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Higher Education Student Affairs (HESA) practitioners play important roles in supporting their campus communities, specifically students, when bias incidents occur on campus. These HESA practitioners often hold the same minoritized identities as students impacted by bias and see their work in higher education as advancing missions of inclusion and social justice. While not all HESA practitioners understand the work as the latter, the participants in this study all believed that diversity, equity, and inclusion work is “everyone’s work” in higher education and felt their roles were meaningful to students and their institutions. This qualitative research study examines HESA practitioners’ experiences at the intersections of their institutions, identities, and bias response work.

The goals of this study included understanding: (a) the experiences of HESA practitioners and the impact on their well-being; (b) HESA practitioners’ relationships to social justice; and (c) how HESA practitioners’ social locations and identities influence and are influenced by supporting students impacted by bias. Eleven administrators, including two who also held faculty roles across ten functional areas, participated in two one-on-one interviews and nine of the eleven participants attended a virtual focus group with other participants. Semi-structured interview questions were informed by the participants’ experiences throughout the study. Participants stories were analyzed using a queer theoretical framework and highlight their multidimensional experiences and intersections of bias, DEI work, their identities, their institutions, legislative challenges, and overall goals as educators. The work concludes with implications for research to amplify participants’ experiences as agents of institutions tasked with carrying out institutional missions when their own identities are often impacted.

Keywords: Bias, Bias Response, DEI, Higher Education, Student Affairs, Practitioners, Identity

ARE WE “SOCIAL JUSTICE WARRIORS:” HESA PRACTITIONERS’ EXPERIENCES SUPPORTING STUDENTS IMPACTED BY BIAS

by

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

> Power at its worst makes itself invisible. The notion that education is neutral is one way of people who have dominant power making it invisible and making propaganda itself incapable of being seen.
>
> —Giroux

I stood in front of a group of first-year students, elated to have the opportunity to talk about calling out and interrupting bias on campus. I remember what I wore and that it was a sunny, warm, not-too-humid day, a late summer day for the south. Before that day, I spent months shaping an in-class workshop to bring discussions about bias on campus to the fore and have real conversations with students about what bias was, how we were impacted by it, and what they could do to intervene; I was going to create a culture shift! This presentation came after months of convincing leadership that talking about bias would not make it happen more frequently, and just because students did not report bias at high rates, we certainly could not assume it was not happening in our affluent, private, predominantly white institution (PWI). So, campus leadership approved my in-class workshop and provided me with no staff support, budget, or no long-term commitment. I was going to champion a more inclusive campus alone, or so I thought. As a queer, white, first-generation woman educator who served in a Title IX role, I started this workshop with the hope that I could make an impact and that I could encourage students to speak up and advocate for themselves and others.

As I stood before that group of students and led them in a discussion about how to intervene, I asked them about barriers they faced intervening in the past. One student offered a barrier they faced was being perceived as “a faggot.” My heart dropped, then started racing. I froze. I did not know what to do. As my queer body stood in front of that room, facing a group of

college men who sat in the back of the room and giggled at what another student—the only Black masculine person in the room—I had no idea what to do. My thoughts raced as I wanted to speak up because I assumed there were other queer folks in the room, but I did not want to come across as scolding the only Black student in the room. I also knew that I generally did not feel safe on campus as a queer person myself, so I thought that I had to be calculated in my response without outing myself. Even today, I wish I had responded differently. I wish I had found some way to emerge from shock, silence, and fear. However, my visceral reaction also inspired this research study, and I wondered if other minoritized staff experienced bias while also trying to prevent it or supporting students who had similar experiences.

A few years later, at another institution, I was approached by campus leaders to cocreate a bias response process for the University. Already quite different from the experience I had at previous institutions, I was excited and ready to engage in the work to create a process and develop a team to support students who experienced bias. This invitation came at the peak of the COVID-19 global pandemic and about halfway through my coursework as a doctoral student. I thought it was the perfect time to engage in praxis as an educator and learner. While conducting this study and writing this dissertation, I was part of the team I created and experienced both pride and uneasiness about the role I likely played in sustaining equity. As such, aspects of this experience called me to ask the questions posed in my research. The bias team leaders (including me) were folks with minoritized identities: a queer white woman and a Black man. Through the ideation and implementation process, we were able to advocate for the University to hire a full-time bias support staff member to lead the team. That position sat under layers of the University structure, was underpaid, and lacked a steady budget to support the outreach and education

efforts. There was no structure to monetarily compensate the team members who volunteered to support students, and most members hold one or more minoritized identities.

While cocreating the team and process for over a year, I was not provided any additional compensation or support to complete my full-time duties, even when I asked. I felt torn between wanting to create the beginning of something I believed could change our campus culture and the nagging feeling I was only doing all this work so the institution could demonstrate its commitment to equity without changing any of its practices. The tension between wanting to create something that lived outside the "business as usual" model and feeling like a tool of the institution often made me feel exploited and sometimes worse: like a traitor to my doctoral program and my integrity as a social justice educator. As I engaged in this process, I wondered if others shared similar experiences where they have been invited to support students or create processes. Still, administrators were met by administrators with shoulder shrugs or budget excuses when they called out the structural issues or inequity. I wondered if they were queer or held other minoritized identities and had to sit in a room with a student with similar identities and act as an agent of the institution in ways that felt in conflict with who they were and what they valued out of fear of compromising their job. I wondered what this meant for us social justice educators, cultural foundations scholars, and change agents.

These encounters shaped my curiosity about this research and my role as a researcher. Those moments where I, as a queer white woman engaged in diversity work, felt exposed, vulnerable, and like the work was way bigger than me, was why I wanted to learn more about others' experiences. How have these moments shaped them? What if they were the staff person whom the queer student sitting quietly in the room confided in about their experience? How were they holding that information? How was it impacting them? Most importantly, I constantly

struggled to hold the tension between feeling that equity work was essential and wondering how impactful it was if the institution was unwilling to change the systems that buoy or tolerate bias incidents.

Higher Education Student Affairs Practitioners' Encounters With Students and Bias

It is important to situate the key players in campus bias incidents to frame this project. They are higher education student affairs (HESA) practitioners, students who experience bias on campus (sometimes referred to as a complainant), students who enact bias (sometimes referred to as a respondent), and how they encounter one another. As higher education aims to create processes to support students, the multiple ways HESA practitioners and students experience bias occur frequently and beyond formal processes. Formal and informal reporting options are available to impacted students. This project assumes bias incidents occur daily and throughout students' experiences in higher education. As such, the likelihood HESA practitioners learn about bias on campus is high as they engage with students impacted by bias in advising meetings, counseling support meetings, student organization meetings, campus events, and more. These encounters may be via email, in-person, and virtual meetings with students. Or, like me, in a presentation about interrupting bias.

In formal processes, a report form is likely available for students to document their experiences with bias incidents. Such report forms are sent to HESA practitioners who either support students impacted by bias as part of their paid role at the institution or do so as an additional responsibility (i.e., diversity centers, dean of students offices, Title IX offices) and are often part of a formal bias response team (Miller, Guida, et al, 2018a). After a student completes a report form, a HESA practitioner typically contacts them as a follow-up to the report. The student is invited to meet with the HESA practitioner to discuss what happened and what they

need for support, and often share hopes for how the institution might respond to the incident. Infrequently, the HESA practitioner may contact the person who caused the harm, whichdepends on the wishes of the impacted person or complainant. The person who caused the harm, or the respondent, is not required to meet with the practitioner as bias response processes are not punitive and are voluntary.

The HESA practitioners who review reported bias incidents might be the only person designated to support students or may be part of a larger, cross-departmental team. If they are part of a larger bias response team, they may encounter the student in a group of other HESA practitioners. In this group, the goal is to provide a more comprehensive array of support for the student. Sometimes, a bias team member may be selected to respond to a report based on their identity. For example, in incidents where a queer student is impacted by bias, the team leader may ask a queer HESA practitioner to be part of the team's response and support the student.

In informal interactions, HESA practitioners may encounter students who experience bias in everyday meetings. Advisors may learn about a student's experience with bias when they meet to discuss academic performance. Diversity educators who provide programming for students may learn about a student's experience with bias at a drop-in meeting or campus event. HESA practitioners who hold minoritized identities may learn about students' experiences with bias because the student feels comfortable telling them if they share the same or similar identity. It is essential to acknowledge that students may not be aware of formal reporting practices at their institution and may report bias to any HESA practitioner at any time. In these cases, the practitioner may offer the student the option to formally report the incident to the team/designated staff member if one exists.

The institution's organization also plays an important role in how the practitioner may encounter supporting students who experience bias. There are no formal standards or requirements about how to build bias teams or processes, or who should play a role. Therefore, bias response processes and teams vary from campus to campus. Some considerations of bias response processes include whether a formal team is needed or if convening one is realistic for a particular campus. Additionally, campuses must consider who should lead a formal team, the office's physical location with considerations for student accessibility and visibility, the leaders' role in the overall institution structure, and their access to others with social capital and power (LePeau et al, 2016). Considerations about the teams' role in influencing campus policies and procedures are important in discussions about bias response. Some institutions forego teams and designate one person to support students who experience bias such as a dean with the term, diversity, in their title, someone hired only to support students, or staff in other equity roles. Again, it is important to consider what access, power, and influence this person and their role have on larger institutional policies. In other words, are they simply being asked to fill a role, or are they being asked to facilitate change? Finally, it is important to remember that HESA practitioners may be asked to serve on formal bias response teams based on their identities so students see themselves reflected. As such, students may expect HESA practitioners with the same or other minoritized identities to empathize or agree with them, placing HESA practitioners in challenging situations as they are called to support the student and act as agents of the institution.

Troubling the Term Bias

Throughout this project, and broadly in higher education, the term *bias* is used to describe the wide range of harm, harassment, and microaggressions students experience through racism,

homophobia, xenophobia, transphobia, and ableism. Despite my misgivings about bias as an "umbrella" term, I use it in this project because of its wide use in HESA. As such, the call for participants captured HESA practitioners' stories in the recruitment phase who more readily identify themselves with bias support staff over microaggression support or antiracist staff. While I had hoped many would identify with the latter, my concern with excluding bias as an umbrella term is that I would not be able to engage readers who do not consider their work as social justice, for example, but have the power to affect change. Additionally, one of the research questions addressed how HESA practitioners name their work. Throughout the study and as discussed in the findings, participants used the terms bias, bias response, DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion), and inclusion interchangeably.

Still, I trouble the use of the word bias early, as it is important to be mindful of how language can be a vehicle to either amplify or diminish the human experience. In this case, I acknowledge bias used as a singular term to describe harm, harassment, and microaggressions minimizes such experiences. As such, it is relevant to keep in mind how such minimizing—intentional or not—impacts the students and educators who experience these and other forms of oppression. Throughout the literature on bias incidents in higher education, bias incidents were often described by authors as singular, isolated events (Davis & Harris, 2016). However, this project recognizes that such incidents are not anomalies or one-time occurrences linked to larger structural and cultural beliefs about groups of historically marginalized populations. To assume "bias incidents" can be addressed by only responding to the harm done in a single incident misses the point as it avoids addressing larger, systemic changes needed to create cultures intolerant of harm, harassment, and microaggressions. Thus, this project is premised on the

assumption that bias response processes only seek to address single incidents rather than structural harm.

Additionally, and through reification, institutions of higher education have attempted to make invisible the ways neoliberalism, white supremacy, and capitalism inhibit educators' ability to facilitate meaningful change that increases access to education for all students. I offer that reification also overlooks the HESA practitioners aiming to create socially just learning environments. Following hooks' (2003) work on critical hope, we must be ever-conscious of the ways we reproduce inequity and work intentionally to change "our educational system so that schooling is not the site where students are indoctrinated to support imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy or any ideology" (p. xiii). In other words, I offer that harm, harassment, and microaggressions are normalized in higher education intentionally to sustain systems of domination and reinforce indoctrination. Institutions will go to great lengths to respond to racism or homophobia by creating multicultural centers, or policies prohibiting harassment, for example. However, they do little to redress the cultural norms that necessitate such centers and staff in the first place.

Furthermore, "How can we expect our schools to be antiracist sites if, as educators, we fail to understand how racism is intertwined with policy, which directly impacts how our schools operate daily?" (Diem & Welton, 2021, p. xi). As such, I conducted this study with the belief that creating antibias policies and procedures does not mean culture change occurs. Thus, when I use the term, bias, I refer to the repeated, insidious, and harmful social injustices, including microaggressions, that staff, students, and faculty experience daily in higher education.

HESA Practitioners' Experiences and Their Link to Bias

Exploring the stories and experiences of HESA practitioners who support students impacted by bias matters because many seek to impact social change through education. However, if we are operating in systems and structures that prevent us from doing such work, what is the impact on our well-being? How might our work be impacted if other practitioners do not see themselves as social justice educators? As a project of cultural foundations, specifically in this work, I sought to uncover and name the complexity in and at the core of responding to bias incidents in education and, as such, doing "diversity work" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 22). Because cultural foundations scholars are concerned with challenging and changing power structures in education, exploring the emotional, physical, and embodied experiences of HESA practitioners who respond to bias incidents elucidates how power operates in such response while recognizing the historical legacies of inclusion and exclusion (hooks, 1994). I propose campus structures for responding to and educating the campus community about bias are not neutral but rooted in higher education's historical, philosophical, and sociological stories.

My concern for how HESA practitioners experience bias support work is connected to education in multiple ways. While I understand not all educators understand their work as bias support work, much less as social justice work, I believe education is social change work. Those who are part of the education system can facilitate such change. In other words, this research was linked to education because HESA practitioners who support students impacted by bias and respond to campus bias incidents operate in a larger educational structure where they may be maintaining systems of oppression, working to challenge them, or a combination of the two. And, because incidents of bias on campus are connected to societal injustices, educational institutions are responsible for responding. Their response is done through HESA practitioners.

Methods Overview

My connection to this project was personal; my goal was to connect to other HESA practitioners so we could tell the stories of our relationship to power, privilege, and oppression through bias response work. I am hopeful that through telling these stories, we can more thoughtfully and critically understand our relationship with the institutions where we work and "work on" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 5). More specifically, I engaged participants in examining their roles as agents of the institution and what impact the relationship has on their emotional health and well-being. To learn more about and elicit the stories of HESA practitioners who engage in supporting students impacted by bias, I explored the following research questions:

1. How do HESA practitioners define their role or responsibility in responding to bias on their campus?
2. How do HESA practitioners' social locations influence how they experience their role in responding to bias incidents?
3. What are HESA practitioners' thoughts about how or if bias response and social justice are interrelated?
4. What is the impact of HESA practitioners' role in responding to bias on their physical and emotional well-being/health?

Through this research, I aimed to showcase the stories of HESA practitioners who support students impacted by bias in higher education. I believe their experiences holding the stories of students facing racial, gender, sexual, religious, and disability bias were worth telling. Their stories about how they show up daily to support students may help unearth how reification and neoliberalism work in higher education, specifically in equity and diversity. Just as neoliberalism condones "banking" education (Freire, 2018, p. 78) and trains students to be docile

learners, it also impacts staff. Individuals often consider bias response as a process, an agreement between the institution and its students, but seldom tell the story of the HESA practitioners or agents of such methods, regardless of the formality of an institutional process. I contend there is much to gain from the stories shared here.

The methods for investigating HESA practitioners' experiences supporting students impacted by bias included three opportunities for participants to share their experiences, with all participants engaged in at least one round of interviews. All participants were invited to participate in a first interview for this research project. The first interview focused on understanding how participants situate themselves in their work in HESA and bias response, their social locations, and how they defined their bias response work within the institutional context in which they work. The second round was a focus group to facilitate conversations among participants about their experiences doing bias response work. The goal of the focus group was to modify the questions for the focus group based on the preceding participant interviews by using asking new questions based on what participants shared rather than solely relying on what I thought should be included. Finally, they were asked to participate in a second individual interview to share their personal experiences on the impact of bias response work on their well-being.

For the second interview, participants were invited to participate in arts-based research to narrate their experiences using photos or poetry. By inviting participants to engage in the research project beyond their narrative experiences, I intended to offer an opportunity for participants to show or explicate their experience beyond narrative only. Two of the 11 participants participated in this form of storytelling; one provided a found poem and another shared a photo that represented where they felt calm. These submissions allowed me to ask

questions about how they interpreted or experienced their submissions about their work in bias response. While I intended for the participants to express their stories beyond narrative and be a powerful moment in the research, the lack of participation from most inhibited deeper meaning making.

Subjectivity/Positionality Statement

> The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility, we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as a practice of freedom. (hooks, 1994, p. 207)

I am a self-identified social justice educator and HESA educator. Like hooks (1994), my classroom is my office where I meet one-on-one with students who experience sexual violence, homophobia, racism, or just need extra support. My classroom is the meeting room where I gather with my teammates and colleagues to ideate, explore, build, and challenge systems and structures. The social justice and HESA educator parts of me are not independent of each other and operate in tandem. Across my experiences as an educator and learner, I have been shaped and influenced by the late bell hooks to the extent that I cannot name my positionality and relationship to education without invoking her. Many years ago, for the first time, I read one of hooks' (1989) essays, *Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness*, where she wrote about her experience as a learner. These words continue to echo in my heart such that I would be remiss not to include them in a description of my own relationship to learning:

> At times, home is nowhere. At times, one only knows extreme estrangement and alienation. Then, home is no longer just one place. It is locations. Home is a place where

> one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference. One confronts and accepts dispersal, fragmentation as part of the construction of a new order that reveals more fully where we are, who we can become, and order that does not demand forgetting. (hooks, 1989, p. 36)

Home and all its fragmentations, as hooks (1989) offered, are my classrooms, office, and meeting rooms. In these spaces, I have discovered new ways of seeing reality literally and figuratively. My journey as an educator has taken me from the rural south to New Orleans and Oakland, and back. In these locations, I have been challenged and invited to exercise my education as the practice of freedom, while troubling who gets to be freed (Biesta, 2013) through education along the way.

Like hooks (1989), I have been changed by education's role in my life. In education, I have expanded "beyond boundaries" (p. 10) even when "transgressing [them] was frightening" (p. 9). Education—both as a learner and educator—has affirmed, alienated, and been the place where I found home and discomfort in ambiguity. Across my experiences as a learner and educator, I have transgressed boundaries as an outsider. For example, I am a Title IX administrator, where I oversee compliance and investigate and support students, faculty, and staff who experience sex and gender-based harassment. I have done this work throughout my career in both formalized and unassuming roles, including as an academic advisor, where I volunteered to advise gender-diverse student organizations, and as an Assistant Dean of Students where I cocreated a bias response process at my institution and served as a member of a formal bias education and support team. These are just a few examples of how I experience my work as a HESA professional, as social justice worker, and as a "diversity worker" (Ahmed, 2012). Like Ahmed (2012), "the experience of working 'on' the institutions' 'at' which I worked also

brought my own thinking closer to home" (p. 5). Therefore, my relationship with this topic was personal, and rather than separate myself from this project, I leaned toward the belief that the personal is political (Lorde, 1978) and educational. As a critical theory researcher, I "see research as a political act because it not only relies on values systems but challenges values systems" (Usher, 1996 as cited in Glesne, 2016, p. 11). I do not experience my work as an educator as benign or neutral, and I believe deeply that my actions—whether intentional or not—influence students and colleagues.

My social location has also influenced my subjectivity on this topic. I am a white, queer, southern, first-generation college student from a poor and working-class family. As such, this project was always filtered through my social locations. I understand that my work as a researcher is constantly seeking what is not readily obvious (Felman, 1987) or clear to me as I make connections, see patterns, and share the stories of future participants. I live at the intersection of many social locations that influence how I show up as a researcher. The most salient is my whiteness and queerness, as I view the world through a queer theory lens to consider life beyond binaries and in multiplicities. In queer theory, "the question a reader might ask is, who am I becoming through the interpretive claims I make upon another and myself?" (Pinar, 1998, p. 225). Through a researcher's lens, questions of becoming feel like permission to be with research participants more openly and remove the pressure to locate Knowing with absolution. Potts and Brown (2015) also challenged me to reconsider Knowing and Knowledge, suggesting, "Knowledge is not neutral or benign because it is produced through power relations" (p. 19). Thus, exploring my positionality as a white woman specifically was vital to understanding my experiences and actions as a researcher. Examining, reflecting, and

challenging my whiteness as an educator, researcher, learner, and human are integral to my identity.

Throughout my career as an educator, I have engaged in antiracist and gender-inclusive practices. Namely, I became engaged in bias response work nearly 10 years ago, during which time I had the opportunity to influence culture change at departmental and institutional levels. Through bias response work, I remained connected to issues that felt important and often personal to me. As such, the inspiration for this research project stemmed from my investment in (a) self-reflection as a white woman in bias response work, (b) a desire to learn more about others' potential personal connections to and the impact of bias response work on them, and finally, (c) a deep desire to bring the stories of these agents to the fore and make clear the human impact of bias response work on campuses. My goal was to be an anti-oppressive researcher as I chose "to do research that challenges dominant ideas about research processes and research outcomes" (Potts & Brown, 2015, p. 19) to create congruence with who I *aim* to be as a researcher and educator and *how* I practice research and education. In this project, I attempted to move from simply acknowledging my positionality as a researcher to actively engaging it and putting my reading and praxis to work.

As a researcher, I was interested in facilitating opportunities for people to make meaning of their experiences. I believe research can expose, provoke, and challenge previously held beliefs about what we thought was true. It opens the opportunity for multiplicity rather than staying closed in our own singular experiences. Research is not about showcasing something I have seen or experienced, but looking for the connections through my experiences and others so we can tell the story together. I research because it is not about searching for facts or truth but eliciting stories and experiences. I was interested in how the participants made sense of their

experiences supporting students impacted by bias through their stories, including narrative, photography, and poetry.

Epistemology

As a learner, I make meaning of the world by applying stories, readings, and quotes to my own experiences. I seek connections with others through their stories and can easily find connections and commonalities even through differences while simultaneously appreciating others' subjectivity. I am interested in becoming more of who I am and, in turn, others becoming more of who they are through our interactions (Biesta, 2013). I believe our experiences connect us; thus, although we have individual experiences of specific events, we are all impacted by them. Through this connection, we can resist reification and learn "more than [we] already contain" (Levinas, 1969, p. 51) as cited in Biesta, 2013, p. 48). I make meaning of my worldview and experiences through my connection to others and believe it is important to cultivate meaningful relationships with family, friends, colleagues, and community. As a researcher, I similarly seek connections across stories and want to understand why some connections are clearer than others or why some do not occur. As I attempt to get to know the world through others, I also invite the possibilities provided by theory. For me, theory offers possible solutions for change, belonging, and social justice difficulties. I am leaning toward openness and the possibility that there is always more to explore and learn as I evolve through reading, writing, relationships, and community.

When I think about the question, "How do I know what I know?, I think of my mother. Raised by a single parent, I often considered my mother as omnipotent when I was younger. She regularly talked candidly about life lessons she learned and had a deep desire to impart her wisdom. When I was young, I asked her if she could "tell me everything there is to know so that

I could just skip having to go to school." While I now know my mother is also a human journeying across life and its lessons and does not know everything, I recognize as an adult that her storytelling and frequently dispensed advice informed how I came to know the world. Through her, I learned to value lived experience as a form of knowledge. I have given little credence to "traditional" or colonial ways of knowing, (i.e., getting good grades in school, standardized testing) and the like (Yosso, 2005).

Definitions

The definitions in this section provide additional context and background for this research project. I aimed to contextualize how higher education refers to bias incidents on campus and, as discussed earlier, highlight what using the term bias excludes in conversations of diversity, social justice, and inclusion.

Antiracism: Antiracism means opposed to racism (Meriam-Webster, n.d.).

Bias: Bias is defined as prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair" (Oxford Languages, n.d.).

Bias education: Bias education is the educational response to bias incidents that seek to garner community conversation, create proactive learning opportunities, elicit restorative processes, and focus on community impact versus a single incident.

Bias incident: A bias incident is conduct, speech or expression motivated, in whole or in part, by bias or prejudice. It differs from a hate crime in that no criminal activity is involved (Teaching Tolerance, n.d.).

Bias response: Bias response is a response insinuating a reactive response to a bias incident that has been reported. Bias response refers to any response by an individual or department at a college or university.

Bias response teams: Bias response teams (BRTs) are institutional committees designed to receive and respond to reports of bias incidents, hate speech, and hate crimes on college campuses (LePeau et al., 2016; McDermott, 2013 as cited in Miller, Guida, et al., 2018b). Different campuses may use variations of this name such as bias incident team, bias team, bias education team, and more.

Diversity: Diversity, according to Karunaratne et al. (2016), is described in two ways. First, there is "'diversity of difference' where valuing diversity is understood only as valuing differences. The second sense is 'diversity for equity.' It is concerned about 'the differences that differences make' or inequalities that arise from salient differences'" (Owen, 2009, p. 187 as cited in Karunaratne et al., 2019, p. 4). As Karunaratne et al. (2016) explained, "although the term diversity can tokenize nondominant groups and norm dominant ones . . . adopting "social justice and inclusion . . . seeks to disrupt this trend" (p. 4). Therefore, bias education as social justice education seeks to elevate college and university responses to bias incidents beyond a single event. Additionally, rather than foreclosing on a definition of the term, Ahmed's (2012) critique of diversity illuminated how the "arrival of the term diversity involves the departure of other (perhaps more critical) terms, including 'equality,' 'equal opportunities,' and 'social justice'" (p. 1). This distinction is relevant to HESA practitioners' experience in diversity work. It acknowledges that social justice moves beyond diversity as the term itself has perhaps lost its connection to instigating institutional change.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion: The term diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is broadly defined as:

> a catch-all term for corporate initiatives, strategies, and practices that support a diverse workplace. DEI programs strive to create inclusive environments that value the individual

> differences of [individuals] and provide equitable access to opportunities. These programs aim not only to welcome and accept people with different backgrounds, opinions, and abilities but also to provide these individuals with the resources they need and remove barriers to success. (Williams, 2023, para. 6)

Hate crime: A hate crime is "a crime of violence, property damage, or threat that is motivated in whole or in part by an offender's bias based on race, religion, ethnicity, national origin, gender, physical or mental disability, or sexual orientation" (Wessler & Moss, 2001, p. 17 as cited in Warywold & Lancaster, 2020, p. 155).

Higher education student affairs: The field known as student affairs in higher education is made up of professionals dedicated to supporting the academic and personal development of individuals attending college or university. Other common names for this sector include student services, student success or student personnel. Those who work in the field specialize in assisting students with a wide array of aspects related to the pursuit of a post-secondary education (Best College Reviews, 2022).

HESA for social justice: HESA for Social Justice are HESA practitioners who engage in "a social justice motivation and praxis [that] consist[s] of the awareness of, understanding of, and skills for disrupting the systems of oppression that cause inequity in society" (Karunaratne et al., 2016, p. 3).

Social justice: As defined by Bell (1997):

> Social Justice is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable, and all members are psychologically safe and secure. (p. 3)

Conclusion

As I embarked on this research journey, my goal was to truthfully retell the stories of HESA practitioners whose voices are omitted from the conversations about social justice, equity, and inclusion in higher education. Higher education should be more concerned with HESA practitioners' well-being, stories, contributions, and desire for change. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the relevant and current literature. Here, I will show how higher education primarily concerns students' experiences of bias incidents. Although some research has suggested more focus should be placed on HESA practitioners (Ahmed, 2012; Anderson, 2018), the landscape for understanding HESA practitioners' experiences is sparse. Chapter 3 provides a detailed explanation of the methods I used in this project. Within the methodology, I gave the research questions, my coding and analysis process, and ethics considered. I then addressed the strengths and limitations of the study.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

In the last 20 years, increased attention on colleges and universities' campus-based incidents of hate, bias, and violence have become more visible. Taking, for example, the proliferation of student groups hosting racially themed Halloween parties, focus on campus-based responses to sexual harassment, and the more recent racial reckoning initiated by the murder of George Floyd in 2020, "institutions with professed 'commitments to diversity' have felt a new sort of pressure to have well-organized mechanisms in place for responding to incidents" (Hughes, 2013, p. 126). Additionally, "schools or colleges rank third among locations where hate crimes take place" (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2011 in LePeau et al., 2016). Therefore, as formalized processes for addressing campus hate, bias, and violence have increased, so too have questions about whether these formalized processes or bias response teams influence structural and social change or maintain existing racial hierarchies in higher education. As such, my research interests lay with how the educators charged with responding to such campus incidents experience these formalized structures, as "bias incident policies and actual responses—to racism, for example—while seemingly caring and progressive, can serve to conceal the ways that higher education is invested and implicated in the racial order" (Hughes, 2013, p. 128). More specifically, if higher education student affairs (HESA) practitioners believe their role in responding to bias incidents and educating the campus community creates social change on campus, this research focuses on learning more about the impact on their well-being and identities if the institution only uses them to fulfill their commitment to inclusion and diversity without taking action to change the environment that tolerates the bias, hate, and violence in the first place.

There remains much debate in higher education and research about who is responsible for educating college and university communities about diversity, inclusion, social justice, and bias incidents. Student conduct offices host formal and sometimes punitive student adjudication processes for many campuses. However, many bias incidents do not rise to the level of violating an institution's policy. As such, "less serious incidents of bias may still cause the victim to feel physically and psychologically unsafe. This concern is why institutions generate alternative response mechanisms such as victim assistance resources and BRTs [bias response teams]" (U.S. Department of Justice, 2003 in LePeau et al., 2016, p. 114). Conversely, campus-wide diversity programming and training responsibilities have been relegated to multicultural departments in the past.

To combine campus education and bias response, higher education professional organizations have called on campuses to create cross-departmental and institutional education programs, including creating bias response teams and cross-departmental committees to create cocurricular diversity training programs and support mechanisms for students experiencing bias. The research remains unclear about who is served through these teams, and as a focus of this study, I was concerned with how responding to these incidents affected the HESA practitioners charged with supporting students impacted by bias incidents, regardless of whether the institution has created a formal team. While a range of research exists on the experiences of HESA practitioners serving in full-time diversity education roles, there is minimal research on the educators' identity intersection and experiences responding to campus-based bias incidents more broadly. The voluntary nature of bias response teams, coupled with the lack of universally accepted expectations, funding, formal positions of power, and the nature of bias response work,

offers an opportunity to understand how these factors combined with an individual practitioner's social locations, impacts their experiences responding to bias incidents.

I was specifically concerned with the individuals and bias team members who are also HESA practitioners and serve in a Student Affairs or adjacent role, as some researchers propose that HESA practitioners who respond to student crises, including bias incidents and hate crimes, experience "secondary traumatic stress, or 'stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person'" (Figley, 1999, p. 10 as cited in Lynch & Glass, 2019, p. 1). While participation or membership on bias teams varies from campus to campus, it generally includes representation from Dean of Students Offices, Title IX Offices, Diversity Centers, faculty from relevant disciplines, and Accessibility Resources Offices (Warywold & Lancaster, 2020). Additionally, Anderson's (2020) ethnographic study on diversity work at a large public institution suggested that institutions use educators' trauma as a resource for institutional gain and that "relieving diversity workers of the burden of being the only ones advocating for change and training the rest of campus could prevent situations where diversity workers are stretched thin and are . . . using their own trauma as an institutional resource" (p. 11). Other factors considered in team membership range from one's positionality as a resource to students, proximity to diversity and inclusion work, and a faculty position in a related area.

Alternately, LePeau et al. (2016) urged that "campus educators need to consider their multiple identities with student identities" and "be reflexive and continue with ongoing training" (p. 126). Regarding HESA graduate preparation programs, it is worth noting that, "professionals who engage in social justice and advocacy work often learned to do so outside of their graduate programs" (Harrison, 2010 in Boss et al., 2018, p. 373). While HESA graduate preparation programs were not the focus of this study, it is relevant to note that not all HESA practitioners

have degrees related to higher education, education, and student affairs. Further, there is no formal training in graduate preparation programs specifically designed to prepare HESA practitioners to respond to and support students impacted by bias incidents. Moreover, although there is significant research documenting the need for campuses to respond to bias incidents thoughtfully, proactively, and thoroughly, less research exists documenting *how* bias response educators experience and "consider their multiple identities" about their role in campus bias response (LePeau et al., 2016, p. 126).

Process for Locating Existing Literature

The impetus for this project and ongoing literature review began in the fall of 2020 when I was called to colead the creation of a bias response team at my institution. As I began to experience conflicting feelings about this calling, I wondered if others shared similar experiences. Were others also questioning the impact they could make at their institution, feeling frustrated about being asked to do diversity work for free while energized to enact social justice education? I conducted brief journal and book searches through my institution's library but felt unfulfilled. No one could answer the main question I had, which was the conflicting feelings I felt just me or questions that needed to be verbalized, explored, and answered?

That same Fall 2020 semester, I created a pilot study that specifically invited participants who were part of formal campus bias response teams to share their experiences on their institution's team. I wondered if their identities influenced how they showed up with students and if their identities were seen as an asset to their institution. The initial literature review I conducted for the pilot study became the groundwork for the literature review included here. As I continued the process of building a bias response team and policy at my institution, I remained interested in how HESA practitioners experienced supporting students impacted by bias. As

such, I was connected through a colleague directly to Dr. Ryan Miller. In the spring of 2021, I had the opportunity to meet virtually with Dr. Miller and ask questions about his research on bias teams. As included in his research, he recommended additional work needed to be done to understand more about how HESA practitioners experience supporting students impacted by bias.

As a result of the conversation with Dr. Miller, feedback from my committee and faculty, pilot study, and personal experiences, the research presented here has changed since Fall 2020 to include a broader participant pool. So, too, has the literature review. For example, I was first focused only on practitioners in formal bias teams. This focus not only narrowed who might be able to participate in the study but neglected to include practitioners who support students informally such as in advising meetings, at campus events, or in mentoring relationships. This expansion provided opportunities to expand the literature options. Without the requirement to be part of a formal bias team, the literature review included Sara Ahmed's (2012) work, which is deeply concerned with how educators experience issues of social justice on campus as diversity workers. It also included work by researchers and educators who consider themselves educators for social justice because they believe, like me, that education and social justice are not separate practices.

Contextualization

Because of the limited amount of research available specifically about HESA practitioners' experience supporting students impacted by bias, the research included articles and books that were most helpful in providing context for my proposed project. Current research includes studies specifically about the role of formal bias response teams in higher education but does not focus on the team members' experiences. Also, where the research focused on formal

bias response teams, it did not include data about bias response outside formal processes. However, when I expanded my search beyond campus bias response to include HESA practitioners who do diversity work more generally, there was a broader discussion of the practitioners' experiences but, save Ahmed's (2012) work, researchers all suggested additional work be done to understand the practitioners' experiences. Overall, the aspects most relevant to this research included observations that study participants across research (those on formal bias teams) did not feel they could make structural or meaningful changes as a team member. A consensus and critique exists that bias response processes serve the institution more than student needs and are unlikely to create meaningful change (LePeau et al., 2016; Miller, Guida, et al., 2018a). Finally, the reviewed researchers discussed whether bias teams and formal processes prioritized the institutional status quo of patriarchal whiteness over challenging campus cultures (Ahmed, 2012; Davis & Harris, 2016; Oliha-Donaldson, 2020).

Overall, the research projects showcased in this study invited multiple ways to interrogate and challenge the role of formal bias teams in higher education. They especially highlighted the need for additional research that deeply addresses how bias incidents impact staff. They also provided context through which to explore the precariousness of formal bias response processes in higher education and, more importantly, what it means for HESA practitioners. In other words, researchers have been concerned about the role of bias response processes, which, in turn, suggested that the staff who shepherd these processes may also experience precarity (Butler, 2012). While some researchers have discussed and nodded toward the need for additional research about HESA practitioners' experiences, I was excited to add research that contributed to HESA practitioners' experiences, specifically. The research in the current literature has focused on student experiences, the role of the institutional process, diversity workers or educators more

generally, and faculty. HESA practitioners, who often hold education degrees and may even consider themselves social justice educators, operate in precarious positions at their institutions. Unlike faculty, there is no tenure track option, and the entry to midlevel staff that supports students impacted by bias may be underpaid and organizationally located under many layers of upper administration. The research in this review highlighted how bias response processes challenge or sustain systems, while my research sharpened the focus on the people (i.e., the HESA practitioners) operating in that system.

The reviewed researchers also offered a critical lens through which to explore bias support processes and the staff enacting these processes. Researchers discussed whiteness frequently as they interrogated the role of bias processes. Researchers interrogated whether bias support processes sought to eliminate bias or merely to placate minoritized students through their reactive responses. In other words, my research encouraged HESA practitioners to consider who bias support processes are for and what it means for minoritized HESA practitioners to be agents or stewards of such processes. Ahmed (2012), Anderson (2020), Davis and Harris (2016), and Oliha-Donaldson (2020) all explored the implications for minoritized educators who facilitate student belonging while also navigating their sense of belonging and exclusion.

Themes in the Landscape of Supporting Students Impacted by Bias

The literature review included five themes: (a) the role of the bias response teams in addressing or responding to incidents at an institutional level, (b) responding to campus bias without a formal bias team, (c) whether bias teams should be, or are, proactive or reactive to campus bias, (d) the role of the HESA practitioners' identities and (e) bias response and maintaining whiteness. Each theme added depth to the research questions I proposed in the study, as they troubled campus bias response as simply transactional. The emergent themes,

when examined, further invited new questions for consideration and pointed to an expansive question: Whose interests do bias response teams serve, and to what extent are HESA practitioners' identities used to bolster those interests or seen as a hindrance? In the following sections, I examine the body of research I collected for this project, highlighting elements most relevant to the research questions presented and those that provided additional points of consideration during the interview process.

Responding to Incidents at an Institutional Level

Throughout the literature, researchers grappled with whether bias response teams serve to protect students or to protect a school's image in the face of local or national attention related to bias incidents. As Miller, Guida, et al. (2018a) noted, "Many colleges and universities created teams in part because of a perceived demand that the institution becomes visible in condemning incidents of bias" (p. 327). As such, tension exists between HESA practitioners' expectations of their school's ability to effect large-scale change at their institutions while an existing reality among many teams suggests they are only responding to single incidents. For example, a participant in LePeau et al.'s (2016) study stated,

> [The Bias Response Team] really is meant to be a reporting mechanism and a victim support educational body. So, I think some folks sometimes get frustrated with that and want us to do more like create a campus response. But that's really not . . . was never the intention of the teams. (p. 122)

The research included conflicting messages about what and who bias response teams serve concerning the needs of an institution.

In their research on how campuses responded to racial incidents specifically, Davis and Harris (2016) called for institutions to address bias systemically and on an ongoing basis rather

than only in response to a single or public event, arguing that large-scale systemic responses either do not exist or are not functioning to serve the needs to disrupt campus-wide bias. Large-scale responses include community-wide email messaging from institutional leaders and campus events scheduled in response to bias on campus. More specifically, students have called on "campus educators to be responsive to bias incidents on college campuses and connect those responses to ultimately improving campus climate for diverse students, faculty, and staff" (Warywold & Lancaster, 2020, p. 157). Davis and Harris (2016) argued:

> Integral to a follow-up statement is the ability to provide evidence of a systemic approach to the situation that becomes embedded in the campus organizational structure, such as a protocol for responding to racial incidents developed by an ongoing committee. (p. 74)

Addressing a single incident publicly, such as via a campus-wide email denouncing hate or bias on campus, Davis and Harris (2016) argued, does not serve to tackle systemic issues of racism or other biases on college or university campuses. Instead, such public addresses to campus communities only work to reinforce the misconception that racism is an individual act rather than "endemic and normalized . . . [and] deeply embedded in many campus communities, making it difficult to expose and deconstruct racist acts that are standard in the campus environment" (Davis & Harris, 2016, p. 71). Community-wide messages initiated from the top down, Davis and Harris (2016) asserted, work only to maintain systems of inequity without addressing the campus culture. Warywold and Lancaster (2020), added:

> The overall result is a kind of public shaming of the students without any regard for meaning-making and learning. Others in the institution and the overall community are left without any overall context on the incident and wondering how they can go back to normal after such an occurrence on their campuses and in their community. (p. 157)

Such top-down responses do not necessarily include the practices or reflections of HESA practitioners' recommendations. For example, students involved in a bias incident may rely on their campus bias team or a HESA practitioner, then receive an email about the incident and assume that the bias team or practitioners initiated the campus-wide response. Therefore, the campus community may perceive these messages as stemming from the HESA practitioners supporting students, complicating the campus community's relationship with campus bias response processes and the social justice endeavors of the HESA practitioners involved.

As such, tension is created when the perceptions of a campus-wide bias response team composed of midlevel administrators whose influence is based on connections in the campus community rather than formalized leadership positions (Miller, Guida, et al., 2018a) do not have the power to influence or change campus climate. As articulated earlier, some team members understand their role as responsive to single incidents, while the larger campus community may have broader expectations. Similarly, Davis and Harris (2016) agreed that campuses have not yet reached the point of positively changing campus culture in systemic ways. Therefore, educators must consider that bias response processes on campus are limited in their ability to solve incidents, primarily related to those caused by oppressive structures in institutions (Warywold & Lancaster, 2020). Caught between the campus community's expectations and the reality of limited influence, I wanted to show how this dichotomy impacts the HESA practitioners who are involved with the institution's response and education processes.

Responding to Bias Without a Formal Team

Formal bias response teams or committees are not the only way colleges and universities respond to bias on their campuses. While many institutions designate teams of people to respond to campus-based bias incidents, others relegate this responsibility to diversity or multicultural

units or additional teams whose primary role is to provide campus diversity education. Miller, Jones, et al. (2018) described those who facilitate the educational responses to bias incidents as, "diversity educators" and explain that they "provide workshops and facilitate discussions regarding differences for the University" (p. 14). Additionally, as Miller, Jones, et al. (2018) highlighted, "the professionals in diversity education often have other primary roles at the institution, with diversity education representing one of their secondary responsibilities" (p. 14). As such, this literature review has considered the experiences of "diversity educators" on formal bias response teams or providing diversity education independently of their full-time role or a formal team. Of relevance to my research project, many diversity educators hold marginalized identities, such that those professionals experience "cultural taxation" and being "burned through" (Anderson, 2020, p. 1 accompanying their "campus's expectation to educate about diversity sometimes regardless of interest or experience in that domain" (Padilla, 1994, p. 26 in Miller, Jones, et al., 2018, p. 14).

Moreover, Miller, Jones, et al. (2018) identified the need to discuss bias response education about diversity education. The literature review has insinuated that bias response education includes elements of diversity education because enacting bias implies a lack of appreciation for diversity (Ahmed, 2012; Anderson, 2020). However, additional terms such as social justice education, multicultural education, and diversity and inclusion initiatives may be used synonymously to infer similar meanings. When discussing diversity or social justice education, the researchers (Ahmed, 2012; Anderson, 2020) revealed that bias response work is synonymous with the latter. For my project, I offer social justice education as an aspect of bias response education. Thus social justice educators can be part of bias response in a campus community.

Proactive Versus Reactive Responses to Campus Bias

An in-depth discussion exists across the research about bias response teams' roles as reactive or proactive agents of change. For example, in LePeau et al.'s (2016) study, bias response teams "hope to make an impact and build a better environment for all students who experience bias" (p. 121). Alternately, however, as discussed in Miller, Guida, et al.'s (2018a) research on nineteen team members at 21 separate institutions indicated that even if bias response teams have "education" in their name or as part of the educational mission, they may have a negligible impact regarding interrupting dominant forms of oppression, or to be proactive. For example, Miller, Guida, et al. (2018a) continued,

> Team leaders talked about desiring proactive educational approaches, but often employed reactive approaches in practice . . . [and] often described responses aimed at helping individuals navigate the existing culture rather than changing the culture. One participant speculated that bias response work often entailed "treating the symptom and not the disease." (p. 9)

In a two-part research project, LePeau et al. (2016, 2018) conducted a qualitative study of a well-known successful bias response team at a large public institution in the midwestern United States. The first study showed that bias team members' connections to the campus were vital in the perceived success of the team's response to bias incidents (LePeau et al., 2016), while the second study addressed those connections in more detail through an examination of social and cultural capital reproduction through bias response team members (LePeau et al., 2018). The authors addressed "building a better environment" as a key theme in the first study among participants (LePeau et al., 2016, p. 121). For example, one participant discussed their work with a transgender student who reported an incident where another student called them by their dead

name. The report evolved into the bias team exploring the University's name change process, exemplifying where bias teams and members can proactively influence more significant institutional changes. LePeau et al. (2016) and LePeau et al.'s (2018) research demonstrate that bias response teams' ability to affect campus-wide change or be proactive likely varies from campus to campus and is largely depends on who is on the team.

Role of HESA Practitioners' Identities

Oliha-Donaldson's work (2020) suggested that educators, not only students, are shaped by campus environments, and Carter and Reynolds's (2011) work addressed Black Americans' experiences with race-related stress. Although their work is not connected to higher education specifically, their work reveals parallels worth exploring as "the heightened stress from the chronic, comprehensive, and cumulative effects of racism and perceived discrimination has been associated with decreased quality of life, negative self-esteem, intrusive thoughts, hypertension, and increased risk for mental and physical illness such as depression, anxiety, or headaches" (p. 156). Additionally, and as Ahmed (2012) discussed in their book, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life,* some bodies are more welcome than others in particular spaces, including higher education, therefore begging us to explore how HESA practitioners whose bodies may not be the norm, experience being called to support students impacted by bias and students who enact bias.

Anderson (2020) provided contexts specific to higher education, proposing that HESA practitioners are "burned through" rather than only "burned out" (p. 1). Anderson (2020) indicated:

> The image of burning through, in contrast to the typical framing of burnout, proved to be an apt metaphor for how student affairs staff and midlevel administrators (directors and

> assistant/associate deans) who provide direct services to minoritized (used here to refer to people of Color and LGBTQ-identified individuals) students [are viewed]. (p. 1).

Their ethnographic study focused on the experiences of HESA practitioners engaged in diversity work with students of color and LGBTQ students; offering an essential and relevant parallel to the research questions posed here. Borrowing from Ahmed (2012), Anderson (2020) situated HESA practitioners as "diversity workers: . . . those tasked with carrying out the campus' diversity policies and practices" (p. 1). This description of HESA practitioners as diversity workers provided a more expansive way to include educators who support students impacted by bias beyond their full-time roles. A participant in Anderson's (2020) study aptly described being burned through as "colleges and universities 'using the backs and lives and traumas of minoritized populations' to educate others" (p. 2).

Moreover, and as Oliha-Donaldson (2020) offered, institutions' responses to bias incidents have not solved diversity issues, as they are "in search of quick and actionable responses, many institutions have attempted to 'solve' the 'diversity problem' with agendas, programs, figureheads, conferences, and training, yet the problems remain" (p. 241). If diversity work or bias response work is never complete as institutions "remain invested and implicated in the racial order," we are called to explore the impacts such open-ended work has on HESA practitioners (Hughes, 2013, p. 128). Ahmed (2012), Carter and Reynolds (2011), Hughes (2013), and Oliha-Donaldson (2020) all discussed the more significant implications for higher education's proliferation of bias response and education teams. However, they do not directly address HESA practitioners' experiences serving as potential tools for preserving the racial order.

Bias Response and Maintaining Whiteness

Davis and Harris (2016), using critical race theory (CRT) as a frame, engaged in a document analysis of campus responses to three racial incidents occurring at three separate institutions. As a tenet of CRT, questions related to interest convergence were most elucidated throughout the literature explored for this project, highlighting possible and necessary areas for inquiry. "Interest convergence claims that gains in racial equity will be advanced only when it benefits White people in some manner" (Bell, 1980 as cited in Davis & Harris, 2018, p. 67) and, as such, provides a critical lens through which to explore both bias response teams and individual team members' experiences and interactions with bias incidents on their campuses. Interest convergence and its preservation of domination through whiteness invite us to be mindful of whether bias response processes would exist if they did not also benefit the institution in some way.

Although diversity education programs, bias sensitivity training, and other programs intend to create more inclusive environments, their target audiences are often white. Centered as the norm in diversity education, white, cisgender, heteronormative, and non-disabled people's learning takes precedence but folks of color, queer folks, genderqueer or nonbinary, and disabled bodies are the subjects for which the education or training is about. Given the centering of whiteness in diversity education, Anderson (2020) entreated HESA practitioners to consider the "unique ways diversity workers occupy awkward spaces between two or more constituencies—often institutional leaders and White, straight, and cisgendered colleagues—and the minoritized students they serve" (Martin et al., p. 3). However, Anderson's (2020) diversity workers engaged across the expectations of the campus community and the institution's centering of whiteness; it is worth considering how they (and HESA practitioners) with minoritized identities navigate

these “awkward spaces” (in Martin et al., p. 3). Thus, how do minoritized populations benefit from such training? Sáez et al. (2007) took on this question by suggesting that “students (especially Whites) who engage meaningfully with peers from different backgrounds and diverse perspectives both inside and outside college classrooms are unlikely to remain isolated in their own racial/ethnic communities” (as cited in Harper & Hurtado, 2007, p. 14). Anderson (2020) brings the discussion back to an earlier question posed by Miller, Guida, et al., (2018a): Whose interests do these teams serve? Davis and Harris (2016) offered a possible answer: “White leaders, who often occupy the spaces and positions with the most power on campus will tolerate advances for students, faculty, and staff of color as long as the changes do not cause a major disruption to the status quo” (Bell, 2004; Castagno & Lee, 2007; DeCuir & Dixon, 2004, p. 67). Against the backdrop of bias response processes being enacted by midlevel administrators (Miller, Guida, et al., 2018a) and HESA practitioners who possess minimal social and cultural capital (LePeau et al., 2018), then we must interrogate how the institutional leadership maintains systems of power through midlevel bias response team members.

Aguire and Messineo (2006) added to the conversation in their exploration of campus racial climates from 1987 to 1993. In the 106 reported incidents they examined, three categories of harm emerged, “1) person-focused harm, 2) cultural bias, and 3) structural bias” (Aguire & Messineo, 2006, p. 27). They found, “White students regard minority students as illegitimate participants in higher education that seek to deprive them of resources” (Aguire & Messineo, 2006, p. 28) while viewing themselves as the rightful, legitimate recipients of education. Because whiteness in Aguire and Messineo’s (2006) research was the norm or status quo, “bigotry was thus treated by the administration as a technical issue at the experience of its moral harm” (p. 29). Thus, interrupting the status quo by objecting to bias incidents on a systemic level would

alter the existing hierarchies. Ancis et al. (2000) echoed Aguire and Messineo's (2006) finding: "White students' lack of awareness or denial regarding racial and ethnic intolerance may result in their tendency to discredit reports of bias and discrimination" (p. 183). Permitting this lack of awareness and posited as the norm across the research to the extent that Anderson (2018) asserted in their research that retaliatory crimes were the most prevalent, "where people who perceive that there is a wrongful incursion or racial/ethnic minorities into White spaces lash out as an attempt to preserve territory" (p. 19). Aguire and Messineo (2006) and Ancis et al. (2000) brought whiteness' relationship to diversity and inclusion work to the fore. Diversity work (e.g., campus bias response or support processes) is designed to maintain white comfort, this study explored how HESA practitioners who aim to challenge whiteness experience their role as institutional agents.

Analysis and Conclusion

Overall, the researchers who focused on the role of formal bias teams found that team members (and their institutions) do not guarantee specific practices or outcomes (Miller, Guida, et al., 2018a) and that bias teams and processes are incident-driven (Davis & Harris, 2016; LePeau et al., 2016) with little focus on future-driven outcomes that address the root causes of bias on campus. The researchers agree that formal bias teams and diversity training and programs do not affect institutional change (Warywold & Lancaster, 2020; Davis & Harris, 2016). Most authors agree or insinuate that bias response or diversity work impacts educators, not just the students, and leave space for additional research to address the role of staff specifically. Ahmed (2012) and Oliha-Donaldson (2020) would perhaps agree that to to examine HESA practitioners' roles thoroughly, researchers must first explore what diversity means and how it is deployed at higher education institutions and that "an equality regime (e.g., a bias

response process) can be an inequality regime given a new form, a set of processes that maintain what is supposedly being redressed" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 8).

As explored earlier, significant research exists exploring the impact of campus-based bias incidents on student populations. Additional research exists on educators' experiences in formal support roles for students impacted by bias and minoritized students. What is missing, and is suggested in the existing literature, is a broader exploration of the experiences and well-being of the HESA practitioners who support students experiencing bias, regardless of their formal role at an institution (Anderson, 2018, 2020; Miller, Guida, et al., 2018a; Oliha-Donaldson, 2020). As Oliha-Donaldson (2020) asserted, "Humans do not merely exist in space and time, but are shaped by space and time," therefore, too, are the HESA practitioners providing immediate response to bias incidents, supporting the students impacted by those incidents, and striving to create more inclusive environments for students and themselves (p. 244). More specifically, and as Anderson (2020) offered, "Far less is known about the experiences of midlevel diversity administrators (assistant/associate deans and directors) or student affairs staff engaged in more direct forms of diversity work with students, faculty, or staff who belong to marginalized and underrepresented groups" (p. 3).

Throughout the existing literature, an air of neutrality is assumed about HESA practitioners' role in bias response processes. While some researchers (Ahmed, 2012; Anderson, 2020; Oliha-Donaldson, 2020) suggested the role of diversity workers and social justice educators be more closely examined, their focus remains on the responsibility of the institution to address issues of inequity, therefore overlooking the full impact to educators along the way. LePeau et al. (2016) added, "This lack of research is problematic because of the unexamined dynamics related to how campus educators consider their own identities, negotiate team

dynamics, and strive for organizational change when responding to bias-related incidents" (p. 114). I do not aim to dismiss the responsibility of institutions to address issues of inequity but instead, add depth to the conversation by sharing the voices of those acting as agents of the institution. Additionally, and by examining the experiences of HESA practitioners specifically, I add to conversations in HESA research highlighting the work of HESA practitioners as "diversity workers" and social justice advocates.

This research provided the stories and experiences of HESA practitioners, which added to the current research discussion. The current literature discussion expressed the value of including HESA practitioners' voices but did not spend time specifically including them. My intention, as highlighted in the following chapter, was to conduct a study project that thoughtfully and more meaningfully incorporated HESA practitioners' stories. The current literature review and research paradigm presented in the earlier chapters provide the framework for highlighting these stories so they stand out among neoliberalism's attempt to tuck them away. Moreover, I have found the interview questions have not been asked and explicitly answered by HESA practitioners. Using a qualitative approach, I created a study that added more HESA practitioner voices to the landscape of bias response.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Throughout the ideation and creation of this project, I endeavored to elicit and share the stories of higher education student affairs (HESA) practitioners who support students experiencing bias, hate, harassment, and microaggressions on their campus. More specifically, I wanted to elucidate the "in-betweenness" I suspected they might experience and how the space they occupy is a space worth attention, exploration, and meaning making. In this basic qualitative research project, born out of my own experiences holding the tensions between being a paid agent of the institution and striving to be a social justice educator, I sought to bring such tensions to the forefront. Merriam (1988) described basic qualitative research as "seeking to understand the meaning a phenomenon has for those involved" where meaning is "constructed, not discovered" (p. 2). As such, this research focused on how HESA practitioners made meaning of their experiences as agents of higher education institutions.

As a researcher using basic qualitative study methodology, I aimed to understand the "meaning a phenomenon has for those involved" (Merriam, 1988, p. 22). In this study, the phenomenon was that students impacted by bias, and those involved are the HESA practitioners charged with providing such support. As Merriam (1988) highlighted, basic qualitative studies are conducted by researchers, like me, who are interested in "1) how people interpret their experiences, 2) how they construct their worlds, and 3) what meaning they attribute to those experiences" (p. 23). As a practitioner and educator who has made a career out of supporting students impacted by bias, as a researcher, I was interested in how others interpreted their experience of the same. I wondered how other practitioners made meaning of their experiences and how they constructed their worlds. As such, the findings discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 answer the guideposts provided in the basic qualitative research methodology.

Not only did basic qualitative research serve as the methodology for this research, but it aligned with my personal belief about how I and others make sense of the world: that "meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the worlds they are interpreting" (Crotty, 1998, pp. 42–43). Additionally, I believe that, just as education is not a neutral practice, neither is research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As a qualitative researcher, I aimed to embrace and engage in subjectivity rather than attempt to achieve objectivity. Building rapport and relationships with the research participants was at the forefront of the recruitment, interview, and member checking processes. Because this research study was about unearthing HESA practitioners' experiences in supporting students impacted by bias, participants articulated individual and collective connections to the research goals.

Many participants shared they did not have the opportunity in their workday to reflect on their work so meaningfully. Many also stated they had never been asked such questions before our meeting. As such, the participants used this project to highlight and bring their experiences to the fore. In exchange, their stories have led me to create a research project that supported my doctoral candidacy and more importantly, changed me for the better. Given the reflective opportunities in the memos and research questions, the participants and I all felt a more profound connection to our work while simultaneously rejecting neoliberal ideologies about what constitutes antibias work in higher education.

Research Paradigm

> The object is to reveal for others the kinds and extent of oppression that are being experienced by those studied. With the exposure of oppression comes the call for awareness, resistance, solidarity, and revolutionary transformation. (Hatch, 2002, p. 17)

I research because it is a way to tell stories, explore, create, and seek meaning in how individuals experience and understand their realities. Through research and in partnership with the research participants, I aimed to provide “value-mediated critiques that challenge existing power structures and promote resistance” (Hatch, 2002, p. 13) among HESA practitioners. As a researcher and educator, I am deeply concerned with education’s and educators’ relationship to power, privilege, and oppression: both how we sustain them and how they disenfranchise us. Each morning, as I prepare to go to work as an educator, I am conscious of my role in my university, its role it in the more extensive state system, and U.S. higher education and schooling. To assume my role as too small, inconsequential, or worse, neutral, would be ignorant. As an educator and researcher, I must slow down and engage with others thoughtfully and critically. This research project not only taught me something, but it also changed me along the process. As such, a critical research paradigm guided this project and how I experienced my work in HESA and as a student of cultural foundations.

A critical paradigm suggests that knowledge is not simply something we can “go get” or “attain.” Instead, this research was shaped by the experiences my subjectivity brought to it and, most importantly, the experiences shared in the participants’ narratives. As is true for a critical research project, I did not look for an answer or a truth. Still, it was a practice to highlight participants’ experiences to understand better what meaning they make of their work in higher education student affairs and their relationships to power, privilege, and oppression through bias response work. A critical research paradigm offered, “One can find one’s subject status and needs for self-expression, self-development, and self-validation constrained, denied, and distorted if the identity categories supplied by cultural milieu are hierarchical concerning things such as gender, race, sexual orientation, and class” (Given, 2008, p. 5). And, as this research

project was concerned with how HESA practitioners make meaning of their experiences through their social locations, critical research provides a mechanism through which participants can identify their subjectivity rather than be identified only through the institution's lens.

I am drawn to research through a critical paradigm because of what it requires of me as the researcher: "profound reflexivity" (Given, 2008, p. 2). A critical research paradigm requires reflexivity and asks the researcher to use multiple theories to explore the human experience. As a component of postpositivist research, critical theory research is not concerned with locating a singular truth or foreclosing on a result. Instead, it is concerned with how humans experience social life and using narratives to tell the stories of those experiences. Using a critical research paradigm aims to create connections among human experiences rather than "discovering" a truth assumed to exist beyond human experience. As a critical researcher, I am drawn to research as a vehicle to "expose ways in which discourses are historically constructed and how these discourses support and maintain conditions of inequality, oppression, and exploitation" (Glesne, 2016, p. 11). Critical research appreciates that our lives are shaped socially, culturally, and gendered. Thus, research projects are concerned with human experience as they are restricted or inhibited by larger, overarching social structures. In this case, I am concerned with how higher education bias response processes shape the lives of HESA practitioners.

Theoretical Framework

Queer theory provided the lens through which I explored participants' narratives. As such, this project drew from queer theory to bolster, explicate, and showcase the narratives provided by the participants. Queer theory not only informed my subjectivity and research paradigm but helped showcase both the individuals' experiences and expose the structural issues in higher education bias response processes. Queer theory emboldens individuals to think beyond

binaries and, more specifically, to consider possibilities in multiplicities. De Lauretis (1991) offered one of the first published quandaries of what was then called "gay and lesbian studies," which called for the examination "'of an already deeply entrenched set of questionings and abrasions of normality'" (Hall, 2003, p. 54 as cited in Watson, 2005, p. 69). As a researcher, queer theory provided me with both possibility and ambiguity: abrasions of normality. Through ambiguity, individuals must increase their tolerance of discomfort and refrain from foreclosing on a single truth or outcome. Applying queer theory to narratives allowed for multiplicities and patterns to emerge.

Britzman's (1998) work, *Is There a Queer Pedagogy? Or, Stop Reading Straight* provided the seminal basis for this project's intersections with queer theory and my interpretations of truth. Specifically, Britzman (1998) challenged individuals to make connections between "a thought and what it cannot think" (p. 151). In other words, consider how people engage with what is beyond the binary of their interpretation of another's experience. She invites people to see what they cannot see. Butler (2012) also provided much of how individuals have come to understand queer theory's applications to how they interpret the other. For example, a key element of queer theory and its application to this project is concerned with individual precarity and opposition to binaries. A person's precariousness is often measured in binaries (e.g., man/woman, rich/poor, young/old). Butler (2012) offered queer theory not only the notion of exploring existence beyond binaries but also invites us to consider whose precarity is alleged. People "tend to figure ethical relations as binding upon those whose face we can see, whose name we can know and pronounce, those we can already recognize, whose form and face are familiar" (Butler, 2012, p. 135). In other words, individuals consider what bodies are read

and treated as precarious over others and which bodies get their attention, time, energy, and resources.

Beyond Butler's (2012) queer theory, feminists expanded how they think about queer theory. For example, I am drawn to Anzaldúa's (1987) work and her invitation to explore multiple forms of consciousness or mestiza consciousness. Anzaldúa's (1987) work focused on the "in-between" worlds she lived in at the literal border of Texas and Mexico and growing up between two cultures. Her writing uses English and Spanish to express herself through both worlds rather than choosing just one. Anzaldúa added to feminism a mestiza consciousness that offers space for multiple ways of existing and experiencing the world. Specifically, for Anzaldúa (1987), this meant a literal being torn between multiple worlds. Through this tearing, Anzaldúa wrote about and advocated for multiplicity rather than choosing between the worlds of which she was part of. She invited the ambiguity of what it meant to be of and from all the worlds. Mestiza consciousness, therefore, is a queering of social locations. Mestiza, Anzaldúa (1987) stated, is where "she can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries" (p. 79). Instead, "the new mestiza" develops an acceptance of ambiguity (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 79).

However, as queer theory has gained popularity in the last 20 years, its critics worry the normalization or "popularization" of the term, identity, and theory applied to queer has detracted from its power to engage in multiplicity (Watson, 2005, p. 71). In other words, researchers considered the ways queer theory been commodified to mean something more singular than it set out to elicit. Additionally, and not unlike other theories, queer theory has also been subject to critique through its theory-to-practice application (Watson, 2005). For example, queer theory has been critiqued as representative of the "ivory tower" in contrast to queer activism which, in practice, affords a more practical application (Watson, 2005, p. 75). As both a researcher and

someone who holds a queer identity, the latter critique resonated with me and was most salient in my considerations for this project. I hoped to use queer theory as a literal application of the "queering" of ideas presented here, storytelling through research, and future analyses. However, I was mindful of the queer theory's relationship to the notion of the "ivory tower" and the irony of its inaccessibility when applied only in a theoretical sense. In this project I hoped to inspire change toward justice in education.

I have been drawn to queer theory and its elements long before I had the words to describe it. Queer theory offers ways to see differently and consider possibilities beyond binaries which stems from gay and lesbian studies. Queer theory does not require a queer identity as a prerequisite. However, I have certainly made sense of my queerness and relationships with the world through it. As such, it seemed unrealistic that I would exclude it from my sense-making of the findings in this research As I remained optimistic about what queer theory can offer my research practice. As a queer-identified scholar, holding a queer identity has afforded me a life that is not predetermined or described. When I grew up, there were few representations of queerness in the media, and I could count the number of queer people I knew: it was a mystery with endless possibilities because of its unknown. Now, as a queer scholar using queer theory, I understand queer theory to invoke possibility. Queer theory rejects binaries and arbitrary frames and rules: much like queerness rejects what society deems as "normal." So, the use of queer theory in this project allowed for an openness that lives outside its "ivory tower" critiques and invites those in the tower to listen closely to the lived experience of educators on the ground. I hoped this work directly influenced participants' practice by encouraging them to think about the multiplicity queer theory offers and providing them space to elevate their voices and experiences as valued and contributing to meaningful change.

Queer theory has a strong relationship to the critical research paradigm and is one of its central vehicles as it challenges the concept of heteronormativity (Glesne, 2016). Therefore, although participants in this study did not need to hold a queer identity, queer theory offered me an analysis of the participants' stories outside the existing binaries. For example, as discussed earlier, HESA practitioners often think of institutional bias response as an interaction between students and the institution: a binary. What queer theory suggested for this study was multiplicities and possibility: rather than only considering the relationship between students and the institution, this project seeks to address the relationship between the institution and the HESA practitioners charged with enacting policy and support, how those practitioners experienced the demands of the institution in relationship with their own and often minoritized identities, and how they experienced encounters with students impacted by bias.

The main elements of queer theory used in this project are queer theory's:

- Denouncement of binary thinking, practice, and interpretation (Anzaldúa, 1987);
- Anticipation of the signified's precariousness; that is, queer theory pays attention to how "other" people and experiences and thus make determinations of their worth or value (Butler, 2012), and;
- Challenge to normalcy and recognition that what is deemed "normal" is a conceptual order that "refuses the very possibility of Other" (Britzman, 1998, p. 157) because the conception of other is outside our recognition.

These elements were useful in engaging this research project as it is precisely concerned with the experiences of practitioners left out of the dominant narrative about bias incidents on campus. Higher education has become fixated on diversity and inclusion for students while relying on agents of the institution—in this case, HESA practitioners—to enact its so-called "diversity and

inclusion." The elements of queer theory require me to expand beyond the binaries institutions create between students and bias incidents, including consideration for the staff member *and* the bias incident *and* the student. In the student-staff-incident triad, I am interested in exploring what happens to the practitioner in that encounter. Queer theory asks for the consideration of what happens when HESA practitioners are "othered." In this case, the othering happens when we dismiss their experiences; thus, I contend there is much to learn. And finally, as Britzman (1998) offered, what was missed in "refusing the very possibility of the 'other'" because HESA practitioners' experiences have been beyond our perception (p. 157)? The following chapters explore what has been missed in overlooking them.

HESA practitioners are often omitted from conversations about campus bias incidents, so their experiences were centered here. I used queer theory to help consider the possibility that by educational leaders' very attempts to include students, they exclude HESA practitioners. Britzman (1998) stated, "Arguments for inclusion produce the very exclusions they are meant to cure. Part of the tension is that in discourses of inclusion, there tend to be only two pedagogical strategies: provisions of information and techniques for attitudinal change" (p. 158). In this quote, Britzman (1998) offered an invitation to consider something outside the two possibilities. In this case, as it resonates with me, higher education institutions pronounce themselves inclusive, yet their actions are often exclusionary. Higher education leaders celebrate information and learning about the other, yet often shy away from creating changes that would substantively shift or change their relationship to power and thus, the other. Further, higher education leaders are comfortable exploring how students experience bias in many cases, but staff and practitioners are frequently excluded from the conversation and glossed over. As such, this study addressed

what happens to the people enacting “provisions of information” or bias processes to explore what can be hidden in binaries.

Research should expose, provoke, and challenge previously held beliefs about what HESA practitioners thought true and create opportunities for multiplicity rather than staying closed in our own singular experiences. As such, queer theory’s investment in engaging beyond binaries provided a meaningful backdrop for this research. As the basic qualitative interview methodology includes the “researcher’s understanding of the participants’ understanding of the phenomenon of interest” (Merriam, 1998, p. 24), queer theory held the researcher accountable for asking questions rather than foreclosing on the meaning of the context. Queer theory required me to remain open to interpretations and explanations as the participants experienced them. Queer theorists also required me to be vociferously conscious of my own experiences in the project asking, “What else, who else, and what am I missing?” My attempts to engage in queer theory and reflexivity are highlighted in the following paragraphs.

Methods

As basic qualitative interview methodology informed the study and queer theory drove the analysis in Chapters 4 and 5, I used the following research methods to capture the experiences of HESA practitioners supporting students who experience bias. The call for participants opened the possibility that participants could come from any role or area in higher education and did not require a social justice orientation. I was curious about how this may affect HESA practitioners’ well-being. As evidenced in the participant profiles and overview, their identities, roles, and relationship to bias response work were expansive and diverse. Therefore, I used two semistructured qualitative interviews, a focus group, art elicitation, and hosted a member checking meeting to capture their stories and experiences. Throughout the recruitment

process, interviews, transcribing, coding, and analysis, I engaged in rigorous reflexivity to reflect, process, and make meaning of my relationship with the participants and their stories.

Participant Overview

Participants in this study reflected on the experiences of staff in higher education, some of whom held administrative and teaching roles. They represented functional areas such as academic advising, student conduct, student involvement, faculty development, residence life, victim advocacy, diversity centers, and formal bias teams. Their experience in higher education ranged from new and early career professionals to those with over 20 years of experience. All except one participant worked exclusively as a professional in higher education throughout their career: all except two participants held an advanced degree (master's or Doctorate) in Higher Education (one participant held a Master of Business Administration and another in Developmental Psychology). Two of the 11 participants held teaching roles and administrative roles. Five of the 11 participants identified as white, including three white women and two white men. Three participants identified as Black, including two Black women and one Black man. Two participants identified as multiracial, one as an Ecuadorian Black woman and another as a Native American and Mexican American woman. One participant identified as an International Latina. Three participants identified themselves as folks with disabilities, three participants identified as queer or gay, and eight identified as straight—all participants identified as cisgender, including eight cisgender women and three cisgender men.

Recruitment and Selection

The participant recruitment tools used for this study included the flier, email/script, and consent form. After creating a recruitment script and Canva flier (see Appendix A) for distribution, and because I am also a HESA practitioner who supports students experiencing bias,

I emailed both the recruitment flier and study description to similarly situated colleagues at my institution and elsewhere who may be interested in participating in the study. I also invited them to send it to their networks. Then, I posted the flier on LinkedIn and my personal Instagram page where a few connections reposted the flier throughout their networks. The initial call for participants asked for current HESA practitioners (a) employed at an institution of higher education at the time of recruitment and (b) supporting students who experienced bias. I followed up with potential participants who were referred to me through my professional connections via email, LinkedIn, or Instagram; this process is called snowball or chain sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I sought participants from all institution types throughout the United States. Participants were included regardless of whether they held a full-time role supporting students impacted by bias (e.g., dean of students, multicultural affairs/intercultural life, Title IX) or supported students affected by bias in addition to their full-time role (i.e., serving on a formal bias team or self-identifying as a someone who supports students impacted by bias regardless of whether there is an existing bias team on their campus).

The process yielded 19 responses to the call for participants, either via LinkedIn message or direct email. I followed up with all 19 participants individually via email or LinkedIn. I provided the electronic Google form version of the consent form (see Appendix B) for them to review for additional study information. I asked each person to return a signed consent form to confirm their participation in the study. Of the 19 Google and consent forms I returned to those interested, 11 participants returned the completed, signed consent form. Those 11 practitioners made up the participants included in this study. Because incentives were used as a recruitment strategy, I secured Pay it Forward Funds from the UNC Greensboro ELC program to provide each participant one $30 Amazon gift card in exchange for their time.

Data Collection

I (a) used semistructured qualitative interviews, (b) conducted a focus group, and (c) invited participants to provide artistic and poetic representations of their experiences to elicit their stories and experiences supporting students impacted by bias (see Appendix C). After data collection, I invited the participants to a virtual meeting via Zoom to share their reflections on the themes. This final meeting was not included in the themes but a measure of member checking that more deeply engaged the participants as cocreators of the project (Glesne, 2016). Data were collected in three rounds from 11 total participants in the following order:

1) a semistructured 60–75-minute interview with each participant to allow for conversations to be coconstructed;
2) an opportunity to participate in one of two, 90-minute focus groups (9 participated) and,
3) a final, 60–75-minute semistructured interview (9 participated).

Of the 11 participants, all participated in the first round; nine participated in the focus group, which was divided into two smaller groups, and nine participated in the final round. One of the participants only participated in the first round but provided written reflections via email to the final interview. Another participant who attended both the first-round interview and focus group did not participate in their final, scheduled interview nor respond to the written reflection questions of the final round via email. Another participant attended the first and final interviews but did not participate in the focus group. Two participants provided a poem and photo, respectively, and as such, I crafted reflection questions to ask them in the final interview. Participant profiles are included in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Profile and Participation Summary

Pseudo-nym	Position /level	Functional area	Identities/social locations	First interview	Focus group	Second interview	Additional submission	Member checking
Elena	Senior	Diversity Center	International, Latina, born and raised outside U.S., English as second language, divorced woman, single parent, Catholic	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Ty	Entry	Survivor advocacy	Black, woman, heterosexual, cisgender, Christian, fat, middle class, nondisabled	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Mike	Mid	Dean of students/ bias team leader	Cisgender, white, gay, man	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Milly	Mid	Fraternity/ sorority life	White, woman, Appalachian, single, Catholic, heterosexual, educated, live in Midwest swing state, conservative	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Alexis	Entry	Student conduct	Biracial, Native American, Mexican American, SA survivor, cisgender, queer, bisexual, not religious, invisible disability	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, found poem	No

Pseudo-nym	Position /level	Functional area	Identities/social locations	First interview	Focus group	Second interview	Additional submission	Member checking
Mobey	Senior	Chief diversity officer	Black, straight, cisgender man, fairly nondisabled, Christian, Baptist, father, partner, husband, brother, resident of rural county in SE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, photo	Yes
Heather	Senior	Faculty	Middle class, anxiety and depression, cisgender, straight, nondisabled, white, woman, mental health diagnoses, hold a doctorate	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Zora	Entry	Academic advising	Mixed, Ecuadorian, Black, Black Woman, heterosexual, Hispanic, non-Spanish speaker, college-educated, non-disabled, middle class, single mother home	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Kay	Senior	Title IX	Black woman, heterosexual, cis woman, PhD, socioeconomic privilege, nondisabled, invisible disabilities	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Will	Mid	Dean of students/ bias team leader	Queer, white, cisgender, man, middle class	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Ellen	Mid	Housing/ residence life	White, woman, mom, terminal degree holder	Yes	No	No	No	No

Round 1: Individual Interview

The first opportunity, or round, was a traditional semistructured, 1-hour interview. In each round, I conversed with participants rather than being a silent observer, as it was important to me that participants felt they were conversing with a colleague more than they were with a researcher. Engaging the participants in conversation aligned with my practice as an educator and researcher. I was not attempting to examine their stories objectively but rather as a part of their storytelling experience. At the end of the first interview with each participant, I discussed the option to participate in the second and third rounds, including an invitation to provide a photo or poem to demonstrate/show/exhibit more about their experiences supporting students impacted by bias.

Round 2: Focus Group

The second round included a focus group where participants were asked to share their experiences supporting students impacted by bias, their emotional and physical well-being practices, and what they hoped the field of HESA would learn from their experiences. I reviewed the written memos from the participants' first interview and crafted questions specific to their reflections for the focus group.

Round 3: Second Individual Interview

As the study focused on highlighting the practitioners' stories, I endeavored to be mindful throughout the study that participants played a role in shaping the project. As such, the final, second semistructured interview (and focus group questions) were shaped around the discussion areas most salient for the participants in the first round. For example, during the time of our interviews in Spring 2023, many states had legislation proposed in the form of House or Senate bills that threatened to limit DEI work in higher education. This topic came up naturally in a few

first-round interviews, so I added a question about how they felt impacted by such proposals in the final, second semistructured interview. In this final one-on-one interview, participants also had the opportunity to share their artistic representation of their experience. as this submission was optional, two of the nine participants who participated in the final round/second one-on-one interview sent artistic representations: Alexis submitted a Found Poem, and Mobey submitted a photo of his yard on a bright day after a rainstorm (see Appendix D). Mobey's photo represented his self-care practice and was shared in the participant profiles. Additionally, and because it was essential to the study, I asked participants to discuss their definitions of, and relationship to, social justice in the final round if they did not have the opportunity to address them in the first round. In the final round, I also added a question asking participants how and if they exercise criticality in their role in supporting students who experience bias.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

> I've been under a lot of stress personally and at work, so it's impacted the time I've wanted to reflect on during this time. I've been relating a lot to the participants, too. Maybe over-identifying with some. I've had lots of moments lately where I feel completely defeated by the system—like I'm swimming upstream trying to throw students life rafts along the way. Sometimes, I don't know where I belong in this work–in education. And, against the backdrop of anti-DEI legislation, where will I go? Will my presence and own identities even be protected? (Reflexivity Journal, March 25, 2023)

Both strengths and limitations existed in my relationship to this research and my interpretations of the findings. This research, like many projects, was personal, and it was my vocation. I am a queer woman and HESA educator who is hopeful yet frustrated about the role I am asked to play in *responding* to harassment, bias, and hate on campus. I get what it feels like

to want to do more than respond. I became engaged in bias support work long before I knew what it was. While getting my master's degree, I recall meeting with the dean of the school of education to advocate for more faculty of color to support my classmates who were harmed more than helped in classes where they did not see themselves reflected. As a young educator, I advocated for queer students in the form of advising new student organizations and ensuring their concerns were heard by higher administrators. About 10 years ago, I heard about bias teams and bias on campus for the first time and said, "Yeah, I know what that is. I see, experience, and hear about it all the time." I was eager to be part of a solution. Fast forward to the tine of this research. I was a full-time Title IX leader, HESA educator, and doctoral candidate researching the experiences of HESA educators who, like me, dedicated some part of their educational career to a desire to impact change. All this time, however, I have been wondering, "How are *we* doing?" And "Can we sustain this level of care without it being reciprocated while seeing institutions slow to change, all the while students and staff are tired, feeling used, and even traumatized?" My short answer to this question is that HESA practitioners need support, connection, and to tell our stories. My relationship with the research had me deeply motivated to lift up participants' voices and thoroughly analyze what they say.

Strengths

Specifically, one of the greatest strengths of this research was rooted in the reflexivity I practiced and the use of queer theory. My methods, combined with a queer theory framework, encouraged me to continue asking myself questions about my relationship to the research and the participants' stories. Simultaneously, I challenged myself not to foreclose on absolution. Of course, themes emerged when completing this research, themes emerged. However, I believed my reflexivity and queer theory application still allowed room for others to make their own sense

of the findings and maybe even continue asking questions. Within the methods, I sought to leave room for the participants to shape the questions in both the focus group and the final interview. Using a semistructured interview method, I could shift questions based on what resonated with the participants. For example, the initial draft of questions did not include a discussion of current legislation, but this was added in the final round because of a focus group discussion. As such, the impact of legislation on participants became part of the first major theme discussed in Chapter 5.

Finally, and although seemingly minor, a strength of the research was the space and time it gave participants to reflect on their values, share their experiences, and, in some cases, reconsider their work. Several participants said, “No one has ever asked me this,” or “The way you reflected that back to me really resonated, thank you.” This time and space, even if brief, gave participants time to reflect and often brought hidden power into the light.

Limitations

The research also has multiple limitations. The first limitation was all the participants identified as cisgender. While they held various racial, sexual orientation, and disability orientations, the research findings did not include the perspectives of trans and nonbinary practitioners in higher education. Their perspectives and experiences would have added depth to the findings and focus group discussions.

As discussed in the previous section, participants’ relationship to social justice varied. Ten participants were motivated by social justice, and one participant was not. While the study was designed to intentionally include anyone in higher education who supported students impacted by bias, it would have been interesting and valuable to learn more about those practitioners who do not have a relationship to social justice. While this limitation is an

implication for future studies, I named it here because I spent much reflection time before building the study and during the analysis, debating whether I should have included such a requirement. However, the result of not requiring a social justice orientation to participate afforded practitioners who did not see themselves as social justice educators to participate. Such participation contributed to my own revelation that social justice is not required for bias response. As such, a future question for research may be: If social justice is not being done in bias response processes, where is it enacted by HESA practitioners?

I anticipated that my whiteness may interfere with my ability to be present before conducting the interviews. As anticipated, my whiteness did indeed occur in at least two of the interviews. In both examples, participants who were women of color described how they felt they must regulate their speech and "mask" their identity. When they shared these examples, I became briefly preoccupied, wondering if I also caused them to feel they had to mask. While I was able to notice my personal reactions to participants' stories quickly, it brought up an important point and limitation: I was a white woman interviewing people of color about their experiences in educational institutions where they were often "the only" person who held their identities. Because whiteness itself is inherently violent and disruptive, I would be I to think my whiteness was different. As such, the participant's responses and vulnerability may have looked different if a person of color had done this research. The findings certainly would look different as my identities could not be separated from my perceptions and analysis.

As an educator, the hypervigilance of my whiteness took up space throughout the interviews and data analysis. Sometimes, as I share in the following paragraphs, it even made me uncomfortable. While I noticed when it did, as queer theory might suggest, there were likely occasions when I did not notice my own awareness of my whiteness. I wondered what my own

hypervigilance about my whiteness detracted from. In other words, the reflexivity I engaged in was deep and thorough, but I also wondered where its depths prevented me from seeing and feeling what needed to change. I considered how my reflexivity in practice superseded what I needed to be doing to move forward as a white woman researcher. As I acknowledge this, my responsibility moving forward is to continue to find ways to maintain both reflexivity and growth rather than debilitation.

Finally, the examples I share in Chapter 5 about my experiences with a student and my personal experience of bias ignited intense reflection as I engaged in the research. These experiences connected me more deeply to the research and influenced my perception of the participants' stories and finding as I, too, am a HESA practitioner balancing the needs of the student, institution, and my responsibility to both. As I was doing the research, I was also experiencing the questions I asked participants. Sometimes, I felt defeated about my role and inspired and curious because of what the participants shared. The participants challenged me rethink and reconsider my work I had not previously. For example, Kay and Will's hopefulness about engaging in critical community inspired me to continue. Specifically, they expressed their belief and hope that education is still a tool for social change and how they reflected their own experiences of being changed through education. They reminded me that I, too, have been and continue to be changed through education.

Coding and Analysis

> It feels too big, too cumbersome. I'm afraid I've coded it wrong. I feel highly motivated and stuck at the same time. I guess I'm trying to journal my way into unlocking something. To feel more sure? Confident? To know that regardless of how I coded there's enough there to make meaning of? To know I won't get so stuck, I stop. Instead,

can I just tell myself to do the next thing and the next, and next, and next—without thinking more than is required? Not my strong suit, but I'm persistent, at least. (Reflexivity Journal, June 17, 2023)

For this project and guided by Saldaña (2009) and Glense (2016), I used codes and themes to explore the stories provided in the interviews and focus group discussion. Immediately after, or in 24–48 hours, I transcribed each interview using temi.com. Because the website allowed for quick transcription but was not 100% accurate, I watched the Zoom recording of each interview along with the automated transcription provided by temi.com. This process allowed me to address any mistakes in the transcript, highlight quotes that immediately stood out to me, and begin recognizing initial patterns. I transcribed and rewatched the first-round interviews before the focus group meetings. I used the first-round interview to inform and update questions for the focus group. For example, I knew one of the two focus groups would contain participants with differing opinions of the role of social justice that could cause conflict at worst or discomfort for some. As such, I added an abbreviated community commitment (Bettez, 2020) exercise to introduce the participants. I followed this transcribing pattern for the second and third rounds by using temi.com to transcribe the interviews, rewatched them individually, and added highlights to each interview. After each round of interview transcripts were complete, I printed hard copies of the interviews into three separate spiral-bound notebooks and began the process of hand coding.

During the first round of coding, I used initial and in vivo coding (Saldaña, 2009). Initial codes are what Saldaña (2009) referred to as "first impressions" (p. 4), and in vivo codes are taken directly from what the participant says. Throughout this process, I highlighted additional quotes that stood out to me and noticed those that affirmed my own experience, contrasted what I

expected participants to say, and encapsulated the study. I practiced "overgenerous" coding in the margins of each interview for each set of interviews, as Glesne (2016, p. 198) suggested. In other words, I coded *everything* the participants said to try to avoid subconsciously omitting part of their experience and foreclosing on any opportunities to learn from the participants. Throughout the coding process, I made notes about any ideas, questions, and reflections in my researcher journal. Each time I had an idea and thought, "I'll remember that later," I tried to write it down to avoid relying on my memory or assuming I would recall my sense-making at that moment. I detail this process further in the following ethics and trustworthiness section.

After each study round had been hand-coded and highlighted, I began typing each code into a Word document. In this second coding round, I practiced simultaneous coding, searching for codes in larger, "fuzzy" boundaries (Saldaña, 2009, p. 6). As I noticed these larger, fuzzy boundaries manifest, I began organizing the codes into chunks of codes. In this process, I reflected frequently on not trying to make meaning of the codes at that point but just to notice where they felt similar. As this coding process repeated for each interview, I developed a codebook (Glesne, 2016, p. 198). A codebook allows researchers to track codes generated in the research.

I then arranged the codes into major categories and subcategories as interviews were transcribed and coded. Therefore, once all codes were typed and grouped, I printed 9 "chunks" of codes with each "grouping" of codes on a sheet of paper. I placed each group of codes on a table in front of me and asked myself these overarching questions:

- More than being similar, what do these codes mean?
- What do they say when compared with other groups of codes?
- What am I missing when perceiving the codes through my lens?

These were questions I continued to ask myself particularly when I felt stuck or unsure where to go. They also helped me remain connected to the theoretical framework, specifically how queer theory encouraged me to reach beyond binaries and keep asking questions. As I pontificated on each question, I moved the papers around to see if they "felt" different when arranged next to other groups of codes. I took breaks to reflect and write about this process and how I was feeling: I drew diagrams and even wrote a found poem using the participants' quotes. I did all this to engage myself in meaning-making beyond thinking, but into feeling and reflecting on the codes: the participants' stories broken into smaller pieces. I continued this cyclical process of moving and sorting the codes physically multiple times until I settled on the themes presented in the findings chapter and as they related to the overarching research questions. The process of physically moving the printed codes took several days. In these iterations, I would reflect on how the codes were organized before me by using my reflexivity journal to write out how each set or codes "felt" and how I interpreted them. I would ask myself, "Is this what the participants were telling me?" I continued this process until I could answer most thoroughly, "Yes, this is what I believe they were telling me." The themes highlighted in the following chapters were not predetermined. Instead, they represent my attempt at telling the participants' stories as they were shared with me.

Vigorous Reflexivity

> The codes are lined up in front of me with green post-its attempting to describe (not analyze) each stack. As I reread my proposal—positionality, theoretical framework, I feel a little emotional looking at these simmered-down versions of the participants' stories. I feel a little overcome with feeling sad about how so many of us ARE part of identity groups who've lost rights. And we are trying to stay hopeful about "the power of

> education." We're pushing against so much tension—from institutions and students themselves. It's putting a lump in my throat. (Reflexivity Journal, July 4, 2023)

Through reflexivity practices throughout the data collection phase, I regularly and vigorously reflected on my past experiences related to bias support work while acknowledging and noticing how I was and continue to be shaped by this project. As a practitioner of feminist inquiry, I am attracted to its requirement for rigorous reflexivity (Britzman, 1998; Butler, 2012; Pillow, 2003), where I can hold myself accountable for how my stories and experiences influence and intersect with the study and participants. More specifically, as Pillow (2003) encouraged, my goal was "to situate practices of reflexivity as critical to exposing the difficult and often uncomfortable task of leaving what is unfamiliar, unfamiliar" (p. 177). I practiced getting comfortable with leaving things unfamiliar in the pre-and post-interview reflections with which I engaged. I also kept a separate research journal to record reflections and ideas that arose outside of the interview process. Rather than only thinking about the project and limiting the writing to transcribing, coding, and analyzing, I also wrote freely, created field notes that included inspiring quotes, and even texted ideas to close friends (Glesne, 2016).

Through reflexivity, I sat in the muddiness of uncertainty. As queer theorists might encourage me, I tried to "allow space between my thoughts and what they could not think" (Felman, 1987). As influenced and inspired by Azaldúa (1987), Britzman (1998), hooks (1989, 1994, 2003), Pinar (1998), and Saldaña (2009) and the process of engaging in qualitative research itself, I have built an acceptance for uncertainty. Or, at least, a tolerance for its discomfort and what it requires of me. Throughout this project, and to engage with uncertainty, I often wrote in my researcher journal. A small, leather-bound journal holds tabs, sketches, poems, to-do lists, written reflections, and dated incidents. Reading from the beginning is almost a mind

map where I can see myself reflecting on, about, and through the research process: preparing for interviews, noting what was happening in the world, reflecting on interviews, and working my way through uncertainty.

I felt "stuck" at each crossroads: when it was time to hand code, then again when it was time to type the codes to create a codebook, and again when it was time to analyze the codes. I used my research journal to write out what I was doing each time I was stuck. I talked to myself in the journal to sort through a plan and a why. I kept checking with myself at teach interval to see if it made sense. While I searched for answers in the textbooks about exactly what to do next, I was relentlessly reminded that there was no exact, step-by-step process, and this process was unique to me. Because my reflexivity practice provided a way to "systematically seek out [my] own subjectivity" while [my] research [was] in progress, and [I] should be "aware" and "observe" [myself] through the use of reflexive notes to [myself]" (Pillow, 2003, p. 181). I leaned on vigorous reflexivity as a means to document, deconstruct, question, and affirm what I was doing.

My reflexivity practice was also a practice in enacting queer theory. In engaging with the muddiness of uncertainty—about the findings, me as a researcher, and the worthiness of the research itself, my own precarity was exposed to myself, not only as a researcher but as a HESA practitioner. For example, I felt the vulnerability of the participants' stories and my responsibility to them while recognizing my own as I determined how much of my personal stories to include here. I knew I was to "observe" myself, and in doing so, I could not foreclose on some omnipotent understanding of what the research means or even the ways I have been changed in this process. Instead, I lived in the "in-betweenness" of binaries: researcher and practitioner,

student and teacher, novice writer and published author. More importantly, I attempted to remain excited about the unknown and become that reflexivity (and the research) afforded me.

Ethics and Trustworthiness

Throughout the study, I remained keenly mindful of my relationship to the research. As I believe it is important and part of critical research to do research that matters to you and is part of your story, I wanted to be thoughtful about ensuring this project was primarily about participants' stories, not mine. This goal proved challenging and required much reflection. There were several instances throughout the Spring 2023 semester while conducting this study where I felt my responsibility to the institution I work for conflicted with my values.

For example, early in the interview phase of the study, I was made aware of an incident on campus where a first-year student who was Black, queer, low-income, and first-generation violated the University's Title IX policy and was suspended temporarily from the residence halls. This suspension became permanent, and the student was sent home to a city more than an hour away without campus transportation. The interim housing suspension effectively removed the student from the institution. Despite my formal role as an investigator, the accused student leaned on me for support in navigating the incident. Through these interactions, I learned of his fear of coming out to his family, which he had to do once he was sent home. And how that fear kept him "in the closet" and was a major contributing factor to the actions for which the University had suspended him.

My disappointment was not in the student but in the University. Where I advocated for the student to be allowed to return to campus because of his willingness to take responsibility for his impact on others and my belief in our responsibility to educate him, my colleague administrators determined the student was "too much of a risk." Rather than take the opportunity

to support and educate a young Black queer man, the institution decided he was not worth their time. I felt powerless, frustrated, and disappointed. I was researching the work of bias response on campus, and I was placed in the middle of the institution and an impacted student. I remembered this as the reason why I was doing this research. This incident, like others, made me question how effective I am (and can be) as a social justice educator.

These experiences further ignited deep reflexivity and accountability to my values as a social justice educator and as a researcher. These values conflicted with what I could achieve in my role at my institution. As Pillow (2003) stated:

> Self-reflexivity acknowledges the researcher's role(s) in the construction of the research problem, the research setting, and research findings and highlights the importance of the researcher becoming consciously aware of these factors and thinking through the implications of these factors for her/his research. In this way, the problematics of doing fieldwork and representation are no longer viewed as incidental but can become an object of study themselves. (p. 179)

Therefore, I felt deeply entrenched in the research questions, participant stories, and my own experiences. Although my story certainly influenced my interpretations and retelling of the participants' experiences, through reflexivity, I was able to use my experience and relationship to the research as a bolster.

Although I hold minoritized identities that are not readily perceived by others, I am conscious of how my physical presentations of gender and race influenced participants' interactions with me and my interpretations of the research. In fact, as another example of Pillow's (2003) inclusion of reflexivity as an object of the study, in April 2023, while reflecting on the notion of building students' capacity for experiencing bias, I personally experienced bias

in my neighborhood. After that incident, I immediately wrote in my researcher journal about how the experience felt and how I felt even more strongly that the notion of building capacity was one with which HESA practitioners must grapple.

The incident happened on a mundane Saturday morning while my wife and I were walking our dog on the same path we took twice per day in our neighborhood. As we walked, someone slowed their car, rolled down their window, and yelled, “dyke!” at us. We were stunned. *Did they know where we lived? What if they followed us? Why would someone do that? Should we change our walking path?* These questions, I know, were not unlike the concerns students have when they experience bias on campus. However, I knew that my wife and I could not hold the person who yelled at us accountable. And, if we knew who they were, we would be the ones to have to tell them about how it impacted us; we did not have an institution to lean on to have the conversation for us. This made me think and reflect deeply on one of the themes shared later in the research about student capacity for what some participants described as “tolerating a certain level of bullshit” in the “real world.”

Additionally, and as I discussed in my positionality statement, I reflected on my relationship with this project and participant as a white woman and a queer, first-generation student. For example, during one of the first-round interviews, Elena shared how tired she often became due to the consciousness she always had to maintain navigating predominantly white spaces as a Latina woman and nonnative speaker. She reflected, “So having English as my second language has made me even more aware of our conversation.” While she explained this, I immediately noticed feelings of worry escalating in me: I worried if she felt she had to be overly conscious of her words with me. Was she exhausted from having this conversation? These questions felt invasive, and I knew my attention on them was not only detracting from her story

but centering mine. I remember this experience keenly as these thoughts were "in the moment," I reflected on them in my postmemo reflection after the interview. Through this reflection, I had to acknowledge that, yes, she was likely exercising the same consciousness level as me as I, a white woman researcher whom she did not know, was not owed the ease and comfort with which she might talk to a trusted friend. My responsibility as the researcher was to not take up space literally or figuratively in my mind on my own feelings and how they might detract from her story.

In the second focus group, Kay, a Black woman participant, stopped herself midsentence to think of how to say something "professionally." She reflected, "Sorry, I was about to speak in my AAVE." Kay felt more comfortable in the group but was immediately conscious of how her speech might be perceived. As the group continued, I wondered how the Black women participants, specifically, might have experienced the study if their identities were more widely reflected in the participants. However, as I noted in my reflection, this wondering felt more about me wanting to create a "safe space," although I understand cognitively that whiteness itself interrupts spaces at best and can be violent at worst (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). I included these reflections and experiences in the identity analysis through the postinterview memoing and reflexivity. I focused on how the participants experience identity rather than how I experience it in their work. This project, and I argue being an educator broadly, required me as a white person to relentlessly and vulnerably reflect on the role my whiteness plays in educational spaces.

Member Checking

Following the completion of the analysis, I engaged in member checking. I initially planned to provide the participants with written copies of their profiles. However, it became apparent during the study that this project and the participants would be better served by

including them in a discussion about the emerging themes. As such, after I completed the data analysis and initial themes, I invited the participants to a virtual meeting to discuss the themes. Two of the eleven participants attended the member checking meeting. However, five participants planned to participate but messaged me just before or after the meeting to let me know they could not attend. Prior to the meeting, I provided an overview of the themes with reflection questions, which included:

1. What stands out to you about the themes?
    a. Is it resonating?
    b. Pushing up against something for you?
2. What do you notice about the overall impact the work has?
3. What do you notice about how identity and social locations influence how we respond to bias?
4. What do you notice about the intersections of bias response, social justice, and DEI work?

One of the participants replied via email to the overview, stating that they felt it was an accurate description of what they experienced in the interviews and focus group. No other participants responded to the theme overview via email. Two participants attended the virtual member check meeting. During the meeting and themes review, the two participants shared how they saw themselves reflected or not, in the themes. For example, Kay clarified that she did not feel her primary motivation was supporting students. Instead, as someone who also works with faculty and staff, she clarified that her motivation is her belief in higher education and its power to mobilize its community to think critically. Mobey shared similar reflections. I incorporated more

of their reflections in the findings chapter and rearticulated some of the findings based on their clarification.

Additionally, I sent the participants drafts of their stories and intersections with the others as they would appear in the final draft so they could comment and correct anything they felt I did not fully or accurately represent. This mode of member checking aimed to invite participants to confirm if they think I represented their stories accurately and be mindful of information that, if published, could be concerning to them. I also wanted participants to have an opportunity to comment and contribute to the project. While they were not formal coresearchers, I invited their comments as part of the final analysis. Seven of the 11 participants returned their profiles via email, and six of the seven provided minor edits that I included in their final profile and throughout the findings, as requested. Edits included changes to their pseudonyms and clarifications about how long they worked at their institution. I intended for participants to feel as connected as possible to the project and its analysis given the chosen research mode.

Conclusion

As a researcher, I also lived (and am living) through what it means to be a HESA practitioner doing bias response work. As I shared in the stories in this chapter, I never felt separate from the project. This proximity afforded me opportunities and challenges to be deeply reflexive about the participants' stories and my meaning-making of them. Therefore, in each stage of the methods, I was also involved *in the work* of bias response while simultaneously doing the research work. The results of the participants' stories and my meaning-making of them make up the findings in the two findings chapters.

CHAPTER IV: PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Each participant profile describes the participants in their own words. During the interview process, we discussed their formal roles at their institutions and how they supported students who experience bias in those roles or outside them, their social locations and identities, and how they defined social justice, social justice education, and the relationship between their work and definitions. The profiles were not intended to be summaries of their interviews, but instead, to bring to life their experiences and stories so they interacted with the themes more personally and their words are brought to the fore. Each profile details the participants' stories and positions as they were shared with me.

Elena

Elena (she/her) worked at a small private institution in the southeast where she had been for 25 years. She described her institution as her "community" and felt very personally and professionally invested in students' and her colleagues' success and well-being. She was a mid-upper-level administrator who moved up and now served as a director for a diversity center on campus. She described feeling pride when looking back on how much the diversity center and programs had increased over the years. Elena's role was still student-facing as she informally supported students who experienced bias. There was a formal bias reporting process at Oaktree University, where she worked. Many of the students who used the diversity center and its programs used the bias reporting process and, as a result, sought support and advice from Elena and her colleagues. Elena shared that although many students used the formal bias reporting process, many others did not, so she still provided support to those students.

Elena described herself as International and Latina. She was born and raised outside the United States and came to the United States as an exchange teacher with the public school

system. As English was Elena's second language, the role of language was important to her identity as she navigated not only often being the only woman of color in meetings at work but also navigating "English not [being her] first language." Another salient part of Elena's identity as a Latina woman was being a mother raising a U.S.-born Latina daughter. Elena's personal and professional connections to her work, identities, and social locations regularly intersected such that she shared, "We cannot leave our skin here, right? I mean, I don't go home and forget about the work that I do because I have to go home and support a Latina person" in a rural county in the southeast. Elena did not differentiate between her work at Oaktree University and engaging in social justice. She reflected many times that she "could not detach from this," meaning she saw her work at Oaktree supporting minoritized students and being a Latina woman and mother as interconnected and always at play. For Elena, her personal and professional lives were both and always about social justice. Even where she saw herself as privileged, Elena talked about how it was difficult to "get rid of [her] international lens," which has shaped how people interact with her and, thus, with others.

Elena also served as an advisor for students participating in Oaktree's Title IX reporting process. Her experience supporting a student with whom she shared her Latina identity provided much reflection and concern for how she felt policies do not always reflect the students they intended to serve. She recalled when a fellow administrator advised her to tell a student she supported that they could trust the process, saying:

> And then now I'm like, wait a minute, right? I mean, the process is based on white supremacy, so why would I trust the process that it was not meant for me? Sometimes we need to break the process, or we need to bend the process, or we need to adjust the process.

Elena often discussed how her identities and social locations intersected with her work and articulated her care for students, and her expectations, and her care for the staff and the institution for which she worked.

Elena discussed the importance of working alongside colleagues in her department. She reflected on how they support each other and how much she values their relationship. Elena also commented on how important it was for higher education practitioners to be able to care for themselves and the value of administrators to ask them, “How are you simply?”

Ty

Ty (she/her) worked at a large public institution in the southeast. Ty went to the same institution where she worked as an undergraduate student and had been in her role as a victim advocate for under a year. Before returning to her alma mater institution, the University of Springfield, she worked in housing and residence life at an institution in the mid-Atlantic. As an entry-level administrator, Ty worked one-on-one with students who have experienced physical violence, including sexual violence, bias, and other microaggressions. The University of Springfield had a formal bias team, and Ty was a member of that team in addition to her role supporting students who experience sexual violence.

Ty identified as a Black woman with natural hair. She described herself as heterosexual, cisgender, Christian, fat, middle-class and nondisabled. These identities were highlighted as Ty reflected on her work to support students at the University of Springfield. Throughout our time together, Ty reflected often on how her Black woman identity created space for herself and Black women survivors to “let go” and be themselves. She articulated a sense of responsibility to Black women survivors at the minority-serving institution she worked at specifically, as she

noted most of the students she worked with "have not been Black or of color," while recognizing Black and women of color are overrepresented in sexual violence statistics generally.

In explaining the intersections between social justice, bias response work, and her role, Ty stated, "As a person, I feel like I can't not do it." In other words, Ty's identities, personal, and professional life were so closely connected that it was difficult for her to distinguish between social justice and her work in Higher Education Student Affairs (HESA). She shared, "I am part of the group that needs the advocacy and the activism" she provided to students in her formal role and on the bias team. As Ty explained that her work and social justice were not distinct, she explained,

> This isn't some skill you can add to the bottom of your resume. This is my life. . . . . And I always wonder: Something that I sit with is like, okay, when people who don't have this attachment to the work are doing the work. How can you actually do it when you can, literally, when you're done at 5 or 6, or whatever you could turn that off, you don't have to worry about, you know, the bias part at all.

As a result, Ty expressed her contributions to advancing social justice at her institutions came from how she showed up as a Black woman in spaces, challenging what it means to be professional and questioning how "we are truly including all folks on the spectrum, of all of those identities into these spaces" in social justice work.

Ty discussed how her practice for getting ready for work and returning home helped her slow down and take care of herself. For example, Ty talked about her appreciation for makeup and how, as a Black woman, the care she took to put on makeup made her feel confident and gave her time for herself before work. Conversely, she described how, after work, taking her makeup off was like taking off parts of the day.

Mike

Mike (he/him) worked at a large public university in the southeast and led the institution's bias team as part of his full-time role, where he had worked for about a year. As a midlevel administrator, Mike had worked at other institutions in housing and residence life and in dean of student offices. In each of these roles, including the role at R2 University, where he worked at the time of this study, Mike advocated for or implemented a bias reporting process before arriving at R2 University. In addition to overseeing the bias reporting process at R2 University, Mike also met with students who were directly impacted by bias. Outside his formal role, he supported to students in the dean of students office, where his role was located.

Mike identified as a cisgender, white gay man with an invisible disability. Mike discussed his awareness of his whiteness during our interviews and reflected that he made a point to display photos and quotes in his office that reflected people of color, pointing out he felt it was a small step but that "representation matters." Mike also described himself as a "casual dresser," considering he worked in the dean of students office. However, he was conscious of how his white male identity, coupled with more formal dress, might be intimidating to students. Mike discussed creating an "authentic" environment without being "performative." He made a point to state the "rainbow Chacos" he wore were an example of him being his authentic self.

He reflected on the role of religion and social justice in his upbringing, sharing:

> I feel very appreciative that I was having conversations about power and privilege very early on in my life. And I don't know how early those conversations take place and my peers' lives, um, but I know for me at least, those were conversations were happening, like in my household and in my church, from a very early age.

Mike noted that, early in his upbringing, he was taught it was not enough to tolerate people. Instead, Mike stated:

> To have a socially just world is that we have the same opportunities despite our identities to achieve whatever we hope to achieve in life and be successful in however we define success, um, cuz that looks differently to different people." Mike shared that he feels he gets to live out his social justice values by working to support students.

Outside work, Mike coached basketball. For him, staying connected to something he loves and providing mentorship gave Mike the refresher he needed to return to work daily.

Milly

Milly (she/her) worked at a large public institution in a large Midwest city and had been in her current role for approximately 4 years as a midlevel administrator. In her full-time role, Milly supported students involved in fraternity and sorority life. She had supported students who experienced bias, specifically working with students who experienced racial bias off campus. At Universal University, where Milly worked, there was a formal bias reporting process, and she was a mandatory reporter who was required to report incidents of bias and harassment that students shared with her. Milly described her role to ensure students were connected to campus resources and support them to graduation, saying, "My job is to support those students and make sure that they unilaterally have access to the same resources. That is my role."

Milly identified as a white woman. Her social locations included being Appalachian, single, Catholic, heterosexual, educated, living in a Midwest swing state, and being conservative. Milly reflected often on identifying as conservative as a student affairs practitioner and how it was "unique" and often surprised colleagues when she shared her conservative identity. A point

of pride for Milly was being able to connect more fully to white, cisgender, fraternity men across her career. Milly shared:

> I have found it helpful to one, just to be able to have those conversations one-on-one with students and be like, it's, it's okay that, that you don't think this like, but let's remember that there are people around us that you need to still be respectful of, um, and be able to have conversations. And I think it's okay to have disagreement um, and still be respectful.

When we discussed social justice, Milly shared her critiques. Specifically, she felt that social justice left out some people, including the white and poor students she often supported. She remarked that "poor white people aren't sexy, and so they're not really included in social justice work." She provided examples of students she worked with who experienced food and housing insecurity and how she felt the work of social justice was not improving their circumstances. Milly did not identify as a social justice educator. She reflected on how she felt the field of student affairs had shifted from focusing on supporting students to centering social justice work. She explained, "When I chose to go into student affairs, none of this was even part of the conversation. I don't know when student affairs became the catalyst for this, that this is the mission of student affairs." Milly saw herself as someone who supported students in creating institutional changes, graduating, and connecting to campus resources, but not as someone responsible for "dismantling" the system.

When discussing self-care, Milly pointed out how her current institution encouraged a balance she appreciated. For example, she described how past institutions she worked for had negatively impacted her mental health by having unrelenting expectations to check email and take little leave time. However, in her role at the time of this study, Milly felt she was

encouraged to take time away and appreciated how the time away from work improved her mental health and relationship with the work.

Alexis

Alexis (she/her) worked at a large public institution in the Mountain West. Alexis's role at Mountain University was in the dean of students office, where she met with students who were accused of violating university policies. In her role, she also supported students who experienced bias that impacted the alleged policy violation or students who disclosed separate incidents of bias. Alexis was an entry-level administrator and attended Mountain University as an undergraduate student, which influenced how she supported and responded to students in her role.

Alexis identified as biracial: Native American and Mexican American, a sexual assault survivor, cisgender, queer, bisexual, not religious, and a person with an invisible disability. Throughout our interviews, Alexis reflected frequently on her identities as a survivor and Native American. While participating in this research, Alexis was part of Mountain University's student conduct policy review and felt it was "full circle" to be someone influencing policy changes while having felt negatively impacted by the same policies as a student. She also reflected on her desire to incorporate more of her Native American identity into her work by finding ways to support Native American students at Mountain University. Alexis articulated throughout her interviews how she felt, saying, "[I] feel that it's my almost responsibility as a person who identifies as diverse to, um, shake things up and again, be that change. Um, so it's definitely, there's more pressure I put on myself." This "pressure" was evident in how Alexis reflected on her experiences supporting students. She did not differentiate between how she supported students and held them accountable; she believed administrators could do both.

When defining social justice, Alexis explained, “It’s not giving everybody the same things; it’s giving everybody what they need to be successful and be able to grow and develop.” She also noted it was important for her to consider history and power when reflecting on social justice, specifically as she reflected on her survivorship identity and working with students who had been and caused harm. When reflecting on participating in this research and her overall contributions to social justice, Alexis shared,

> Those who’ve experienced things [i.e., harm, microaggressions] are motivated to be the change that they want to see. And I think that’s the biggest takeaway that I’ve had from doing this project is really understanding that, um, you know, it, the experience that we’ve had is what we want to change in higher education and in the communities that we work with and with these students.

Alexis shared that when her work felt heavy, she made a point to create a physical space at home where she put her work bag and items: a physical “putting aside” of the day to recharge and connect. Alexis also wrote found poems to process her and her students’ experiences.

Mobey

Mobey (he/him) served as the chief diversity officer (CDO) at a small private liberal arts university in the southeast, Hardy University. As part of his role as the CDO, he oversaw the university’s formal bias reporting process including supervising staff responsible for supporting students impacted by bias and educating faculty, staff, and students about bias on campus. In addition to leading DEI efforts at Hardy University, Mobey was also involved in responding directly to some bias reports.

Mobey identified as a Black, straight, cisgender man who was relatively nondisabled, Christian, Baptist, a father, partner, husband, brother, and resident of a rural county in the

southeast. Mobey was raised in a single-parent home with a low socioeconomic background and was a first-generation college student. He often reflected on his father's identity and his work in DEI and bias response, felt connected to creating a better world for his children, and even shared about a time when he experienced a direct connection between his work and higher education and his children. His motivations are "personal," as he shared how higher education shaped and changed his life while also being called to improve the institutions of which he was a part.

Mobey described social justice as "trying to create the systems, the structures in place so that people can have a fair shot, a fair chance, and also to have what they need." He added that when bias incidents occur, it is often the result of a lack of social justice education. As such, Mobey understood his role of increasing social justice education by "contributing to a system that produces citizens, in the true essence of the word." As Mobey also taught the history of education in a higher education graduate program, he frequently reflected on history's role in institutions and our understanding of them. He aimed to both name the history and appreciate higher education while increasing access to those who have been historically left out. As a self-care practice, Mobey discussed how important it felt to find time to "recharge." He shared how small acts like taking lunch off campus alone or focusing on tasks at home, like mowing the yard, provided him space to compartmentalize, feel successful, and think.

Heather

Heather (she/her) was a faculty member at a community college, Summit Community College in Mountain West. Heather recently gained tenure and is responsible for faculty development at her institution in addition to teaching. When asked about her role in supporting students who experienced bias, Heather stated she supported students in her classroom and students who came to learn that she was a faculty member they could rely on for support.

Additionally, Heather cochaired the College's DEI Committee outside her formal teaching and development responsibilities. Heather identified as middle class, had mental health diagnoses, and was a cisgender, straight, nondisabled, white woman. Throughout our time together, Heather reflected on how she engaged in her own growth and development as a faculty member by participating in reading groups and challenging her preconceptions about grading, attendance policies, and student access. Heather could easily articulate where she felt she had grown in her knowledge of equity and inclusion and where she wanted to engage further.

Heather described social justice as "action and advocacy" where someone was "more in the trenches to fight for equity." She explained she felt this definition reflected her role at work and shared that "it's not always something" with which she had been comfortable. Heather stated, as she approached and recently received the "community college version of tenure," she was more comfortable speaking up as she alluded to a fear of not gaining tenure if she spoke up in the past. She also cited her own growth around DEI as a catalyst for being more comfortable speaking up. Heather was careful not to state she felt she had completed—or ever would complete—her knowledge and growth around DEI. She reflected on struggles she had extending patience when students made homophobic, racist, or ableist comments in the classroom, specifically. Still, she was working on engaging those students in conversation without shutting them down or causing further harm to students who may be impacted in the classroom.

When it came to advancing overall social justice at her institution, Heather stated she hoped she was contributing to "moving the needle." She stated how her frustrations with the college's leadership often left her feeling disenfranchised and like she carried the weight of DEI initiatives. However, Heather talked about how, across her experience at Summit Community College, she could reflect on changes that have been made. She discussed the work she did to

advocate for trans and nonbinary students to be able to include their preferred names on classroom rosters. Heather shared how her reflections on classroom and teaching policies challenged her to structure her classroom and syllabi to be more inclusive. Specifically, she stated that changing these practices "really improved my relationships with my students cause it's maybe less of like an authoritarian, you know, and more of like a facilitator of their learning and someone who's here to help."

Heather reflected on the importance of self-care in her work. As a faculty member seeking tenure, she stated that it was challenging to take summers off in the past even though she was not on contract. Instead, she shared that she was better about setting boundaries around work when not working and taking breaks when needed. She stated she took "mental health" days and tried to avoid waiting until she was sick to do so.

Zora

Zora (she/her) was an academic counselor at a "4-year medium-sized, private school, that is somewhat religiously based or connected," Bishop University. Supporting students who experienced bias was not part of her formal role. However, she saw herself as someone students could come to for support was also comfortable referring students to other offices, if needed. Zora identified as mixed race: Ecuadorian and Black, a Black Woman, heterosexual, Hispanic, non-Spanish speaker, college educated, nondisabled, middle class, and was raised in a military, single-mother home.

During our interviews, Zora and I did not have the opportunity to discuss social justice expressly. Still, she reflected on experiences throughout her childhood, early career, and graduate school as a DEI and multicultural educator. Zora believed DEI work was everyone's work and that she did not have to work in a multicultural space to engage in such work. Specifically, she

shared, “I would never really want to work in the DEI office space because that kind of idea that it seems to fall upon folks that look like us, and it’s tiring.” Zora reflected on how she learned to navigate her identity as a mixed-race woman and her desire to create more inclusive spaces for others. Much of Zora’s current experience in higher education centered on how she felt her role was to support minoritized students while challenging them to “not always play the race card” at their predominantly white institution. In other words, she felt uniquely positioned to have difficult conversations with students of color as they saw themselves reflected in her.

Kay

Kay (she/her) worked at a midsized institution in the mid-Atlantic region, Lion University, where she served as the institution’s Title IX Coordinator. Bias response was part of Kay’s formal role as she received all reports of bias at Lion University. Prior to working at Lion University, Kay worked in a student conduct office and reflected that she previously wanted to work in equity and inclusion but stated that she was now on the “equity, response, policy side.” Kay pontificated on—and troubled—equity, inclusion, policy, and response throughout our interviews. Early on, specifically, she reflected:

> Maintaining this whole notion of impartiality, although I trouble that quite a bit right, but you know, maintaining this notion of impartiality, I’m trying to create processes that, although I can’t make them feel good, but create processes that people feel heard and respected in.

Kay identified as a Black woman, heterosexual, cis woman. She had a PhD and socioeconomic privilege; she was nondisabled and had invisible disabilities.

Much of Kay’s work, or her reflections on her work, revolved around how she defined social justice and how policy, equity, and DEI work were not necessarily social justice. As she

saw it, “social justice is the maximum good for the most people considering the most marginalized first.” Kay added:

> You cannot have meaningful relationships without conflict . . . and so when we are defining social justice, I don’t think social justice is peace. So that’s what people want when they talk about social justice, diversity, belonging, and inclusion. They want peace. They want the absence of conflict.

As such, Kay’s definition of and relationship to social justice informed how she interpreted the role of bias response broadly in campus communities. Although Kay did not “believe that the institution will be the place of social justice work,” this did not mean she did not interrogate the role she played engaging in policies and practices that purported to do so. Rather, Kay spent much of her time in our interviews reflecting on and centering her own “social justice sensibilities” to navigate and make meaning of her work and larger value set.

Kay’s self-care practices intentionally allowed her the space to reflect and be still. Specifically, she engaged in mindfulness and meditation and cited her experience as a doctoral student on philosophy to provide her foundation for such reflection. As a Black woman, Kay shared how mindfulness gave her space to separate from herself as a racialized body and notice her feelings rather than identify with them. Kay also used movement, running, and CrossFit to exorcise her frustration. She reflected, “So you know . . . I’m trying not to be aggressive all day. I’m trying to hold back so I won’t be perceived as aggressive, so you know, throwing weights around. That’s where I can actually be aggressive. And it’s fine.”

Will

Will (he/him) worked at a private liberal arts university in the Midwest, Midwest University. Will had been in his role in the dean of students office for under 1 year and supported

students who experience bias is part of his full-time role. Will was responsible for Midwest University's bias response and education process and oversaw the restorative processes for bias, student conduct, and Title IX cases. Although Will had been in his current role for under 1 year, he stated he has spent much of his career informally supporting students who experienced bias. Will identified as queer, white, cisgender, a man, and middle class.

Will discussed social justice throughout our interviews and described it as "a tool that allows us to create a society where everyone has what they need to succeed." Using the term, "tool" intentionally, Will stated that "social justice is a tool, an understanding, a framework, however, you want to think about it, that helps us move toward that goal of getting people what they need to be successful." As such, Will's definition of social justice influenced how he worked in his institution to affect changes. Citing the current political context and working in an institution in the Sixth Circuit, Will reflected on how he alters language in training and education to reach broader audiences. For example, Will stated:

> I can deconstruct that and reframe it in a way that never uses the word social justice because while that means something and resonates with me as an individual, it's gonna turn 10 other people off and it's gonna cause someone to be like, why are we funding this?

Will remained mindful of how his definition of social justice motivated him to stay in the work while troubling others' interpretations of the term.

During our interviews, Will was navigating his new role and the tension he felt between the political limitations of his work and his desire to affect change. In other words, he reflected that he felt limited in his role and was only expected to serve as a figurehead of bias response. As

such, Will shared his desire to be transparent with students about what he could and could not do related to redressing bias. He reflected:

> Because I am in the position where I can actually do something to address the things that are infuriating to me as a person and as a staff member [and] . . . I think we always have to think about how we can do the work in whatever way we have to.

And although he sometimes felt limited by his institution to respond to students in the way he felt was best, Will highlighted the importance of students feeling heard through bias response processes.

To care for himself, Will discussed how he tried to engage in areas of campus where he could see students flourish and enjoy their experience. For example, he stated that volunteering and attending campus events were especially important to him. Will also talked about the role therapy had in life and its contributions to his work.

Ellen

Ellen (she/her) worked at State University, a large public university in the Southeast. At State University, Ellen held students accountable for policy violations and supported the staff who reported to her. Supporting students who experienced bias was not part of her formal role but intersected with her work. When describing how her formal role intersected with bias response, Ellen shared incidents that recently encapsulated the overlap of student accountability and bias, such as a Black student charged with vandalism for covering up a sign on a residence hall named after a slaveholder. Ellen identified as a white woman, a mom, and as a terminal degree holder.

When defining social justice, Ellen considered aspects of what it meant to be social beings with notions of equity, questioning, “How do we as social animals make sure that the

systems that we're using to just be and exist are accessible to folks across a lot of different identities and a spectrum of experiences?" When discussing social justice education, Ellen explained, "I think that the difference for me is if you say I'm a social justice educator, how are you also holding yourself accountable to actually engage in social justice work?" As such, Ellen described her engaging in social justice work by recognizing and understanding how her identities influence how students perceive and experience her as an administrator rather than "doing social justice" in meetings with students. Ellen reflected that she "doesn't see it [conduct meetings] as a platform" to engage students in what she referred to as restorative or educational conversations. Instead, she felt the work she was called to do was about students' physical and immediate safety. She contended they were unlikely to engage in educational conversations if they did not feel either.

Ellen reflected she often felt she "has to get over this imposter syndrome" when conversing about bias; however, she recognized that working in higher education required her to know how bias showed up for students. Ellen shared that she often second guessed herself and even sometimes made herself smaller to "make up" for her white woman identity. She often reflected on the work she did to lean on trusted colleagues to both support and challenge her to interrogate these feelings so she could better support students who did not share her identities.

As a housing administrator, Ellen shared that she had experienced blurred lines between work and her personal life and how such lines made self-care more difficult. However, Ellen stated that clearer boundaries between work and home helped her be more present at home and with her children. Ellen also cited colleagues' support in self-care to sustain her in her work.

Conclusion

Each participant's institutional roles, institution type and location, social locations and identities, relationship to social justice, institutional role, and well-being practices were shared here to set the stage for how they showed up in the interviews and are represented in the themes in Chapters 5 and 6. While each participant's experiences and relationship to bias response work varied, there were some intersections, and most importantly, they all had stories and experiences they wanted to share about their work.

CHAPTER V: CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY HESA PRACTITIONERS

At the beginning of this project, I set out to better understand and then tell the stories of how Higher Education Student Affairs (HESA) practitioners are affected by supporting students who experience bias incidents. I wondered if they felt the same tension I did between enacting social justice while being agents of institutions tied to agendas disparate from the work of social justice. Some HESA practitioners feel they hold two overarching responsibilities one to the institution they work for and the other to their personal missions to participate in social justice. In this project, I explored how practitioners achieved those responsibilities, how they negotiated this tension, and how their relationship to social justice influenced their work. This research mattered as an exploration of HESA practitioners' experiences supporting students impacted by bias because, as educators, many (not all, as the findings suggest) seek to impact social change through education. As I posed earlier, I am concerned that if we HESA practitioners operate in systems and structures that prevent us from doing such work, we become deeply impacted. This work and the stories shared uncover the complexity of responding to bias incidents in education and as such, doing "diversity work" (Ahmed, 2012).

Although not a theme, it is necessary to distinguish and identify *who* participants referred to when they shared stories about students who experienced bias. Participants referred to supporting students who enacted bias or caused harm (often referred to as a respondent in formal processes) and students who were impacted by bias or harm (often referred to as a complainant in formal processes). This contextualization was relevant not only for understanding the participants' stories but also for situating their positionality. For example, they might be asked to meet with or support a respondent per their formal role, or relationship to a student. These were often referred to as "educational conversations" in the interviews.

Additionally, many participants worked in student conduct or accountability offices. Their formal roles and positionality uniquely situated them in relationship to the notion of "supporting" a student who experiences bias. In other words, they may have interacted with a student who was a respondent in a student conduct or policy violation meeting but who had also experienced bias as a complainant in a separate or related incident. As the participants' experiences are told, it is important to be mindful of the various roles and contexts in which they support students, including those who enacted harm.

Current Political Context and Politicization of DEI in Higher Education

As my and the participants' subjectivities continued to shift and influence these findings, so did the political landscape surrounding higher education, civil rights, and freedom of speech throughout early 2023. For example, when data collection for this project began in February 2023, the North Carolina House and Senate had two proposed bills targeting the LGBTQ+ community's access to healthcare and education. By July 2023, the North Carolina House and Senate proposed 12 bills attacking education, freedom of speech, and civil rights (American Civil Liberties Union, 2023). Moreover, by the end of June 2023, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard and Students for Fair Admissions v. UNC eliminating the use of affirmative action in college admissions (*Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College,* 2023). As I reflect, consider, and make sense of how to tell best the stories of the 11 participants in this study, it is imperative that I not only note this curricular (Slattery, 2013) backdrop but use this in the analysis of the research questions:

1. How does responding to bias incidents impact student affairs practitioners' well-being?

2. How do student affairs educators' social locations influence how they experience their role in responding to bias incidents?
3. How do HESA practitioners perceive the relationship between bias response and social justice, and how do their perceptions impact how they engage in their work?

The summer 2023 Supreme Court Session and bills introduced (and passed in states such as Florida's *Stop Woke Act, HB 7*) all informed how participants reflected on and told stories about their experiences. Specifically, all except one participant described themselves as holding one or more minoritized identities, and each of them cited personal connections to supporting students who experience bias and furthering the mission of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) in higher education.

HESA Practitioners' Experiences through a Queer Theory Framework

In addition to the political and legislative backdrops against which this research took place and participants' relationships to the same, I employed a queer theoretical framework to consider, analyze, and make sense of the themes. Queer theory is not only a driving factor for the research questions as I considered the experiences of HESA practitioners that lie outside the binary of a student and bias incident, but it was also a perspective and lens through which to expanded our consideration of the HESA practitioner as an "other" (Britzman, 1998, p. 157), and in this sense, created the possibility for HESA practitioners to see them as worthy of such rumination. As a reminder, the main elements of queer theory employed in this study are:

- Denouncement of binary thinking, practice, and interpretation (Anzaldúa, 1987);
- Anticipation of the signified's precariousness; that is, queer theory pays attention to how we "other" people and experiences and thus make determinations of their worth or value (Butler, 2012), and;

- Challenge to normalcy and recognition that what is deemed “normal” is a conceptual order that “refuses the very possibility of Other” (Britzman, 1998, p. 157) because the conception of other is outside our recognition.

I attempted to do more than sieve the emergent themes through queer theory but rather imagined they each took a shape in my hand. Moreover, as I touched them, turned them, held them in a different light, I considered how queer theory informed my understanding from all angles. In other words, this analysis includes my feeling through (not just about) the themes and their relationship(s) to queer theory discussed throughout.

Findings Overview

Across each interview, participants clarified their deep passion for guiding, supporting, and increasing students’ access to education and, thus, degree completion. Several participants cited feeling motivated to influence their campus community through education, including faculty and staff. While many participants shared other goals, intentions, critiques, and desires for students and themselves, their stories were shared more cohesively in the following themes:

1. Being Impacted by Legislation, Institutions, and Students: HESA Practitioners’ Challenges
2. Is Bias Response Social Justice? Intersections, Dissonance, and the Role of the “Social Justice Warrior” in Bias Response
3. “Bias Incident Intake:” How HESA Practitioners Perceive their Role and Intersections with Identity
4. “We are Most Critical of What We Love:” Motivation to Do and Stay in the Work

In efforts to resist fragmentation (hooks, 1989) of their experiences by boxing them into themes, the following shows interconnection and overlap across how participants perceive and

experience the reality of their work and its contrast to its goals. More specifically, the themes revealed here showcase how serving in higher education as faculty and staff sustains and disenfranchises us.

Being Impacted by Legislation, Institutions, and Students: HESA Practitioners' Challenges

> The diversity worker has a job because diversity and equality are not already given; this obvious fact has some less obvious consequences. (Ahmed, 2012, p. 23)

This study's participants noticed the institutional and legislative impacts on themselves and students. Students also impacted them as they navigated the personal challenges they felt because of the tension between the expectations from legislation, institutions, and students against their own expectations. In this theme, I discuss the challenges the participants face and how they feel about them. More specifically, I discuss how recent and ongoing DEI legislation across the country impacts HESA practitioners and their work, the institutional influences on their work including those posed by systems, policies, students' capacity for difference, staff leaving, difficulty with leadership, and managing tension between the students they support and the institutions they serve. Finally, I discuss how students' expectations of HESA practitioners impact their work and how all these challenges impact them personally.

Participants experienced significant challenges regarding their roles in supporting students who experience bias and see their role beyond simply "a job." Before delving into this theme, although addressed in a later theme, I lay the foundation that the HESA practitioners in this study felt largely fulfilled in their roles. Perhaps more important and relevant to this study was that the participants also derived much personal meaning and fulfillment from their work. Several participants cited personal experiences as students that inspired them to enter the field of HESA. Many agreed that "education can be transformative," as one participant stated because

they had experienced that transformation. Another participant explained that her belief in the capacity for change and growth came from her own experience in education, where she "learned how to think critically." Their feelings of fulfillment were often tied to individual student interactions and feeling like they were part of that student's successful degree completion. When further interrogated about how the participants felt about their impact they had in advancing their campus's overall bias response or inclusion efforts, they struggled to articulate a feeling of fulfillment despite their original reasons for entering the field.

As such, the following highlights the barriers to such fulfillment. Overall, obstacles and challenges stem from misalignment between their goals for bias and students', institutions', and legislative goals. Overall, HESA practitioners strongly desire to improve campus culture but do not feel set up by their institutions to do so successfully. Therefore, they turn their focus to individual student interactions to achieve a feeling of success.

Legislation Challenges

As made popular in the second-wave feminist movement, "the personal is political." The participants reflected in this study—those who identified as gay, queer, Latinx, mixed race, Native American, and Black and their intersections—were experiencing a new and present politicization of their identities and vocations. Now, more than ever, the intersections of their identities and trades are debated across national news outlets, social media, in living rooms across the country, and in the Supreme Court. Still, the HESA practitioners featured here and those not in the study were not included in those debates. The courts and social media comment threads have not considered the HESA practitioners whose identities and vocations are at stake and the impact of such a threat. The political context and politicization of DEI work in higher education became not only a backdrop against which this study was conducted but limited how

some of the participants could fulfill their roles. Even where their roles were not yet impacted directly by changing legislation, most participants held the same minoritized identities that became the center of some of the proposed legislation aimed at limiting the rights of LGBTQ+ folks or restricting education about African American history. The participants discussed these and additional challenges and concerns related to pending legislation in some states. However, at the time of the study, the Sixth Circuit had already decided on a case limiting how some participants could legally respond to bias incidents on campus (*Speech First, Inc. v. Schlissel et al.,* 2019).

Leaning Into Privilege: Feeling Overwhelmed and Avoidant

All participants voiced concern for colleagues in states where legislation had already impacted their work. However, for some, that concern was also met with a sense of avoidance or deferment as they already felt too overwhelmed to truly process the "what-ifs" of pending legislation because they felt constantly barraged by legislation threatening their identities. Additionally, some participants did not feel deeply impacted by their state's legislation. Specifically, Ty, who identifies as a heterosexual Black woman reflected on her nuanced feelings about anti-LGBTQ legislation in her state. She shared:

> In a way, it's nuanced for me because, especially for anti-trans, anti-LGBTQ plus bills, I'm like, 'Is this me exerting my privilege of being able to turn it off?' Right? Um, the same way that folks are able to turn off anti-black legislation. Um, so I've been sitting with that for a little bit.

Ty shared extensively about the conflicting feelings she had about her own statement. As a self-identified social justice educator, she knew it was important to pay attention to and engage in her state's legislation around anti-LGBTQ bills that impact higher education. At the same time, she

was already feeling depleted as a Black woman educator who supports other Black women who experience violence and microaggressions regardless of relevant legislation.

Mike voiced feeling the need to pay attention to his state's proposed legislation but also stated that his role had not been impacted, nor did he anticipate his role would shift considerably:

> And I recognize there's a lot of privilege with that cuz I know some; I have some friends who do DEI work in Florida who are not in the same position as me at this point in time. And so, I think for me, it's not necessarily impacting me and my work. It's definitely something that I'm considering.

However, Mike also discussed how his role as the bias team lead at his institution was not what he thought it would be. He shared that he began in the role feeling hopeful about the impact he would make regarding campus bias education and improving the culture. Instead, due to staffing shortages in his office and roles, he was asked to prioritize other work duties over leading the bias team; thus, he was unable to focus on the bias response work as anticipated.

In these examples, the participants leaned into binary thinking to cope. As they both held minoritized identities (Black woman and gay man, respectively), their binary thinking served as a protective mechanism so they could focus on the work before them. For Mike, the binary lied between feeling like his job was not threatened because his role required more than bias response. For Ty, her binary reflection on her state's anti-LGBTQ legislation versus a focus on race offered her a welcome reprieve emotionally. Rather than only pointing out the binary nature of their individual reactions to the legislative impacts and the precarity of "others" who are missed. However, I drew attention to the reification occurring because of the positions they were placed in in the higher education system, specifically, the reification of bias, hate, and microaggressions. When the staff who were called to support students who experienced bias

were overtasked with work unrelated to their role or so disenfranchised they found it difficult to empathize with other minoritized communities, they were likely ineffective changemakers.

Rather than asking why they were reacting in this way, queer theory asks inividuals to think more deeply. It requires people to ask what mechanisms are in place to restrict participants (and themselves) from exploring all the possibilities of the legislative impact. For example, Mike reflected on the legislation only in terms of whether it would threaten his employment or not and Ty shared that because the legislation in her state impacted only LGBTQ folks, she felt she could "take a break." In these either/or binaries, Mike and Ty leaned into the privileges they felt being protected from the impact because of their identity or position. These positions, queer theorists might argue, excluded not only the reality that the legislation impacted Ty and Mike but also limited their ability to explore how they might prepare for future legislative impacts and foreclose on any other meaning-making outside these binaries.

Hoping for Proactivity: Preparing for Changes Based on Legislation

Participants also articulated a desire for their institution to be proactive in preparing for legislative impact, regardless of whether they were in a state that had already experienced changes. Some participants even articulated to institutional leadership that they did not want to "wait and see" but felt it was important to let the campus community know the institution was already thinking about and ready for potential impacts. As Mike continued, he ultimately determined he felt his institution needed to begin having conversations with students and across leadership about how they could best prepare for possible changes to how they support students experiencing bias. Mike shared:

> I think that sometimes we look at things through rosy glass lenses and, um, sometimes we need to, we need to, I don't know, have some hard conversations about what could potentially happen. And if that's the case, what's our plan if we even have one?

Here, Mike also named the "rosy colored lenses" that prevent us from digging more deeply or, as queer theory would ask us, to consider what we are missing.

Elena, another participant highlighted the notion of leaning into the questions about legislation impact more deeply:

> What are we gonna do about this? Is there something that we proactively can think about? And, if we know that this legislation is going to affect this, can we prepare writing? Can we start having discussions with students about this?

Elena's statement came from a conversation she and other Directors in her division were having about the potential impact of legislation at their institution. Their leader made a comment that felt dismissive to the BIPOC and queer staff in the room. She expressed concern not only for students but her colleagues, too. Elena also brought to light what she suspects is a fear of some institutions to make statements about the political climate, sharing:

> And obviously we know that there is a fear of making this completely public because it's a political statement. But at the end, it's not a political statement. It affects students. And if we are a student-centered space, we have to protect the well-being of the students. And not even thinking about our faculty and staff, but of our students; then we should be informing students about what's happening.

Here, Mike and Elena addressed an expectation, or hope, that their institutions did not wait for legislation to change how they responded as a campus. Instead, they suggested that no matter what legislation that impacted their work may be passed, they expectd their instituetions to

address how the threat of such legislation impacted students, faculty, and staff. However, as discussed in the literature review, institutions often use bias response teams (or other DEI offices) to make blanket statements to campus communities after an incident occurs (Davis & Harris, 2016). The literature review also saw a proliferation of statements from university leadership in the wake of the summer 2020 "racial reckoning." After a Google search of "2020 campus statements against racism," the first several hits go directly to statements made by colleges and universities across the United States. Although they did not directly name it as such, Mike and Elena's expectations that institutions provide a statement or engage in conversations prior to legislation affecting their work would largely be a break from how institutions usually respond: reactively.

The Impact of Legislation Has Already Begun

Kay, who was a Title IX administrator, and Will, who worked at an institution in the Sixth Circuit and led his university's bias response process, spoke directly to experiences they have already had related to adjusting their work and bias response to align with compliance standards set by either the Department of Education or Sixth Circuit of Appeals, respectively. Feeling overwhelmed or avoiding was still possible for them, but it occurred under the constraints of compliance with the law. As their work was already informed by law, they had much to say about how they and their students were impacted.

For institutions in the Sixth Circuit jurisdiction, specifically, Will discussed being prohibited from meeting with students who have enacted bias. This restriction, Will said, negatively impacted the student who experienced the bias and the student who was accused or who was the respondent. He went on to discuss that his inability to address bias incidents directly

not only affected respondents in the short term but deterred their ability to think more broadly and critically about the impact of their actions in the future. He shared:

> All of those people [respondents] who would've evolved their thinking and approach as a result now no longer have that opportunity. So they're gonna continue to do this, right? Which maybe it's a learning loss opportunity for the respondent, but it also then becomes a residual harm that occurs in other communities because they're gonna continue to say those things.

Will felt he could no longer have "educational conversations" with students due to his institution's fear of "being political." In other words, he articulated the perception that addressing students who enacted bias was perpetuating a liberal or "woke" agenda. Notably, although Will was prohibited by law from contacting a respondent in a bias incident, none of the participants articulated a clear and successful method of accountability process for those who enacted bias even when contact was possible. In most cases, a respondent was invited to an "educational conversation" and because most bias response processes were not punitive, practitioners could not require students to attend them. A possible solution to Will and the other participants' concerns about accountability was discussed in the final theme.

As a compliance officer, Kay interpreted her role supporting students slightly differently than participants who saw themselves in more of a support role. She distinguished between her role in enacting policy, in her case Title IX policy, and those who served to support students through a bias incident. However, Kay often referenced her "social justice sensibilities" and how those sensibilities both influence and often conflict with her role in enacting the law. She stated, "Being a compliance person also puts me in a unique position in the university too, where it's not all just about. I also feel like I'm working for the man a lot." Kay's position required that she

interrogate and understand the role of compliance. Although she often felt she was "working for the man," she reflected that she was especially equipped to navigate this tension and interrogate policy in a way that allowed her to do her job and influence her colleagues because of her criticality and social justice sensibilities.

Kay and Will felt the impact of law and legislation on bias response. Their knowledge of legislation led them to seek new ways of addressing bias or ideate about what possibilities existed given the constraints. In other words, although they understood their role, they accepted they could not (and their institutions were unwilling to) create systematic changes to address bias. Kay and Will advocated for a more community-oriented, proactive inclusion of difference, rather than bias response processes at their institutions and across higher education. I discuss recommendations for a more community-oriented approach to inclusion in the final theme.

However, the participants clarified the ways they were considering—or not—the legislative challenges in their state and nationally. Where participants seemed to avoid the legislative challenges, such avoidance came as a coping mechanism and already feeling overwhelmed as a minoritized person or working in a state that had not passed any legislation that impacted higher education. Regardless of how the participants felt personally impacted, they seemed keenly aware of how colleagues in Florida felt threatened and what such a threat meant for colleagues and their careers more broadly.

Institutional Challenges

While some participants discussed institutional challenges as using policies and systems interchangeably, others made distinctions between the two. For example, where the terms were used interchangeably, policies were often used to describe systems such as student conduct or Title IX policies. These policies have also created systems of control and domination in

education. Participants used the terms policies and systems separately when they discussed bias reporting systems, for example, which they saw as separate from institutional, punitive policy. In other words, bias reporting systems are perceived as having less authority than institutional policies and procedures. Participants also articulated the problematic nature of making a bias reporting process punitive or duplicative of existing policies, such as a student code of conduct policy where students must be held accountable. At the same time, they were aware that although not punitive, the system still mimicked policies that had not affected systematic change to prevent bias or respond more thoughtfully.

Participants also often referred to higher education or their respective institutions as systems when discussing systems. This subtheme highlighted the significant tension practitioners felt navigating policies, systems, and students' expectations and the impact of their convergence on the practitioners. Here, I look closely at the precarity of the HESA practitioner as "other," in policy, system, and student expectation discussions where practitioners are excluded but expected to carry out expectations without considering their impact on them.

Participants Feeling in the Middle of Policies and Systems

Perhaps the most salient experience for participants related to navigating what they described as the system broadly was a sense of "feeling in the middle." Particularly for participants who held minoritized identities, they shared experiences of feeling as though they were "selling out" those who shared the same identities. In other words, they felt that given their misgivings about the system, referring a student to an institutional system (e.g., a formal bias reporting process) felt like betrayal; they knew the system would not resolve the student's concern, but they referred them to or ushered them through it. While many participants shared this experience, those who worked in student conduct or adjacent roles highlighted this tension

throughout their interviews. Alexis described a meeting with a respondent in a code of conduct violation. The student, who was part of a Native American group on campus, vandalized another student organization's U.S. flag because they felt targeted by the other student organization. Alexis shared the student's Native American identity and felt she could understand how the student felt about the U.S. flag and why they vandalized it. She commented:

> I understood from their perspective, but from a policy perspective—and that was where my line had to be drawn. And that's something that I had to explain to them was that I'm here to uphold the policy and the current policy that I have. Yeah. And the current policy, that's not something that's, you know, in there, um, actually and so there we just have to uphold what is there.

In this example, Alexis reflected that her role was to "uphold the policy," so she had to "stay in that lane." Alexis articulated that her role was to uphold the policy and encourage students to express themselves in ways that did not violate policy.

Ellen, who was white, described a similar meeting she had with a Black male student who allegedly posted over the name of the residence hall he lived in because of his frustration with the administration for not renaming the hall or removing the name. The student felt frustration and anger because he had to live in a building that he felt heralded by a white supremacist leader. The student was charged with violating the university public posting policy. Ellen recalled:

> Because we have a no public hosting policy, they had to come into my office and talk to me about that behavior when really they, as a student of color living in a residence hall named after a white supremacist was really, really difficult for them. And that was, and so we really had to dig into a lot of like what does advocacy looks like at an institution

> that is primarily white, that does not serve students of color in a way that feels very prominent or very forward even in 2023.

Although Ellen, like Alexis, had to follow the institution's policy and felt her first role was to "do her job" to enforce the policy, she took the time to engage the student in a conversation about how to express his activism. As a white woman, she reflected that she was conscious throughout their meeting of how the student would perceive her, but also how she expressed support for the student without expressing support for the policy violation.

Ellen and Alexis both felt "in the between" the system (their institution), their role (student conduct officers), and the student (who is both accused of violating policy and negatively impacted by the system). They empathized with the students they met with, and both identified feeling like they had to prioritize their enforcement role over endorsing the students' actions despite their understanding of them. Alexis's experience highlighted the precarity of HESA practitioners, which I hoped to elucidate in this study. As a mixed-race, Native American woman in a position of authority over students with whom she shares the same identity, Alexis was required to enforce policies she did not create and were not written with this student population in mind.

In addition to navigating policy and negotiating their own feelings about enforcing policies, several participants discussed similar tension about what they referred to as an overall system. For those who were enforcing policies they either did not agree with or knew were not built to serve students' identities, they reflected on their role in the larger system or institution. Elena discussed how she recognized the need for her role and diversity center to exist on her campus, sharing:

> I'm very aware that higher education was not meant for people that look like me or people that look like the students that we serve here, right? So, uh, I'm very aware of that, but I also believe in the power of education.

She went on to state that, perhaps, her position would not be needed in an ideal world. As such, she believed her role was to critique the system and advocate for students. Until then, Elena said, "I think that it's mine and our responsibility to continue, um, doing the work to challenge those systems."

Similarly, Alexis, who served in a more formal policy enforcement role, reflected often on how she felt about enforcing policies that excluded students. Specifically, she cited feeling a stronger sense of responsibility to question policies because she not only shared similar identities with students impacted but also worked at her alma mater, where she also felt unrepresented as a student. She shared, "I kind of feel that it's my almost responsibility as a person who identifies as diverse to, um, shake things up and again, be that change. Um, so it's definitely, there's more pressure I put on myself." Alexis used staff meetings as a main tool to advocate for students. For example, during our interviews, Alexis discussed being part of a student code of conduct policy update where she felt she had both an opportunity and responsibility to include the stories and experiences students had shared with her to shape the policy to be more inclusive.

Overall, participants felt keenly aware of their roles in both policy enforcement and the larger system, whether in their institution or higher education generally. Such an awareness elicited feelings of personal responsibility to improve policies or systems and support students who they knew would be, or were already, negatively impacted by policies and systems. Participants spent much of their time in the latter, and, as Elena suggested, institutional leaders

feel their work is done when putting support systems in place rather than challenging the systems that necessitate support in the first place.

Staff Leaving

Participants discussed the impact of other colleagues leaving the field, and some shared that they, too, considered departing from their role or the field of HESA. The main contributors to these feelings were constraints on their work in bias or DEI and the impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic. The departures of their colleagues from higher education or the field broadly felt particularly relevant to the participants as they either lost thought partners (i.e., people they felt understood their work), those who shared the same or similar identities, or both. In other words, their community at work has been increasingly and consistently disrupted since 2020. This sense of loss and reconsideration of where they can be most influential as social justice educators has impacted them deeply. These losses also impacted how much or how often they could engage in social justice work. Mike shared:

> I would love to have some consistent staff so that I could focus on doing the job that I was hired to do. You're losing funding, you're losing thought partners in the office, you're having to do, uh, you know, other people's work. It's just challenging.

In this example, not only was Mike being asked to do work outside the scope of his role in bias response, but the institution also made statements about what work needed to be prioritized and clarified to Mike that the priorities did not include preventing bias. When Mike was told his priorities were not about preventing bias, he felt it sent a message to Mike about his role and how it shifted since he began. He explained:

> I just feel like when I entered the role, I had all these other really great ideas of things that I would hope to accomplish. I just I find myself becoming more and more okay with not trying to do all of the things.

Will, who was similarly situated at his institution, also shared how he felt real barriers to creating change. He indicated, “I think had I realized how limited I would be in my current role of what I can actually do from a bias incident response, it probably would’ve made me rethink if this is what I wanna do.” These constraints made Will question his role entirely.

Participants articulated a strong desire to work in communities to create change. As many were mid- to upper-level leaders, they felt a commitment to higher education and their calling was as educators to clear pathways for access for all, especially minoritized students. However, as Mike stated, due to the significant loss of staff in and after 2020, “We are losing people left and right because this is becoming, this work is becoming unsustainable,” Due to ongoing constraints around bias and DEI work, staff are experiencing significant points of reflection about where and how they can be most effective in facilitating access for all students.

Challenges From Students and Student Capacity

Participants discussed both students impacted by bias and those who caused harm and were unwilling to be in the community with those they hurt in meaningful ways. As Milly reflected, “I think we live in a world right now where disagreement is seen as harm” and this has increased students’ intolerance of harm. They felt and cited multiple times that harmed students “want us to solve their conflicts” and want “offenders removed from campus” rather than finding ways to address the harm. So, although practitioners sought additional support from their campuses to do their work effectively, students (complainants and respondents) did not seek to engage with each other meaningfully. In other words, students wanted the practitioners to

remove harm-doers or intervene in the same ways student conduct or Title IX policies did to address policy violations. However, because microaggressions and hate speech were not policy violations, the harm students experienced did not meet those “policy standards.” As such, complainants feel their needs were not met. Conversely, if a student was named as a harm-doer, they sought compassion, second chances, and understanding.

As practitioners were aware of and navigating how policies and systems disenfranchised minoritized student populations, they were also aware of students’ unwillingness and capacity to address harm caused by other students or the institution. For example, although some cited recognition that current students seemed to have an increased awareness of social issues and DEI, they were equally and sometimes negatively impacted by the social media vehicles that increased their awareness of such issues. In other words, practitioners often felt students wanted the institution, or them, to remove people from campus who had enacted even minor transgressions against them. For example, Will reflected: “I’ve also found that students just don’t have the capacity to deal with conflict [and] well maybe we as an institution can’t engage, but can we help students engage in those conversations themselves?” Zora added, “I do worry sometimes . . . social media has played a really great role in like destigmatizing and providing education,” but this has contributed to students’ lack of capacity to engage in meaningful conversations around difference. Given the participants’ observations that students generally were both sensitive to issues of difference and were also unwilling to engage in processes to redress bias incidents when they experienced or caused harm, their unwillingness to engage in bias response processes posed a relevant concern to staff supporting students who experienced and enacted bias.

The participants most frequently discussed complainants' expectations of them to remove harm-doers from campus. Nearly every participant cited an incident where a student expected them to remove someone from campus and did not want to engage in any type of repair, nor were they interested in the respondent being educated. Participants stated that many complainants did not believe educating respondents was an effective way to address their feelings or the impact of the harm. As such, these expectations often left students with the perception that practitioners did nothing or worse, did not care. These cases were particularly difficult for participants who held titles that students perceived as more "powerful" or with whom they shared an identity.

While I discuss the importance of their role later, it is relevant to provide a connection here. Institutions expect practitioners to be thoughtless, rule-following, obedient policy enforcers, system supporters, or ideal workers (Acker, 1990). However, as is the case with several participants, they were given titles and served in roles where students could easily anticipate the opposite: that they were challenging the system and in roles to serve students' needs (and desires). As these polarizing realities exist, the experience of what it meant for the participants to be educators with social justice orientations complicated how they navigated these polarizing forces. Participants discussed further how they attempted to manage these conflicting expectations.

Managing Expectations of Students, Institutions, And Themselves

As practitioners navigated legislative, institutional, and student challenges that impacted their work and experiences, they spent significant emotional energy managing these often conflicting expectations and challenges. They were managing students' expectations of themselves and the institutional processes, and they also spent time managing their own

expectations. The latter was challenging for the participants. As addressed previously, balancing their own goals, the institutional demands, and student expectations of them and the institution became a significant part of their role and work. In modifying their own expectations of bias response processes, in particular, some participants felt it was important to relay these same expectations to students about what bias response "is and is not.'' Mobey articulated this sentiment, saying:

> Communicating what our [bias response] system is and what it is not. So, our system is rooted in education and development. We want to expand perspectives. We wanna support students or reporters of the experiences that they've had here. It's not a punitive one. We have other resources on campus that address the punitive aspects, whether student conduct, human resource, or even campus police and safety.

Mobey used this type of language throughout the interviews to articulate how he personally managed the expectations of students and his institution. While he aimed to educate students and foster environments where they think more critically, he found that being transparent about the limitations of the bias response process at his institution was helpful for the entire campus community.

Will shared a different example of how he navigated and managed expectations. In this example, he shared how he managed student expectations while being more precise about his own ability to affect change. Will reflected on the frustration he often felt having to use what he felt was coded language to communicate to students that he could not do what they wanted to support them. He explained:

> Every time I meet with a student because of bias incident response, I know that there's a certain level of BS I'm going to be giving them because I'm gonna say this informs our

educational programming and does it maybe, but not in a meaningful way. Um, this is a terrible thing you experienced. Absolutely. But then the institution, because of something outside of our control, has made a decision that we're not gonna do anything more than just support this student.

Mobey and Will both expressed the need to tell students first what they could not do in their roles of bias response. Will especially felt aware of how students perceived him as his assistant dean title suggested to students that he held the authority to stop unwanted behavior: "Like someone reaching out to an assistant dean thinks that they, that I have this power that I really don't, right?" Ultimately, Will, and other participants like Kay and Mike expressed concern that they could not control the outcome, despite students' expectations otherwise, and feared how such unmet expectations impacted students and themselves, especially the practitioners who identified as social justice educators.

Overall, managing expectations from students, institutions, and themselves was a frequent and salient experience among participants. They used language to manage the expectations of students and the institution while negotiating expectations of themselves. For example, Elena often discussed her desire to facilitate systematic change at her institution but frequently felt like "we are just putting band-aids on larger issues." Other participants, like Will and Mike, reflected on their desire (and expectation) to engage in meaningful dialogue with students to address systematic issues. However, they felt prohibited from doing so either due to legal guidelines, students' lack of desire to engage, or restrictions based on the role of the bias team.

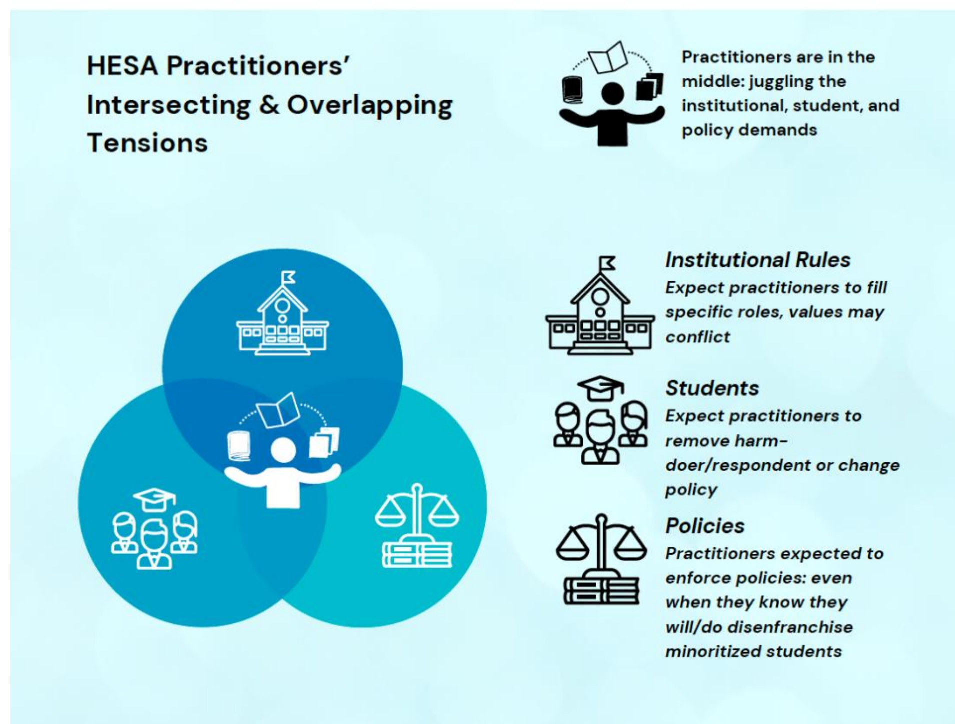
Institutional challenges affecting participants' ability to engage in bias response work and social justice most frequently included navigating institutional policies and systems, the impact

of staff leaving, and managing students' expectations. As participants often sat "in the middle" of these issues and stakeholder expectations, their experiences mattered. Rather than being mindless, detached workers (Acker, 1990), they were complex, engaged, connected, and passionate practitioners who sought at least to make a positive difference in students' lives or even alter educational systems to be more inclusive. However, as evidenced by the challenges they experienced, their goals and expectations may be outside the scope of what their institutions demand of them. Alternately, those same goals and expectations may match students', but as practitioners, they were limited in their ability to affect change. They realized, ultimately, students may only see them as agents of the institution or larger system.

Personal Challenges/Impact

Because practitioners sat in the middle of the tension between students, policies, and institutions, they experienced significant dissonance personally. In this dissonance, they felt more broadly betrayed by their institutions and higher education. This betrayal and the ongoing microaggressions and harm students experienced (that resonated with many) created feelings of numbness and burnout. As they felt impacted, they were equally concerned with how and if they were sustaining the systems they hoped to dismantle as educators. Figure 1 demonstrates the tensions participants felt between their institutional roles, students, and policies they were required to enforce or uphold. Throughout my interviews with the participants, including the focus groups, the word "feeling" occurred several times as participants attempted to identify how institutions impacted them. The subthemes highlighted are the most frequent feelings shared among participants: betrayal, dissonance, and feeling numbed and burned out.

Figure 1. HESA Practitioners Intersecting and Overlapping Tensions



Betrayal

In the focus group, a discussion about institutional betrayal (Smith & Freyd, 2014) ensued after Alexis used it to describe how students felt after a campus incident. While typically used to reference how students feel a sense of betrayal from their institutions when they experience sexual violence, several participants stated they had not learned about the concept of institutional betrayal. However, in the second one-on-one interviews and after being introduced to the concept, a few participants shared how they felt betrayed by their institutions in ways similar to students. Feelings of betrayal, as articulated by at least one participant, felt more severe than feeling disappointed or frustrated. Elena, who saw her institution as part of her community and thus felt responsible for critiquing it, described feeling betrayed most recently by her institution. In our second interview, Elena reflected that she felt so impacted by a recent series of events that she "did not even have the energy to give it to be critical" of the institution.

For Elena, her criticality was an expression of her love and commitment to the institution, and, at the time, she felt betrayed. She explained:

> I'm usually one person that is participating and saying something, right? And yesterday I was like, I can't, I cannot even give energy to this, right? Because I'm in a position that if I say something, it might not come out in the most professional way.

While Elena often expressed how she navigated her Latina identity as a leader in her department and felt she had to "watch her expressions" and "manage her tone," she had been at the institution for so long that she knew her colleagues and leadership came to expect her to be someone to speak up. However, because she felt betrayed by the institution, she wondered if she was mistaken about the institution's intentions around inclusion for the first time in a long time. So, rather than speaking up as she normally would and feeling comfortable—to a certain extent—to be vulnerable, she decided she did not have the energy to mask her anger and feelings of betrayal. So, instead, she remained silent.

Mike and Will described feeling betrayed by their institutions because they felt they were "sold" a specific job role and instead of creating change at their institution, they were only allowed to "check boxes." They felt their presence and roles allowed the institution to claim they that they were responsive to bias on campus without any responsibility for improving campus culture for minoritized students. Will reflected on his betrayal in his role and how the institution betrayed the students by not allowing him to do his job fully: "I think about it [betrayal] from multiple contexts, both from those brought in to do the work. But then also to how the institution is betraying those that it serves, which are students, right?" Mike shared that he "never felt less a part of something in my career than being here" when talking about the disconnection he felt between the job he was excited about and hired to do and the work he has been able to do. He

talked earlier about adjusting his expectations to mitigate his disappointment, but this was also an example of the betrayal he experienced.

Each participant shared stories about what they felt was more than disappointment or frustration; it was betrayal. Once this was introduced and explained as a phenomenon in the focus group, many participants resonated with it in the final interviews. For some participants, identifying their feelings as betrayal offered a new way to name their experience. Betrayal was especially salient for those who took on full-time roles to lead bias teams and served in support roles at the institutions they attended as undergraduates. Their relationships with the institutions they worked for were more than employer—employee ones; the participants felt the institution was part of their community and vice versa. The betrayal was experienced by students and practitioners who felt denied the opportunity to engage in their social justice mission.

Feeling Dissonance

Some participants named dissonance and described how they intentionally "disconnected" or fragmented themselves from the work as a coping mechanism. Forced into fragmenting themselves, the Black and multiracial participants described this fragmentation most often. While white cisgender participants most often discussed leaving "work at work," the BIPOC participants cited "not being able to take [their] skin off," or for queer participants, they discussed always being queer. Therefore, the dissonance the BIPOC participants experienced, especially those who identified as Black, Latina, mixed race, and Native American, was so great they had to find ways to disconnect from the work that often required more energy than their white, cisgender counterparts. Mobey, who has worked in HESA for more than 20 years, described compartmentalizing "in a healthy way," sharing:

> I learned the practice of bracketing or compartmentalizing, um, not just putting in a place where it pressurizes and, and can explode, but I try not to let other people's stuff become my stuff. And what I mean by that, you know, if someone experiencing a bad day and they're having, uh, or acting out, or they've experienced some trauma or something like that, you know, at best, that's their, I mean, well, not at best, it's their trauma. I should not assume and have that transferred onto me because I'm not going to be of service to them and to help them in a time of need.

Here, Mobey confidently shared his practice of compartmentalizing. However, he also reflected that it took him time to learn to compartmentalize in a way that protected his energy as a Black man in education without shutting down completely. Mobey reflected that this tension, or balance, was necessary for him to be effective as an educator and facilitate education for those who may have caused harm to others who share similar identities.

Ty shared personal reflections on dissonance as she discussed her experience as a new professional at her undergraduate institution. As a student activist, she felt she was able to speak out. Now, she understands herself as "part of the administration" and struggles with how to navigate being a paid agent of the institution as a Black woman recognizing the "ivory tower wasn't built for me." She explained:

> I think it's even more difficult because it's like, well, can you continue to be in this position? Or I guess internally, I said, well, how can I continue to be in this position or not fight as hard for this thing that I have to enforce that I don't agree with? But the maturity and the professionalism in me says that I really have to pick and choose my battles and also know when to delegate, um, and have other people fight those battles,

> um, while I'm doing other things. I'm in a situation where, oh, these two parts of me are actively like going head-to-head with each other.

Later, Ty described a specific experience working with a white trans student where she felt activated after the student told her that she could not understand how they felt. Ty ultimately created space for the student during their interaction, despite her feelings. She talked about the dissonance she felt, commenting:

> I really had to like stop and reroute all of my thoughts and just all of my physical wanted to say; it sounds awful, but to be completely honest, what I wanted to say was, well yeah, I know how you feel. Lynching was just made a federal crime last year. [. . .] And my privilege could be seen as, because I can't hide, I have to become comfortable with who I am in this identity and being loud and proud and bold about being a Black woman.

In real-time, Ty had to navigate her own feelings of being activated to hold space for both her and the student. At this moment, she prioritized her work—or professional identity—to accommodate and center the student. She shared that this experience took great energy, and she did not feel she had someone she could talk to about it.

Alexis recounted during our interviews that the loss of a close family member who is Native American inspired her to do more to support Native American students at her institution. While she did not name this as experiencing dissonance, I discuss it here because, during our time together, she could identify that she had largely felt she had to exclude parts of her identity from her work. As a student conduct officer, she navigated how to enforce policies she disagreed with while maintaining her integrity as an alumna, survivor, and Mexican and Native American woman. She reflected:

> We don’t have a large Native American population at Mountain University, and so I’ve been really contemplating that going back to the reservation, um, and thinking about how we can really emphasize and create more, um, like cultural practices that might feel comfortable for somebody who’s Native American. And so that’s something I’ve been really wanting to work with and it’s a new goal of mine is to connect more with our Native American resource center and just see about what we’re doing outreach-wise.

In this narrative, Alexis shared how recent personal experiences encouraged her to bring her Native American identity to the fore of her work as a practitioner. More specifically, she contemplated how this might allow her to support the Native American student community more meaningfully and proactively at her institution rather than only intersecting with them in her role as a policy administrator.

While Alexis, Ty, and Mobey all experienced dissonance differently and articulated it in multiple ways, they each noted how parts of them were either fragmented due to their work or where they had to fragment themselves to manage and support students. As folks who identified as Black and Native, and Mexican American, it was especially important to interpret their experiences outside the binary of what often gets called work–life balance. Instead, I suggested looking in between and around these experiences and stories to the circumstances that required such fragmentation. Such in-between-ness invited consideration of Anzaldúa (1987) again to make sense of and interrogate why higher education, which many participants understood to have the capacity to improve people’s lives, tolerated the necessity for practitioners to live in the borderlands and split themselves into parts just to survive at work.

Feeling Numb and Burned Out

Burnout or feeling numb was not something participants experienced after one incident or interaction. It was the result of several months or years facing the same student issues repeatedly with little or no reprieve, students sharing experiences that mirrored the practitioners' experiences as minoritized folks, and feeling burdened by the institution to provide support without the institution making changes to improve the culture and circumstances that necessitate such support.

For example, Kay mentioned feeling burned out five times. As the only person in her office, she reflected on how she had been dealing with a particularly difficult case that required her emotional and mental energy in ways that she was worried she might neglect other areas. She reflected:

> Yeah, just feeling kind of burnt out and I don't think I've ever felt burnt out in this space before, um, until like this one case in particular. Literally, it's causing my anxiety to go up because I'm spending so much time on this one matter. I look back, and I go, oh my God, I didn't create this case, and I needed to send outreach and now it's been three days, and I haven't done that because I was dealing with this.

This case, she shared, had gone on for several months, and she was experiencing microaggressions from the students who questioned her knowledge as a Black woman with a PhD. She stated, "I think it's difficult for me because of the, it's directed toward me too. And so, yeah. Um, for the longest time, [they] wouldn't call me doctor." Kay not only experienced stress related to the demands of a difficult case—which many participants could relate to—but also experienced microaggressions as the students and parents involved in the case questioned her credibility because she is a Black woman.

Heather, who served as the interim chair of her college's DEI committee, also talked about feeling burned out as she reflected on how her institution asked her to step into the role when the paid, full-time DEI staff person left their role. Heather stated, "You know, cuz like, and that's when we get burned out because like, we need more people to get invested in this so it's not just the same people over and over and over doing this." She was concerned about how long the institution would continue to ask her to do this work without compensation and, as she shared, she did not feel like the best person for the role. She recalled:

> And then when [the previous DEI person] left, they still have not rehired that position. We're hoping they're going to soon. Um, but in the meantime, our president kind of handed it off to me and one other person to like, keep running for now. Um, so the, that's, I mean, it's kind of built into what I do cause it's considered part of my service to the college. Um, and, and so in, in that way, but I'm not being, like, for taking over the leadership of it there, there's no extra compensation for it. It's just something I'm doing to help keep the group together until they figure stuff out. But yeah. Yeah. I feel very unqualified to be overall in charge of this.

Heather shared that, although she sometimes felt unqualified to do the work, she did not want all the years of progress to halt. She felt largely responsible for ensuring her institution's DEI efforts continued while she and others waited to see if a new DEI director would be hired.

Early in the interview with Elena, she talked about feeling numb. As she described the work she did with minoritized students and working in a diversity center, she reflected:

> We get used to, and we get a little bit of numb. So, when you ask about how do I respond to that, right? I mean, when it's issues around race and ethnicity, it's frustrating, right?

> Because we are also part of those communities, and we also as, as, uh, as people, um, sometimes have to deal with the same, um, with the same issues, right?

Here, Elena highlighted that some of her feelings of numbness are related to sharing the same identities with students. As discussed earlier, Elena shared her work was also about her own identities in many ways. She commented:

> I mean, some students are pretty resilient and they know how to, um, manage those things, but we know that there are some students and we know that even when we try to be resilient, when it's one after another, um, then it does get to you to everybody, right? It does get to the students; it does get to us as well.

For Elena and other participants who shared the same minoritized identities as students impacted by bias, their experience of burnout was more personal than those who felt they could "leave work at work." This burnout led Elena to describe a sense of "numbness" that acts as a coping mechanism to return to work daily.

As feelings of burnout and numbness occurred for HESA practitioners, they did not result from a one-time incident or interaction. For Kay, Heather, and Elena, these feelings emerged after months of microaggressions, years of work on a DEI committee, then the institution retracting support, and years of supporting students who experience bias like the bias many people experience daily. Their experiences also reflected themes highlighted in the literature review. Most specifically, the notion of being "burned through," as explored by Anderson (2020), and "using the backs and lives and traumas of minoritized populations to educate others" is explicated in this subtheme (p. 2). Elena's experience provided a direct example of trauma used as a resource, and Mobey, Kay, Heather, and Elena all expressed elements of being burned through, perhaps also caused by feeling betrayed by their institution.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a robust answer to Research Question 1: How does responding to bias incidents impact HESA practitioners' well-being? In response to this question, however, participants articulated the challenges they faced and how they felt about them. I began this chapter with a quote from Ahmed's (2012) book, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*, where she referred to the hidden impact of doing diversity and equity work. As the theoretical framework for this study suggested, these findings delved into such hidden parts of diversity work. Ahmed (2012) asserted diversity and inclusion work is needed in educational institutions because such institutions are inherently lacking in these areas. Therefore, there must be people to fill where such deficits exist, including those with minoritized identities that match those of the students institutions recruit. However, she asked us to consider the cost. The stories in this chapter suggested the cost is the emotional and sometimes spiritual well-being of the HESA practitioners doing the work. For most participants, the challenges they faced from legislation and institutions (both their respective institutions and higher education, generally) and the personal toll these challenges take were great.

The legislative, institutional, and personal challenges HESA practitioners face are significant and overlapping. While this chapter parsed the challenges and impact on practitioners into neat sections, the impact should not be interpreted as so clear and separate. For example, many participants reflected they did not often have time to think about, nor were they asked, to explore the questions posed in this research. As such, their responses to questions often included feelings, reflections on policy, how they navigated their role, what they felt the role of bias response in higher education was, and whether the impact of their work made a difference in the overall cultural landscape of their institutions. These feelings and reflections were filtered

through challenges posed by legislation, institutions, students' expectations, and staff leaving the field of higher education. I often felt their answers to the questions were not direct paths but rather their way of making sense of their work, who they were, their impact, and how to be kind to themselves along the way.

Finally, to consider the application of queer theory to HESA practitioners' challenges and being impacted by students, legislation, and their institutions, is to bring their precarity to the forefront (Butler, 2012). Rather than assuming practitioners were neutral, policy-enacting workers, their experiences highlighted what HESA practitioners should consider in the future. In addition to concern for students and institutions, those in power in higher education should consider the role and implications of such a role for HESA practitioners.

CHAPTER VI: DISSONANCE, ENGAGEMENT, AND HOPE FOR COMMUNITY AND ACTION

As the participants shared stories of their experiences in real-time, the ways they navigated and made sense of them are further highlighted in this chapter. Specifically, the key goals of this study included learning more about Higher Education Student Affairs (HESA) practitioners' relationship to social justice–if they had one–and how it influenced their work in higher education. I also wanted to understand if other HESA practitioners felt their identities and social locations influenced how they supported students impacted by bias. As such, and through the participants' responses to questions related to these goals, I learned that not only am I not alone in traversing what feels like conflicting agendas against my own, but that the participants shared common frustrations, dissonance, and hopes. The following discussion about the role of social justice in bias response, the role of the participants' identities and social locations, enacting criticality in and on their institutions, and their hopes for critical community highlights the participants' experiences in higher education.

Is Bias Response Social Justice? Intersections, Dissonance, and the Role of the "Social Justice Warrior" in Bias Response

Higher Education Student Affairs Practitioners often have personal relationships with social justice that inform their work in higher education. However, most do not feel bias education nor their institutions can achieve such social justice. In this theme, I explored how practitioners are naming bias response, social justice, their relationship to DEIB, and how they navigate aligning their social justice orientation without calling it social justice. This theme responds to research question three, highlights not only HESA practitioners' relationship to bias response work and social justice, and discusses how they perceive them as connected, or not.

First, I will share the participants' perspectives on bias, bias teams, and DEI/B: they often used the terms interchangeably, but more poignantly, they had much to say about the role of bias response teams and processes, including their role in "educating the campus community" about bias. Then, this theme highlights the tension participants named and described when discussing their relationship with social justice work and their institutional work and how they navigate the looming "anti-DEI" climate to communicate about social justice without naming it. All participants definitions of and relationships to social justice and its connection to bias response were tied to their identities. In other words, their identities or social locations seemed to influence how they defined social justice or attached their work to it. While identity is discussed in more detail in the following theme, in this theme, I elucidate how participants talk about, define, and engage in bias, bias response, social justice, antiracism, and what they make of the role of bias response teams or formal bias response processes. Finally, I discuss how participants changed their personal work or bias processes and to language to improve or adapt their practice or the overall system.

Bias Talk

Throughout our interviews and focus groups, participants broadly discussed bias and how they understand it impacts students. There was an underlying assumption that bias occurs everywhere and to everyone. However, most participants discussed bias as students with minoritized identities experienced it. The most common groups participants discussed as experiencing or impacted by bias were Black and multiracial, LGBTQ+, Latinx, English as a second language speakers, Jewish, and white students.

Participants also shared a consensus that bias occurs when others have a true ignorance of a cultural or racial group they do not know. However, they asserted that ignorance and lack of

awareness can and does cause harm. For many, the types of bias reports or stories they learn about from students come from the intentional–or unintentional–harm done by another based on their identity. Participants saw their role, or at least the hope for their role, to educate the person who made a statement or enacted an action that was harmful to someone else. Their assumption that ignorance is the root of much bias assumes the harm-doer needs education and is open to such education. As such, participants commented on how they or an institution might weigh the "severity" of the bias to gauge how to respond and that "harm" was generally used to refer to bias with less severity. For example, they discussed how hate speech is free speech: although harmful, it is technically not a bias incident. This measure of severity and assumption that harm-doers want and are open to education provided much discussion about the role of bias teams and processes.

Bias Teams

> An equality regime *can be* an inequality regime given new form, a set of processes that maintain what is supposedly being redressed. (Ahmed, 2012, p. 8)

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, not all participants were part of formal bias teams, nor did all participants work at institutions where formal bias teams existed. Where formal bias teams did not exist, participants like Heather discussed how "it's like always the same people getting tapped," and these are the people who students know they can go to if they experience bias. However, almost all participants either commented on the role of bias teams in our interviews or shared a common understanding that, as Milly stated, "I think we all do the work. It's the work" when supporting students who experience bias. While all participants agreed supporting students was part of bias response work, their stories and experiences demonstrate that bias response teams and formal response processes, as we know them, are not the answer to

preventing or even effectively addressing bias incidents. A few participants either suggested or grappled with the idea that bias teams only perpetuated the inequality that persists, as Ahmed (2012) suggested.

A key factor in bias team or process ineffectiveness, as shared by participants, was their inability to provide meaningful harm resolution. As has already been discussed, bias response teams are not punitive processes, so institutions cannot make students participate. Furthermore, without what most participants called community-based or restorative processes, they did not feel campus education about bias was enough to prevent it. None of the participants worked at institutions where they felt the process for addressing bias was complete or effective. For now, as Kay, Mobey, Will, and Mike articulated, the measure to determine the success of bias response processes' is whether they responded to a student who reported experiencing bias. Even when action, change, or educating the harm doer cannot occur, participants gauge their success -n responding to the student who experienced bias. For example, Will shared that before he meets with students who have experienced bias, he feels: "This is not gonna be the resolution they want, this is not going to resolve their concern, this is not gonna make them feel heard." For these reasons, participants stated that students largely felt bias response processes were ineffective because teams and processes could not remove harm-doers from campus in the same ways they assumed punitive processes could.

Another factor that contributed to how participants perceived the effectiveness of bias teams and processes was based on misunderstandings about the role of bias teams in their institutions. Specifically, the larger campus community's expectation of bias response processes was to address campus culture and provide campus-wide responses and statements related to bias. In contrast, some participants suggested the function of bias response processes was only to

address single incidents in narrow ways. Kay discussed how she felt like teams did not fully understand the role of bias teams and often duplicated already-existing punitive processes. She shared:

> And so the reason why I don't like teams is because sometimes teams want to take action that you should only take when there's a policy violation. So, a team might get a report. The team might think that, oh, wow, this is the most, you know, horrible thing, especially because again, in my role, the people that see this all the time, we see that this is like all that we see, right? But when people don't see all that, they can get one incident, and where they are putting the severity, the incident is not where I put this in so like, because I see the scope of what's happening around the institution.

Kay suggested that bias teams did not have the information and context about their campus community to assess and respond to harm appropriately and equitably. She also stated that bias teams, in particular, did not understand the larger scope of harm occurring on campus. For example, as a Title IX administrator who also responded to faculty and staff, she felt bias response teams often were only aware of a small sample of what harm, violence, and microaggressions are happening on campus. In her assessment of bias teams, she also distinguished between formal adjudication processes that consider policy violations, such as Title IX, in contrast with bias response teams that were not designed to be punitive and often did not have accountability measures built into the systems. Bias response teams did not review policy violations but, as she argued, may treat them as such and try to supersede other institutional processes. She explained that for these reasons, she felt bias teams promoted cancel culture rather than challenging students and institutions to engage in community meaningfully.

Overall, a consensus around bias teams was such that institutions have not done well in distinguishing bias response processes from punitive processes that already exist at the institution. Nevertheless, we expect students to want something different and will understand a bias response process as more community oriented. As Ahmed (2012) suggested, however, we have not been able to distinguish these "regimes" from existing ones. Further, and as Kay stated, "Coming together then disbanding isn't helpful" for bias teams. Here, she refers to the structure of bias response teams at institutions. Because they are cross-departmental, they often meet to review bias incidents when they are reported to the team. During these meetings, the team may discuss how to respond to the impacted student and determine next steps. After these meetings, the team members return to their regular, full-time roles. As a reminder, some participants in this study were part of formal bias teams, including Will, Mobey, and Mike, where these types of meetings occurred. However, the other participants were not part of formal bias teams, and their institutions do not have one. The role of bias teams and their membership was complicated by the lack of leadership, authority, and autonomy given to bias teams and processes to enact change.

DEI Talk

Without prompting, all participants used the terms bias response/bias and DEI interchangeably. As a reminder, and as shared in Chapter 1, DEI is an acronym or umbrella term used to describe programs, initiatives, and efforts institutions use to achieve diversity, equity, and inclusion. As a reminder, diversity, equity, and inclusion have distinct meanings, but when referred to as DEI, participants generally refer to any efforts to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion at their institutions. While DEI and bias response were often used interchangeably, participants seemed to use the term. DEI when referring to larger institutional missions and

goals. For example, if they had a formal bias response process, many understood bias response work to be part of larger DEI efforts at their institution. In the larger context nationally and in the immediate wake of the murders of several Black folks in 2020, including George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, many institutions announced their rekindling (or first-time kindling) of DEI as a significant priority for the institution. These commitments sparked the creation of at least one of the participant's institutions' bias teams and two participants attended a conference for national chief diversity officers. However, in the last year (2022–2023), these blanket commitments to diversity have come under scrutiny, and, as of late, some institutions have rescinded or altered their statements or commitments because of political pressure. This backdrop and context for what DEI means nationally and how participants discussed such efforts is important to consider. Here, their reflections on DEI work signify two clear points: first, that DEI work is everyone's work at the institution, and second, that DEI work, at its core, is not about changing or dismantling systems.

DEI Work is Everyone's Work

Regardless of how participants defined social justice, all agreed that DEI work was not relegated to multicultural centers or those in formal DEI roles and was, instead, the responsibility of all staff and faculty. As Milly reflected, "identities impact education," so all practitioners must know and understand the support and resources available to students to help them navigate universities. Similarly, Zora and Ty shared that they both had experiences where they either worked in a DEI space or considered it and ultimately decided they did not have to work in designated spaces to do DEI work; their perspectives and contributions were valuable no matter where they worked. Ty shared:

> Something that one of my mentors told me was that you can do multicultural work without being in multicultural affairs, and that's something that has really stuck with me. And so, I feel like having a presence in this kind of functional area will make it more of a resource to people who look like me that we know, who are disproportionately impacted by bias.

Ty's advice from her mentor not only influenced her career path as a Black woman in education, but also caused her to reconsider what DEI work entails, where it happens, and who could do it.

The shared notion that it was everyone's work to support DEI efforts and that DEI can and should be done in all areas, including those outside diversity centers and programs, does not mean that everyone has the same mission around DEI work or that everyone sees the work as their own. Heather shared frustrations with fellow faculty pushing up against strides she made to implement more inclusive classroom practices, saying, "I think some people think like when you're asked to implement DEI practices, we're telling you to like overhaul your entire curriculum right this moment. And it's like, no, it's incremental." These frustrations sometimes made her feel it was difficult to do DEI work and affirmed her concerns that colleagues believe DEI is relegated to specific curricula and offices. Heather added that some feel DEI threatens academic rigor: "A small but very loud minority feel that equity work is a threat to rigor. Um, and that we're like coddling our students." Comments such as those made by her colleagues reveal the conflict they feel between rigor and DEI work. Additionally, Heather interpreted their comments to be directed at minoritized students when she suggested using more equitable grading methods such as not grading papers for correct English grammar.

These participant excerpts highlight how they think about DEI work and their responsibility. I discuss what some of the participants mean when they talk about DEI and how

they differentiate it from social justice, bias response, and antiracism, as it was evident that everyone had a different understanding of the goals of DEI despite how frequently it is used in higher education.

DEI is Not Going to Dismantle the System

Some of the participants discussed DEI's relationship to dismantling or changing systems. Specifically, they discussed how DEI work, including bias response, was limited in its effect to create changes at their institutions. These participants would likely agree that DEI is another way of perpetuating inequality because of its incapacity to alter the systems necessitating the need for DEI. Will directly addresses this point when reflecting on how effective he felt he was in his work. "Effective" for Will would mean being able to change the system. He shared:

> I think how an institution supports or address or engages in this work then has a direct impact on the ability to like, feel energized by it. Because if you came to a job to contribute in a way, and you weren't really told how the system actually doesn't allow you to do any of that.

The "system" Will referred to was his institution's bias response process and how he did not feel it was set up to affect change.

Kay similarly assumed that DEI work was initially intended to dismantle systems. However, she reflected that she no longer assumes DEI will change the system. Instead, she resolved that bias, and thus, DEI work would not dismantle anything. She shared, "We may not be able to dismantle those things, and maybe we are gonna be confined to DEIB work. I think bias response teams are DEIB initiatives, I don't think it's social justice." Here, she suggested that social justice was about changing systems instead. DEI work, she later contended, was about inclusion and belonging in existing systems and structures rather than adjusting the systems and

structures to be more inclusive. Milly also stated, "I don't think we dismantle anything; we just create new structures." As someone who did not see her work as related to social justice or dismantling systems, this reflection still aligned with how the other participants viewed their institutions.

Social Justice Talk

I was most interested in asking participants how they perceived the relationship between bias response work and social justice, including how they defined it. I was motivated by this question because I used to believe that social justice motivation was required by those who did bias response work. However, the call for participants did not indicate such a requirement because I also assumed that many practitioners who do bias response work do not see their work as connected to social justice. Participants in this study primarily reflected the former and did see their work as connected to social justice; however, some did not. Therefore, the participants' conversations prior to this section suggested that social justice motivations are not required if DEI and bias work only serve to support students through existing power structures rather than working to change them. While the participant profiles in Chapter 4 provided the participants' definitions of social justice, their critical and relevant perspectives on the relationships between social justice and bias response work are heard.

Notably, in two separate interviews, Ty and Heather talked about how the term social justice can sometimes have a negative connotation because it is viewed as being "extreme" in the context of higher education. Specifically, they both discussed being called "social justice warriors" and were advised to change how they talked about their work. Ty reflected: "Social justice sometimes has a negative connotation around it because everyone is like, 'here you go,

being a social justice warrior again." Similarly, Heather shared her frustrations with her campus leadership's expectation that she brings her colleagues along in DEI work. She stated:

> If there's someone who is anti-DEI, we're, you know, we're supposed to approach them with love to change their mind, you know, and like not be social justice warriors. And, um, we, you know, our, our president has been basically said that she's not an activist president.

Heather, a white woman faculty member committed to DEI work, reflected that not only did the statement by the president invalidate the work she had been doing, but she expressed feeling like her values did not align with the institution's as she felt they once had. Heather felt the president was not only dismissing her work on her college's DEI committee but also made her consider whether the institution was where she could live out her values as a DEI educator and faculty member.

The assumption that having a social justice orientation was extreme, influenced how participants aligned themselves with the term and influenced how they talked about social justice with different audiences. For example, although Milly did not identify with social justice as a motivation for supporting students, she did see herself as someone who provides support to students to increase access to what they need versus what the institution thinks they need. She commented:

> So, I think that my role is to empower the student to make those changes and whatever that might be and whatever that means for them. So no, I still don't see myself as that being that person that's the change agent.

Milly was the only participant who expressed her work as separate from social justice. She instead saw herself as supporting students if *they* wanted to make those changes. She later

shared, "I mean, on its core, bias response is about making sure people have access to the education." Again, Milly's comments suggested bias response is designed to usher through existing processes rather than change the system or enact social justice.

While Ty, Heather, and Milly did not have the opportunity to be in a focus group together, their stories insinuate that Milly is possibly the kind of practitioner who might be turned away by social justice language, although she supports equity and inclusion in the institution. The difference among these three participants was that Ty and Heather were invested in changing the system, whereas Milly was not. As I reflected on these three participants' relationship to social justice, I admittedly, despite my queer lens, thought about the relationship to social justice in a very binary way prior to this study: a sort of "you're with us or you're not" mentality. However, during one of our sessions, Mobey reflected that his colleagues' social justice orientations exist on continuums. Queer theory, like Mobey, encouraged me to consider the participants' reflections through a continuum lens rather than a binary one. Within that context, I resist "assigning" a place on the continuum for these participants but follow Mobey's lead to at least reconsider their being at opposite ends of a spectrum.

However, what the participants' comments suggested overall was that their relationship to social justice is separate from, sometimes in conflict with, institutional goals to change the system. Kay stated, "I don't believe that the institution will be the place of social justice work." So, to revisit Bell's (1997) definition of social justice, it requires "full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs" (p. 3). Bell's (1997) definition suggests a need to reshape to meet groups' needs. Arguably, and as stated previously, the participants' reflections did not necessarily suggest that reshaping occurred; instead, students and bias response practitioners navigated existing structures.

Antiracism

While most participants did not discuss antiracism in conjunction with DEI work, a few did and made distinctions between the two. Given recent discussions around the differences between institutional commitments to DEI work and antiracism, it feels relevant to include the few participants' reflections on antiracism and how they describe the distinctions they make between them. Elena and Kay were the participants who discussed antiracism the most, and they both discussed antiracism as being beyond, or requiring more work, than social justice. Specifically, Elena reflected on an interaction with colleagues where antiracism was suggested, saying:

> We are right now thinking about the difference between equity and equality. So, let's not even go to antiracism; that's, that's further down, right? I mean, so in that continuum of social justice, I see somebody becoming an antiracist as, as in that last part, right? I mean, without an end, without a finish line, right? But, more toward that end. Um, and for us to get there, we require a lot of work.

To Elena's point, understanding of the difference between equity and equality is needed before antiracism can occur. She also insinuates that taking up antiracist work in higher education is more difficult than differentiating between equity and equality because antiracism is not something that the institution could achieve or "check off." Instead, it does not have a "finish line," as she stated.

Kay adds depth to the consideration of antiracism by noting that systems in higher education, such as bias response and Title IX processes, are measured by the level of response they provide to the person impacted. In other words, as discussed previously, responding to bias incidents by contacting the impacted person and offering support meets the requirements of the

system created; it does not disrupt the likely racism that necessitated the system in the first place. Therefore, the response is not antiracist because there is no action to disrupt the racism that may have occurred. She adds, "One of the core tenets of antiracism is like whiteness says that we need to have quick outcomes and that we need to, um, everything needs to be quantified and there needs to be a clear connection." Kay went on to explain that antiracism denounces whiteness. She explained that because bias response processes are measured by how quickly and if they respond to students, they perpetuate whiteness. She suggests that whiteness and white supremacy are aligned with a desire to have quick outcomes, even if those outcomes are only responses to single incidents.

Therefore, if our systems are measured in response and provide quick outcomes, they cannot be antiracist. As Elena stated, antiracism is an ongoing practice that does more than simply respond by checking in with the person harmed. Similarly, Kay adds: "Antiracism is a more decolonial thing. It takes time. [You have to] be okay with, um, unresolved endings and that this conversation must continue." The time required of antiracism and ambiguity in ongoing conversations makes it a mismatch for how higher education measures its success in "responding" to bias. However, Kay and Elena's discussion of the variation and ambiguity inherent in antiracism also benefit from an application of queer theory. In other words, although few participants discussed antiracism, the lack of discussion may suggest an intolerance for ambiguity, which is perpetuated by institutions that want measurable solutions. The lack of discussion around antiracism makes it difficult for participants to engage in their work as antiracists because their institutions and colleagues may be so conditioned to look for the "quick outcomes." Kay suggested that they feel antiracist work does not meet the current definitions of success in bias response work because the measure of success is to simply respond to bias

incidents. They suggest it is much easier to call or email a student who has experienced bias then be able to mark the case as "responded to" than engage in antiracist practices that might include critical community building.

Making Changes to Language

Not only in the wake of emerging DEI-prohibitive legislation but to "effectively communicate [their] missions," as Mobey described it, some participants discussed altering their language about social justice, bias, and DEI depending on the audience they are addressing. Altering language to accommodate various audiences was a way participants felt they could remain true to their social justice motivations regardless of whom they were communicating with. Alternately, some participants expressed how using social justice language, including terms like "dismantling" or "antiracism," either did not accurately describe their actions or turned some colleagues off. For example, Milly saw herself as supporting students in enacting change on campus but did not identify with the language of dismantling or even the term social justice. Others, like Ellen and Alexis, had social justice motivations but saw their policy-enforcing roles separate from social justice. Others discussed direct applications of inclusion in their classrooms and presentations, not just in language. For example, textbooks should include same-gender couples and always use a microphone in presentations rather than assuming everyone can hear. These examples of varying relationships to social justice, the language often associated with them, and applications of inclusive practices demonstrate how, even among HESA practitioners who support students who experience bias, they also respond differently to social justice terminology.

Additionally, Will highlighted the necessity of altering language not just to meet the needs of campus colleagues and audiences and as required by law in the state where he works.

When reflecting on how he was personally motivated by social justice, he reflected that not everyone has the same understanding. Recent legislation and politicization of DEI work have led some to be misinformed about what DEI work is and funding has been affected for his department. Will shared:

> It's a tool to help us create the world where everyone has what they need; I can deconstruct that and reframe it in a way that never uses the word social justice, because while that means something and resonates with me as an individual, it's gonna turn 10 other people off and it's gonna cause someone to be like, why are we funding this?

Will's comment highlights his experience navigating language and the political landscape to attempt to achieve his goals in bias response.

Similarly, Mobey shared how he has come to navigate various audiences. Serving in a leadership role at his institution, Mobey reflected that he discusses DEI more openly with his direct reports than when providing updates to the institution's cabinet, for example. He reflected:

> The values stay the same. The content stays the same, but the delivery will change. . . . just being able to read those cues and understand who's in the room and, and culturally understand, you know, how will this land on these ears who, you know, hear these words.

In addition to modifying the language he used to discuss DEI work depending on the audience, Mobey further reflected that he took on the responsibility to be effective as a leader in communicating about DEI work. This effectiveness, he shared, could occur assuming the audience was "interested, yet naive" to the topic.

Mobey's assumption that audiences are interested assumes the best of our campus community members. While the final theme addresses participants' reflections on students' and the campus community's readiness for critical conversations, other participants did not share

Mobey's hopefulness. Still, Mobey's and Will's discussion of altering language to communicate DEI goals is relevant to the political climate and the research questions posed here. Further, as queer theory is applied to their reflections, it asks what might be lost when we cannot use the words needed to describe social justice or DEI? To Mobey's point, are we effectively communicating our mission of DEI and creating change? Can we have both if we omit language to "meet people where they are" or censor ourselves based on laws and state legislation?

Overall, participants in the study largely felt their work in higher education was connected to social justice; however, some did not. Therefore, the participants' conversations suggest that social justice motivations are not required if DEI and bias work only serve to support students through existing power structures rather than working to change them. The participants' reflections suggest that social justice is about changing systems. In other words, bias and DEI sustain power structures while social justice is about changing them. Some participants referred to themselves as "social justice warriors," and they shared that there is an assumption in and outside higher education that to be social justice-oriented is to be politically extreme. As such, this influences how participants aligned themselves with the term and how they talked about social justice with various audiences. Moreover, as suggested in this theme and explored further in the next, responding to single incidents perpetuates inequity and impacts participants' feelings of effectiveness and satisfaction.

"Bias Incident Intake:" How HESA Practitioners Perceive their Role and Intersections With Identity

While the participants held various roles, including informally supporting students impacted by bias, everyone noted how their identities influenced how they provided such support. The identities and social locations of practitioners and students played significant roles

in how “well” they felt they could support students. This theme addresses another area of tension the practitioners felt as they balanced the role they played at their institution formally against roles they either wanted to fill to support students or the roles students expected they should fill. This theme addresses the power students assume participants must have to address bias, and conversely, we learn from some participants that they feel they have little power to affect change or address bias in meaningful ways. In this theme, we see the role participants’ identities and social locations play in supporting students or referring them to others who may be more “appropriate.” Specifically, this theme addresses how sharing or not sharing identities with students impacts how supportive practitioners feel and race’s role in such support.

Tensions Between Support and Policy Enforcement

Participants discussed their roles at their institutions extensively. Most salient throughout the discussion of their role was how they categorized themselves as either supporting students or enforcing policy. Some participants even articulated feeling they could not both support students and enforce policy or had been told by supervisors as such. Keeping this in mind as an overall reflection of their role, several other participants discussed their limitations due to their proximity to policy enforcement, such policy’s limiting parameters, and what they identified as the institution’s fear of being perceived as political. A few participants discussed their frustration working in offices that students associate with enforcement but having to serve in a response or support role.

Another consideration related to the tension participants felt between support and policy enforcement occurred when they served in “informal bias response” roles but formally worked in policy response, where their main responsibility was to enforce policies. In these roles, they interact with students who may have been referred to their offices due to alleged policy

violations. These participants reflected on their complicated relationship with wanting to support students or enact social justice education and bias response, while doing their jobs. They felt responsible for enacting their criticality as policy enforcers but ultimately must follow policy. Alexis and Ellen reflected on this tension as they both serve in roles that enforce student conduct policies.

Ellen reflected on her own desire to engage in bias support and enact social justice through that support. However, she described an incident where she felt she had to prioritize and distinguish between the students' safety and bias response or, in this case, her ability to have what she called an "educational reflection." She reflected:

> I'm reacting to an immediate need where there's escalated confrontation or potential hostility or threat. And I don't see it as a platform. I mean, there might be some learning happening. I think that we learn inherently from the experiences that we have, but I'm not going in and belaboring the educational or reflection pieces of it because my job is to just first of all prioritize the safety and secureness of both individuals involved.

What stands out boldly here is the binary nature of what Ellen feels she must choose. For her, the priority is *physical* safety and secureness, and thus, addressing policy violations. Bias incidents suggest psychological safety may be at risk, but that is less enforceable through formal policies. Ellen does not feel her role allows her to accomplish both, and, because her job in policy enforcement, that takes precedence.

Alexis shared examples of similar tension she felt wanting to support students while also being responsible for holding them accountable for policy violations. For example, Alexis discussed examples of meeting with students for policy violations and also making it a goal to learn about their connection to the institution overall, including barriers to access they may

experience. In these conversations, Alexis feels she can go beyond policy enforcement and provide support. She reflected:

> There's definitely an accessibility factor that I struggle with. Um, and, you know, wanting to make sure that students feel that they're heard but also that they're supported. Uh, without doing everything for them . . . in my position cuz I do accountability. I'm on the conduct side and, um, I'm always told, [my supervisor] is like, we have to separate support and accountability.

Alexis discusses the tension between support and accountability, while Ellen discusses the tension between accountability and social justice. However, when Alexis described support to include removing barriers for students, she talked about doing such as synonymous with social justice. In other words, removing barriers and supporting students was her way of enacting criticality and transgressing her role, even slightly. Alexis, who is also a newer professional in the field of HESA, received instruction from her supervisor to separate support and accountability. Arguably, Alexis is maintaining and working toward a more expansive practice of accountability than is required or tolerated in her role.

The title of the role and office where practitioners were located also highlighted the tension they felt between supporting students and enforcing policy. Specifically, and as the literature review highlighted, Dean of Students (DOS) Office staff often fills bias response roles. Participants shared that students' perceptions of DOS offices are often one of accountability and enforcement. Thus, placing staff in formal bias roles in DOS offices does not set prepare students or professionals up for success. As mentioned earlier, formal bias response processes are not formal adjudication or accountability processes as students understand them, so to place full-time

professionals in DOS offices and include "Dean" in their title implies to students that bias processes are formal, and they can expect formal or punitive actions when they are harmed.

Will and Mike discussed this tension as they both work in a DOS office. Specifically, Will reflected on interactions he had with students in his role where students felt frustrated about his inability to respond in a way that felt congruent with what they expected of his title. He shared:

> Like someone reaching out to an assistant dean thinks that they that I have this power that I really don't, right? Like, I appreciate the thought, but . . . there is that piece where it's like, it's, it's insult to injury, right?

Will not only feels he cannot meet students' expectations, but also feels that his inability to do so actually exacerbates the harm they experienced. Will further explained how he feels constrained not only in his role, but also due to the restrictions imposed in his state about how he can support students who experience bias. He reflected on having to tell a student they cannot get the outcome they expect, sharing:

> [Students] then are also simultaneously in not getting that resolution being told by their institution, I'm really sorry this happened to you, but we're not gonna do anything about it. And so then you become part of the system that is so broken because you've, you've lost sight of the response part, right? Like, yeah, I'm really bias incident intake.

Because Will cannot respond to bias incidents in ways that are congruent with his value as a social justice educator, he experiences the lack of response as contributing to perpetuating harm. Throughout the interviews, Will often and deeply reflected on the tension he felt between holding his title and being able to enact what students might think of as "deanly" responses.

For example, Will shared a particularly poignant reflection of his role in the dean of students office related to this limitation. He explained:

> The reality that, like, how can we just be honest with each other and try and be supportive and empathize, but also then contextualize? Right. And there is no winning in this conversation. Like, I don't actually view there being a potential positive outcome. And that actually is probably part of how I approach all of the bias conversations. I go into them knowing that the student is likely gonna leave feeling wronged by the university, feeling unheard. And by doing it that way, which some may argue is not the right approach, I actually think I'm starting at just what the most realistic baseline is with my goal to be. How can we have the person leave feeling something different than that, right? If I accept that by the nature of our system, this is not gonna be the resolution they want, this is not going to resolve their concern, this is not gonna make them feel heard. What can I then do through that conversation to try and move them farther from that baseline of just 'not good'? Like, what does it mean for me as an assistant dean to invite a student into my space and then basically tell them, well, yeah, all those things you want, that's not gonna happen, but I'm here to support you, right?

At this point in the interview, Will shared frustrations he felt between wanting to support students in how they expected him to, and the limitations placed on him by legislation and the institution. He was at a place where he just wanted to be direct with students about what he could and could not do while simultaneously wanting to do more.

Alternately, Mike, who holds a similar role at a separate institution, cited a few instances in which he referred students to Deans. For example, a student shared about an interaction with a faculty member and Mike worked with the Academic Dean of the department to refer the

student. Mike did not interpret his role as part of the DOS office to have authority similar to that of Academic Deans. Thus, and to Will's point, their experiences suggest we cannot assume that students will know which staff member with the "dean" title will best address their needs or assist them with the resolution they desire.

The role and title participants held significantly influenced the tension they felt between enacting institutional policies and supporting students. The excerpts shared in the previous sections are from participants who feel bias response work and social justice are connected, thus exacerbating the tension they felt between support and policy enforcement. Again, this subtheme provides an opportunity to call attention to how binary thinking limits the participants' perceived ability to support students and potentially to enact change. Additionally, when considering this tension through a queer theory lens, we can explore it as more than simply policy enforcement or support but as a method of perpetuating the systems of inequity that negatively impact the participants and subsequently students. What happens when we consider this tension as more than, "this or that," but what does it mean and what are the implications?

Intersections with Identities and Social Locations

In addition to exploring how HESA practitioners were impacted by supporting students experiencing bias, I was also interested in learning how their identities and social locations influenced or showed up in those interactions. The participants discussed their identities and how their identities intersected with students' and, sometimes, other colleagues' identities. Overall, participants distinguished between how it felt to support students when they shared identities with students versus when they did not share identities with them. The participants most often discussed were racial and religious identities, including what it meant to support Black, Latinx,

Hispanic, Jewish, LGBTQ+, and white students. The practitioners' identities and social locations influenced how they responded to and supported students with these and intersecting identities.

Not Sharing Identity

However, the most relevant part of this subtheme is how much time the participants spent reflecting after interacting with students. Fewer participants cited preparing in advance to support students, particularly those with whom they did not share the same identities, suggesting that practitioners are not only impacted by students who experience bias but also impact students. Still, most participants discussed a sense of thoughtfulness and reflection when discussing how they experienced supporting students with whom they did not share an identity. For example, a few participants discussed responding to bias reports where Jewish students were impacted, but they did not also hold a Jewish identity. The participants reflected feelings of wanting to support and do their own research about Jewish students' experiences so the students did not have to educate them. Other participants reflected on difficult interactions with students with whom they did not share identities.

Notably, all the white, cisgender, female participants discussed feeling "unqualified" or uncertain when doing DEI work generally or supporting a student of color who experienced racial bias; the women's reflections on their qualifications to support students of color were noteworthy. The notion of being qualified to do DEI or bias work did not come up in interviews with other participants. However, most participants discussed the tension they felt when meeting with students they did not share an identity.

Additionally, Heather discussed feeling unqualified "to be overall in charge" of her college's DEI committee but also felt a sense of responsibility to ensure the work of the committee continued while searching for a full-time role to be filled. As a classroom educator

engaged in social justice education, she also discussed how she navigated being a white woman who teaches about racial microaggressions. She stated that, as she has continued to teach, she has become more comfortable and continues to educate herself.

Ellen discussed how her identity as a white woman took up space in meetings she had with students of color, specifically saying:

> When you asked about my goal earlier, to just be someone that someone sees as a, a safe place, when I'm not perceived as that, that's when I can, that's when I start to feel like I may have done something wrong. Have my identities come into too much to like drive the conversation? What are things that are not making the student [feel safe]? And I have to be okay if it's about my identities sometimes.

Ellen went on to discuss that she spends emotional energy outside meetings with students to reflect on her identities, specifically her whiteness and white supremacy. She worries about whether her "identities drive too much of the conversation." She reflected that she works to distinguish between feeling disappointed if a student may not feel comfortable with her because of her whiteness while recognizing how white supremacy as a structure influences a student's perception of her as a "safe place." Ellen seemed to be aware that her whiteness may threaten how safe students of color feel when meeting with her. Such awareness is affirmed by Leonardo and Porter (2010), who suggested that "Violence is always present in a social system because of the struggle over power structures' participation in the system" (p. 146). The violence they refer to is whiteness, as they invite us to consider whether engaging in discussions about racism and seeking to undo oppressive systems can occur when a discussant is a white person in power.

Milly's, who identifies as a white cisgender woman, explanation of how her identities impact students' perceptions of her did not cause her reflection; instead, it was something she saw as more matter of fact. Milly shared:

> Sometimes I think because of who I am and how I show up in spaces, I am maybe not the best person to do the bias response work. Like, I'm not a person of color. I'm not; I don't see myself as any marginalized identity, to be real honest with you. [Still], the last thing I wanna be is some well-intended white person that really screws up a bias response because that's not good for anybody either. I am cognizant of, in particularly in those moments, like I will have never felt more like a heterosexual middle-aged white woman than I when, you know, a person, a trans person of color comes up to me and says something.

While Milly articulated throughout our interviews that she believed equity and inclusion were part of everyone's work in higher education, she still questioned whether she was "the best person to do bias response work." Her comment suggests that to best engage in bias response, you must hold a minoritized identity and that bias response is about responding to incidents of racism. Milly later shared that she often refers students to others, including her institution's formal bias response system, when she does not feel she is the best person to support them.

Mike shared similar reflections when discussing an incident where he met with a Jewish student who experienced antisemitism. In their meeting, Mike stated that the student shared information about the Jewish faith to help him understand the incident's impact on her. The student's explanation of the incident made Mike wonder if someone of the same faith would have better served the student. He stated:

> And while I appreciated her taking the time, I also recognized that, gosh, this would've looked so differently if she met with somebody on our [bias] team who was Jewish, who, you know, she didn't have to break down a couple of things or explain some things that maybe you wouldn't have to explain to someone of a similar faith as you.

Like Milly's comment, Mike suggests that the student could have been better supported by someone who shared her identity. While representation matters in incidents of bias (and as many who serve in formal roles also hold minoritized identities for these reasons), Mike and Milly's experience entreats us to ask what additional responsibilities they must take on learning more about race and religion, respectively, before engaging with a student with whom they do not share identity.

Will and Ellen especially articulated awareness of their whiteness and the space it takes up in student meetings. Will discussed his responsibility to "bring certain identities to the table" and was conscious of the space he "took up literally and figuratively" in spaces with others. Ellen reflected on how she navigated her role as a conduct practitioner who was also white. She commented:

> What is the reflective behavior or reflection on the behavior I wanna get to while also recognizing that I am white, and they are not? And the whiteness is the issue, not the whiteness is the issue, but the white supremacy is the issue.

Ellen understood her role as having power over the student, not just as an administrator, but also as a white person. She shared that she constantly reflects on navigating these power dynamics. Mike even expressed concern that his white male identity prevents a student from engaging with him, saying, "I always wonder if I reach out and then I don't hear from a student, did they look

me up and already decide not to engage from there." Although Mike is also an assistant dean role, students are not required to meet with him if he contacts them.

As Will identifies as a queer white man, he stated he felt comfortable supporting queer students. He expressed awareness of supporting students who hold identities he does not share and the responsibility he feels to them, sharing:

> I think being a white cisgender man who is then supporting trans students who are experiencing and feeling, um, negatively impacted by the campus climate, understanding what my cisgender identity brings into the table, right? Supporting students of color, not being able to understand that full experience, um, for students who are dealing with ableism, which is also kind of shown a lot around our campus recently. Not understanding what that experience is or of our Jewish students who've experienced several significant bias incidents.

Regarding supporting students of color, Will did not express a desire or need to make students "feel safe," but seemed to accept that he could never understand the experiences of students of color. This excerpt suggests he shares similar sentiments toward students who hold other identities he does not share but still wants to enact his privilege as an administrator and white man to disrupt his institution. Will said:

> I never experienced that [racial discrimination]; I don't know what the day-to-day life of that is. So there's no really like set in my mind about what might count as severe. So I'm probably more inclined to do a really thorough assessment.

Will implied, as others with minoritized identities do, that when a student experiences a bias incident related to a minoritized identity he also holds, he does not feel he has to do as much research or preparation to relate to the student because he has likely experienced similar

incidents as a queer man. Kay also added that not sharing an identity with a student likely causes her to assess an incident more thoroughly because she has not experienced or lived the same identity.

When asked how their identities and social locations impact how they do bias response work, participants more frequently discussed when they noticed differences between themselves and those impacted by bias. The differences were often articulated as barriers to understanding a student's experience and, thus, being able to support them fully. Some participants, like Ellen, had difficulty time separating her personal influence on students from her whiteness. Others saw differences in identity as more factual, and like Milly and Will, they understood their role in getting the student to the best place for support.

Sharing Identity

While participants shared stories of how it felt when they did not share identities with the students they supported, they also discussed what it meant for them when they did share the same identities. Sharing one or more identities or social locations made practitioners like Kay and Zora feel more "capable" of supporting and relating to students, while also impacting how they assessed the "severity" of the incident. Kay and Milly also discussed where sharing a racial identity with a student was helpful to a student and how they felt they could be a resource to them.

In Chapter 5, I discussed student capacity as a factor influencing the participants' ability to feel effective in their roles, and student capacity also connects to this subtheme. When participants shared identities with students, they also articulated higher expectations or thresholds for tolerating bias and microaggressions. In other words, the participants expressed feeling that students lacked the capacity for bias or their thresholds were too low, (i.e., the

participants did not think it was that bad). Students' lack of capacity is implied in the following examples. Milly commented, "Sometimes I think I struggle in recognizing bias because I just think, well, that's the way it is," further highlighting the notion that students have a low tolerance for bias or microaggressions. First, Kay reflected on how, as a Black woman who experienced bias and microaggressions herself, she built a level of tolerance to "survive" and often places those same expectations on students. She explained:

> I see a Black woman, and they're making a report. I feel like I need to be on higher alert about the impact because I feel like since I have experiences, I like, oh, well, that's not that bad, right? Because I'm a Black woman, I'm like, this is literally just daily life of being a Black woman.

Kay went on to articulate and reflect, in real-time with me, how she felt her view was problematic and wanted to be more thoughtful moving forward when assessing the stories of Black women at her institution.

Zora, who is a Black woman and advisor, reflected on a meeting she had with a Black male student who was struggling academically and had ADHD. As they discussed his barriers to success, the student told Zora he felt "racially oppressed." Zora, not unlike Kay, remembered her reaction and felt the student was only saying that to her because she was a Black woman. She shared:

> I don't know why: as soon as he said that, I said, 'Hold your face.' Um, cause it was, again, not to invalidate, but the way he said it, it was just like, you know, 'nobody looks like me.' You know, something about 'I'm racially oppressed here,' something about being at PWI. And he's like, and I'm in a fraternity, but it's so hard to try to find a place to fit in. Are you saying that to me because of how I look, right? Um, because let's be

honest, you're gonna look at someone a certain way and kind of, 'How comfortable can I get with you?'

Zora did not interpret the student's experience as "severe" enough to warrant racial oppression and recalled her reaction to the student as feeling surprised.

Conversely, participants also felt and articulated responsibility to students who shared identities with them. Milly discussed how, as a white woman who leans more conservatively, she has access to and feels responsible for having conversations about bias with white male fraternity men: "I think that's why I've been successful in building relationships with fraternity men is that I don't really align with all of these progressive things." Zora, who is the only Black woman in her office, discussed how she was specifically asked to advise a Black female student who is underage to help her navigate college. Elena, who is Latina, talked about how she intersects with the formal bias process at her institution as a process advisor to students who share her Latina and Spanish-speaking identity. Finally, Ty articulated how, as a Black woman victim advocate, she recognized the power of a Black woman student, seeing herself reflected through her. Each of these examples speaks to the participants' responsibility to support and educate students with whom they share an identity solely based on their identities.

Overall, participants felt a responsibility to students who shared one or more of their identities and some noticed they had higher expectations of those students to "tolerate" a certain level of bias. This responsibility to demonstrate tolerating microaggressions was expressed by participants who identified as Black and Latina and those who identified as queer. When they shared their stories of preparing students for life outside college and its protections (e.g., bias teams), they named the tension they felt between wanting to prepare students for the world as they experienced and improving the world through education. Again, there is tension between

what participants articulated as feeling responsible for ensuring students see themselves reflected in administration and preparing them for life after college, where even less support exists. Sharing identity, for some, meant a "telling it like it is" mentality. It also meant extending themselves emotionally to support students. It feels diminishing to narrow the tensions in sharing identities with students to such binaries. Rather, I seek to understand the effects of that tension and what it means, especially for those educators who enact social justice.

Whiteness

Whiteness became a subtheme in the study, whether described as a barrier for white participants to connect to students of color, participants discussing their white identity, or the participants discussing whiteness generally. As the literature review suggests, and some participants agree, bias response processes play a role in "maintaining whiteness," and thus do not create systematic changes. Additionally, two of the eleven participants discussed at length their concern for white male college students at length without prompting. So, whiteness, as discussed here calls attention to whiteness as both a way of understanding and relating to power and dominance and the role of white male identity in addressing bias incidents on campuses.

Milly, who identified herself as "more conservative" than most of her HESA counterparts, expressed concerns that white male students are being overlooked in conversations about equity and inclusion. She contended that as we are trying to be more inclusive, we are excluding and isolating white men as an unintended consequence. She shared:

> We can't seem to find a way where everyone can sit at the table. It's like there's a limited number of seats and so we take a seat away from somebody to make sure someone else has a seat. And while there's a time and place for that, at some point we need to make sure there are more seats.

As Milly argued for “more seats” at the table, she stated there should also be room for white men to be part of equity discussions. During the interview, Milly expressed sincere concern that DEI work and student affairs’ commitment to that work was overlooking white men. Moreover, as she articulated, “They’re our students, too” and “I am also responsible for making sure they complete their education” just as she stated her role was to support all students to graduation. Milly explained that the inclusion of minoritized students had inadvertently excluded white men to the point that they may seek to belong in other ways, such as through extremist groups: “They’re gonna end up in an extremist group of some kind. Because that’s where they see themselves.” Particularly as we discussed students’ feeling a sense of belonging, Milly articulated her concern that white men do not feel they belong and will seek to belong elsewhere if needed.

Zora, who identified as a Black woman, shared similar concerns about white men and their role in DEI. She said:

> Sometimes, I do wonder with this DEI work, if we’re doing everything right. We’re making sure that these groups who have been oppressed, who have not given access to everything, are being provided the same, provided the same equitable, right? But again, I’m, I get concerned, like as we talk more and more, as we push and challenge these things, there’s people that we know we’re never gonna get through to.

Not unlike Milly, Zora articulated concern that, through efforts to include minoritized students, higher education has excluded white men. She also went on to express concern for what she saw as the long-term effects of excluding white men from DEI work in higher education, saying:

> [White men] here feel like they’re being vilified, and it isolates them and then they turn to these more extreme views, and they fall into those. Because realistically, when you do

like research and like some of these extremist groups, extremist groups particularly very like old white brotherhoods, a lot of those people didn't have a support system prior to being involved in this group. And now, suddenly, they found a support system that says, no, you're being vilified and being told you're bad, which are not bad.

Zora's comment adds to the discussion by highlighting the ways she suspects white men are validated by extremist groups versus the invalidation Milly contends they experience in higher education communities concerned with DEI.

As shared in the discussion of white participants' experiences supporting students with whom they do not share an identity, whiteness played a significant role in their experiences with students and in bias response work broadly. Being white for Ellen, for example, was something she felt she had to "apologize for," while Mike noted that he has "not met any white men in bias response" work. This dichotomy opens the discussion to include asking how being white and whiteness influences participants' experiences responding to bias incidents. Thus, generally, being white and whiteness were experienced and perceived by the participants as a barrier to connecting with students and bias response work/DEI generally. As the participants shared earlier, bias response and DEI are rooted in whiteness, so it i158hat surprising tthat his barrier would surface in the study.

Participants' roles at their institutions and identities influence how they perceive their work, which is related to bias response. Notably, those who worked in more "formal" roles, such as the Dean of Students Office or student conduct, articulated the struggle they felt when students expected them to be able to act based on their title. For Will, especially, the ways institutions name offices and policies imply an inherent power associated with those charged to carry them out. However, Will and others lacked the institutional authority to make substantive

decisions. In addition to their roles, the participants were also aware of, or reflected on, how their identities and social locations influenced how they supported students. Overall, sharing identity with students created a sense of responsibility toward students, although not sharing identity caused deeper reflection and often more “referrals” to other staff who did share identity. Finally, in this theme, two of the 11 participants discussed their concern for white college men in detail, along with a concern that DEI is creating a lack of communication and coalition building that includes white male students.

We Are Most Critical of What We Love: Motivation to Do and Stay in the Work

In the face of challenges and conflicting emotions around their role and effectiveness in advancing social justice the participants remain motivated to support students, find ways to engage in their own social justice education, and create opportunities for their campus communities to engage across differences. This theme addresses how participants describe the impact they feel they are making to advance social justice or guide students to degree completion and gain much of their motivation from the satisfaction of the feeling of supporting students. The participants often cited commitments to, or the belief in, the power of education to improve students and their lives as motivators to continue their work despite ongoing and new challenges. Finally, this theme elucidates self-education as a driving factor for participants to continue challenging themselves to better support students.

Supporting Students

Throughout the interviews, participants frequently communicated their drive to ensure students felt supported by them personally and throughout their education. Support, in general, played a significant role in how the participants assisted students at the institution and how the participants felt about their work. In other words, participants both wanted students to feel

supported by them and felt validated when they provided support. While support and its relationship to sustaining inequity is troubled throughout the findings and by the participants, it remained a significant and driving motivator for the participants to engage in their work related to bias response. Generally, participants most often referred to the complainant, or impacted student or community member in a bias incident when discussing student support. Because bias response processes are nonpunitive and the participants' institutions do not require accused students to respond to communication, participants most often reflected on their engagement with impacted students and came to them for support, guidance, or remedies. When participants (usually those who held a student conduct or compliance role) discussed supporting respondents to student conduct issues, they added it was important to ensure "respondents have outlets, too," and they provided support by being that outlet. "Being that outlet" sometimes involved letting students express their frustrations about the systems and policies on them.

What Support for Students Looks Like

While supporting students was not the only metric of feeling successful for all participants, the notion of support and its forms echoed throughout their experiences. For example, participants described support as empowering students, giving them voice and agency, extending grace and empathy, and acknowledging the impact an incident of bias has on them. As participants articulated how they supported students, I noticed the support provided often included addressing where they felt the student had a "gap" or lack of support elsewhere in the institution and where they felt the institution was unwilling to address systemic issues. Regardless of whether they supported a respondent or complainant, participants felt a sense of responsibility to make up for where they saw the institution was not serving or supporting the student. Similarly, and as Will shared, some participants felt defeated when they had to

acknowledge or validate a student who felt disenfranchised or betrayed by their institution, but they could not address the larger issue. Will said, "Students sometimes feel like support doesn't mean anything if we can't do what they need or want." Here, Will describes the feeling of supporting a student by acknowledging them and the impact, yet the student feels unsupported because Will cannot do what they want to address the bias incident. This type of support, Will contended, only served to "replicate issues in society" because "we are only supporting students with marginalized identities" without being able to address the larger systemic issues.

Making an Impact

While feeling as though supporting students was an important part of how participants felt motivated to continue their work, they sought to influence their campus communities more deeply through education about bias to address larger systemic issues. When asked what their contributions to bias response were at their institution, participants articulated both enacting a sense of criticality and creating safer (physical and emotional) spaces for students and the larger campus community.

Participants felt they made an impact on their campus community by enacting a sense of criticality about their institutions and where they can make changes based on those critiques. Elena described this criticality as stemming from a love for her institution, saying:

> I'm very critical of [my institution], but I've been here 25 years, right? So I love [my institution and [it] has given me a lot. I'm also very aware of what [my institution] is capable of being so I'm very critical of it too.

Here, Elena is not only referring to how the institution improves itself for students, but as a community member herself, she holds high expectations, too. She enacted her criticality, she

said, by educating herself, being an ally, speaking up at staff meetings about issues of DEI, and calling out where she felt the institution could and should improve.

Additionally, Will and Heather discussed their contributions to “the ever-so-slight moving of the needle” toward inclusion or seeing “macro changes over the years.” Heather shared an example that at her institution, adding the names and pronouns students use to course rosters seemed impossible in the past. She said years later that it has become so easy that it is no longer an issue. In his role as a campus DEI leader, Mobey said, “I feel really proud to be able to educate people” and see the “system improved.” He has seen his institution improve its bias response process to one that is not only about response but has expanded education for the campus.

Motivation

Supporting students is what institutions herald and validate, so it was not surprising that the participants most frequently measured their success and motivation by how much a student felt supported. However, their belief in the power of education to create “just citizens” was also a driving motivator, especially for participants like Kay and Mobey who held leadership roles and interacted with students, faculty, and staff. Another participant, Mike, discussed the values instilled in them by their families and religion to “serve others as humans” and enact the social justice values “my parents and family instilled in me.” Milly did not have a social justice orientation but referenced her religious values as a motivator to be a student affairs practitioner. Participants’ motivation to continue their work in higher education came from internal motivators to create and contribute to a “greater good” beyond their own experiences.

Kay and Mobey most frequently talked about their motivation related to creating just citizens and believing in the power of education as motivation to continue in higher education.

Kay discussed the role of religion in her life and social justice as influencing her belief that "there will always be a bend toward justice" and the power of education in that bend. While she did not think "institutions can be the place of social justice work," she differentiated between the classroom and institutions. Specifically, the classroom can be a place to change and open minds because of academic freedom. She stated, "That's why I believe in the academy. That's why I do believe in academic freedom." Kay's belief in the "academy," she stated, came from her education as a philosophy doctoral student and the questions and values it instilled in her. "I would not be able to think this way without education," she said, and this capacity for thinking was what she hoped to instill in others.

Mobey's motivations for creating just learning environments were also personal as he shared the impact he hopes his work has on his children. He reflected, "How am I using [my role] to inform and shape perspectives, expand perspectives so that people will act more kindly, more justly, because they may encounter my daughters, my family." Mobey's belief in education motivated him to continue the work to "expand perspectives," and was informed by his own experience in education as a first-generation Black male student informed his decision. He had experienced both the power of education and where education can better serve the greater good.

Mike and Milly reflected on their religious values as motivators for their work in higher education. For Mike, who shared that the "values of social justice were instilled in [him] at a very young age," his role in overseeing the bias response process at his institution aligned with his values and motivated him to continue the work. The opportunity to live these values buoyed him even when he encountered institutional challenges as he stayed focused on the impact he could have on individual students. Similarly, Milly cited her religious values as a motivator to work in higher education and help students navigate college. She said, "The basis of Christianity

is to help those least among you," so carrying out that mission motivated her to support and refer students to those who can provide support when they have experienced a bias incident.

Self-Education

Self-education around bias response and DEI played an important role in how some participants remained motivated to remain in higher education in their respective roles. Not surprisingly, many broadly took on a learner approach to continuing their education around bias response and DEI. However, most participants did not rely on their institutions to provide them ongoing educational opportunities around DEI. Instead, they sought it out themselves in both formal and informal ways. For example, Ty stated that she spent time outside work, often reading articles and engaging in social media to process her own emotions and remain educated on events that impacted herself and students outside the institution. Heather took a more formal approach citing leading campus workshops and book clubs to learn more and leaning into vulnerability as a white educator. She shared that these opportunities are where she has been able to examine her practices and "interrogate why I do certain things," such as grading and attendance policies in her courses. While Kay and Mobey briefly discussed the role of conference attendance in their ongoing development, they both cited personal work, such as reflection and reading, as where they gained the most education for their work.

Considering the challenges experienced by participants, as articulated in the previous chapter, motivations to do and stay in the work are relevant their well-being and longevity in the field. Many participants felt that supporting students provided motivation to continue the work, but deeper meaning came from when and where they felt they were making more meaningful impacts on their campus community. While this was sometimes measured in the cumulation of students who felt supported, participants cited being able to see "the needle move" as helpful in

feeling motivated. Finally, participants' connections to a "greater good," the "power of education," and personal values were important in their motivation to work in education broadly.

Hope for Community: Building Higher Education and Students' Capacity for Believing We Can Change

> I don't think you can be a pessimistic person and survive well in this work. I have to ultimately believe in the human capacity to change. (Kay)

The participants were relationship-focused and employed reflection of their own institutions' roles in forging such relationships. They remain hopeful and invested in their institutions and students' capacity to engage in community and transformative justice (A. Brown, 2020) and believe critical community building is the answer to address bias on campus meaningfully. This theme demonstrates how participants envision their campuses beyond "bias response" and into thriving, critical communities that can engage through difference in meaningful ways, even when it is difficult. Specifically, this theme addresses participants' possible solutions for moving forward, such as shifting our attention from individual acts of bias to building capacity in our campus communities to address how to move forward together including the harm that has occurred. The discussion of bias response here is synonymous with DEI, and the participants suggest ways to center social justice beyond bias response and DEI.

"Bias Response Isn't Working:" The Need to Center Justice

As a reminder, earlier in this Chapter, I discussed distinctions some of the participants made between bias response, DEI, and social justice. Namely, that bias response and DEI are not social justice and thus, do not move institutions "toward justice." For example, Will stated, "I think we need to be honest with ourselves in saying what bias incident can and can't do, and that the response [to a singular incident] is not gonna fundamentally change the culture of the

campus." While this research did not focus on the efficacy (or not) of campus bias response processes, some of the participant's experiences with the latter influenced how they perceived and experienced their work in higher education. More importantly, their responses revealed how bias response not only sustain inequity but keep administrators in disenfranchised positions as agents of the institution when they seek to make substantive change. For example, Will, who oversees his campus's bias response process, suggested, "I've actually thought about completely dismantling our bias system and replacing it with some sort of community conversations." Will contends that because the bias "system" is not moving the campus toward justice, he wants to be able to create clearer pathways to do so as an agent of the institution.

The Role of Community and Being Part of the Community

Several participants, including Will, Kay, Zora, and Milly, articulated a desire to have difficult conversations with students and their colleagues. Most of them contend that these conversation are not happening because their campus community has not been able to engage in dialogue across differences, and some feel that we are "losing our ability to talk to each other" when things are hard. As Kay suggested, we cannot do social justice without talking to each other. Specifically, Kay highlights the need for "difficult" conversations. Broadly, the other participants agree that people are turning away from such discussions. Will added that he believes that because bias response processes "miss the community piece," and reengaging the community can help address harm when it takes place.

Milly and Zora shared similar concerns about their campus communities' unwillingness to engage in difficult conversations, specifically as it related to their pointing out how they believe white folks are excluded from conversations around difference. Their concern for excluding white folks was that such exclusion could cause more harm to individuals and

minoritized groups. Zora provided an example of an incident where she disagreed with some of her graduate school classmates when they learned about an event for only white students to discuss race. She stated, “If they can’t talk about it with each other, do we [Black folks] really want them to talk to us about it [race]?” She suggested that issues of difference can also be discussed in spaces where folks with majority identities are willing to come together rather than putting the work on minoritized folks. Milly’s concern was about white college men as she suggested needing “a bigger table” that included everyone, not only people who are minoritized to discuss and engage across differences.

In addition to creating opportunities for students to engage in conversations about differences, several participants articulated their relationship to the campus community and desire to facilitate and be part of these conversations. Elena, Kay, and Ty discussed their personal relationships with their campus community and a general concern for ensuring staff and faculty are also included in the definition of “community” as it relates to social justice. Elena, who has worked at her institution for 25 years, talked about her concern for staff, stating: “It’s a safe space [our office] in the sense of like, this is where [staff] can really be [themselves].” Here, Elena provides an example of how a diversity center’s physical space is important for students and staff. Kay highlighted that, in her role in Title IX, she is concerned not only for students but the entire campus community: “We sometimes forget that staff and faculty are [at our institutions] much longer than students.” She suggests that, in efforts to support students to graduation, administrators often forget themselves and other staff and faculty as members of the campus community. Ty added to the notion of being part of the campus community by reflecting on what it feels like to work at the same institution where she received her undergraduate and graduate degrees. She articulated the tension she feels between being an administrator and

“going along” with policies she disagrees with, where as a student, she would have vocalized her opposition: “I was very vocal and active as an undergraduate student, um, and even as grad and folks who like, know that about me, I think it’s even more difficult because it’s like, well, can you continue to be in this position?” While navigating her professional role, Ty articulates the struggle between feeling part of the community and being responsible to her social justice lens. She also names her relationship with the campus community beyond her professional role.

Their desire to engage in community conversations demonstrates the lack of efficacy of bias response processes and highlights such responses as an example of a “power-over” structure. In other words, the participants’ suggestions to have more community conversations imply that the structure of bias response only duplicates systems that do not fully address bias as a systemic issue but rather as specific incidents. If bias response processes were “working” to address inequity or center justice, perhaps participants would feel more successful and connected to their campus community.

Building the Campus Community’s Capacity to Engage in Conversations About Difference

As Will stated, “Threats to our existence aren’t going away,” so he suggests we find ways to build capacity in our community to address those threats. While Will’s comment may suggest a pessimistic view, he instead argues for and is hopeful that community dialogue is the only way to create substantive change. Kay adds that despite how institutions perceive belonging, true belonging for all community members occurs when we can “belong” even when and if we cause harm. “Being in community is the hardest thing we can do,” she says, and “what people want when they talk about social justice, diversity, belonging, and inclusion, they want peace. They want the absence of conflict.” Therefore, to achieve belonging for all community members, these

participants suggest that restorative justice and critical community-building practices are the pathways toward that goal because they allow for conflict about accountability and inclusion.

Participants shared their hopes for the future and articulated their belief in the "power of education" in multiple ways. They each felt a profound responsibility to their campus communities, and most saw themselves as community members. As Chapter 4 identified barriers to their success, this theme and chapter overall addressed where they feel successful, the role of student support, and their criticisms of bias response processes. More than bias response, they suggest that "addressing bias response as a community [not just as part of a process] may get us somewhere." Participants suggest that that place is a more inclusive campus community that has the capacity to hold harm and belonging in the same hand and move the needle of justice.

Conclusion

In this theme, the participants suggested that discussing bias response matters. Specifically, they highlighted the varying perceptions and definitions of bias response and DEI work in higher education. The practitioners' experiences highlighted the role of social justice in bias response work and showed that not everyone in higher education sees bias response as social justice. As such, some participants were called "social justice warriors" and warned by campus leadership that such language turns some community members away. As some participants experienced dissonance between their identity as social justice educators and their formal roles at their institutions, they often measured their feelings of success in one-on-one meetings with students. This theme then entreats the consideration of bias response and DEI work as replicating "inequality regimes" and thus again brings to light the consideration of participants' precarity in carrying out those regimes (Ahmed, 2012).

Participants' identities played a role in how they responded to students and in whom they felt most comfortable and equipped to support. White participants most frequently noted discomfort or uncertainty when supporting students of color. These participants cited referring students to other "better-equipped" staff. Alternately, participants with Black and queer identities cited being more critical of students with whom they shared identity as they navigated how to prepare them for the inevitability that they would experience harm again. Participants' motivations to remain in bias and DEI work despite barriers were tied to individual student success or evidence of improved campus systems over time. These changes and motivations would feel more meaningful and lasting, some participants suggest, if campuses were more willing to engage across differences through restorative or critical community-building practices that included staff, faculty, and students.

CHAPTER VII: LEARNING FROM PRACTITIONERS AND "SOCIAL JUSTICE WARRIORS"

> DEI seems like an entirely new language of coopted words created for the sole purpose of not saying what the actual issue is. Microaggressions, implicit bias, courageous conversations, etc. Just say colonialism, racism, and white supremacy. Say it with your chest. (Deer, 2023, Post)

My own conflicting emotions and experiences inspired this study as a self-identified social justice educator trying to "change the system from in" while supporting students who experience bias. Throughout my career in higher education and especially in recent years, I have felt tension between wanting to say yes to opportunities to incorporate what I thought was social justice into institutional practices and sometimes feeling exploited so the institution could check a box. These tensions are only further highlighted when I support students, staff, and faculty impacted by bias incidents. These experiences, and the ones I highlighted in Chapter 1, made me wonder if other practitioners had similar experiences and if it mattered. As such, this study lifted up 11 voices of HESA practitioners who wanted to share their stories supporting students impacted by bias. As shared earlier, my goal was to clarify the human impact of bias response work. While some of the impact was made manifest through this research, much of what I offer only invites more questions.

This final chapter provides an overview of the research study and key findings. In addition, I also discuss the study and its connection to the literature review and theoretical framework. Then, after discussing the strengths and limitations of the study, I share how this research contributes to the field of higher education and implications for future practice and

research as it relates to the experiences of HESA practitioners who support students impacted by bias.

Overview of Study and Findings

HESA practitioners' experiences of bias on campus and their role in responding to and supporting the students impacted, are often excluded from research about bias incidents in higher education. As suggested in the literature review (Anderson, 2020 and Oliha-Donaldson, 2020), more work needs to be done to understand better how HESA practitioners are impacted while doing diversity work *in* the institutions they work for through bias response (Ahmed, 2012). As such, I designed the methodology for this study to elicit their stories and experiences via three total rounds of data collection. The first round was a one-on-one interview, the second round was a focus group, and the third was a final semistructured one-on-one interview. While there is much to learn about HESA practitioners' experiences, I focused on the following research questions to guide the study.

1. How does responding to bias incidents impact student affairs practitioners' well-being?
2. How do HESA practitioners' social locations influence how they experience their role in responding to bias incidents?
3. How do HESA practitioners perceive the relationship between bias response and social justice and how do their perceptions impact how they engage in their work?

With a focus on these research questions, four overarching themes emerged in the research:

1. Is Bias Response Social Justice? Intersections, Dissonance, and the Role of the "Social Justice Warrior" in Bias Response

2. "Bias Incident Intake:" How HESA Practitioners Perceive their Role and Intersections with Identity
3. We are Most Critical of What We Love: Motivation to Do and Stay in the Work
4. Hope for Community: Building Higher Education and Students' Capacity for Believing We Can Change

HESA practitioners are asked to support all students so they successfully graduate and bolster institutional missions. As shared here, much of that support takes the shape of responding to students when they experience bias, including microaggressions, sexual assault, and other forms of violence and harm. In this study, I was particularly concerned with how and if participants' identities influenced how they experienced supporting students impacted by bias. Moreover, identity influenced how participants responded to and supported students impacted by bias. The meaning they made of their experiences as practitioners also inspired their hopes and motivations to continue in education, even when they faced challenges in and outside their institutions.

Connecting the Research to the Literature, Theoretical Framework, and Findings

Throughout the research, coding, and analysis process, I harkened back to the questions posed by the queer theory framework. Much of my learning as a doctoral student and in this process, I felt drawn to the question, What can I not bear to know? (Felman, 1987). This question required a constant striving to look beyond what was obvious and instilled in me a comfort with ambiguity. More specifically, the following aspects of queer theory guided the research and analysis process:

- Denouncement of binary thinking, practice, and interpretation (Anzaldúa, 1987);

- Anticipation of the signified's precariousness; that is, queer theory pays attention to how we "other" people and experiences and thus make determinations of their worth or value (Butler, 2012), and;
- Challenge to normalcy and recognition that what is deemed "normal" is a conceptual order that "refuses the very possibility of Other" (Britzman, 1998, p. 157) because the conception of other is outside our recognition.

While I considered queer theory throughout the findings chapters, I want to highlight some of the more resonant analyses and an overall sense of where I am feeling a pull toward that which is beyond my perception (Felman, 1987).

Because queer theory rejects the very notion of "normalcy" and binaries, this study itself felt like an exercise in identifying HESA practitioners' precarity in higher education. In other words, as a project of queer theory the subject matter (HESA practitioners themselves) was an exercise in seeking experiences outside the common binary of student and institution. Here, the precarity and identification of the HESA practitioner, are considered. More importantly, and as I will articulate in more depth later, the project was me leaning toward what I myself could not bear to know. Prior to this research, I had held steadfast to the belief that social justice was required for bias response. This project has changed that, and I still feel uneasy writing it. I think it is the newness of it and perhaps some grief about what I thought I was doing or changing. Now, I am left to interrogate more deeply about what this means for me as a scholar and practitioner committed to social justice.

The literature review also influenced the findings as I often recalled and referenced Ahmed's (2012) work. Their words, "working on institutions we work for," echoed in my mind as I listened to the participants repeatedly and read their interviews intently and often. As they

discussed their “working on” their institutions, I recalled much of Miller, Guida, et al.’s (2018a, 2018b), Miller, Jones, et al.’s (2018c), LePeau et al.’s (2016), LePeau et al.’s (2018), and Davis and Harris’s (2016) work, who have already paid attention to the role of bias response teams in addressing incidents. The participants in this study echoed loudly the concerns highlighted in the literature that bias response systems only replicate inequity and have not addressed antiracism, colonialism, or white supremacy. Finally, as I listened, read, and felt the participants’ stories, I was reminded of other researchers’ recommendations to learn more about HESA practitioners. This research answered that call, and the participants and I were glad to answer it.

The literature review and theoretical framework were reflected throughout the findings. Much of what the participants discussed in Chapter 4 about challenges they experience were points posed by the researchers in the literature review. For example, the literature researched whether campus bias response teams serve as response mechanisms or social change tools (Davis & Harris, 2016). As the literature review suggested, the participants also grappled with the same question: as Will stated, “By the nature of how we do bias incident response, I am the problem, right? Like I am part of the institutional problem that we are facilitating and perpetuating.” As such, the participants in this study added how this tension impacted them as they navigated the whether or not they felt successful and fulfilled in their work. The tension, as described in Chapter 4, often a resulted from feeling in the middle of expectations from their institution and students. Their values and goals often lived somewhere in the middle and were seldom fully aligned with the institution or students. Overall the alignment of queer theory and this research enhanced not only the findings but the trustworthiness of the analysis and findings as it pushed me to continually resist foreclosing on binaries or reducing the participants’ experiences to finite conclusions. Instead, the themes intersect and are as multidimensional as the participants’ stories.

Still, I feel there is ambiguity about the precarity of HESA practitioners in higher education. Or at least my meaning-making. For example, although several participants articulated feelings of betrayal (Smith & Freyd, 2014) in their relationship with bias response work and their institutions, it remains unclear what such betrayal means for bias response work. As reflected by the participants, betrayal was felt when their institutions did not act congruently with their mission or goals around inclusion. For example, Elena recalled feeling betrayed when she learned her institution had terminated someone who had worked there for several years and built an inclusion program the institution was known for. For Elena and others, betrayal was stronger than disappointment, signifying a loss of trust or faith. As I continue to struggle with the "so what does this mean for the field" question, I am reminded that naming such ambiguities invites additional questions and more importantly, brings HESA practitioners' experiences to the forefront.

Perhaps what is most salient in the findings and participants' stories is their telling and sharing hours of thoughts and reflections with me about their experiences. I suspect (and was told by a few) that they hope I may share their stories so that administrators in higher education begin to think differently about or reconsider what we are asking practitioners to compromise when they are expected to enact policies that contradict their values. Minimally, I hope this research and telling of stories have shown that "education is not neutral" and that there are ways "power has made itself invisible" (Giroux as quoted in Franca, 2019, para. 1). Perhaps, this research is one small way of making power visible. In the next session, I discuss how the study answered the research questions.

Addressing the Research Questions

The first research question was largely driven by my own wondering if other practitioners felt the same tension I did between social justice and my role. More specifically, I wondered if others experienced that same feeling of being torn between a commitment to social justice and unwitting complicity with biased systems that impacted all of us. The second research question addressed whether practitioners' social locations such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and nationality, changed how they enacted and thought about their work in bias response. Finally, the third research question emerged from my deep curiosity about how other practitioners perceived their work and its relationship to social justice. Exploring the third question was truly an exercise in leaning toward discomfort to seek what had previously been difficult to admit, as addressed earlier. The answer to the third research question affirmed what I was afraid to know and as such, has influenced my perspective moving forward.

Bias Incident Response and Its Impact on HESA Practitioners

The findings in Chapter 5 demonstrate the impact of bias response on the participants. Furthermore, as shared in Chapter 6, participants discussed bias response as not just a formal bias response process, but DEI works more broadly. Therefore, the participants discussed how they felt about supporting students impacted by bias, bias responses processes (formal or informal), DEI work in higher education, and how legislation, institutions, and students impacted them personally and their relationship to the work.

In the coding process, the codes that most frequently appeared were those I labeled, "being impacted." This code group contained the emotions participants named throughout our interviews and later became part of the research's first and most in-depth theme. In other words, the participants had the most to say about how they were being impacted, followed only by the

frequency of the group of codes related to supporting students. It was clear to me and even stated by a few participants, that they had never been asked questions about *their experiences* supporting students impacted by bias at their institutions.

The participants frequently discussed how they felt "dissonance," "tension," and "frustration" when describing their complicated relationship with their expected role in the institution (enforcing policies and procedures) and their own values. This overall tension contributed to many participants' concern they were "part of the problem" and "perpetuating the system" of inequity in education. In addition to the tensions felt at work between their role expectations, student expectations, and institutional expectations, participants who identified as Latina, Black, and Multiracial also cited the impact of the tension at work was something they "could not take off" when they went home at the end of the day. In such cases, their identities were part of their work at their institutions, literally and figuratively. For these participants especially, these feelings coincided with well-being practices that included finding ways to figuratively "take off the day," like Ty, who described putting on makeup in the morning and taking it off after work, and Kay, who lifted weights where it was "okay for me to be aggressive."

Alternately, and as shared in the final theme in Chapter 6, participants also felt "hopeful" about the future. This hopefulness motivated them to continue working in higher education generally and for most participants, doing DEI work specifically. Their hope often referred to hoping they "made an impact on students" or made even small changes to institutional culture around DEI. Their hope, broadly speaking and named by a few, was fueled by their belief that education and being educated have the power to change minds for the better and encourage communities to think critically and be inclusive. Many participants felt working in education was

how they could live their values. This hopefulness also accounted for some of the tension they described feeling. There was tension between the institution and their personal values and tension existed between what institutions and policies currently existed and the hope they had to make them more inclusive.

The Influence of HESA Practitioners' Social Locations on Their Response to Bias Incidents

The participants discussed multiple intersections of their social locations with their bias response work. While some seemed more aware of their intersections with bias response work, everyone noted how some aspect of their identity or social locations showed up and influenced how they supported students impacted by bias. For the white, straight participants their whiteness and heterosexuality specifically played a role in how "well" they felt they could support students of color and LGBTQ+ students. Milly articulated this when discussing supporting a Black trans student: "I will have never felt more like a heterosexual middle-aged white woman than I will when, you know, a person, a trans person of color comes up to me and says something, I'm like, 'wow, I'm not the person for this.'" However, the participants who identified as LGBTQ+ and Black, Latina, or Multiracial expressed how their sexual orientation and racial identities influenced a sense of "responsibility" they had to students who shared the same or similar identities. This responsibility was articulated both as a sense of feeling protective while also wanting to "prepare" students for a lifetime of microaggressions.

Participants who identified as Black, Latina, and multiracial most frequently discussed how their racial identity played a role in the responsibility they felt for supporting students who shared the same racial identity. This sense of responsibility manifested in wanting to be a "resource," feeling empathy, feeling pressure to speak up as a person of color, and recognizing the importance of representation. Ty, for example, articulated this feeling of responsibility

throughout her interview as she discussed being a Black woman who supports survivors of sexual violence at a minority-serving institution. Despite the challenging emotional labor required of her, she felt a responsibility to continue in the work because her presence encouraged women of color to seek support where they may not do so without representation.

White participants most frequently discussed fears of how “qualified” or “well” they felt they could support students of color, in particular. Ranging in responses from wanting to recognize where their whiteness might be a barrier to feeling supported for students of color to preferring to refer students to colleagues of color who could better support students, many white participants felt uncertain of their capabilities when supporting students of color. Therefore, identity did play a role in how the participants supported students impacted by bias with varying senses of responsibility based on whether or not they held a minoritized racial identity.

HESA Practitioners’ Perceptions of the Relationship (or not) to Bias Response Work and Social Justice

For ten of the 11 participants, social justice played a role in how they interpreted their work related to bias response. Chapter 4 provided each participant’s personal definition of social justice and how it connects to their work, either broadly in higher education or specifically to bias response. However, most participants discussed social justice related to their roles and work in higher education. Their perceptions of the relationship between bias response and social justice did impact how they engaged in their work. For example, when participants discussed social justice and social justice education, most named it as a motivator for supporting students or working in higher education. This motivation also contributed to their self-education, such as leading campus workshops, attending conferences, or challenging themselves through reading. In other words, a social justice motivation enhanced the participants’ desire to continue in the work

and learn. As only one participant stated they did not have a social justice motivation, it is difficult to draw inferences about how the lack of connection impacts others. However, this participant did not feel she needed to be motivated by social justice to support students or refer them to her campus's bias response process.

Additionally, the ten participants who discussed social justice as motivation also distinguished between what they felt they and their institutions were doing and social justice. In other words, as discussed in Chapter 6, many participants articulated bias response work was not social justice. So, although social justice and social justice education were motivators and values for most participants, they did not feel that their institutions promoted or were enacting social justice in their expected bias response to institutional roles. This research question and discussion of themes in Chapter 6 provided the most challenging findings for me as a researcher and social justice educator. For many years, I have wanted bias response and DEI to be part of social justice education. However, as discussed in the findings, having a relationship or motivation driven by social justice does not seem to be required to do bias response or DEI work. As the participants suggest, bias response work and DEI work do not fundamentally change systems that require them in the first place.

Implications for Research and Practice

This study contributes to the research about bias response and DEI work in higher education and answers a call to include practitioner voices in such research. This research is valuable because it provides insight into how the participants charged with enacting bias response and DEI *feel* about their work, including tensions and hope. This contribution is valuable because the participants' relationship to their work affects their well-being and feelings of success and ultimately impacts their work's effectiveness in institutions. Moreoever, most

importantly, the research brings these practitioners' precarity to the forefront and out of the shadows of the institution/student binary. Higher education functions through the contributions of the dedicated and passionate practitioners charged with living out its mission and this research calls attention to those often asked to engage in policy enforcement when it conflicts with their values. Now that the participants' stories have been made manifest in this research, we and our institutional leaders have work to do.

Invest in Critical Community Building

Perhaps the research's biggest lesson and motivation is the need to invest resources in staff and programs to support restorative processes that engage critical community building across institutions (Bettez, 2020). Because restorative justice can address harm in communities and critical community building provides a foundation for restorative justice to be meaningful, these practices address many of the participants' concerns. For example, as discussed in Chapter 5, practitioners expressed concern when students expected them to remove harm-doers from campus or to address the bias incident that impacted them. Because critical community building is defined as "interconnected people who assist each other in critically thinking through issues of power, privilege, and oppression through dialogue, critical question posing, and active listening" (Bettez, 2020, p. 14) it creates the foundation for students, faculty, and staff to engage in difficult dialogue, even when it challenges harm-doers to name harm and those who are harmed to name the impact.

Practicing restorative justice and critical community building will provide opportunities for students to engage with each other in meaningful ways and, as the participants suggested, allow practitioners to effect change. The staff and faculty in this study saw themselves as much a part of their campus communities as students; some had worked at the institutions for more than

20 years. They were also concerned about each other, their colleagues, and those in the field. Investing in practices and people committed to building community through restorative practices is one way to address the participants' concern that students cannot engage but also create pathways for them. Alternately, staff who feel more connected to student learning and critical community building may feel more connected and validated by their work.

As the participants articulated a belief in education as a power for good, we need tools to effectively carry out their personal and institutional missions meaningfully and beyond checking the box. While there are multiple ways to engage in this practice, I suggest asking bias response and DEI practitioners at your institution about how they believe this critical community-building and restorative justice practices would facilitate the institution's mission and advance bias response and DEI work. From there, provide financial and personnel resources to build a team that can dedicate time to implementing and facilitating conversations across the institution. Committing to critical community building efforts may be more effective if initiated and supported by the Chancellor and President's office. As Will suggested, starting with residence halls and professional staff teams may be an effective way to incorporate these practices.

Provide Opportunities for Meaningful Reflection

As several participants in the study articulated, they had either not previously been asked or considered the questions posed in the study. These questions motivated them to consider their connection to bias response and DEI work and make time to reflect. Such time for reflection provides practitioners the time to reconnect to their personal values and the institutional mission. Carving out time to reflect, rather than constantly react, not only addresses the sense of overwhelming participants shared, but also resists reification. As Berila's (2016) mindful anti-oppression pedagogy suggested, "we have to literally unlearn oppression: examine our role in it,

dismantle deeply held ideologies, and create alternative, more empowering, ways of relating to one another’’ (p. 3). If practitioners constantly react to student crises and bias incidents, there is no time to reflect, much less engage in mindful anti-oppression pedagogy.

This recommendation is perhaps the most radical despite its misleading simplicity. As Hersey (2022) stated, “Rest is a form of resistance because it pushes back against capitalism and white supremacy” (p. 13). Stopping, slowing, resting, and reflecting on our work and how we *feel* about it may give practitioners time to examine their attachment to their work and invite questions about how their values align (or not) with the institution. This form of rest, as Hersey (2022) stated, is rooted in Black liberation and thus may be as “radical” as the “social justice warrior.” As such, some institutional leaders and managers may fear the resistance rest and reflection provide. However, I contend that if we are to even attempt to engage in culture change, we must first understand how we feel about it and our relationship to it. These practices can begin in staff meetings with supervisors willing to dedicate time to staff rest and reflection. Such practices will likely be received well by teams already engaged in critical community building because they are already thinking through issues of power and privilege.

The Trouble With Transparency

When I asked the participants what their “magic wand” solution or request of higher ed leaders is, many said transparency. They are exhausted by blanket inclusion statements and responses to singular incidents. They want transparency about what is and is not being done. As B. Brown (2020) suggested, “Clear is kind: Feeding people half-truths or bullshit to make them feel better (which is almost always about making ourselves feel more comfortable) is unkind” (p. 48). The participants who echoed this would rather know the truth about their institution’s stance on inclusion and bias than be hopeful about a reality that will not come.

Such transparency applies to DEI/bias-specific positions. Institutions must stop recruiting social justice educators for positions where they cannot enact social justice. Again, be clear about the expectations and ask staff what theirs are. From there, hopefully, institutions and practitioners can align their values from the beginning to address feelings of betrayal and burnout. Thankfully, B. Brown's (2020) book, *Dare to Lead,* lays out a foundation for leaders and teams to engage in conversations and truth-telling, allowing practitioners to feel clear about what and to whom they are committing their work.

While the participants longed for more transparency from their institutions and several were troubled by the lack of clarity about their roles, I must also trouble transparency through a critical lens. Transparency from institutions about their stances on issues of inclusion, violence, bias, and hate would require them to abandon their purpose. Institutions of higher education are in the business of producing degree earners, making money to support its goals, and inspiring students to give back when they graduate. As a side effect, students, faculty, and staff increase in size, which benefits the university. I share this not to be pessimistic but to acknowledge the cost of transparency for institutions.

As a critical scholar and researcher, I must acknowledge both the institutions' limitations while I and others endeavor for a better relationship with them. As agents of higher education institutions, we are responsible for understanding and interrogating institutions as systems rather than expecting them to understand their impact on us and students. HESA practitioners, as shared in the stories here, do the required bidding of institutions. For example, student conduct offices ensure students adhere to rules and policies, leadership offices support bolstering civility, and dean of students' offices create buffers between the students and institutions with position titles that provide students, as Will alludes to, a false sense of protection from the institution itself.

Often, these offices, disguised as student development, are where the labor of maintaining systems of domination occurs. So, we must ask ourselves, do the institutions need to tell us that in the name of transparency, or can we name it ourselves? As we forge forward, perhaps our goal is a combination of the two. From that naming, I suggest we might offer ourselves the clarity we need to press forward and continue to push the boundaries about what we mean by student development, accountability, and belonging. Only from there can we truly begin to engage in conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Expanding Research on HESA Practitioners Engaged in Bias and DEI Work

As I shared earlier (and multiple times), this research has led to more questions about HESA practitioners and their relationship to bias response and DEI work. Opportunities for additional research include a more in-depth comparative study of HESA practitioners in bias response work with social justice motivations and without. This examination of HESA practitioners may provide higher education leaders and practitioners with additional information on reconciling disparate motivations and their impact on students. For example, does the impact on the student differ if the staff member supporting them has a social justice orientation or not? As discussed in the limitations, a worthwhile project may be to continue research on minoritized practitioners who do bias response work. While not addressed in this literature review, there was existing literature on the experiences of multicultural center staff. However, following Ahmed's (2012) work, a research project that expands on the experiences of minoritized staff throughout institutions who respond to bias may provide additional insight into the call for additional research on staff. Finally, this research increased my curiosity about upper-level leadership and its relationship to social justice and bias response. I also wondered if they were even concerned about how staff have been impacted. Therefore, additional research on the presidential, cabinet,

and chief diversity officers would be worthwhile in comparing their experiences and gauging their concern for staff enacting DEI and bias response work.

Conclusion

> I went into this project pretty convinced you had to believe in social justice to do bias response work. I no longer think that. My thought process, or perspective, has shifted so that not only have I let go of the idea of bias response work as the type of social justice I believe in, but that it can't be as long as institutions resist change to power structures. Bias processes can't affect the system because they are functions of the system. Damn it. (Reflexivity Journal, July 5, 2023)

This research has both validated and challenged me. I feel validated because I am not the only one who has felt so much tension between my values, the institutions I work for, and my students. Because of this, I feel a great sense of responsibility to articulate the participants' stories as thoughtfully and clearly as possible through writing, presentations, and to any higher education administrator who might listen. I firmly believe their stories must continue to be told if higher education truly is to be a place of transformation for our campus community. I also feel challenged by the findings because, just a few short years ago, I held tightly to the conviction that bias response could be and was social justice work. I no longer believe that and am grappling with what that means for me and student affairs work in higher education.

Just as I no longer believe that a social justice orientation is required of the staff who do bias response work, anyone can do bias response work. As Milly shared in her interview that she is passionate about supporting students and maintains her initial intent to enter the field as one to help students graduate. Therefore, I suggest bias response work might be done by those in higher education who might feel less personally affected. For example, Milly shared in a focus group

that she makes a point to attend campus events that host controversial speakers because she knows she will be less impacted than her colleagues. What if we invite practitioners like Milly to lead *response teams* while practitioners like Kay, Ty, Elena, Will, and others do the work of naming and creating transparency in diversity, equity, and inclusion? Perhaps, in this model, those practitioners with social justice orientations may feel more connected to their work of strengthening education as a tool for social justice.

In the first chapter, I opened with a story about being called to cocreate a bias response process at the institution where I worked. I felt honored to create something so meaningful at a place, like so many participants referred to, which gave me so much. It was where I had learned to think critically, and I was allowed to share that legacy with others. I recall feeling hesitant about writing down the procedures for the bias response process. There is a particular section where we (and many bias response teams) write disclaimers about what we are not. For example, "We are not a disciplinary body." This line alone gave me pause because I saw both the opportunity to do something different and the crutch on which the institution could learn to avoid taking responsibility for harm, hate, bias, and violence that does not meet the definition of a policy violation.

Three years later, I am not confident that my fellow bias team members or I created anything different for our students. Instead, I feel we have put more work on already minoritized staff (most of us are queer and BIPOC) to shoulder the trauma of our students. Our experiences on our bias response team mirror those of participants like Will and Alexis who often questioned the role of policy. Furthermore, like Will and Kay, we crave educational resources such as restorative justice and critical community building to support us. As I again lean toward that which is uncomfortable to acknowledge, bias response processes and teams appear only to

perpetuate inequity because they mirror existing processes apart from accountability for the harm doer or respondent. I am left to grapple with what that means for me as a social justice educator. Do I continue to support the bias response model and put more energy into demanding institutional leaders provide support for restorative justice (because I do believe in it), or do I follow the adage we have heard so many times: "If you always make it work, they won't acknowledge it doesn't."

As the literature suggests, this research also implies that bias response processes (whether by teams or otherwise) are not working on our campuses. When their success is measured, as discussed in Chapter 6, simply responding to students when they are harmed makes it impossible for bias response process to create institutional change. Institutional leaders see the number of incidents reported and the number of students "responded to" and mark it as successful. The measure of success dictated by the institution is very different from the measures of success defined by the HESA practitioners on the teams. The response is not enough for our students or HESA practitioners. Rather, practitioners suggest that community, connection, and dialogue before, during, and after campus conflict are the tools by which we can build more inclusive campus communities.

As I highlighted in this project, midlevel practitioners who often hold minoritized identities themselves are the ones invited to support students who experience such forms of oppression. As hooks (1994, 2003) encouraged, how exactly do we maintain hope and education as an act of freedom when it occurs in systems of oppression in which we are so deeply impacted? While I did not expect to answer that question entirely in this research, I journeyed alongside the question as a guidepost. As anticipated, I heard inferences from participants about neoliberalism and reification, but nothing that pushed the boundaries of what I previously knew

about the impact of bias response on higher education. However, I feel I better understand the relationship and perceptions of higher education practitioners, their students, and policies, as it is clear to me through the participants and their stories that we ought to ask more questions of the people who work in the institution to support the students and enact the policies.

Finally, it feels most fitting to harken back to bell Hooks as she has and continues to inspire this research and my work in higher education. My goal as an educator, including as a member of a bias response team, is to enact critical hope to challenge "schooling [as] the site where students are indoctrinated to support imperialist White-supremacist capitalist patriarchy or any ideology" (hooks, 2003, p. xiii). Instead, I endeavor to engage in the kind of education where "we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as a practice of freedom" (hooks, 1994, p. 207). As I continue to struggle with what this research means for my practice, I feel committed to the "labor for freedom" through education and I must decide if bias response is where I want to put my energy as the vehicle through which to do so.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT AND GRAPHIC

Email Subject Line:

Call for Participants in Study on HESA Practitioners' Experiences in Anti-Bias Efforts

Email body:

Hello, NAME,

My name is Megan Karbley and I am contacting you because of your work in Higher Education or Student Affairs or an adjacent role and to invite you to participate in a study I am conducting as a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (see Figure 2). I am a full-time Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) educator serving as a Title IX Investigator and part-time doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations (ELC) program. [INSERT DETAILS ON HOW I AM CONNECTED TO THEM, IF APPLICABLE].

You have been asked to participate in this study because you work in higher education and serve in a student affairs or adjacent role. Because of your proximity to supporting students in higher education, I also anticipate you may have experience supporting students impacted by bias, hate, harassment or other forms of violence or microaggressions. As such, I am inviting you to participate in this study to share about your experiences, your identities, your relationship with your work, and your thoughts about bias response work as social justice work. I am conducting this study to highlight HESA practitioners' experiences and stories and to learn more about how this work impacts your overall well-being related to supporting students impacted by bias on their campus.

This study is part of the requirements for my doctoral research in the Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations (ELC) program at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Through this study, my hope is to learn more about your experiences, connect you with other practitioners, and provide the field of HESA with additional information about the impact of bias support on staff.

If you agree to participate in this study, I will ask to meet with you via an online conferencing platform a maximum of three (3) times, as the study design includes three (3) parts. Throughout the interviews and focus group, I will ask you about your role in higher education, the work you do related to supporting students impacted by bias, your identities, and how you are impacted by the work of supporting students.

- The first online meeting will be one-on-one with me and take approximately 60–75 minutes.
- In the second round, you and all participants will be asked to meet with me via online conferencing to engage in a 90 minute focus group. The intention of the focus group is for you and the other participants to share your stories and ideas with one another, including your experiences participating in this study.
- Finally, you will be invited to a third and final interview one-on-one with me which will take approximately 60–75 minutes.

The timeline of these interviews and study is approximately February through March 2023. However, modifications to this timeline may be made to accommodate participants' schedules.

An honorarium of $30 will be provided to participants who participate in at least 2 parts of the study. A maximum of 10 participants will be selected.

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. By reviewing and signing the consent form here, you agree to participate in the study as outlined above and in the consent form. After submitting your name and email on the consent form via email, I will contact you by email to begin scheduling your interviews as outlined here.

Sincerely,

Megan

Figure A2. Participant Recruitment Flier

UNCG DOCTORAL RESEARCH STUDY
CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS:

HESA PRACTITIONERS' STORIES:

HOW SUPPORTING STUDENTS WHO EXPERIENCE BIAS IMPACTS YOU

To learn more or sign up, contact:
Megan Karbley, PI, at
mykarble@uncg.edu

Must be: Currently employed in higher ed, support students who experience bias	RECEIVE A $30 GIFT CARD
	Time Commitment: 3 sessions, 60-90 minutes/each

INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED VIA ZOOM AND INCLUDE 2, 1-1 INTERVIEWS & 1 FOCUS GROUP

APPENDIX B: ONLINE CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT

Project Title: Researching HESA Practitioners' Experiences in Anti-Bias Efforts

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. There may not be any direct benefit to you for being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. If you choose not to be in the study or leave the study before it is done, it will not affect your relationship with the researcher or the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Details about this study are discussed in this consent form. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. If you have any questions about this study at any time, you should ask the researchers named in this consent form. Their contact information is below.

What is the study about?

This is a research project. Your participation is voluntary. The goal of this study is to elicit the stories of HESA practitioners who support students experiencing bias, hate, harassment, and microaggressions on their campus. This qualitative project will explore the tensions between being a paid agent of the institution and striving to be a social justice educator and seeks to bring such tensions to the forefront.

Why are you asking me?

You have been asked to participate in this study because you work in higher education and serve in a student affairs or adjacent role. Because of your proximity to supporting students in higher education, I also anticipate you may have experience supporting students impacted by bias, hate, harassment and/or other forms of violence or microaggressions. As such, I am inviting you to participate in this study to share about your experiences, your identities, your relationship with your work, and your thoughts about bias response work as social justice work. I am conducting this study to highlight HESA practitioners' experiences and stories and to learn more about how this work impacts your overall well-being related to supporting students impacted by bias on their campus.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Research Questions

1. How does responding to bias incidents impact student affairs practitioners' well-being?
2. How do student affairs educators' social locations influence how they experience their role in responding to bias incidents?
3. How do HESA practitioners perceive the relationship between bias response and social justice and how do their perceptions impact how they engage in their work?

Interview and Focus Group Questions

Round 1: Work you do, external

Bias work: I am interested to learn more about your experiences related to supporting students impacted by bias. First, I want to share what I mean by bias and invite you to add or amend what I've said in any way that feels most resonant with you. Bias response includes supporting a student who's experienced any form of bias, hate, microaggressions or violence related to any part of their perceived or actual identity. This includes racial discrimination, sexual harassment, disability discrimination, and more. In other words, if a student came to you for support because they experienced harm or violence in your current or past campus community, let's talk about what that experience was like for you.

1. What is your formal title at your institution?
2. What is your role in responding to bias on your campus?
    a. Is this part of your formal role?
3. What made you choose to do this work?
4. What is your goal in terms of work related to bias response? What are you hoping to accomplish through your bias response work?

5. As a queer, white, cisgender, first generation working class, non-disabled, nonreligious woman I notice when certain identities are activated in bias response work. So, I'd like to learn more about what that feels like for you. Let's start with you sharing your social locations.
    a. Racial identities
    b. Socioeconomic status
    c. Education level
    d. Gender identity
    e. Sexual identity
    f. Religion
    g. Disability status
    h. Others that are meaningful to you
6. In what ways do your social locations influence how you respond to bias incidents?
7. How do you define social justice?
    a. What about social justice education?
8. Tell me about how you see bias response and social justice being interrelated. (Restate how they defined social justice in their previous response).
    a. Or, if you do not interpret them as interrelated, tell me more.
9. Who we are, meaning the combination of our experiences and social locations, impacts how we do our work. Tell me about how who you are relates to how you interpret the relationship between your bias response work and social justice.
    1. Restate how they described their relationship to ask this question.
10. Describe practices you engage in to maintain your mental and physical well-being.
    a. How do these practices impact your capacity for this work?

b. Is there anything else you want me to know before we start talking about next steps?

11. Discuss participation in the next step:
    a. In addition to our next interview, I want to offer you the opportunity to provide a representation of how you process, or make meaning, of your experiences. For example, if writing, music, movement, or photography are ways you process your work, you may provide that prior to or during the next interview. There are no parameters or instructions here: just an opportunity to show rather than talk about how you process.

Round 2: Focus Group

1. Provide an overview of the focus group and my role
    a. Provide a note on the term bias as an umbrella term and what it can mean in the context of this project.
2. Ask each participant to introduce themselves:
    a. Pseudonym
    b. Pronouns
    c. Institution Pseudonym and type, (i.e., public 4-year, community college)
    d. Your full-time role and your relationship to bias response work
    e. Social locations you want to share with the group
3. Tell us about a fulfilling experience you had supporting a student impacted by bias.
4. Tell us about a challenge you faced supporting a student impacted by bias.
5. In what ways do your social locations influence how you respond to bias incidents?
6. Describe practices you engage in to maintain your mental and physical well-being.
7. Tell us about how you see bias response work and social justice as being interrelated?

8. What do you want other HESA practitioners and the field to know about your experiences?
9. What can be done to make bias response better (insert how they described what they are looking for)?

Round 3: Impact of work you do on your well-being

For participants who did not submit additional information:

- *What reflections from the focus group would you like to share? Did anything challenge or affirm your experience?*
- *Remind participants that questions are geared toward the work they do related to bias; no matter if it's part of their formal role.*

1. What is most challenging about the work you do?
2. What parts do you find fulfilling and why?
3. What does it bring up for you?
4. What parts of your identity are activated or highlighted?
5. What incidents are the most difficult for you to respond to and engage with and why?
6. What do you think the impact of your bias response work is?
7. What do you think the impact is related to increasing social justice?
8. Given your experience, what do you think is most important to highlight/address?

For participants who provided additional submissions:

1. Tell me about why you selected (insert what they provided) to demonstrate how your experiences as a (name their role) related to bias response impact you.
2. Describe the experience of (insert what they did).
    a. What feelings, emotions, and experiences came up for you?
3. Insert specific clarifying questions I have about their piece.

4. What is most challenging about the work you do?
5. What parts do you find fulfilling and why?
6. What does it bring up for you?
7. What parts of your identity are activated or highlighted?
8. What incidents are the most difficult for you to respond to and engage with and why?
9. What do you think the impact of your bias response work is?
10. What do you think the impact is related to increasing social justice?
11. Given your experience, what do you think is most important to highlight/address?

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANTS SUBMISSIONS

Allie's Poetry Submission

this policy is not made for me
reclaim a voice, not as a victim, but as a survivor
what change can you see and when will it happen?
The clouds are gray. I think a storm is on its way.
I think a storm is coming.
Find sincere expression, profound transformative effect.
My eyes are heavy. I didn't sleep.
I don't get this.
I think a storm is coming. Can you handle it?
'Rehabilitative and nonstigmatizing manner.'
Restorative justice isn't just for the respondent or the respondee.
A storm is coming.

Mobey's Photo Submission

Figure 3 includes the photo submitted by Mobey to provide an analogy of his self-care. Mobey shared that time-limited, specific tasks such as mowing the lawn and taking care of his home give him time to reflect and feel accomplished.

Figure D3. Participant Photo Submission