skins in the process of assuming leadership for diversity initiatives. Sabrina said that CDOs should expect opposition because their presence and work will threaten others in the institution. Turner (2007) noted that women of color in senior leadership find themselves “being more visible and on display, feeling the pressure to make fewer mistakes, finding it harder to gain credibility, and being stereotyped” (p. 21). The women of color CDOs articulated similar challenges, but they also described a particularly difficult dimension of their role: that of being blamed when others in the institution made diversity-related mistakes. Frances stated, “If the president makes a mistake, a diversity mistake, I get blamed, because I wasn’t doing my job. If the provost makes a diversity mistake, the diversity officer gets blamed, because, ‘Weren’t you advising them? Weren’t you telling them?’” Their position often required them to maintain confidentiality, and given the need to cultivate relationships with institutional leaders, the CDOs likely would not shift blame to others. This leaves them in the position of serving as a target. Those with a longer tenure at their institutions may have accumulated a higher degree of social and navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) in the form of relationships and credibility to weather these situations.

### **Implications**

Several implications emerged from this study that provide institutions, CDOs, and researchers with avenues for action and study.

**Institutions Must Understand the Complexity of CDO Role and Provide Visible Support**

CDO leadership is complex, under-defined, and replete with public agendas and hidden mandates. Given current demographics of CDOs, we learn that institutions usually hire people of color and women to lead their diversity efforts as executive-level CDOs and that these CDOs work most frequently at Predominantly White, research institutions (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). These institutions are most likely to operate in a highly decentralized fashion with disciplinary silos that value research and rationality and that prioritize masculine, authoritative ways of leading (Harris & González, 2012), a style of leadership that is out of sync with the relational, values-driven work of CDOs that emerged in my study.

CDOs serve in a facilitative capacity in their institutions as catalysts, persuaders, and relationship-builders, and systems where poor communication and resistance to top-down directives are the norm are not conducive to the integration of diversity across the learning enterprise. Turner, González, & Wong (2011) described the detrimental impact of poor communication for faculty women of color, and I would say that the impact is even more dire for women of color serving as CDOs. Their work depends on creating effective communication channels and relationships, and in the absence of real authority, they must rely on extending the referent power of top leaders across the organization. Women of color in these positions are extreme tokens by virtue of their race, gender, and perhaps other social identities, and they are likely to be a lone example or one of very few women of color in senior leadership. As they work to establish relationships, they must negotiate microaggressions, stereotypes, and negative attitudes about diversity-related work.

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Institutions that hire CDOs must support them publicly and vest them with the imprimatur of the senior leadership, including the president, provost, and board of trustees. This means that those who serve in these senior leadership roles must themselves engage in courageous conversations about the historical and ongoing effects of racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and other forms of oppression. Institutional leaders thus model engagement for others in the institution and provide strong, public commitment for the CDO in her work. The University of Connecticut and other institutions have models in place for universities to emulate.

Where an institution invests its resources communicates what it considers to be important. Generally, the CDOs in my study have been able to build their divisions, largely through their own development and planning. They entered departmental structures that were inadequate to fulfill their mandate, and their build-out sounded somewhat haphazard and vulnerable to budget cuts. Institutions may want to provide the CDOs with time to assess needs before making commitments about budgets and staff, but lack of structure may also communicate low institutional commitment to diversity (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). Although on the one hand, the CDOs were able to exercise agency in developing a vision and implementing a structure, they spent much of their early years at their institutions gathering rather than deploying resources. Structures should be flexible enough for CDOs to respond to needs they identify, but adequate enough upon their arrival to engage actively and without delay in their work. These structures also need to be protected as much as possible from budget cuts; if they are the first to be reduced or eliminated, those decisions convey lack of institutional commitment to the complex work of diversity change.

### **University Presidents and Provosts Should Create Support Systems for CDOs**

In addition to the need for difficult dialogues and a clear understanding from senior leaders about the university's diversity commitment, those to whom the CDO reports – most often the president or provost or equivalent role – should establish support systems for CDOs, particularly those serving in new positions. Given the potential for isolation and tokenization, CDO supervisors should develop a clear networking and mentoring plan for CDOs to access upon entry. This could mean having the president and provost introduce the CDO in personal meetings with deans, administrators, board members, and community leaders, where these individuals can share their diversity-related hopes and, without fear of negative consequences, honestly communicate potential challenges. For example, are there certain departments that deans have had challenges bringing on board for centralized mandates? Do community leaders have diversity-related goals that conflict with the direction of the university? What are the critical – and, equally important to understand, non-starter – diversity priorities for board members? Having the president and provost present for these conversations fills several needs: 1) it facilitates clear communication and access among institutional leaders, the CDO, and a variety of important constituents; 2) it combats isolation that the CDO might otherwise experience; and 3) it alleviates pressure on the CDO to be the lone voice advocating for diversity. Research also indicates that strong and visible institutional support for women and people of color in leadership contributes to reducing resistance that they face in their roles (Lucas & Baxter, 2012).

Four of the CDOs in this study shared challenges they have experienced in identifying and accessing mentors to serve a variety of professional and personal needs. Some of the

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particularly vexing questions that arose from the women of color in this study included: How should I handle my president or provost in this challenging situation? What confidential advice do you have about a tricky personnel situation? Should I confront a microaggression from this person I will need to work with in the future? If I heard “no” the first time around, how should I ask again? Who are potential allies and enemies? What are the personal and professional costs of compromise in this situation?

In the absence of mentors, the CDOs were left to figure out these questions on their own, which contributed to their feeling of isolation. Presidents and provosts need to understand and not feel threatened by the reality that CDOs must have opportunity to share their challenges, questions, and concerns with a trusted network of mentors and advisers. There should be a mentoring plan in place when CDOs arrive, so they can tap immediately into a network of supporters. This will combat isolation and enable their greater effectiveness on behalf of the university.

Institutions that bring on board women of color to lead diversity efforts should recognize that these leaders may also benefit from a strong community of other women of color, White women, and men of color. If universities already have affinity groups for these faculty and staff, the CDO should be able to access them to fill affiliation needs. Granted, the potential for awkward relationships exists, given the CDO’s professional positionality, but the need for identity-related community emerged strongly in this study.

The mentoring and networking plan developed by the president and provost should include adequate support for CDOs to access resources through the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE). The CDOs in this study who were engaged

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with NADOHE spoke consistently of the mentors, networks, and sense of professional identity that they gained from their involvement. Because of the unique nature of CDO positions, it is important that diversity officers be able to develop strong relationships with others in similar roles.

These institutional support systems should be created with an understanding of the extraordinary challenges, trauma, and pain that women of color may experience in enacting their leadership. The CDOs experienced primary trauma in the form of microaggressions, isolation, and marginalization, and they also assumed the secondary trauma of others who are affected by oppressive institutional systems. There are real costs to navigating the tensions inherent in the CDO role, including work-life imbalance, detrimental health impacts, and psychological pain. By putting into place a clear structure of support, as well as a commitment to sharing the responsibility of diversity across a wider range of institutional leaders, institutions can better facilitate the wellness of their CDOs, contributing to their longevity and effectiveness.

### **CDOs Should Learn and Apply a Critical Agency Framework**

The CDOs in the current study all responded positively to describing their work in a framework of critical agency and self-efficacy. Although the concepts of agency are not difficult to grasp, they were new ones for all but one of the CDOs. Jacqueline, who had studied psychology, was familiar with agency theory. I believe that encouraging CDOs to learn and apply a critical agency would benefit their institutions and help them weather challenges they encounter in their roles. “The presence of women of color in mainstream higher education gives them a seat at the table to make contributions to discussions and decisions that will impact them and others, but this requires a commitment or responsibility to be present purposefully and

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consciously” (Jean-Marie, 2011, p. 15). Agency provides the opportunity for women of color to be conscious, present, and prepared in their leadership.

Research demonstrates that a strong agency orientation and high self-efficacy beliefs increase resilience in the face of resistance, the capacity to view obstacles as opportunities, self-referent thought, optimism, future orientation, and receptivity to innovation (Bandura, 1982, 2006). The CDOs in this study all shared experiences that related to these components of agency, and they certainly entered their positions with strong self-efficacy. The presence of women of color in the academy provides an opportunity for transformation “through their conscious deployment of agency” (Jean-Marie, 2011, p. 16). Helping CDOs frame their leadership through a deeper understanding of agency provides additional grounding to transform the culture of higher education.

### **Future Study**

First, there is need to move research of CDO positions beyond analyses of structure and strategies to considering the ways CDOs experience their roles as institutional leaders, diversity cheerleaders and mascots, and (typically) tokenized minorities in higher education. Research that employs a narrative methodology offers a promising way to understand their experiences. Narratives have the potential of assisting CDOs with meaning-making and building community (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Personal narratives from those who experience marginalization are “an important site of resistance. Furthermore, they invent, reform, and refashion personal and collective identity” (Montoya, 1994, p. 210). The alignment of narratives-as-resistance with the symbolic strategy of storytelling as a means of effecting change (Bolman & Deal, 2008) presents a distinctive opportunity to analyze and understand the leadership of women of color. Viewed in

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a critical race and critical feminist framework, narratives from marginalized individuals and communities offer distinctive knowledge that challenges hegemony and exclusion (Sulé, 2011) and also provide a cure for the silence, isolation, and self-blame that often surround the experiences of tokenized groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Narrative research offers discursive spaces, particularly for women of color, for self-definition and for creating multi-dimensional images that go beyond existing stereotypes that limit the range of choices available to marginalized individuals and groups in higher education institutions.

Second, a continued research focus on CDOs from specific identity groups, such as the current study of women of color and Pittard's (2010) study of African American male CDOs, can deepen understanding of particular dynamics and challenges that impact CDOs. Pittard's respondents described the importance of race and class in their early educational experiences, but unlike for the women in my study, these social identities did not arise in the stories they shared about their current work as CDOs. Pittard's research was focused on leadership experiences informed by their personal and professional background, leadership preferences, diversity competencies, select organizational realities and career realities. She may not have asked questions related to the relationship of leadership and social identities. I believe, however, that most of the women in my study would have discussed their social identities no matter how I asked the questions in my interview protocol, because their experiences as extreme tokens make identity an everyday reality for women of color CDOs. Research that directly compares the experiences of men of color and women of color CDOs could yield interesting insights about tokenization, positionality, and agency. It is also important to seek the perspectives of Asian

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American, Pacific Islander, and Native American/American Indian CDOs, who are severely underrepresented among diversity officers.

Finally, research on CDOs should incorporate an agency framework and examine application of the conceptual model for CDO positionality presented in this study. Literature about human agency and occupations demonstrates that greater self-efficacy and a strong sense of agency contribute to longevity, innovation, optimism, resilience, and change (Bandura, 2006). A deeper understanding of the interactions of agency, identity, and institutional context will contribute to the diversity leadership literature and strengthen the ability of universities to recruit and retain CDOs who can establish sustainable structures for change.

### **Conclusions**

My qualitative study of five women of color CDOs sheds light on the lived realities of leaders who experience extreme tokenization by virtue of race, gender, and leadership role. CDO positions are still fairly new in university structures, and current research about these positions focuses on the structures and strategies institutions and CDOs employ. The results of this exploratory study add to current CDO literature by elucidating the experiences of those who have been tasked with systematizing a commitment to diversity, even as they experience marginalization themselves.

Social identities affected how these women experienced their lived reality as extreme tokens, and they had to manage their own expectations, in addition to the impressions of others regarding behavior, competency, and status, in order to fulfill their functional and symbolic roles. They felt compelled to perform their role in ways that often seemed incomplete and sometimes false, as they navigated microaggressions, disagreements with senior leaders,

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cultivation of allies, and expectations of dominant and marginalized communities. They understood and deeply valued the importance of serving as “beacon of light” for those who experience marginalization, even as this dynamic introduced pressure and tension for how they made decisions and shared information.

When I began this research project, I examined my own experiences as a woman of color in diversity leadership, and I reflected on what I had learned about CDO positions through pilot studies conducted in the course of my graduate work. I shared that I began this study with some skepticism that creating a CDO position in and of itself can change an institution’s culture, where deeply-engrained structures of power and influence exert a co-optive pull on diversity change agents. In a different study, I described a dynamic of hiding the CDO in plain view – vesting her with a title but little in the way of influence and power. Throughout this study, I have returned again and again to the question of whether universities intend to institute real change or instead to co-opt women of color to serve as “window dressing” for their diversity efforts, as Sabrina wondered.

After spending time with the women in this study, I suspect that neither extreme is true. Several of these CDOs believe deeply that their institutions are committed to change, and they have been in their positions for long enough to catalyze and witness progress in student outcomes, affirmative hiring, and integration of diversity across the organization, as a result of individual, proxy, and collective agency. CDOs who are newer to their institutions have taken a “wait-and-see” posture to understand the level of organization commitment to diversity. In all cases, though, the potential or reality of co-optation existed, in forms such as speaking up in private but not doing so in public or accepting incremental successes as a sign of progress. I

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describe these examples not to judge or lay blame, but rather to present the complicated reality for women of color who are tasked with diversity leadership. They encounter extraordinary difficulties that cause me to question the costs of asking those who experience such extreme marginalization to serve in CDO roles.

In spite of these challenges, the women in this study shared inspiring stories of exercising critical agency, maintaining a realistic sense of optimism, celebrating the successes of students, faculty, and staff positively impacted by the changes they have instituted, and enacting a style of leadership that resists assimilation and dominant ideologies. The framing of critical agency resonated with all of them, and through practice, they have developed sound strategies to be effective. They also valued the perspective they bring as outsiders within (Collins, 2000), with the skills to understand how both the margins and the center function. Jacqueline described holding onto this position of alterity as a key component in her success in higher education. The CDOs understand that they do not experience privilege as a result of this status, but it provides them with a perspective advantage that others in the institution may not have and that contributes to their capacity to be effective change agents for diversity.

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# AGENCY OF WOMEN OF COLOR CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICERS

## Appendix A

### CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICER QUESTIONNAIRE

**Consent to participate:** (insert informed consent statement here)

#### General Information

Your name:

Preferred pseudonym (if you do not provide a pseudonym, one will be created for you):

#### Educational and Professional Background

Please indicate your academic background below:

Degree Earned	Year Completed (or Anticipated)	Institution Conferring

Please describe your professional path below, beginning with your current position:

Position or Role	Dates in Position or Role	Institution or Organization

Professional organizations in which you participate:

#### Demographic Information

Gender:

Racial or ethnic background:

Age:

Additional demographic information you would like to share:

#### Structure of CDO Position

Title of your position:

Title of your office:

Year CDO position was established:

    Prior names for position, if any:

Year your office was established:

    Prior names for office, if any:

Where are you located in the organizational structure of your institution (check all that apply)?

\_\_\_\_\_ Academic Affairs

\_\_\_\_\_ Student Affairs

\_\_\_\_\_ President's Office

\_\_\_\_\_ Other (please specify)

Title of the person(s) to whom you report:

Do you supervise any departments or offices? Y/N

    If yes, please list them here:

Do you directly supervise any personnel? Y/N

    If yes, please list their positions here:

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Do you hold another faculty (e.g., adjunct, lecturer, tenure, or tenure-track) or administrative appointment? Y/N

If yes, what rank/position and in what area:

Did you teach during the 2010-2011 or 2011-2012 academic years? Y/N

If yes, what courses did you teach:

On-campus committees that you chair:

On-campus committees on which you serve:

Community organizations with which you are involved:

CDO Budget (choose one): Under \$50,000; \$50,000-\$100,000; \$100,000-\$150,000; \$150,000-\$200,000; \$200,000-\$250,000; \$250,000-\$300,000; \$300,000-\$350,000; \$350,000-\$400,000; \$400,000-\$450,000; \$450,000-\$500,000; over \$500,000

What percentage of the budget relates to personnel costs:

What percentage of the budget relates to operating costs:

Has the CDO budget increased or decreased in recent years? In what ways?

To what do you attribute those changes?

Please indicate the degree to which you are engaged with the following functions in your institution (1=not involved at all; 3=moderately involved; 5=highly involved):

Student Recruitment

New Student Orientation

Student Retention Initiatives

Faculty Recruitment

New Faculty Orientation

Faculty Retention Initiatives

Staff Recruitment

New Staff Orientation

Staff Retention Initiatives

Diversity Training

Fundraising

Campus Climate Assessments

Other Assessments

Community Outreach

Institutional Strategic Planning

Institutional Budget Decision-Making

Research Related to Diversity

Curriculum Planning or Development

Human Resources

EO/AA Compliance

Other functions (please list)

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### **Institutional Information**

Name of institution:

Please list other diversity offices or functions that exist at the institution:

Student demographics

- Total number of undergraduate students

- Total number of graduate and professional students

- Percentage students of color

- Percentage White students

- Percentage international students

- Percentage women

Faculty demographics

- Total number of faculty

- Percentage faculty of color

- Percentage White faculty

- Percentage international faculty

- Percentage women

Staff demographics

- Total number of staff

- Percentage staff of color

- Percentage White staff

- Percentage international staff

- Percentage women

**Appendix B**  
**CDO Interview Protocol**

CDO Background

- How have your earlier experiences prepared you for your current position?
- What interested you in this position?
- How have you developed the cultural competency needed in this role?
- What are your professional development resources?
- What professional organizations are you involved with?
- To whom do you look for mentorship?
- What about this position is most satisfying or rewarding to you? What is least satisfying or rewarding or most challenging?
- Where do you see yourself professionally in the next five years?

Institutional Context

- How would you describe your institution's commitment to diversity?
- How does the institution describe this commitment? How would someone unfamiliar with the university know about its diversity commitment?
- To what degree is diversity integrated in these areas: institutional planning, decision-making, curriculum, budgeting?
- What are the diversity priorities for the institution?
- What is an area where you think your institution struggles with regard to diversity?
- How does the institution measure progress or success?
- What mechanisms exist to assess progress with regard to diversity issues?

CDO Position

- What goals was the CDO position created to address?
- What can you share about the process for creating the CDO position? Where did your institution look for models in creating the CDO role?
- How has the position evolved?
- What is the structure of the office? Has that changed over time?
- How would you describe your job to someone unfamiliar with it?
- How well-understood is the CDO position in your institution? Where does ambiguity exist?
- You indicated that you report to \_\_\_\_\_. How does that reporting structure work?
- How would you describe the placement and stature of your office in the institution?
- What kinds of institutional decisions are you involved with making? Where else would you like to be engaged? What are the reasons you are not engaged in these areas?
- What resources are available to you and your office? To what extent are your resources adequate to fulfill the expectations of your office? What additional resources would be helpful?
- What are key relationships that you have established to fulfill your role?
- What is your relationship with the other diversity offices or capacities in the institution?

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- Use the list of functions from the questionnaire to probe regarding allocation of time, resources, etc. in these areas. What are key strategies that you employ in these areas?
- How do you measure progress or success in your position? How does this compare with how your supervisor measures progress or success?
- What are barriers or obstacles that you encounter in your work? Please describe a specific situation when you have encountered an obstacle.
- Where do you encounter the most resistance? What are the reasons for this resistance?
- How do you see the presence of CDO capability impacting the culture or the functioning of your institution?

### Self-Efficacy

- To what degree do you believe that you can impact the culture of inclusion in your institution? Can you describe an example of how you have influenced the campus diversity culture?
- How have you been effective in meeting organizational goals?
- How do you deal with setbacks? Can you describe an example?
- Please describe a situation when you've had to balance competing priorities. How did you do this? What were the outcomes of this situation?
- In what ways do you find your diversity work to be rewarding?
- In what ways do you find your diversity work to be draining or discouraging?
- How do you maintain your energy? How do you balance your professional and personal selves?
- How do you define CDO leadership?
- I'm going to read a definition of human agency, and I'd like you to talk about how this relates to your work as CDO. How have you exercised agency?
- How and where has your exercise of agency been constrained? How have you navigated these constraints?

### Social Identities

- I have chosen to focus this study on women of color serving as CDOs. Research indicates the impact of these identities on women of color serving as university presidents and faculty, whereas little has been written about whether these identities impact the work of CDOs.
- How do you identify in terms of race and gender? How have these identities influenced your work in colleges and universities? Probe for areas of study, motivation, chosen work.
- How, if at all, would you say that your identity as a woman of color influences your experience as CDO? What informs how you respond to this question? Can you describe a time when these identities were a factor?
- What is the gender and racial composition of the people with whom you work – supervisor, colleagues, campus allies?
- How would you describe your personal and professional relationships with other people of color, women, and women of color on campus?

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- What advice would you give to someone considering a Chief Diversity Officer position? How, if at all, might this advice change if the person were a woman of color?
- Could you please share your reflections about the following quote: “While being in the middle is true of all leaders, people in token positions must negotiate the many challenges of being visible as a representative and invisible as an individual” (Smith, 2009, p. 268).
- What leadership qualities are valued in your institution? In what ways might these qualities be gendered or racialized?

### Conclusion

- What other information would you like to share?