The Double Dutch Retention Framework: A Grounded Theory Study on Increasing Racial Staff Diversity at Pacific Northwest Community Colleges

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The Double Dutch Retention Framework: A Grounded Theory Study on Increasing Racial Staff Diversity at Pacific Northwest Community Colleges

by

Dominique S. Austin

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education
in
Educational Leadership: Postsecondary Education

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the troubling underrepresentation of staff of color in Pacific Northwest community colleges. Despite the proven benefits of racial staff diversity in promoting student success, community colleges face challenges in recruiting and retaining staff of color. Existing literature concerning non-teaching staff at community colleges is limited. This study adds to the existing literature by investigating the experiences and perceptions of staff of color in Pacific Northwest community colleges to identify effective strategies for increasing racial staff diversity.

This study used a constructivist grounded theory approach in a comprehensive data collection process involving surveys, individual and focus group interviews, and memo writing. The rigorous data analysis process identified four primary themes as critical factors for staff of color retention: organizational culture and leadership, cultural competence and belonging, community and support, and professional growth and equitable practice.

These findings are the foundation for the emergent theoretical framework, the "Double Dutch Retention," which offers strategies for increasing racial staff diversity at Pacific Northwest community colleges. While the study focuses on Pacific Northwest community college staff of color, its insights shed light on the performative nature of diversity, equity, and inclusion commitments in higher education.
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Chapter 1: Statement of the Research Problem

Power, privilege, and oppression have remained challenging topics in education since the foundation of the United States of America. As colleges and universities seek to achieve greater racial diversity, effects of white supremacist ideology impede institutional diversity growth. Higher educational literature shows that while college campuses significantly benefit from having a racially diverse staff population, these institutions continue to undervalue their staff of color, which leads to a higher attrition rate for these staff members. This study aims to develop a theory, grounded in the perceptions of staff of color, on how community colleges in the Pacific Northwest can increase their racial staff diversity.

According to the U.S. Census (2015), by 2060, people of color will comprise more than 50% of the total U.S. population and higher education institutions. Colleges and universities nationwide are identifying how to provide students of color with more opportunities and access to their institutions. However, they are struggling to create environments conducive to students of color's success (Aiello, 2019; Aiello, 2020; Tatum, 2003; Harden, 2014; Harden, 2016; Higher Education Coordinating Commission, 2016; Steele, 2016; Washington Student Achievement Council, 2013). Although students of color increasingly pursue college degrees, this population's retention and completion rates remain low due to the challenging experiences this population often faces on college campuses. These students feel the effects of culturally incompetent peers and employees,
inequitable policies and practices, and hostile campus climates (Aiello, 2020; Eckes, 2005; Turner et al., 2008).

Scholars have proven that racial diversity among staff and faculty increases the academic success of students of color (Higher Education Coordinating Commission, 2016; Washington Student Achievement Council, 2013). Unfortunately, as the number of students of color in the college and university system rapidly increases, the number of faculty and staff of color remains stagnant (Aiello, 2020; Griffin, 2020; Harden, 2014; Harden, 2016; Steele, 2016) further decreasing proportionality in the ratio of students of color to faculty and staff of color.

Due to the importance of hiring and retaining strong faculty and staff of color, many institutions nationwide are trying to identify ways to increase their staff and faculty racial diversity. As an example of the resulting disproportionality, in 2016, faculty and staff of color roughly made up 27% of the total number of people employed by colleges and universities across the nation, while the total population of students of color was approximately 45%. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). This trend of disproportionality will continue if colleges and universities fail to provide an environment conducive for faculty and staff of color to thrive. The goal of racial proportionality between students and staff of color has not been attainable, perpetuating a system that challenges the success and retention of many employees and students of color (Aiello, 2020; Eckes, 2005; Tatum, 2003; Turner et al., 2008).
A new theoretical framework is needed to identify practices higher education institutions can implement to increase racial diversity amongst their staff. This framework utilizes the perceptions of Pacific Northwest community college staff of color to uncover a grounded theory to increase racial staff diversity. This study provides a theory to address the underrepresentation of staff of color at Pacific Northwest community colleges, grounded in the stories, experiences, and perceptions of these staff members. Community colleges in the Pacific Northwest can use the findings and recommendations in this study to increase the racial diversity of their staff, which will additionally be an asset to the larger body of higher education literature.

This chapter situates the context and significance of why community colleges need to hear staff of color's perceptions. It introduces the problem statement and the purpose of the study, including research goals and questions. Finally, this chapter concludes with a presentation of the methods used for conducting the research.

**Definition of Terms**

There are various terms used interchangeably to discuss employees at higher education institutions. Below are definitions for staff and faculty in the context of this study. The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems (IPEDS) uses terminology and definitions based on the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system used by Federal statistical agencies. However, the SOC's terminology is inconsistent with the language used in Postsecondary Education or Higher Education. Thus, the terms and
definitions used in this study are a mixture of common terminology used in Higher Education and the SOC terminology used for Federal reporting.

The SOC, the IPEDS, several other studies, and databases use faculty and staff interchangeably. Employee categories and classifications at community colleges vary, but faculty and staff are the two most commonly used employee groups, often associated with Higher Education. For reporting purposes, the SOC system and IPEDS recognize all higher education employees as postsecondary staff and divide them by their occupational category, part-time, and full-time status. In one major occupational category, postsecondary teachers, the SOC and IPEDS have conflicting terminology. The SOC utilizes the term postsecondary teachers to describe instructional staff, which higher education includes in the term faculty. The IPEDS recognizes that higher education institutions refer to faculty as instructional and research staff and public service staff; therefore, the IPEDS includes all three under the category of postsecondary teachers for reporting. This study uses the following definitions to clarify the roles and scope of the terms faculty, staff, and employees of color:

**Faculty.** Persons with initial assignments to conduct instruction and research.

**Staff.** Persons whose primary activity supports the institution's functioning outside of faculty instruction, including but not limited to managerial, executive, support, technical, and other personnel. There are no data on temporary and part-time employees, thus not included in this study.
**Employees of Color.** Reference both staff and faculty who identify as a person of color,

**Person of Color.** An individual who is not white or does not identify with European ethnic groups.

Although this study focuses on staff of color at community colleges, with very little research surrounding this population, the experiences, literature, best practices, and concepts discussed may rely on studies focusing on faculty of color at four-year universities.

This study utilizes various terms, including *community colleges*, educational institutions offering two-year programs leading to associate degrees, vocational and technical programs, and certificates. The term *predominantly white institution* (PWI) describes educational institutions where white European students, faculty, and staff are the majority population. Additionally, the *Pacific Northwest* (PNW) refers to the northwest region of the United States, comprising the states of Washington and Oregon.

The last term essential to this study is *grounded theory*. This qualitative research approach involves developing theories or conceptual frameworks from data collected through systematic and iterative analysis, allowing theory to emerge from the data rather than being preconceived or imposed. It focuses on generating theories grounded in the experiences and perceptions of individuals studied (Charmaz, 2014).
Significance of the Research Study

Higher education administrators seeking to increase racial staff diversity must understand the relationship between staff of color and their respective institutions. In addition, the findings and recommendations from this study will benefit community college practitioners and administration interested in developing systems to increase the number of racially diverse staff on their campus.

Faculty and staff significantly influence students' experiences and directly contribute to student success. Positive and supportive student-staff interactions are essential, as students interact with staff at all levels of their educational journey (Roberts, 2018). Research points to the critical need for students of color to interact with staff of color throughout their college experience; therefore, staff of color needs proportional representation (Griffin, 2020). By increasing the number of staff of color, there will be an expanded opportunity for students of color to gain a sense of community and belonging, resulting in higher retention and graduation rates. Community college administrators are responsible for identifying and implementing retention practices and strategies to ensure the overall success of community college students.

Community colleges must pay attention to the experiences and perceptions of staff of color to recruit and retain them effectively. As an outcome of this research, community colleges in the Pacific Northwest (PNW) will have access to information on cultivating environments where staff of color feels valued and thrive, ultimately growing the number of racially diverse staff on their campuses.
Staff of Color and Institutional Benefits

Racial diversity among colleges and universities faculty and staff is critical to institutional success for various reasons, such as improving institutional racial climate, supporting students of color, preparing the overall student population to enter a globally diverse workforce, and assisting with faculty, staff, and student retention (Harden, 2014; Harden, 2016; Higher Education Coordinating Commission, 2016; Hughes, 2015; Steele, 2016; Washington Student Achievement Council, 2013). Institutions that foster a racially diverse workforce tend to be more creative, have higher rates of workplace morale, and have an overall increase of positive attitudes towards diversity and inclusion (Konrad et al., 2006; Levin et al., 2014; McLeod et al., 1996).

Colleges and universities with a high staff of color turnover rate suffer financial losses due to spending portions of their working capital budget on recruiting, hiring, and training new employees. For example, upon hiring, an institution must provide new employees with a new salary and benefits, coupled with the recruitment process can come at significant expense to the institution. Given the daunting staff replacement costs, it would be more financially efficient for higher education institutions to cultivate environments conducive for staff of color to thrive and remain at their current institution.

Staff of Color and Students of Color Success

The interactions between faculty, staff, and students are critical to the student experience and their ability to succeed (Barnett, 2010; Cejda & Hoover, 2010; Cox, 2011; HECC, 2017; Hoffman, 2014; Kimbark et al., 2017; Prince & Tovar, 2014; Schuetz,
Research shows that students' interactions with faculty often contribute to their empowerment, academic achievement, career development, and sense of belonging (Anderson & Carta-Falsa, 2002; Cook-Sather, 2012; Cox, 2011; Docan-Morgan & Manusoy, 2009; Mullen et al., 2000; Hoffman, 2014; Wang & BrckLorenz, 2018). Frequent positive interactions between students and faculty, both inside and outside the classroom, result in positive student outcomes, such as increased student motivation and academic success (Cook-Sather, 2012; Hoffman, 2014; Mullen et al., 2000). Although students' in-classroom experiences with faculty are essential, their out-of-classroom interactions with them are equally valuable. Since students interact primarily with the staff members of community colleges outside of instructional times, researchers posit that these other professional interactions also significantly contribute to their experience (Cox, 2011; Middleton, 2006; Prebble et al., 2004; Roberts, 2018).

The staffing structure of most community colleges adds barriers to faculty-student interactions outside of the classroom, as roughly two-thirds of community college faculty are part-time (Aiello, 2020; Chen, 2018; Miles, 2010). As higher education scholars continue researching ‘best’ student retention and engagement practices, more research points to staff’s impact on the student lifecycle. Roberts (2018) recognized that students interact with staff throughout all levels of their educational journey and suggests that staff significantly influences students’ experiences and, in some cases, directly contributes to students' success.
Academic faculty and professional staff cultivate the learning students engage in throughout their relationship with an institution. However, the literature surrounding professional staff interactions with students is lacking due to how these positions are often perceived as unimportant (Burke, 2020; Dobson & Conway, 2003; Middleton, 2006; Roberts, 2018; Steele, 2016). The reality is no function of an institution will thrive without the support of administrative, technical, and support staff. By the very nature of their work, staff plays a significant role in the student experience within an institution (Burke, 2020; Dobson & Conway, 2003; Middleton, 2006; Robert, 2018; Steele, 2016). As a result, there is a growing interest in professional staff and their contributions to student success, especially those in student service areas, who assist students in navigating academic practices, providing personal support, and guiding social integration (Dobson & Conway, 2003; Graham, 2013; Middleton, 2006; Roberts, 2018; Steele, 2016).

As the interest in staff and student interactions grows, scholars are highlighting the significance of this relationship. The most widely used student development theory, Astin's (1984) theory of Student Involvement, concludes that students' level of academic and social involvement is the result of an institutional environment conducive to their learning and ability to thrive (Astin, 1984; Astin, 1999; McClenny & Marti, 2006). Consistent with Astin's (1984) student development theory, much of the literature suggests community college students who interact with professional staff are more likely to be successful, resulting in higher rates of persistence, retention, and overall student
success (Cejda & Hoover, 2010; Cox, 2011; Hoffman, 2014; Kimbark et al., 2017; Prince & Tovar, 2014; Roberts, 2018; Schuetz, 2008; Wood & Ireland, 2014). Furthermore, Roberts (2018) claimed that "the interplay of positive relationships between academic staff and professional staff, and between all staff and students, will be central to continuing to improve student retention" (p. 151). Thus, research from these last few decades shows an expansion of the positive effects of engagement and interaction between students and faculty, to also exist between students and staff at 4-year colleges and community colleges. Still, predominant literature focused on staff and student interactions at community colleges is limited, and Involvement Theory often omits the experiences and perspectives of students of color.

Based on the prominence of white-dominant institutions and the whiteness inherent in higher education, there are flaws in applying engagement and involvement theories to non-white students. Student Development research, which describes how staff and student interactions are critical to the success of any student, is based on a bulk of historical student success literature focused on white students' relationships with a predominantly white staff population without considering the experiences of students of color. Contrary to the claims of engagement theories, toting the positive effects of faculty and staff interactions, of how students' interactions with faculty and staff may improve their academic success, not all students experience this, and may impede their success (Barnett, 2010; Cejda & Hoover, 2010; Price & Tovar, 2014; Wood & Ireland, 2014). Several studies show students of color who reported how their negative interactions with
their white faculty and staff impacted their educational outcomes and led to disengagement (Alexander, 2011; Ford & Harris, 1996; Harper, 2006; HECC, 2017; Wood & Ireland, 2014; WSAC, 2013). With the achievement gaps and negative stigmas surrounding students of color in education, students of color often face barriers because of their white faculty, staff, and peers and will benefit significantly from interaction with a racially diverse staff workgroup (Crisanto, 1998; Guiffrida, 2005; Hickson, 2002; Hughes, 2015; Levin et al., 2014; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). Roberts (2018) claimed that professional staff could contribute to student success by a) Ensuring that staff welcomes students with a positive attitude, b) Listening to what students need from their institution, c) Constantly and regularly communicating with students, d) Providing students with appropriate services for their specific stage in school, e) Focusing on supporting students throughout their educational journey and not just their first year, and f) Fostering an institutional culture using strength-based language to empower both staff and students. Yet, these contributions are not always distributed to students of color, further highlighting the need for greater staff racial diversity.

There is a disconnection between white policymakers' intentions and the realities of what students of color are experiencing at these institutions (HECC, 2017; Hughes, 2015; Harden, 2014; Harden, 2016; WSAC, 2013). Most white staff often lack the cultural competencies needed to support students of color and the knowledge of racial and cultural differences between their experience and their students. Other times, they ignore the realities of race in our society, further showcasing the critical need to increase
racial staff diversity, which can positively impact underrepresented students of color (Tatum, 2000; HECC, 2017; WSAC, 2013). The staff of color at community colleges in the PNW could not only advocate for underrepresented students but also bridge the gap students of color often feel between themselves and campus resources, allowing them to become empowered with an increased sense of belonging (Hughes, 2015; Newhouse et al., 2019; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007).

While the racial demographic of staff at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest does not reflect the student racial demographic, these staff members bring value to these institutions by uniquely supporting racially diverse students. Additionally, white students benefit from staff racial diversity through exposure to diverse cultures and new ways of thinking (Levin et al., 2014). For example, increasing racial staff diversity gives all students a glimpse of the global workforce, preparing them to enter a more diverse society. In addition, the experiences and knowledge staff of color brings to college learning environments promote campus discussions and interactions from a perception-based approach inaccessible to white staff (Harden, 2014; Konrad et al., 2006; Levin et al., 2014; Steele, 2016).

The recruitment and retention of staff of color are essential to the success of institutions desiring to offer adequate, or even excellent, service to diverse students attending community colleges in the Pacific Northwest (Alexander, 2011; Campbell & Campbell, 2007; HECC, 2017; Levin et al., 2014; Steele, 2016; Turner et al., 1999; WSAC, 2013). Thus, identifying how these community colleges can better recruit and
retain staff of color is pivotal. Many researchers discuss the importance of racial diversity within the staff and faculty as a contributing factor to student and institutional success, yet there is a lack of research on the experiences, recruitment, and retention of staff of color, specifically in community colleges (Aiello, 2020; Griffin, 2020; Harden, 2014; Harden, 2016).

**Staff of Color and Perceived Experiences**

Despite the evidence of the educational and institutional benefits of having a racially diverse workforce, there is significant underrepresentation in Higher Education and literature as well. Researchers discuss how people of color at predominantly white institutions enter hostile and unwelcoming work environments filled with micro-aggressions, discrimination, and belittlement. These negatively impact their decision to stay at their institution (Aiello, 2020; Flaherty, 2020; Flaherty, 2021; Griffin, 2020; Levin et al., 2014; Steele, 2016).

Recognizing the lack of research on staff of color, Steele (2016) conducted a qualitative study on professional staff members of color at a predominantly white institution in a Midwestern state. After their study, Steele provided four-year universities with suggestions from staff members of color on supporting and increasing the retention of their population. With curiosity as to what influences them to stay and what contributes to their decision to leave, Steele (2016) found seven themes that emerged from the experiences of these staff members: (a) institutional factors, (b) "the invisible employee," (c) support, or lack thereof, (d) unspoken expectations, (e) negativity of the
environment, (f) institutional benefits, and (g) navigating the institution (p. 31). In their study, Steele (2016) suggested that "further research is needed to explore why staff members of color leave institutions, remain at institutions, and what services an institution may provide in order to support staff of color" (p. 8), and provided a list of where and how scholars can replicate this study. However, when specifying the various types of higher education institutions scholars can explore using this research, Steele (2016) failed to mention community colleges, perpetuating the cycle of omitting community colleges from the literature.

Staff of color at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest often feel undervalued and alienated by their institutions, despite the institution's claims of fostering an inclusive environment (Aiello, 2020; Burke, 2020; Gillespie, 2020; Powell, 2019; Solomon, 2018; Steele, 2016). Former employees in the Washington State community college system perceived the common trend in the high turnover rate of employees of color, compared to the low turnover of their long-lasting white co-workers, as disturbing (Powell, 2019; Solomon, 2018). There are many possible factors contributing to the challenges people of color face on college campuses, among which are: racial campus climate; a lack of sense of belonging; monolithic institutional practices; a lack of upwardly mobile opportunities; displays of performance allyship, systemic racism, hostile working conditions; and other institutional barriers (Aiello, 2019; Aiello, 2020; Griffin, 2020; Hughes, 2015; Levin et al., 2014; Steele, 2016; Flaherty, 2020). To
successfully identify how community colleges in the Pacific Northwest can increase the number of staff of color on their campuses, it is critical to know their experiences.

Within higher education institutions, people of color often find themselves in middle to lower-level positions, frequently overlooked, unheard, and have limited influence on institutional change (Aiello, 2020; Burke, 2020; Levin et al., 2014; Steele, 2016). In contrast, their white counterparts tend to occupy higher ranks, receive higher salaries, and have greater chances of promotion, creating an environment that favors the retention of white staff members. Furthermore, middle- to lower-level positions face a higher risk of termination, lack social capital, and are underpaid. These status deficiencies persist in higher education, despite recurring research-driven claims of these staff positions' importance (Burke, 2020; Dobson & Conway, 2003).

Additionally, employees of color face unequal expectations requiring them to over-commit without compensation. Staff of color faces the burden of leading diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives and serving as mentors to students of color. These additional responsibilities are typically imposed on them without compensation, mainly when they are one of the only employees of color within their department or institution (Aiello, 2020; Levin et al., 2014; Steele, 2016; Flaherty, 2020). Additionally, often with the job classifications of nonacademic or non-administrative professional staff members, employees of color are not included in discussions and decision-making regarding racial justice and the racial campus climate. Overworking for lack of change poses a double negative for staff of color who feel they can use their time more efficiently, as their
recommendations are continuously ignored (Aiello, 2020; Burke, 2020; Flaherty, 2020; Flaherty, 2021; Griffin, 2020). Other than being singled out and tokenized to serve as representatives on diversity, equity, and inclusion committees, employees of color often feel isolated.

Predominantly white institutions foster a professional culture in which employees of color may not fit. In contrast, the views, behaviors, and actions of employees of color often push against white cultural norms (Flaherty, 2020). As a result, employees of color may not be selected for promotional opportunities or even have opportunities to serve in the academic areas that would gain them institutional influence. For example, there is a disproportionate number of white faculty in the STEM and English fields, management positions, student life, and leadership roles. Employees of color are predominantly in the Social Sciences and Arts, multicultural affairs, and lower-level positions (Burke, 2020; Griffin, 2020; Levin et al., 2014). The few employees of color who manage to serve in positions of institutional influence are often not taken seriously by white students or colleagues, are belittled as a "diversity hire," and are even dehumanized (Aiello, 2020; Flaherty, 2020; Flaherty, 2021; Griffin, 2020; Levin et al., 2014; Levin et al., 2011; Steele, 2016).

Levin et al. (2014) found that employees of color must give up their cultural identities and values to pass as professionals according to standards established by white cultural norms to remain part of the college staff who maintain institutional influence. Additionally, employees of color must assimilate into their institution's professional
culture and navigate their work environment in ways that contradict their professional and personal lives (Flaherty, 2020; Griffin, 2020; Levin et al., 2014; Levin et al., 2011). Although several researchers found that employees of color experience these challenges because of their racial identity, not all people of color blame racial disparities but focus their dissatisfaction on their lower employment classification.

Community colleges in the PNW are not exempt from the negative impact of racial issues. Racial issues are the primary factor in the departure of staff of color from colleges and universities (Flaherty, 2021; Griffin, 2020; Levin et al., 2014; Steele, 2016). Burke (2020) highlights how Black service employees lack respect and value within their institution and argues that these staff members did not attribute their feelings to racialized experiences but to their relationships with their supervisors and colleagues. Contrarily, Flaherty (2021) found that Black staff employees experience a considerable lack of respect and empathy from their institutions, causing them to leave at high rates.

Fostering a more diverse and inclusive environment starts with increasing racial staff diversity. Community colleges in the PNW struggle to effectively recruit and retain staff of color. With the changing demographics in the U.S., community colleges need to rid themselves of the negative impacts of racial issues and create diverse and inclusive practices that will positively contribute to the staff of color experience (Hughes, 2015). Because most of the current literature focuses on faculty of color at four-year universities, methods of effectively recruiting and retaining staff of color at PNW community colleges will remain a mystery until research addresses this issue.
Staff of Color and Community Colleges in the Pacific Northwest

The disparities between the total percentage of staff of color and students of color are alarming. According to 2018 data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2018), staff of color in the Oregon community college system only comprise 12.61% of all employees, while students of color comprise 37% of all community college students in Oregon. Similarly, the percentage of employees of color at community colleges in Washington State is only 18%, whereas students of color make up 49% of the Washington community college student population. Staff of color only make up 17% of all staff, while students of color make up 44% of all students between Oregon and Washington combined (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Due to the abovementioned factors, the lower staff of color population contributes to staff and students’ challenges. Unfortunately, community colleges in the PNW face diversity, equity, and inclusion issues due to the disproportionality between students and staff of color. Moreover, the lack of racial staff diversity is a symptom of a more significant problem of institutional racism that may be rooted in these educational systems (Aiello, 2020; Griffin, 2020; Hughes, 2015).

Community colleges in Oregon and Washington promote a strong commitment to fostering diversity, addressing racism, and working to dismantle racist policies and practices (Oregon Community College Association, 2020; Washington State Board for Community and Technical College, 2019). Despite these systemwide commitments to fostering a culture of inclusion, free of discrimination and harassment, people of color
still experience challenges, often feeling isolated, alienated, and unvalued by their institution (Aiello, 2019; Aiello, 2020; Harden, 2016; Hughes, 2015; Solomon, 2018).

Aiello (2020) found staff of color at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest are actively being negatively affected by the systemic racism that exists at their institutions. For example, 2015, 40% of the newly hired Black people at Clark College in Vancouver, Washington, left within a year. In addition, seven other women of color left during that period. At Clark, people of color only made up 14% of the total faculty and staff population and perceived their working conditions to be hostile, resulting in Clark College settling several lawsuits due to discriminatory practices (Gillespie, 2020; Powell, 2019; Solomon, 2018). Although Clark College faced challenging retention issues, not all Pacific Northwest community colleges share the same challenges and can create more effective and welcoming environments that promote the success of staff of color.

Several colleges in metropolitan areas of Washington are progressing towards achieving inclusive environments and demonstrating an increase in racially diverse staff (Hughes, 2015; Wood, 2020). In 2019 and 2020, South Seattle Community College was ranked in the *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*'s top 25 list of most promising community colleges to work for (Wood, 2020). Similarly, leadership at Highline Community College set a benchmark goal and successfully increased their faculty racial diversity by 20% from 1995 to 2010 (Hughes, 2015). Although the number of faculty of color at Highline Community College has increased, increasing staff of color is just as necessary due to their involvement in working with and supporting students.
Summary of Research Study Significance

From higher education literature surrounding faculty and staff of color, three concepts are apparent: (a) faculty and staff racial diversity are beneficial to college campuses, (b) the experiences of faculty and staff of color are often intermixed with challenges unique to their populations and (c) despite institutional efforts, colleges, and universities still struggle to recruit and retain staff of color. While these factors are well-established phenomena, much of the literature surrounding racial diversity amongst higher education employees have used research and data collection which focuses primarily on faculty, specifically those working at four-year universities (Aiello, 2020; Griffin, 2020; Harden, 2014; Harden, 2016; Higher Education Coordinating Commission, 2016; Washington Student Achievement Council, 2013).

The missing influential voice in defining the experiences and perceptions surrounding community colleges is that of the staff of color who labor there. Scholars and researchers must prioritize hearing and understanding the voices of staff of color in higher education to identify practices designed to enhance the institutions' abilities to increase their staff racial diversity. This research is pivotal because predominantly white staff and administrative leaders create current college and university initiatives to foster communities of color, who may be unaware of the unique experiences people of color face (Aiello, 2019; Aiello, 2020; Griffin, 2020; Harden, 2016; Tatum, 2003; Washington Student Achievement Council, 2013). This study aims to fill the research gap by exploring the perceptions, experiences, and practices of recruiting and retaining
employees of color in community colleges. It will incorporate theories grounded in the voices and perspectives of staff of color working at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest.

**Problem Statement**

Staff of color are disproportionately underrepresented on community college campuses in the Pacific Northwest (Aiello, 2020; Higher Education Coordinating Commission, 2016; Washington Student Achievement Council, 2013). As a result of the Pacific Northwest community college systems' failure to increase staff diversity, staff, faculty, and students of color at these institutions often feel alienated, undervalued, have a sense of disconnect, and eventually abandon their educational pathways (Aiello, 2020; Higher Education Coordinating Commission, 2016; Solomon, 2018; Washington Student Achievement Council, 2013). This perpetual problem negatively impacts the retention rate of staff of color and the experiences and academic success of students of color (Aiello, 2020; Griffen, 2020, Higher Education Coordinating Commission, 2016; Washington Student Achievement Council, 2013).

Many possible factors contribute to the low number of staff of color at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest. However, very little is known due to the lack of literature surrounding recruiting and retaining staff of color at community colleges, especially in the Pacific Northwest. This study narrows that gap by creating a grounded theory based on the voices of staff of color currently employed at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest.
the PNW. It explores their perceptions of staff diversity and identifies how their institutions can recruit and retain staff of color.

**Purpose of the Proposed Study**

This study aimed to develop a theory on how community colleges in the Pacific Northwest can increase the number of racially diverse staff on their campuses, grounded in the perceptions of currently employed staff of color. In addition, this study explains both why community colleges struggle to increase their staff's racial diversity and suggests how they might better achieve this goal. In the research, the retention and recruitment of staff of color is the ability of community colleges in Oregon and Washington to attract and keep non-white, non-teaching employees.

**Research Goals**

Three goals contribute to the scope of the study. Goals are pivotal to the success of research studies because they contribute to the reasoning behind a researcher’s intentions of solving an issue (Maxwell, 2013). Further, the three goals listed below provide the motivation and focus of this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Maxwell, 2014).

**Goal 1**: Document how the staff of color at community colleges in the PNW perceive their institution's commitment to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion.

**Goal 2**: Understand how the experiences and perceptions of Pacific Northwest community college staff of color impact their retention.
Goal 3: Identify retention and recruitment practices essential to increasing staff racial diversity at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest.

Research Questions

Research questions connect all components of a research design and are often directly linked to the goals of a study (Maxwell, 2013). Maxwell (2013) suggests that research questions connect the study's purposes, literature, and existing research topic knowledge. The research questions in this study evolved naturally from the goals and literature around faculty and staff of color in higher education. The questions asked in this study are rooted in the literature that allows exploration of the complexities of this phenomenon, whereas these questions organically provide support and context to the explored issue (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Maxwell, 2013). Thus, the research questions facilitating the exploration of this phenomenon are as follows.

Question 1: How do Pacific Northwest community college staff of color perceive their institution's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, given a significant disproportion between the numbers of staff of color and their white counterparts?

Question 2: What experiences motivate staff of color to continue working at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest, despite systemic barriers for employees of color in higher education?
Question 3: What recruitment and retention practices do Pacific Northwest community college staff of color perceive as essential to their institutions' ability to increase the number of racially diverse staff on campus?

These research questions directly link to the goals and purpose of this study by guiding the qualitative inquiry, explaining the low number of staff of color employed at community colleges, and identifying practices to increase this number.

Presentation of Methods

As colleges nationwide strive to increase the number of people of color at their institutions, research regarding faculty and staff of color is essential (Aiello, 2020; Aiello, 2019; Steele, 2016). Community colleges must hear from their staff of color, listen to their experiences, get their perspectives, and implement their suggestions to obtain a more racially diverse campus. The purpose and goals of this study are deeply rooted in how these staff members can help create an environment conducive to increasing their staff's racial diversity. The outcome of this study provides a framework for action that community colleges across the nation could use, grounded in the perceptions and experiences of staff of color at community colleges. This study used various qualitative methods described below to develop this framework.

This study utilizes descriptive qualitative research to investigate why community colleges in the Pacific Northwest struggle to recruit and retain staff of color and identify practices and strategies that will aid these institutions in increasing the racial diversity of their staff. A descriptive qualitative approach allowed for an in-depth, open-ended,
unstructured exploration of staff of color's perceptions, experiences, and suggestions for all to learn from (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2014). Therefore, a descriptive qualitative research design is the most appropriate approach to amplifying staff of color's voices. (Bhattacharya, 2017; Charmaz, 2014; Chong & Yeo, 2015; Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). Additionally, this research study will utilize grounded theory strategies to construct a theory based on the inductive data collected, exploring ways community colleges in the Pacific Northwest can better recruit and retain staff of color (Bhattacharya, 2017; Charmaz, 2014; Chong & Yeo, 2015; Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013).

The grounded theory design relies on the theoretical sampling method of continuously collecting and analyzing data (Charmaz, 2014; Chong & Yeo, 2015; Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Maxwell, 2013). Theoretical sampling requires continuous analysis throughout the data collection process to triangulate the data, enhance its credibility, and develop multiple levels of themes and categories. Also, theoretical sampling requires the research data to guide future data collection methods and instruments, such as survey questionnaires, one-on-one interviews, and focus group interviews (Charmaz, 2014; Chong & Yeo, 2015). The target population for this study is staff of color currently employed, or one year removed, from working at a community college in Oregon and Washington, also known as the Pacific Northwest.
Chapter 1 Summary

Community colleges in the Pacific Northwest display a striking racial imbalance in their staffing patterns, with white staff members significantly outnumbering staff of color. This discrepancy becomes even more glaring considering the increasing racial diversity of student populations in colleges and universities nationwide. Due to this increase, there is a greater need for more diversity in the curriculum, institutional practices, and overall racial climate that will contribute to the educational advancement of people of color (Aiello, 2020; Harden, 2016; Hughes, 2015).

Existing literature in higher education has primarily focused on recruiting faculty of color, inadvertently neglecting the vital role that staff of color play in the success of their institutions (Aljohani, 2016; Bhebhe & Maphosa, 2016; Crosling et al., 2009; Soomro & Ahmad, 2013). This study addresses this notable gap in literature, which shifts the focus from faculty of color at four-year universities to staff of color in community colleges, specifically those in the Pacific Northwest.

Chapter 1 dives into the significance of this research study and outlines its purpose, goals, and research questions. Subsequent chapters provide a detailed roadmap of the research process, starting with a thorough literature review and the conceptual framework in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 presents a comprehensive description of the methodology applied in this study.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction to the Literature Review

This study aimed to understand the low number of racially diverse staff on community college campuses in the Pacific Northwest and identify ways to increase this population. This chapter will discuss the literature surrounding staff of color in higher education, providing context, justification, focus, and a framework for this study. Most qualitative researchers use the literature review to summarize and utilize current theories and pre-established frameworks as guides while conducting their research (Charmaz, 2014; Mitchell, 2014).

Most grounded theorists conduct a literature review and develop a theoretical framework after their data collection and analysis process to validate the emerging theory rather than using any established theories as a guide to test empirical data (Charmaz, 2014; Chong & Yeo, 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Maxwell, 2013; Mitchell, 2014). The literature review summarizes previous relevant literature, identifies gaps in the knowledge of existing literature, and houses the conceptual framework that serves as a lens for studying a phenomenon (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Mitchell, 2014; Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). Classical grounded theorists argue that completing the literature review last negates any possible influences that existing researched knowledge and frameworks have on the outcome of newly forming theory development. Although classical grounded theorists argue that the preconceived notions and assumptions from prior literature may influence theory development grounded in the indicative data,
constructivist grounded theorists argue that literature reviews are less of a threat to effective and unbiased data collection and that the use and review of existing theoretical frameworks may provide helpful evidence to illustrate the argument or claims of a phenomenon (Charmaz, 2014; Mitchell, 2014).

Conducting a literature review and theoretical framework before data collection ensures rich and informative data. Literature reviews expose the researcher to an abundance of knowledge, exposure to literature, biases, preconceived notions, theoretical concepts, and relevant established frameworks, allowing for the discovery, examination, and defense of ideological positions (Charmaz, 2014; Mitchell, 2014). Additionally, frameworks provide analytical structure and support for research studies (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). Theoretical frameworks specify variable relationships to inform an argument, whereas conceptual frameworks provide a lens for conceptualizing the research phenomenon that influences data collection and analysis formulation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Maxwell, 2013). Instead of a theoretical framework, the literature review in this study used a conceptual framework to inform the data collection and analysis process. Using a conceptual framework strengthens the understanding and context of Pacific Northwest community colleges' struggles to increase racial staff diversity, grounded in the experiences and perceptions of staff of color to help shape the theoretical framework developed.

This chapter will introduce the literature surrounding staff of color in higher education, highlighting current practices which higher education institutions use to recruit
and retain employees of color, all while critiquing previous research. Furthermore, this chapter explains the use of theoretical frameworks in constructivist grounded theory and how Harro's (2000) cycle of socialization served as the conceptual framework for this study.

**Key Literature Review Concepts**

Our world is host to a complex communal system providing both distinct and subtle advantages and disadvantages that dictate the manifestation of our social groups within the socially constructed hierarchy of identities (DiAngelo, 2018; Feagin, 2006; Freire, 2000; Harro, 2000; Ludwig, 2020). Our established policies, rules, norms, and roles govern this system, which still contains a foundation built upon systemic oppression (Freire, 2000; Harro, 2000; Ludwig, 2020; Merriam & Brockett, 1997). Power, privilege, and oppression situates marginalized social groups deemed inferior in unfair, cruel, or unjust positions, preventing access to resources or opportunities, such as education (Freire, 2000; Harro, 2000; Ludwig, 2020; Merriam & Brockett, 1997). Deeply rooted in biases, the conditioning of our society perpetuates this system of oppression based on our social identity groups (DiAngelo, 2018; Harro, 2000; McIntosh, 1988). Before discussing how this perpetual cycle of socialization served as a conceptual framework, it is imperative to define socialization, bias, socially constructed identity groups, and systems of oppression.
Socialization

Socialization is a process that explains how humans acquire the values, beliefs, and biases that construct our understanding of our world's societal dynamics (Freire, 2000; Harro, 2000). The socialization process is a product of how one's direct phenomenological influences shape the views and perceptions of oneself and how other people and communities assign roles to others in various aspects of one's life journey (DiAngelo, 2018; Harro, 2000; Irving, 2014). The conceptual framework centers on socialization throughout.

Bias

Bias are the attitudes, stereotypes, and prejudice that influence one's understandings, actions, beliefs, and decisions to favor or not favor certain traits or characteristics (Brecher et al., 2019; Lune & Berg, 2017; Maxwell, 2013; Ross, 2020). There are four levels of awareness where bias emerges: conscious, unconscious, implicit, and explicit (Brecher et al., 2019; Ross, 2020). Conscious bias is awareness of attitudes, thoughts, and beliefs about certain groups. Unconscious bias is similar but devoid of personal awareness. Similarly paired, implicit bias is how our bias influences our actions or decisions unconsciously, whereas our intentional actions and decisions to favor groups classify as explicit bias (Brecher et al., 2019; Ross, 2020). Bias is the root of how we, as humans, are socialized. We construct our understanding of various social groups based on information we receive from our environment. Depending on contextual situations, bias
is the foundation of social identity groups' perceptions. In this study, bias fosters the general assumptions about staff of color.

**Manifestation of Socially Constructed Identities Groups**

Social identities, which come from various social categories, such as race, class, gender, physical and mental ability, religion, sexuality, and more, are the salient traits and characteristics that are most present in social group settings (Freire, 2000; Harro, 2020; Terry, 1999). Unfortunately, our society has manifested different social identities within each social category creating a hierarchy within these social groups. Depending on contextual situations, the distribution of power and privilege favors the dominant social groups, creating a system that provides multiple social identity groups, some with advantages and some with disadvantages (Freire, 2020; Harro, 2000; Ludwig, 2020; Merriam & Brockett, 1997). However, the foundation of our United States society is rooted in white Supremacy, an ideology prioritizing the most common systemically advantaged social identity groups; white, affluent, heterosexual, able-bodied, Christian, and male (Aiello, 2020; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Dury, 2003; Kim, 2021; Merriam & Brockett, 1997; Wider, 2006). Our societal public institutions mirror, of course, this dominant ideology.

**Systems of Oppression**

When a group of people holding power establishes rules, norms, culture, policies, procedures, and environments that restrict the advancement of individuals or social groups they perceive as inferior, they effectively create a system of oppression
(DiAngelo, 2020; Freire, 2000; Harro, 2020; McIntosh, 1988; Tatum, 2003). Systems of oppression interweave throughout the social identity, classification, and contextual situations providing dominant groups with advantages at the expense of members of systematically oppressed groups (DiAngelo, 2020; Harro, 2000; McIntosh, 1988). A typical example of such an oppressive system can be easily observed when a systemically advantaged group of people use their power to create institutional norms and policies, often referred to as "common" or "best" practices, that create an environment hostile to disadvantaged groups (DiAngelo, 2020; Freire, 2000). Of course, oppression does not affect everyone, as outlier individuals from systemically non-dominant groups can overcome oppressive systems. However, systems of oppression cannot exist without an oppressive population capitulating and internalizing their oppression.

**Review of Staff of Color in Higher Education Literature**

Many experts explore how institutions of higher education and students benefit from racially diverse faculty and staff (Crisanto, 1998; Guiffrida, 2005; Hickson, 2002; Hughes, 2012; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007), the many retention challenges institutions and faculty and staff of color face (Aiello, 2020; Brown, 1988; Levin et al., 2014; Phillips, 2002; Smith et al., 2004; Stanley, 2006; Zamboanga & Bingman, 2001), and best practices in recruiting and retaining staff and faculty of color (Brown, 1988; Dumas-Hines et al., 2001; Isaac & Boyer, 2007; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Kayes, 2006; Phillips, 2002; Piercy et al., 2005; Shufelt, 2002; Thompson, 2008).
Institutional Challenges to Recruit and Retain Staff of Color

Scholars recognizing the increased benefits institutions gain from having racially diverse employees also recognize the structural and cultural issues preventing this population from increasing (Levin et al., 2014; Steele, 2016). Colleges and universities actively recruit employees of color. However, once employees of color arrive, they are placed in an environment that is not conducive to their success. Concluding their study, Steele (2016) recommended four practices four-year universities should implement to retain staff members of color better:

1. More representation in administrative roles
2. Professional development that leads to promotional opportunities
3. Institutional practices which reinforce cultural competency and accountability to build trust between staff members of color and the institution
4. Continuing to increase racial staff diversity

Although these recommendations are for four-year universities, Levin et al. (2014) highlighted community colleges' challenges in recruiting and retaining faculty of color.

In their qualitative study, Levin et al. (2014) utilized Martin and Meyerson's Culture Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Cultural Identity Theory as lenses to examine the perceptions, experiences, and personal identities of part-time and full-time faculty of color throughout California's community colleges. Using the Snowball method, Levin et
al. (2014) identified and conducted one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with 36 community college faculty of color and summarized their findings into two categories:

1. Faculty of color perceive institutional culture differently than their white counterparts. Thus, they navigate the professional world differently. And,

2. Faculty of color perceive they have less institutional power than their white counterparts and feel forced to abandon their social and cultural identities to assimilate.

Levin et al. (2014) did not make any recommendations; instead, they challenged community college reform practitioners to acknowledge the complex identities of their faculty and create an institutional culture that embraces racial and cultural diversity rather than cultural assimilation. Among the 36 participants, Levin et al. (2014) omitted part-time faculty (n=5) from data analysis due to perceptions inconsistent with the full-time faculty. Though these discoveries are profound, inconsistencies between part-time and full-time faculty of color signify that these findings may not translate to staff of color; this is where more research exploration is needed.

Aiello (2020) embarked on the journey to explore faculty and staff of color recruitment and retention at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest. In this phenomenological study, Aiello (2020) focused on how faculty and staff of color perceive the qualities and components of effective administrative leadership, which leads to successfully recruiting and retaining employees of color. Aiello endeavors to unveil factors contributing to increased retention and recruitment of employees of color. Using a
three-strand data collection approach, Aiello (2020) based his data on campus climate surveys completed by all faculty and staff from five different institutions, individual interviews with eight participants (two classified staff, three administrators, and three faculty), and a participatory narrative inquiry group interview. Concluding his research, Aiello (2020) highlights that the barriers PNW community college employees of color face are consistent with much of the literature reviewed above. Participants used interpersonal coping strategies to overcome their barriers. Additionally, the racial identities of participants were perceived negatively. However, this study incorporated the experiences of faculty and staff of color at community colleges, specifically in the Pacific Northwest; Aiello (2020) interpreted participants' experiences and responses through the lens of a white man.

Researchers have used various methods to identify best practices to increase racial diversity among higher education employees. Aiello (2020) utilized three strands of data interconnectedly to identify themes and patterns impacting employees of color at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest. Hughes (2015) used multiple data sources to identify how a community college in the Pacific Northwest successfully increased its faculty of color.

**Institutional "Best" Practices to Recruit and Retain Staff of Color**

Many scholars and institutions claim to have best practices for recruiting and retaining employees of color. Yet, colleges and universities nationwide are still struggling to increase the number of racially diverse employees on campus. Highline Community
College (HCC), an urban institution in the Pacific Northwest, successfully increased its percentage of faculty of color by more than 20 percent within 15 years. When investigating HCC’s success in recruiting and retaining faculty of color, Hughes (2015) used multiple qualitative methods to examine events leading to HCC’s ability to turn their number of full-time faculty of color from 4.3% in 1995 to 23.3% in 2010.

Due to the transformation of racial and cultural demographics in the community HCC serves, the college faced an influx of racially and culturally diverse students—ending up as Washington's most diverse college in 2020, with 68% students of color (Hughes, 2015; Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, 2010). Noticing the demographic shift, Hughes (2015) used causal analysis, secondary quantitative data from the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges, and unscripted one-on-one interviews to identify best practices HCC used to increase its faculty racial demographics. In this case study, Hughes (2015) used convenience and snowball methods to identify and interview 13 faculty and administrators employed at Highline to hear about their experiences and perceptions through diversification. During the investigation, Hughes (2015) found that intentional actions, strategic planning, and interpersonal relationships are needed to increase racial faculty and staff diversity successfully. After hiring a president advocating racial staff and faculty diversity, Highline's leadership developed a diversity committee with various employees of color, revamped hiring practices to model recommendations from field experts, created a diversity policy, and fostered a campus environment that valued
diversity (Hughes, 2015). This study's findings are informative and prove that community colleges in the Pacific Northwest can improve their diverse workforce.

Community colleges in the Pacific Northwest recognize their greater need for racial diversity amongst their employees and are trying different methods to achieve this goal (Harden, 2014; Harden, 2016; HECC, 2016; Hughes, 2015; Smith, 2018; WSAC, 2013). Enough research has identified "best" practices to improve faculty of color recruitment and retention across higher education institutions, but this research has vastly not extended to staff of color; however, these practices to improve institutional racial environments for faculty of color may also benefit staff of color, but this omitted from the research. The Chief Diversity Officer at Portland Community College claimed to have built a diversity internship program for diversifying full-time faculty, offering an inclusion advocate program to train faculty and staff on recognizing their biases in hiring practices (Smith, 2018). Central Oregon Community College matched grant funding to create positions for staff of color (Newhouse et al., 2019).

The Higher Education Coordinating Commission (2016) believed institutions that want to embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion should:

1. Identify and dismantle barriers preventing equity and inclusion;

2. Practice non-discriminatory hiring and promotional practices that are equitable and inclusive;

3. Develop the cultural competency of faculty, staff, and administrators through diversity training, reflections, self-evaluations, and education;
4. Discuss systems of power and privilege and the influence people in these positions have on college social and learning environments;

5. Encourage intercultural exchange with diverse higher education professionals; and

6. Center diversity and inclusion in strategic planning, using leadership to foster a culture of accountability and courageous conversations throughout the institution.

Best practices developed by various governing bodies and policymakers are closely related. Like the Higher Education Coordinating Committee (2016) of Oregon, the Washington Student Advancement Council (2013) suggests that institutions:

1. Establish efforts to increase racial staff diversity;

2. Center training and development around diversity, equity, and inclusion to increase employees’ cultural competencies; and

3. Identify and implement structures supporting faculty and staff from underrepresented backgrounds.

Other colleges and universities, such as Seattle University, Oregon State University, Washington State University, and various community colleges in Oregon and Washington, host weeklong retreats and trainings focusing on improving the work environments for employees of color and addressing systemic barriers to improve retention. Many institutions and governing bodies create racial affinity-based support groups for faculty and staff of color that address equity issues throughout their system.
The Higher Education Coordinating Committee (2016) and Washington Student Advancement Council (2013) conducted studies to identify the effectiveness of diversity, equity, and inclusion training across higher education institutions in Oregon and Washington. Their studies found that while various institutions continuously offer diversity training throughout the year, many staff choose not to participate or do not see the value in these trainings.

Concluding the review of research on staff of color, research has shown that employees of color benefit colleges and universities in various ways. Many institutions are exercising different methods to recruit and retain staff of color. However, limited research clearly describes the best practices for recruiting and retaining staff of color at community colleges.

This study contributes to higher education literature, providing perspectives from staff of color working at Oregon and Washington community colleges. The following sections will discuss the theoretical frameworks in grounded theory and introduce the theoretical lens that guided this research.

**Situating the Theoretical Framework**

Students, staff, and faculty leave their institutions for various reasons, including quality of life, sense of belonging, institutional environment, and interactions with colleagues and peers (Soomro & Ahmad, 2013; Steele, 2016). While many factors prevent populations of color from accessing higher education, the white supremacy foundations of the U.S. college system largely contribute to the retention and recruitment
of faculty, staff, and students of color at community colleges. Due to the traumatic racial
history embedded in the U.S. education system and Pacific Northwest, the low number of
faculty and staff of color has an impact on the experiences of employees of color today,
resulting in a perpetual cycle of low retention and recruitment of faculty and staff of
color.

Recognizing that current literature regarding higher education employees of color
focuses primarily on faculty at four-year colleges and universities nationwide, the
following section provides context and background demonstrating the importance of
researching staff of color retention and recruitment at community colleges in the Pacific
Northwest.

**History of Racism in U.S. Education**

The history of race and education in the United States is troubling because of its
white supremacist foundations. The U.S. education system is deeply rooted in white
supremacist ideology, creating a perpetual system of oppression still in place today. Since
the creation of the U.S. education system, people of color have lacked the opportunity,
access, and cultural capital needed to achieve degree attainment. Many researchers
discuss how historically oppressed social groups and races fall victim to barriers
preventing access to the U.S. education system, which currently exist and date back to
slavery (Aiello, 2020; Turner et al., 2008; Warren, 2009; Wilder, 2013).
The U.S. Education and Socialization

During the antebellum South, white enslavers retained control of the enslaved Black people, reinforcing the belief that white people maintained intellectual superiority over them (Stephens, 1861). This tactic prevented a rebellion by intentionally hindering the enslaved Black people from education. In the early stages of U.S. slavery, enslaved Black people, consisting of various African tribes, worked in vast lands controlled by white enslavers. While enslaved on these plantations, Black people could not communicate and share information in their native languages. As generations passed and English became the standard language, keeping enslaved Africans uneducated became a new technique to control enslaved Black people (Jeynes, 2013; Lincoln, 1965; Stephens, 1861; Walker, 2020; William, 2009). During this time, various states created anti-literacy laws preventing enslaved Black people from learning to read or write to ensure that Black people remained ignorant. These anti-literacy laws punished Black people for learning and made it a criminal offense for white people to teach enslaved people to read or write (Aiello, 2020; Jeynes, 2013; Lincoln, 1965; Mitchell, 2008; Palmer & Maramba, 2011; Walker, 2020; William, 2009). Although many barriers prevented enslaved Black people from education, many enslaved Black people were resilient and sought ways to learn to read or write through informal channels (Palmer & Maramba, 2011; Walker, 2020; William, 2009).
Black Resilience in the Face of Educational Oppression

Learning to read and write are core necessities of education, and education is necessary for freedom. Black people who were victims of slavery in the U.S. knew education was critical to liberation. Thus, Black people, during slavery, sought out an education in various other ways, including interacting with white children or playmates by secretly listening to teachers from outside of the schoolhouse and studying the bible. Education amongst enslaved Black people became intergenerational as the elders secretly taught the young (Mitchell, 2008; Walker, 2020; William, 2009). By the end of the U.S. Civil War, W.E.B. DuBois estimated that five percent of all enslaved Black people could read and write (Jeynes, 2013; Mitchell, 2008). After the U.S. Civil War ended in 1865, so did slavery and anti-literacy laws. Although the government in the U.S. restricted Black people's access to education as a form of white supremacy, other racial groups experienced systemic oppression by the U.S. education system in various ways.

Native Americans and Forced Assimilation in Education

The U.S. government created an education system to indoctrinate white supremacist ideology across all levels of education, especially at the collegiate level. For example, in 1819, the U.S. Congress passed the Civilization Fund Act to teach Indigenous people to be "civilized" Americans (Adams, 1995; Chapman; 2020; Jeynes, 2013; Newland, 2022; Oregon Department of Education, 2020; Prucha, 2000). With the agenda to rid tribes of their language, religion, and culture, the U.S. promoted the Civilization Fund Act as a support system that promotes the opportunity for Indigenous
tribes to learn English, preserve and protect their land, and receive top-tier education on their reservations (Chapman, 2020; Oregon Department of Education, 2020). President Monroe, the U.S. Congress, and the U.S. House of Representatives passed this resolution to assimilate Indigenous people into the white political culture and prevent further extermination from continuous threats by white frontiersmen (Chapman, 2020; Jeynes, 2013; Prucha, 2000).

The Civilization Fund Act contributed to the further extermination of native people and made them more prey to white frontiersmen. In retrospect, the Civilization Fund Act created an environment of effective genocide against native and indigenous people of the U.S. For over 150 years, U.S. education became a primary source for forced assimilation and, in some cases, the extermination of Indigenous people (Newland, 2022; Jeynes, 2013; Oregon Department of Education, 2020). In 1879, the U.S. government opened its first off-reservation Native American Boarding School, Carlisle Indian Industrial School, which catalyzed removing Indigenous children from their homes (Jeynes, 2013; Newland, 2022; Oregon Department of Education, 2020). However, Indigenous people were not the only racial group forced to assimilate through education, as Asian Americans were also victims of cultural assimilation.

**Asian Americans in U.S. Education and the Model Minority Myth**

Asian Americans are descendants of people from the Asian continent. The two most prominent Asian ethnic groups that settled in the U.S. in the last century were Chinese and Japanese. In the 1850s, both experienced education in the U.S. differently
(Jeynes, 2013; Kuo, 1998). When Chinese people started settling in San Francisco, California, they experienced significant job and educational discrimination, and as a result, they created Chinatown communities that replicated and spread to other cities all over the U.S. (Jeynes, 2013; Kuo, 1998). Despite these actions of cultural empowerment, U.S. public schools denied Chinese people access to education until the 1870s when several community leaders indoctrinated Chinese students with Christianity (Jeynes, 2013; Kuo, 1998; Young, 2020). Most notably, Yung Wing, the first Chinese U.S. University graduate, mentored a group of Chinese exchange students in the Chinese Educational Mission, which neglected Chinese customs while assimilating Chinese exchange students. At the 1876 United States Centennial Celebration, Chinese students could display their U.S. education in front of U.S. President Grant, a turning point for Chinese education in the U.S. (Young, 2020).

How Japanese immigrants experienced the U.S. educational system was different. World War II and conflicts between China and Japan significantly impacted Japanese people and their schooling, specifically in the western part of the U.S. The dispute between China and Japan fostered separation between Chinese students and Japanese students who, unlike their Chinese counterparts, mostly attended schools that were predominately serving white children. That is, until the birth of Japanese internment camps (Jeynes, 2013). During the Roosevelt era and the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Japanese American people had to relocate to internment camps to prove their loyalty to the United States (Jeynes, 2013; Wenger, 2012). Education in the internment camps
reinforced what it meant to be loyal to the U.S. and an American. As a result, many Japanese families realized the way to escape racism in the U.S. was through education and assimilation into American culture (Chow, 2017; Nguyen, 2021). Valuing education, Japanese American families strongly encouraged and supported their children to attend four-year universities, creating the model-minority myth (Chow, 2017; Nguyen, 2021; Yeh, 2014).

**Historical Inequities and Attempts at Education Reform**

Historically, communities of color lacked access to education in the U.S., especially before the late 1960s (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Jeynes, 2017). With segregated schooling, coupled with low funding and reduced resources for inner-city public schools, repercussions of this inequitable access to education between racial groups created an education achievement gap, perpetuating a negative and false stigma that Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people devalued education, while Asian and white people valued education (Chow, 2017; Darling-Hammond, 1998; Nguyen, 2021). The low number of students of color thriving in higher education resulted from the low quality of education students of color were provided in the U.S. K-12 education system (Chow, 2017; Darling-Hammond, 1998; Nguyen, 2021). In addition, while students of color were victims of a segregated and discriminatory education system, people of color searching for employment in education faced continued demonstrable segregation and discrimination policies and practices in the workforce (Aiello, 2020; Drury, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 1998; Steele, 2016).
Institutionalized white supremacy has been fostered in the U.S. education system in everything from curriculum to environment, perpetually passed down through generations and continues today. A just educational system should not perpetuate systemic racism as the ability to influence people's beliefs, values, and knowledge. The fact that it does highlights the need for more people of color to work in higher education. Unfortunately, the foundation of colleges and universities in the U.S. stems from white supremacist principles perpetuating a cycle of socialization for people of color working in colleges and universities. Recently, national conversations have occurred regarding the denunciation of Critical Race Theory. This framework teaches people to think critically about our society through the lens of race, labeling these ideas as anti-white or anti-American (Kim, 2021). Yet, colleges and universities in the U.S. were used to foster racial differences through superficial theories, promoting intellectual inferiority and superiority among racial groups (Herrera, 2011; Jasckik, 2019; Powell, 2022; Thelin, 2004; Wilder, 2006).

The antebellum, early-elite colleges reinforced and taught that people outside the norm of white Christian men were inherently inferior and manipulated research to confirm this ideology (Powell, 2022; Thelin, 2004; Wilder, 2006). Higher education was an exclusive institution until the Morrill Act of 1862, which made public higher education more accessible to people of color (Aiello, 2020; Drury, 2003; Geiger, 2016; Lee & Keys, 2013). However, the 1890 Morrill Act revision restricted this access to higher education institutions by allowing public universities to deny students based on
race if there was an alternate institution of higher education available to serve people of color (Aiello, 2020; Drury, 2003; Lee & Keys, 2013). In 1964, the introduction of Affirmative Action and the Civil Rights Act outlawed segregation and discrimination based on race, sex, religion, gender, and sexuality (Aiello, 2020; Darling-Hammond, 1998; Steele, 2016). Soon after Affirmative Action and the Civil Rights Act, people of color gained access to employment opportunities in higher education. As a result, students of color gained access to better education, decreasing the racial achievement gap from the 1970s to the 1990s. Yet still, staff at these institutions were predominantly white (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Steele, 2016).

The Community College Landscape

Race and ethnicity are significant components of community college organizational culture. Student retention rates at colleges and universities are critical to institutional success throughout the higher education landscape. The retention rates at community colleges are lower than at most four-year institutions. There is a vast need to increase the retention rates of students of color at community colleges to address the racial achievement gap between students of color and their white counterparts; thus, it is essential to identify ways to meet the needs of these students. Recognizing that the demographics of the community college student population is primarily comprised of students of color, there are unique needs for students when considering intersectionality. Various genders, sexual orientations, ages, abilities, and economic backgrounds intersect with the student of color population. However, community colleges are understood and
administered from mostly white perspectives, fostering white cultural norms that exclude the views of faculty, students, or staff of color (Aiello, 2019; Aiello, 2020; Levin et al., 2001). Therefore, it is pivotal for community colleges to increase the number of racially diverse staff to support and increase the retention of students of color and meet the needs of these systematically marginalized populations.

**The Origin of Junior (Community) Colleges**

Community colleges play a pivotal role in transforming the United States' higher education system, changing the hierarchical structure of colleges and universities since their existence in 1901 (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Drury, 2003; Thelin, 2004; Wilder, 2006). The U.S. government needed to boost the economy and create opportunities for upward mobility through higher education. However, upper-level administrators from prestigious universities wanted to limit intellectually inferior students from accessing their institutions. Therefore, elite university administrators established the community (junior) college system, separating general education for first- and second-year students from focusing on specific disciplines in third- and fourth-year college studies (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Drury, 2003).

The U.S. government responded to our society's inequities governed by income, status, and power by creating the community college system. The government then promoted it as an extension of educational opportunity. Additionally, the U.S. marketed the idea that community colleges were pivotal to upward mobility to lower-income communities (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Drury, 2003; Thelin, 2004; Wilder, 2006).
However, a more honest depiction of community colleges' foundational purpose was to sort students into lower economic job structures, which is why they only offered two-year degrees. Community colleges, with a student population having only limited access to higher education, advertised a high level of hope and upward mobility to people deemed previously “excluded” by higher education while at the same time limiting educational and job possibilities (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Drury, 2003). Although today's community colleges are evolving into educational offerings with endless possibilities, their purpose was originally to keep oppressed people oppressed.

Community colleges evolved into postsecondary institutions offering students open access to education (Aiello, 2020; Drury, 2003; Harden, 2014). Despite its past structure of intentionally restricting a once excluded population from 4-year institutions, many students now use community colleges as a vehicle to earn a degree that transfers to 4-year institutions, creating a particularly viable access pathway for students of color (Aiello, 2020; Jain, 2009).

As a result, the demands of community colleges are high, enrolling the highest number of students, more than half of all postsecondary education students. They offer a comprehensive curriculum, certificates, associates and transfer degrees, high school completion, and in some cases, applied bachelor's degrees (Aiello, 2020; Cohen & Kisker, 2009; Drury, 2003; Harden, 2014; Saenz et al., 2011; Voorhees, 1987). They also serve different educational purposes than four-year institutions (Barnett, 2011; Miles, 2010). In addition to providing pathways to four-year institutions, community colleges serve their
local communities, fostering continuous learning and development by serving as cultural centers.

**Student Racial Demographics of Community College**

The 1,200 community colleges nationwide serve over six million students (Harden, 2014). Many students use community college to earn a degree that transfers to four-year universities. Primarily, low-income or first-generation students, undocumented students, and students of color utilize community colleges as an entry point to postsecondary education (Harden, 2014; Jain, 2009; Wood & Ireland, 2014). Community colleges house over half of the nation’s postsecondary educational students, and students of color make up close to 50 percent of the student population (Aiello, 2020; Aiello, 2019; Barnett, 2011; Cohen & Brawer, 2002; Harden, 2014; Jain, 2009; Miles, 2010; Voorhees, 1987). For example, more than half of all Black students in postsecondary education attend a community college (Harden, 2014). In addition, out of all LatinX students enrolled in postsecondary education, two-thirds of this population attend community colleges.

**Faculty and Staff of Color Demographics of Community Colleges**

The staff employment rates for people of color at community colleges are well below the representation of their student population (Aiello, 2020; Griffin, 2020; Harden, 2014). Consistent with national data, the racial diversity among faculty and staff at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest does not reflect the racial diversity of the total number of students these institutions serve (Aiello, 2019; Aiello, 2020; Harden,
Combining all community colleges in the Pacific Northwest, staff and faculty of color only make up 18.28%, compared to students of color, who make up 47.54% of the total number of students served (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

Research indicates that institutions with a racially diverse employee population attract more students, faculty, and staff of color (Aiello, 2020; Harden, 2016; Harden, 2014; HECC, 2017; Hughes, 2015; Levin et al., 2014; Steele, 2016; WSAC, 2013). Research also indicates that the lack of racial diversity among faculty and staff of color employed at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest affects the retention and recruitment of faculty, staff, and students of color (Aiello, 2020; Harden, 2016; HECC, 2017; WSAC, 2013). The disproportionality between students of color and employees of color is alarming and could potentially impact institutional success (Aiello, 2019; Aiello, 2020). Therefore, Oregon and Washington community colleges continue searching for strategies to increase staff of color, through their DEI committees (Oregon Community College Association, 2021; Washington State Board for Community and Technical College, 2019). However, the struggle continues as the white-normative culture of community colleges is not conducive to the success and growth of staff of color.

**Theoretical Framework use in Grounded Theory**

Theory in qualitative studies is a broad explanation of constructed behaviors and attitudes that create a transformative perspective, informing data collection and analysis and providing a call to action (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, Maxwell, 2013). Theoretical
Frameworks provide an analytical perspective through which conceptual understanding may be concretized, serving as a research foundation for other new emergent theories (Mitchell, 2014; Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). Constructivist grounded theorists recognize that existing theoretical frameworks may not account for all the socially constructed hierarchies in our society, and that often theories omit the voices of marginalized social groups (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Maxwell, 2013; Mitchell, 2014). Much like the gap in the research literature, a related theoretical gap is highlighted when considering the missing representation of community college staff of color in higher education research. This study amplifies staff of color voices at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest.

Charmaz (2014) recommends using a theoretical framework as an anchor for the reader and demonstrating how "grounded theory refines, extends, challenges or supersedes extant concepts" (p. 310). This study uses the development of a theoretical framework to foster an understanding of the interrelationships between staff of color and community colleges in the Pacific Northwest. The theoretical framework in this study considers the complexities of our socially constructed education system, as the researcher makes strides to:

1. Understand the low number of staff of color at these community colleges in the PNW,

2. Define how staff of color in this study perceive their institution's commitment to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion, and
3. Identify how these institutions can increase their staff racial diversity through a deeper understanding of the honest perception of their staff of color.

Therefore, a theoretical framework will serve as a lens to co-construct emergent theory grounded on this study’s participants' experiences. To account for participants' perceptions of the emergent theory, Harro's (2000) Cycle of Socialization served as an initial theoretical guide to advance this study's design. Harro’s cycle acknowledges the perpetual roles humans play in our society based on the social identities humans are born with.

**Conceptual Framework Cycle of Socialization**

With the shortage of staff of color at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest, Oregon, and Washington community colleges systems are actively trying to increase the number of racially diverse staff on their campuses, but struggle to do so (Aiello, 2020; Harden, 2016; Higher Education Coordinating Commission, 2016; Washington Student Achievement Council, 2013). Many institutions perceive the lack of racial staff diversity as a problem to solve; however, it is only a symptom of a more significant issue rooted in the community college systems’ socialization.

Community colleges embody dynamics of power, privilege, and oppression that strains the relationship between employees of color and their institution (Aiello, 2020; DiAngelo, 2018; Harden, 2016; Levin et al., 2014; Tatum, 2005; Wilder, 2006). The Cycle of Socialization will illustrate a connection between the underrepresentation of staff of color and the foundation of oppression holding up these educational systems.
Furthermore, the Cycle of Socialization provides a context for the roles everyone plays in our systems and predicts continuous and cyclical actions based on social identities.

**Figure 1. The Cycle of Socialization**

There are eight stages in the cycle of socialization (see Figure 1): the beginning, first socialization, institution and cultural socialization, enforcement, results, actions, the...
core, and lastly, the direction towards change. These eight stages work together to create a self-perpetuating system of socialization. Harro’s model can be used to better understand how our Pacific Northwest community college systems have come to replicate a culture grounded in white supremacy.

**The Beginning**

The beginning stage of socialization starts at birth. We are born into pre-established, socially constructed identities and conditions we know nothing about, resulting in our inability to play our roles in navigating our societal norms (Harro, 2000). Consciousness and bias at this stage are non-existent, and we have no knowledge or understanding of how the world works. Thus, at this stage, there is no reason to place blame or feel guilty. We cannot yet define others, yet the world has already determined how our salient identities will show up (DiAngelo, 2018; Freire, 2000; Harden, 2016; Harro, 2000). The existing society we were born into has many complexities that contribute to the power dynamics in our education system.

Long before we were born, elite white males fostered white supremacist ideology through the U.S. education system (Herrera, 2011; Jaschik, 2021; Powell, 2022; Thelin, 2004; Wilder, 2006). Elite colleges and universities with ties to slavery, including Yale and Harvard, severed as templates for later colleges to base their practices, policies, and norms on (Hodgman & Hopson, 2021; Jaschik, 2021; Parry, 2017; Powell, 2022; Thelin, 2004; Wilder, 2006). Providing this foundation, oppressive practices came to exist across college campuses. For example, Harvard University's administration, staff, and faculty
enslaved more than 70 people who worked in roles that today would be considered staff service positions, i.e., janitorial, cooks, and grounds people. Similarly, Yale enslaved labor for service roles and as the primary construction of their earlier campus buildings (Jaschik, 2021; Parry, 2017; Wilder, 2006). Moreover, as institutions exclusive to white, wealthy men, both Harvard and Yale engaged in developing scientifically inaccurate theories dehumanizing Black people, such as eugenics (Jaschik, 2021; Thelin, 2004; Powell, 2022; Wilder, 2006). As two of the most prestigious, elite, and influential universities, the white supremacist foundation created by Harvard, Yale, and other institutions have lasting effects, still in existence (Powell, 2022).

Due to segregated schooling, racial discrimination, and theories belittling people of color, there are often negative stigmas and perceptions that devalue the intellect of people of color and deem them inferior (Levin et al., 2014; Mitchell, 2008; Warren, 2009; Wilder, 2006). Thus, when it comes to employment opportunities on college campuses, the views of hiring authorities may influence the decision not to select a person of color as a final candidate, adding barriers to fruitful job attainment (Bailey & Moore, 2004; Harden, 2016).

While there is demonstrated disproportionality between staff of color and students of color, there is an overrepresentation of people of color in lower-level positions. These lower-level positions, lacking institutional influence, often feel the brunt of change during times of crisis. For example, over the past decade, community colleges nationwide have continued to face budget cuts, yet as the salaries for lower-level jobs decrease, the
compensation for upper-level administrators continues to increase (Burke, 2020; Harden, 2014; Flaherty, 2021). Additionally, the perpetually reinforced negative perceptions created about people of color as only worthy of the lowest positions in higher education sets the preface of underrepresentation in racial staff diversity. Yet, as staff of color continue to enter the field of education, there is a considerable lack of knowledge because the perception of staff of color, coupled with the social identity of people of color, has been widely ignored by researchers. This broadcasts the value that staff of color at community colleges are considered unimportant and are not valued. It seems higher education scholars are not interested in studying this population, leaving gaps in the research literature (Dobson & Conway, 2003; Flaherty, 2020; Flaherty, 2021; Harro, 2000; Levin et al., 2014; Merriam & Brockett, 1997). These historical factors firmly establish the Beginning: a community college environment based in a white supremacy environment, which only replicates and strengthens over time.

**First Socialization**

As we age, the human brain develops increased consciousness levels to the Beginning, and we then enter the First Socialization stage. This stage is where we shape our world's perceptions based on the influences of the people closest to us. First, we learn who we are and how we should think about ourselves and others. Then, based on what we are taught, we figure out our roles and societal norms. Thereafter, we learn about the institutions, cultures, and the people in charge of our socialization. Unfortunately, this is when our parents, teachers, and leaders instill biases, prejudices, and social stereotypes
into our psyche, either consciously or unconsciously, and we fail to question these biased beliefs because we lack critical thinking skills and the knowledge to do so (Harro, 2020).

As staff of color gain exposure to the cultural environments of community colleges, with the lack of mentors of color, they are systemically conditioned to assimilate to an established "professional" culture by people who are maintaining the overall Cycle of Socialization and may or may not have their best interest as they are welcomed into these academic environments (Aiello, 2020; Harden, 2016; Steele, 2016; Flaherty, 2020). Furthermore, staff of color often internalize being subordinate and feel the need to suppress their social and cultural identities, often self-perceiving them as "unprofessional" (Levin et al., 2014).

Staff of color fail to see themselves reflected in the education system, especially in the middle to upper-level staff positions (Burke, 2020; Levin et al., 2014; Steele, 2016; Flaherty, 2020; Flaherty, 2021). For the rare times that staff of color are represented in positions of institutional influence, they often perpetuate racial stereotypes. For example, Asian people commonly work and lead in STEM areas, and other people of color work and lead in diversity, equity, and inclusion positions (Griffin, 2020; Levin et al., 2014). Additionally, higher education institutions tend to underpay people of color, compared to their white counterparts, and offer them lower compensation for similar work. People of color often accept the institution's lesser offers because they may have reduced employment opportunities in society (Levin et al., Steele, 2016; Flaherty, 2020). The first socialization is a naive state, where people are blind to the realities of the world and
conditioned not to ask questions or challenge "authority." Thus, staff of color are ignorant of good and bad and, as a result, may not counteroffer or challenge their institutions, believing they can prove their worth over time.

**Institutional and Cultural Socialization**

At this second level of socialization, information sources expand rapidly. We learn all kinds of information that either confirms, expands, or contradicts what we learned from our First Socialization. As we acquire more knowledge, we become increasingly aware of the underlying infrastructure of our societal system, which is often shaped by power dynamics that are, in turn, influenced by our socially constructed identities. We consciously or unconsciously internalize information from the media, societal systems, government, and various other institutions. Societal messages teach us to form our own biases and then act on our biases to benefit those who the system advantages and oppress those who the system disadvantages (Harro, 2000; Love, 2000).

Institutional and cultural socialization denies Black and Brown people of color access to education and creates negative stigmas that they do not value education as opposed to their white and Asian counterparts, which limits their employment opportunities in education (Chow, 2017; Darling-Hammond, 1998; Tatum, 2003; McGrady & Reynolds, 2013). This system also determines who is employable and who is not, sets professional standards, and decides who is the "right fit" for a role. Segregation and discrimination have contributed to the perception that Black men are undervalued and held to lower expectations. They are also frequently underrepresented in staff
positions beyond the service roles established by early educational institutions (Flaherty, 2020; Harden, 2016; Harper, 2006; Tatum, 2003; Merriam & Brockett, 1997).

Through the lens of assumptions and learned rules and roles, specific characteristics, traits, and positions are assigned to ourselves and others. As a result, staff of color tend to gravitate towards diversity, equity, and inclusion positions, leading their institution to reduce them to serving on a committee as a diversity representative. White staff tokenize staff of color by asking them to provide extra support for students of color, highlighting their lack of cultural competency. Conversely, white staff often suggest people of color are not qualified, belittling their intelligence, education, experience, and value. The hard work of staff of color who had to prove their worth can lead to unfair expectations placed on other staff of color, despite being hired for their skills and expertise. Consequently, staff of color overcommit outside of their position description (Aiello, 2020; Levin et al., Steele, 2016; Flaherty, 2020). This perpetual cycle results from biases present in our educational system. Some people may not notice this conditioning, while others may notice but brush it off due to the work environment’s consequences for those who speak out (Flaherty, 2020; Griffin, 2020; Harro, 2020; Love, 2014). These biases and patterns of behavior can lead to discomfort and adverse outcomes for staff of color (Griffin, 2020; Harro, 2020; Love, 2014).

*Enforcements*

Initially, community colleges were created by elite university administrators to divert the attention of lower-class people from attending their institutions, leading to an
imbalanced system of inequities between groups with power and systematically oppressed groups (Brint & Karabel, 1989; DiAngelo, 2018; Drury, 2003; Feagin, 2006; Freire, 2000; Harro, 2000; Ludwig, 2020; Thelin, 2004; Wilder, 2006). The system is managed by reward and punishment. Ensuring people play the roles they are supposed to based on social identity. However, many people fail to acknowledge the structures that uphold white supremacy, preventing an increase in racial staff diversity. Even when institutions intentionally develop initiatives to recruit and retain staff of color, they receive pushback and are accused of being racist for focusing on fostering a more inclusive environment.

White supremacy has a strategic way of working to maintain the status quo. As more people speak out against oppression, host diversity workshops, and expose the racist practices embedded in our society, they get punished by people who hold institutional power. Media outlets like Fox News and political parties such as far-right Republicans cultivate white men as victims who feel attacked and promote propaganda like "The Great Replacement Theory" (Blake, 2021; Bump, 2022; Garcia-Navarro, 2021; Miller-Idriss, 2022). To stop racial justice, former President Trump issued an Executive Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping, banning federally funded institutions from providing diversity, equity, and inclusion training (Exec. Order No. 13950, 2020).

Privilege is a term geared towards people who have benefited and are continuing to benefit from systemic oppression. People with privilege had the power to create norms, rules, and laws that directly benefit them. Ironically, U.S. citizens were defining the term
"privilege" as being "Black in America" when, in fact, privilege refers to the advantage gained from systemic oppression (DiAngelo, 2020; Harro, 2000; Irving, 2014; Love 2000; McIntosh, 1988). Contrarily, Donald Trump displayed a classic case of interpretational oppression acting on the ideology that one social group is superior to another and reinforcing established "social norms" (DiAngelo, 2020; Freire, 2000).

The design of our society fosters a culture that criticizes people who challenge the social biases that shape how we think, see, and interact with others. People of color who challenge social norms receive labels such as “the angry Black woman,” “exotic” or “sassy” for Latina women, “aggressive” or “hostile” for Black and Latino men. The enforcement in our society rewards Asian people with the "model minority" myth label because they far outpace other races in educational achievement or assimilate to what it means to be an "American" (Chow, 2017; Lee et al., 2020; McGrady & Reynolds, 2013; Song 2021). Contrarily, people of color who are successful, thriving, and speak proper English experience the burden of "acting white," which assumes white people are the only racial group that achieves higher success levels (Harper 2006; Tyson, 2005).

Community college systems create hostile environments that negatively affect staff of color through racial microaggressions, offensive humor, isolation, tokenization, racial slurs, and blatant insults (Gillespie, 2020; HECC, 2017; WSAC, 2013). If staff of color calls out racism, it affects their ability to move up in the institution, or they might even get fired. On the other hand, if they don't call out racism, they can move up within their institution (Flaherty, 2020; Harro, 2000; Love, 2000).
Results

The phases of socialization and the enforcements that uphold white supremacy have resulted in environments where we examine our identities and those of others and reflect on our roles in this perpetual system (Harro, 2000). People who benefit from our system of oppression may feel guilt, fragility, fear, or develop distorted realities. In contrast, oppressed people may feel a sense of isolation, alienation, fear of losing their job, or have low self-esteem. The lack of staff of color at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest is a foundation of our educational system. Everyone has a role and participates in this system of oppression; thus, everyone inherently contributes to community college environments that are not conducive to the success of staff of color.

Due to hostile working conditions, staff of color may not speak up about their experiences, and as a result of serving in positions that lack institutional power, are overlooked, suppress their voices, and cannot influence institutional change, they leave (Aiello, 2020; Burke, 2020; DiAngelo, 2018; Freire, 2000; Harden, 2016; Harro, 2000; Love, 2000; Merriam & Brockett, 1997; Steele, 2016). In addition, by leaving their institution, they perpetuate the cycle of socialization, further contributing to the lack of staff of color. As a result, the remaining staff of color face burnout because of their working conditions, and those who are courageous enough to challenge their institution leave because they're unheard.

The reality is that when staff of color continue to leave, the system will never change. On the other hand, white colleagues may not be aware of the experiences of the
staff of color face and those who are aware may not speak up. Often, the white staff who are culturally conscious and considered racial allies give up seats in essential decisions to make room for staff of color, only for another white person who does not advocate for people of color to fill that seat. Additionally, white people may be afraid to speak up against systems of oppression because they do not want to say the wrong thing. On the other hand, white people who consider themselves "color blind" may unintentionally continue to enforce white supremacist ideology and use discriminatory hiring practices. Either way, these scenarios contribute to the perpetual cycle of underrepresented staff of color.

**Actions**

Eventually, this issue will come to a crossroads. The community colleges will have to decide whether to continue operating in a system that benefits those who are comfortable and resist change or move in a direction that fosters an equitable system inclusive of other cultural norms. Staff of color may be complacent in their roles and continue to work in a hostile environment to survive. Additionally, white staff may not see the value in training on diversity, equity, and inclusion because they believe it is anti-American or reverse racism. The Higher Education Coordinating Commission (2017) in Oregon found that only a small number of community colleges in Oregon have initiatives addressing equity and inclusion issues and host racial justice professional development (HECC, 2017). However, the HECC (2017) also identified that individuals who need
diversity training opt-out of participation, fail to realize the importance, and consider it a waste of their time.

Furthermore, institutions that struggle to recruit and retain staff of color often produce burnout on the lone "diversity person" responsible for all social identity issues (Flaherty, 2020; HECC, 2017). A participant in Flaherty's (2020) study stated that "having to fight and speak up against systemic racism is an unfair burden to put on people of color" and in her resignation letter said, "This dynamic is part of why systemic racism continues to exist." Community college norms cater to those with power, creating challenges for systematically disadvantaged people who lack access to resources, opportunities, and, ultimately, upward mobility, i.e., social capital. Due to this deficit in social capital, systematically oppressed groups must fight for a seat at the table concurrently with advantaged groups fighting to remain in their seats.

The core of the cycle and the direction for change are both under the action stage. Taking action has two outcomes: to either disrupt or perpetuate this system. The foundation of our education system continues to influence the structure of community colleges. Thus why this study aims to dismantle an oppressive structure through its methods of hearing the voices of those who are affected.

**Cycle of Socialization: The Core**

The seventh and most crucial component of the cycle is the core that fuels systems of oppression through hate, ignorance, fear, confusion, guilt, and insecurity (Harro, 2000). Those in power fight to continue the cycle out of fear of losing power. An
increase in racial staff diversity means an increase in differences, beliefs, and experiences. Additionally, increasing the number of racially diverse staff insinuates environmental changes and sparks fears that people of color will replace white people or create a system where they are not the priority. Even when presented with information regarding the benefits racial staff diversity brings, our greater society portrays people of color negatively. As oppressed people internalize inferiority, they too experience the core feelings, and it causes cognitive dissonance that justifies and argues with the realities of oppression (DiAngelo, 2018; Harro, 2000; Love, 2000).

Direction for Change. The direction for change is to establish momentum toward liberation, which means challenging the status quo, questioning processes, procedures, and policies, and educating those who benefit and those who don't. The direction for liberation requires intentionality, reflection, and action toward building the structure to combat the preservation of social hierarchies, as suggested by Love (2000):

Many members of society, both those who benefit from oppression as well as those who are placed at a disadvantage, want to work for social change to reduce inequity and bring greater justice, yet continue to behave in ways that preserve and perpetuate the existing system. This happens because humans are products of their socialization and follow the habits of mind and thoughts that have been instilled in them. The institutions in which we live reward and reinforce behaviors [and thoughts] that perpetuate systems and resist efforts toward change (Love, 2000, p. 470).

The policymakers foster a system from the lens of white people, who the U.S. education system has socialized, and may not understand the realities of staff of color (HECC, 2017; Hughes, 2015; Harden, 2014; Harden, 2016; WSAC, 2013). By conducting this study and elevating the voices of staff of color, community colleges in
the Pacific Northwest will have the critical insight needed to create conditions that disrupt the white supremacy culture embedded within our educational system. Disrupting this oppressive cycle may increase the retention of the current and future staff of color, which will naturally contribute to the recruitment of more staff of color.

Chapter 2 Summary

Across Oregon and Washington, students of color are experiencing a feeling of isolation and alienation and a lack of support from faculty and peers in community colleges. Hostile environments filled with racial inequities, discrimination, and microaggressions contribute to the overt racism they experience, causing some to report feeling dehumanized and used (Gillespie, 2020; HECC, 2017; WSAC, 2013). The lack of racially diverse staff at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest adversely affects the recruitment and retention of faculty, staff, and students of color (Aiello, 2020; Harden, 2016; HECC, 2016; Smith, 2018; WSAC, 2013). While staff of color is proven to benefit institutions by advocating for and fostering environments that promote the success of students of color, there is a significant disproportion between the number of students of color and staff of color at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest (Aiello, 2020; Harden, 2014; Harden, 2016).

Higher education presents significant challenges to faculty and staff of color, which contribute to the low numbers of racial diversity amongst faculty and staff at higher education institutions (Aiello, 2020; Griffin, 2020; Hughes, 2015; Levin et al., 2014). Although the list of structural and cultural challenges that people of color face in
higher education is well known through the perceptions of faculty of color at 4-year colleges and universities, there is a significant gap in higher education literature surrounding faculty of color at community colleges, and an even more severe lack of research literature and curiosity around staff of color at community colleges (Aiello, 2020; Hughes; 2015; Levin et al., 2014).

To fully understand the low number of staff of color at these institutions, this study sought out their experiences and highlights how staff of color perceive their institutions' commitment to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion to construct a theory to increase racial staff diversity at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest, through their voices. Researchers have used both qualitative and quantitative methods, including in-depth literature reviews, document reviews, and examination, to examine the experiences of faculty and staff (Fetterman; 2009; Glesne, 2010; Maxwell, 2004). The next chapter will provide an in-depth discussion of the methodology used in this study, which focuses specifically on staff of color, to identify ways in which community colleges in the Pacific Northwest can increase their racial staff diversity.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The previous chapters introduced the problem statement, goals, and literature review of staff of color in community colleges. This chapter outlines the methods utilized to research how community colleges in the PNW can increase recruitment and retention of staff of color, grounded in the perceptions and experiences of this population. Furthermore, this chapter explains the processes for conducting this study, including revisiting the research questions, discussing the research design and rationale, introducing the sampling methods, identifying the research population, explaining the data collection and analysis process, and discussing the role of the researcher.

Research Questions

Research questions are pivotal to a research study, providing guidance and focus (Maxwell, 2013). This study documents how staff of color at community colleges in the PNW perceive their institutions’ commitments to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion, understands how the experiences and perceptions of staff of color impact their retention, and identify recruitment and retention practices essential to community colleges increasing staff racial diversity. The following are the research questions that guided this research:

**Question 1:** How do Pacific Northwest community college staff of color perceive their institution's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, given a significant disproportion between the numbers of staff of color and their white counterparts?
**Question 2:** What experiences motivate staff of color to continue working at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest, despite systemic barriers for employees of color in higher education?

**Question 3:** What recruitment and retention practices do Pacific Northwest community college staff of color perceive as essential to their institutions' ability to increase the number of racially diverse staff on campus?

**Research Design**

The low racial staff diversity across PNW community colleges is alarming compared to the large student of color population present at these institutions. To identify the reasons for this discrepancy, we must listen to the voices and perceptions of staff of color. Therefore, this study utilized descriptive qualitative research methods to amplify the voices and perceptions of staff of color, providing real-world context to their institutions’ recruitment and retention challenges. In addition to descriptive qualitative research, this study used grounded theory to understand this phenomenon better and generate a new theory based on the data gathered.

**Rationale for Descriptive Qualitative Research**

Qualitative studies describe social situations from participants' perspectives, centering and focusing on their voices (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Torrance, 2010). Qualitative research interprets participants’ realities by focusing on how they constructed their meaning, perceptions, and experiences, providing insight into how they make sense of their social settings, roles in society, and societal structures (Berg,
2001; Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Lunes & Berg, 2017). Thus, descriptive qualitative research served as the design that allows for multiple inquiry methods to gather information about the lived experiences, meaning, and perceptions of community college staff of color through an emergent research design (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013).

Descriptive qualitative research examines social conditions in their natural settings to understand the experiences, factors, and context and uses this information to describe a situation or behavior of a phenomenon (Salkind, 2007; Yin, 2014). The findings in descriptive research are valuable because "they provide information that enables researchers and practitioner to define specific variables clearly, to determine their current situations, and to see how these variables may relate to other variables” (Salkind, 2007, p. 2). Furthermore, descriptive qualitative research is an action-oriented research design that "may change the lives of participants, the institutions in which they live and work, or even the researchers' lives" (Creswell, 2013, p. 26). It is a research design that places the research as the instrument to understand the experiences and perceptions of staff of color and to provide tangible recommendations that community colleges in the Pacific Northwest can utilize.

Using descriptive qualitative research as a research design revealed previously unknown information about staff of color at community colleges in the PNW by gathering data and interpreting metaphors, descriptions, symbols, and stories related to this phenomenon (Berg, 2001). Specifically, this study employed descriptive qualitative
research to describe the experiences of staff of color, their perceptions of their institutions’ commitments to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion, and to illustrate the persistence of staff of colors working at community colleges in Oregon and Washington. This study’s use of descriptive qualitative research provided the necessary information to develop a theoretical framework, which community colleges in the Pacific Northwest can use to efficiently recruit and retain staff of color.

**The Rationale for Grounded Theory Design**

Grounded theory is a complex research design method where researchers develop a theoretical framework to explain a phenomenon through the continuous processes of data collection, theoretical analysis, and theory formation (Charmaz, 2014; Chong & Yeo, 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Howell, 2013). The grounded theory design approach used in this study is rooted in constructivist grounded theory, which incorporates the researcher’s world view and acknowledges real-world complexities, allowing for multiple truths to emerge (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Howell, 2013).

Constructivist grounded theory, developed by Charmaz (2014), is considered the second-generation grounded theory approach that combines the classic systemic grounded theory and emerging grounded theory, while adding the researcher’s worldview (Bhattacharya, 2017; Charmaz, 2014; Chong & Yao, 2015; Creswell, 2013; Glaser, 1992; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Charmaz (2014) recognized the limited objectivist and positivist worldviews of the classic forms of grounded theory and
created constructivist grounded theory by incorporating the researchers’ social
construction (Bhattacharya, 2017; Charmaz, 2014; Chong & Yao, 2015). Furthermore,
Charmaz (2014) acknowledges real-world complexities and allows for multiple truths by
situating the researcher and participants in a relationship that recognizes how the
histories, beliefs, values, level of understanding, and assumptions of each party inform
the perceptions of everyone’s lived experiences. Thus, Constructivist grounded theory
utilizes the inductive, comparative, emergent, and open-ended components from the work
of Glaser (1992) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) as foundational components while also
preserving the complexities of how humans make sense of the world (Charmaz, 2014;

This study moves beyond describing the perceptions and experiences of staff of
color to generate a theory of how community colleges in the Pacific Northwest can
increase staff racial diversity. Given the limited research on community college staff of
color and the intentions of moving beyond descriptive results, grounded theory is the
most appropriate research design.

**Sampling Methods**

The success of a study depends not only on the selection of humans but also on
the location, setting, process, and practices, all of which are included in the sampling
methods (Maxwell, 2013). As there is a significantly underrepresented population of staff
of color at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest, institutional policies and
procedures, cultural climate, and overall commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion
impact the recruitment and retention of staff of color. Therefore, staff of color is the chosen sampling population for this study. The study recruited and selected participants from this population in two phases: initial sampling, the first sampling phase, and theoretical sampling, the second sampling phase.

**Initial Sampling Phase**

The initial sampling phase is integral to the first part of data collection, consisting of identifying, selecting, and inviting participants to be part of this research study. The initial sampling phase provided scope and laid the foundational concepts for the initial coding phase in data analysis (Charmaz, 2014; Morse, 2011). Furthermore, the initial sampling phase in this study used a variation of purposeful, convenience, snowball, and self-selecting sampling methods to identify research participants in the recruitment process (Charmaz, 2014; Morse, 2011).

**Purposeful Sampling**

Purposeful Sampling is the deliberate process of selecting unique settings and participants relevant to a phenomenon, goals, or questions to ensure participants with specific characteristics are chosen (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Maxwell, 2103; Morse, 2011). Staff of color have unique experiences and perspectives that may provide important insights, and as they are significantly underrepresented at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest, the purposeful sampling method supported the intentionality of selecting a small group out of a larger staff population.
**Convenience Sampling**

Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which participants are selected based on their availability and accessibility (Berg, 2000; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Corbin & Strauss, 2012; Lune & Berg, 2017; Maxwell, 2013; Morse, 2011). Furthermore, convenience sampling is used by researchers interested in studying groups or populations with scarcity in literature, as a form of purposeful selection that identifies the best participants to solve a phenomenon (Maxwell, 2013). Convenience sampling contributes to the foundation of data sampling and was used to determine the boundaries and trajectory of this study (Morse, 2011).

**Snowball Sampling**

Snowball sampling allowed for the identification of additional participants meeting the research criteria by asking initial participants for recommendations (Berg, 2000; Lune & Berg, 2017; Maxwell, 2013). Moreover, snowball sampling is often used in conjunction with convenience sampling to add variation to the sample and allows for further data to emerge (Morse, 2011). Due to the small population of staff of color, snowball sampling, a nonprobability sampling strategy to locate participants with specific attributes or characteristics, provided a sense of randomness (Berg, 2000). However, as a voluntary research study, participants are not required to participate, which adds a self-selecting sampling component.
**Self-selecting Sampling**

To ensure ethical recruitment and to allow prospective participants to participate voluntarily, this study utilized self-selecting sampling as a variation of sampling. This method enables participants to opt-in to the research study, without feeling any pressure to participate (Berg, 2000). Given that staff of color are a small population within the Oregon and Washington community college systems, this research study employed a combination of purposeful, convenience, snowball, and self-selection sampling methods to select participants from various institutions. The self-selection sampling method ensured that the study was conducted ethically and with the participants’ best interests in mind. These sampling methods were utilized in the initial sampling phase of the recruitment process. Together, these sampling methods comprised the initial sampling phase of the recruitment process; they provided a sense of protection and allowed participants to choose whether to participate or not.

**Theoretical Sampling Phase**

Grounded theory recognizes the inseparable relationship between data collection and analysis, as they work together to generate themes, categories, and codes that inform the research process, and ultimately lead to the creation of a theory grounded in data (Charmaz, 2014; Morse, 2011). Thus, the second phase of sampling methods utilized in this study was theoretical sampling, which is a fundamental method in grounded theory that bases data collection on concepts grounded in the data, requiring the researcher to gather in-depth information through continuous analysis, coding, and collecting data.
(Charmaz, 2014; Chong & Yao, 2015; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Maxwell, 2013; Morse, 2011).

Theoretical sampling involves returning to data sources and continuously collecting data until data saturation is achieved. According to Maxwell (2013), "theoretical sampling is driven by the theory that is inductively developed during the research (rather than by prior theory); it selects for examination of those particular settings, individuals, events, or processes that are most relevant to the emerging theory" (p. 120). As such, theoretical sampling requires continuous inquiry, refinement of categories, and in-depth data collection to construct a theory based on inductive data (Charmaz, 2014; Chong & Yeo, 2015; Maxwell, 2013).

During the theoretical sampling phase, themes identified in the initial sampling process provide context and inform the line of inquiry. The researcher identifies initial codes by analyzing data solely from the first sampling phase of data collection and subsequently comparing the interpretation of these with themes from other data sources perpetually until saturation is achieved (Charmaz, 2014; Chong & Yeo, 2015; Creswell, 2013; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Maxwell, 2013). The researcher will then use these generated themes to guide the following line of inquiry. The fluidity of this process may require the researcher to conduct second or third interviews with participants, or to contact new participants, based on information that is needed or unclear. Therefore, the theoretical sampling process in grounded theory is constantly evolving as the researcher
develops. The following section will explain the process for identifying and recruiting research participants.

**Sampling Population**

This study focuses on staff of color who are currently employed or were one year removed from employment at a community college in Oregon and Washington, referred to as the Pacific Northwest. Oregon and Washington have a total of 46 community colleges, 17 in Oregon and 34 in Washington. The Oregon Community College Association (OCCA) oversees the 17 community colleges in Oregon, while the 34 institutions in Washington are part of the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (WSBCTC) system, including five technical colleges that were not included in this study, resulting in 29 community colleges.

The population size of staff of color in these community colleges was identified using the 2018 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) by disaggregating the raw data to obtain the racial demographics of students, staff, and faculty. The data showed that out of 28,274 faculty and staff listed from all Pacific Northwest community colleges, only 5,320 people identified as persons of color. Further disaggregation revealed that staff of color comprised 11.44% of the Oregon and Washington community college systems’ total population employed, yielding a sample size of approximately 3,237 for this study.

Participants had to self-identify as non-white to be included in this research, and in order to study the experiences and perceptions of staff of color, only those who
identified as a person of color with the employment classification of “staff” were selected for this study.

Criteria for Participation and Recruitment Process

The initial sampling phase of this study established participant criteria and explained the process of accessing data (Charmaz, 2014; Morse, 2011). Purposeful sampling was used to select participants based on specific characteristics, such as identifying as a person of color, while convenience sampling identified easily accessible participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2013; Lune & Berg, 2017; Maxwell, 2013; Morse, 2011). The study utilized a combination of purposeful, convenience, snowball, and self-selection sampling methods to ensure that the study was conducted ethically and within the participants’ best interests in mind.

The recruitment process began with purposeful and convenience sampling, resulting in a sample of four participants, one person from a rural institution and one person from an urban institution in Oregon, and one person from a rural institution and one person from an urban institution in Washington. These participants received the recruitment email (see Appendix A), inviting them to complete a short survey (see Appendix B). The survey included a recruitment question, which enabled the use of snowball sampling to locate more staff of color who may be interested in participating, based on the networks of the initial four participants. To ensure privacy, the right to participate, and the option to withdraw, consent to participate in the research form (see Appendix C) was attached to all recruitment emails. The self-selecting sampling method allowed potential participants
to opt in and resulted in 48 qualified participants out of the total 79 individuals who received the recruitment email.

**PNW Community College’s Racial Representation**

In the initial sampling phase, the survey was sent to 79 participants, and those who opted out of participating shared the survey with their networks, increasing the number of possible participants. The self-selecting sampling method allowed potential participants to opt-in, resulting in 48 participants submitting survey responses. Out of the total survey responses, four participants identified as faculty, and one participant facially identified as white, resulting in 43 qualified participants.

The participants represented both states, with 23 or 53.48% from Oregon and 20 or 46.51% from Washington. Out of the 46 total community colleges between Oregon and Washington, 8 Oregon community colleges and 15 Washington community colleges were represented for a total of 23 institutions. Several participants had experiences working at multiple institutions in the Pacific Northwest, as well as various colleges and universities across the U.S. Unfortunately, 10 or 23% of participants were no longer working in the community college system, and two of the ten participants who continued through the interview data collection process left their institution during the study.

Given the ambiguous nature of racial identity, a self-identifying concept was used to collect the survey’s racial demographics. The results showed that 25 participants identified as Black (4 are biracial) and specified the following: human with melanated skin, Hebrew, African origin; Afro-Latina; African-American (1 person Black w/ white
mother). 16 participants identified as Latino/a (3 are biracial) with other terms such as Mexican, Mexican-American; Chicano/LatinE; Indigenous Mexican; Latina/Hispanic; LatinX, Indilatina (Indigenous Latina); Mestiza, Afro-Latina. Six participants identified as Native Indigenous-only 1 Native- and used other names such as Native American (Choctaw); Indigenous Mexican. Lastly, seven participants identified as being from the Asian & Pacific Islander community, with two specifying biracial, one being white, and the other identities being Filipino American; Samoan/Pacific Islander.

This sampling population section discussed the number presents the population criteria for this study's participants, including the number of possible participants, the number of completed the surveys, and the number of qualified participants. The various institutions represented by the participants in each state, as well as a number of participants who departed from the community college system. This section presented the racial demographics of the participants, including the terms and identities they used to self-identify. The next section discussed the data collection and analysis process utilized in this study.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Data collection is an essential component of qualitative research, and in grounded theory, data analysis is just as important (Charmaz, 2014; Chong & Yeo, 2015; Howell, 2013; Morse, 2011). In grounded theory research, data collection and analyses are interconnected and rely on each other to construct an emergent theory (Charmaz, 2014; Chong & Yeo, 2015; Howell, 2013; Morse, 2007). The iterative and comparative nature
of grounded theory data connection requires the researcher to interactively go back and forth between data and emerging analysis (Charmaz, 2014). This ongoing process of constantly exchanging collected data with emerging codes leads to rich, detailed, focused, and complete data (Charmaz, 2014; Chong & Yeo, 2015).

**Data Collection**

Researchers use various methods to collect data, but primary first-hand research provides insight into the setting, emotions, and physical and non-verbal interactions and allows the researcher to hear participants’ voices (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In most qualitative studies, the researcher’s role serves as a research instrument, and is pivotal to the data collection process (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Maxwell, 2013). The rigors of grounded theory data collection require the researcher to be open-minded, and flexible and allow the data to guide the research and emergent theories. (Charmaz, 2014; Chong & Yeo, 2015). Additionally, data collection in grounded theory requires continuous reshaping and redefining from various sources to increase the knowledge and study's focus (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The data collected in this study consisted of a survey, semi-structured one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews, and researcher memos. The survey highlighted the relationships and perceptions participants have with their institutions, while the one-on-one interviews aimed to hear participants’ experiences and impacts at their institutions.
The focus group interviews aimed to observe participant interactions and identify solutions to increasing staff racial diversity at these institutions.

Survey

Surveys are excellent data sources to gather information on the perceptions and experiences of participants. Surveys used in the qualitative analysis involved describing the trends, attitudes, and opinions of a group of people or testing for potential connections between different variables within that group (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The survey data collection method is foundational to the initial coding phase, providing supplemental categorization to a broader staff of color population. Additionally, surveys provide different codes that potentially inform the interview data collection process in which survey questions investigate staff of color perceptions situating the context of their experiences (Howell, 2000).

The data collection method in this study highlighted the relationships, perceptions, and experiences between staff of color and their institutions. The survey consisted of six questions centered on participants' perceptions of their institution's commitment to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion, institutional recruitment and retention strategies, and participants' sense of belonging. One of the last survey questions allowed participants to opt for individual and focus group interviews.

Individual Interviews

The second data collection phase was individual interviews aimed at detailing the lived experiences of the staff of color. The individual interviews are a data collection
method that allows participants to reconstruct their experiences to provide data based on events, behaviors, and feelings (Berg, 2000; Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Lunes & Berg, 2017; Seidman, 1991). The semi-structured, one-on-one interviews utilized open-ended questions (see Appendix D) to explore factors contributing to participants' choice to work in the community college system and their reason for staying or leaving. In grounded theory, developing a theoretical framework relies on data saturation; thus, ten participants agreed and were selected for individual interviews to saturate the data with similar experiences and reoccurring themes, as discussed in Chapter 4. Ten participants were selected based on the order of completed surveys, with responses agreeing to participate in both individual and focus group interviews. Interview participants were selected by convenience and purposeful sampling with intentional efforts to ensure five participants from Oregon community colleges, five participants from Washington community colleges, and racial diversity.

All interviews were transcribed via a transcription service, coded, and analyzed, spotlighting emergent codes and areas for information. The individual interviews were instrumental to the focused coding phase that informed focus group interviews. Once all ten individual interviews concluded, all ten participants were invited to a two-hour focus group interview to discuss and identify solutions for community colleges in the PNW to increase the number of staff of color on their campuses.
Focus Groups Interviews

The purpose of focus groups in this study was to hear participants' perceptions, ideas, and experiences on intentional recruitment and retention practices their institutions would benefit from implementing. Focus group interviews allowed the researcher to observe participants’ interactions and discussions and to analyze the group's motivations, decisions, and priorities (Lune & Berg, 2017). Additionally, focus group interviews promote conversation among participants around a phenomenon relevant to the group (Bhattacharya, 2017; Lune & Berg, 2017). Thus, the third data collection phase included two focus group interviews with participants from the individual interview data collection phase.

All ten individual interview participants were invited to participate in a two-hour interview session, informed by findings from individual interviews and survey data. The theoretical sampling process in grounded theory encourages the researcher to follow the data; concluding our first focus group session, participants wanted to reconvene for a second focus group session (Charmaz, 2014). The first focus group session opened with an activity asking participants to construct their ideal community colleges, which led to a rich conversation. The second focus group session utilized guiding questions (see Appendix E) to generate a conversation regarding ways community colleges in the Pacific Northwest can increase their racial staff diversity. A total of eight participants participated in both focus group sessions; six out of ten participants attended the first focus group session, and four out of ten attended the second.
During the focus group interviews, participants discussed emerging themes from the initial and focused coding phases, which added validity to the data collection and analysis. All interviews took place via Zoom, and were digitally recorded, transcribed, and analyzed immediately to ensure rich data quality. Throughout the data collection and analysis, all data were triangulated using memos to pre-identify initial concepts and emergent theory (Bhattacharya, 2017; Charmaz, 2014; Sbaraini et al., 2011).

**Research Memos**

Research memos are one of the main characteristics of grounded theory data collection that assist theoretical development by tracking the research process via notetaking (Chong & Yeo, 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Memos encourage the researcher to practice critical thinking, analysis, questioning, and openness to change for further data collection (Charmaz, 2014; Howell, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Furthermore, memos add to the continuous comparisons between data and codes, guiding the researcher into data areas that need exploration (Chong & Yeo, 2015).

Through the data collection and analysis, memos ensured critical phrases, themes, and concepts were noted. The memos provoked ideas through continuous studying, interpreting, and comparing data to form analytic codes. In addition to serving as a triangulation method, writing memos contributed to in-depth conceptual analysis, allowing me to record and make sense of participants' experiences, reflect on my experience during observations and concerns regarding participants, and detail the data
collection process (Bhattacharya, 2017; Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Howell, 2013).

Data Analysis

The data collection and analysis process in grounded theory is not linear but continuous throughout the research process (Charmaz, 2014; Chong & Yeo, 2015; Corbin & Strauss, 2012). The working relationship between data collection and analysis incorporates contextual relationships to explain and theorize participants' perceptions by examining the construction of their beliefs, meanings, values, and actions (Bhattacharya, 2017; Charmaz, 2014; Chong & Yeo, 2015; Maxell, 2013). The lived experiences and perceptions of community college staff of color across the U.S. often go unheard. The data collected via surveys and interviews by staff of color from community colleges in the Pacific Northwest gave voice to this population while identifying how their institutions can increase staff racial diversity.

Data from this research was deduced upon reviewing 12 interview transcripts and 43 survey responses to make meaning of participants' stories and produce a theoretical framework rooted in the most salient themes. The results from the survey responses and interviews, discussed in Chapter 4, describe, and outline initial, focused, and theoretical codes, grounded in participants' perceived sense of belonging and trust in their institutions' commitment to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion. The coding process used during the research process included section-by-section coding, which separates,
describes, and groups data segments to thematize participants' truths as a primary component throughout Charmaz's (2014) coding in grounded theory.

**Coding in Grounded Theory**

Coding is the foundation for constructing analytical frames and transforming collected data into emergent theory. Generally, qualitative researchers utilize preconceived categories and existing theory to describe a phenomenon; however, in grounded theory, the coding process guides the researcher in conceptualizing data uncovering feelings, experiences, and explanations via interrogation methods, sorting, and synthesizing to generate new concepts (Charmaz, 2014). The coding process was instrumental to this study's results by categorizing, summarizing, and labeling data segments to synthesize participants' stories and perceptions in real world situations (Charmaz, 2014; Chong & Yeo, 2015). Three coding stages inform theory construction during the data analysis process: initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding (Bhattacharya, 2017; Charmaz, 2014; Chong & Yeo, 2015).

**Initial Coding**

Initial coding shapes the core of theoretical analysis by examining collected data to establish themes and codes that influence future data collection processes. The initial coding phase guides the early stages of research towards the data collection and the researcher's learning process. Furthermore, the initial coding phase requires the researcher to be open to possible changes in the theoretical directions while identifying
provisional, comparative codes grounded in participants’ responses (Charmaz, 2014).

Four critical questions were answered during this phase of research, including:

1. What is this data a study of?
2. What does the data suggest? Present? Leave unsaid?
3. From whose point of view? and

This data analysis phase presented initial codes foundational to the focus coding phase. The initial coding phase was simultaneous to the early stage of data collection. During this phase, survey data were divided into a composite of responses presenting descriptive statistics to generalize perceptions and identify common trends. The survey's note section allowed participants to detail their experience using paragraph form, in which answers concomitant with survey transcripts were analyzed and categorized via the section-by-section coding method.

**Focused Coding**

The next coding stage in grounded theory analysis was focused coding. In phase is the starting point for theoretical integration via conceptualizing initial codes to determine conceptual strength (Charmaz, 2014). This second coding phase facilitated data interpretation and conceptualization by categorizing and constantly comparing initial codes to identify the most salient themes (Charmaz, 2014; Chong & Yeo, 2015; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Howell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). Theoretical formation relies heavily on the
focused coding phase, as this stage reveals patterns, identifies data gaps, and promotes the most prevalent initial codes to focused codes (Charmaz, 2014; Howell, 2013).

Developing focused codes included organizing the most common initial codes and narrowing them to broader categories (Charmaz, 2014; Chong & Yeo, 2015; Creswell, 2013; Howell, 2013). The researcher utilized constant comparative methods during this phase to analyze the data collected through the survey and individual interviews. The data were compared, and common themes were identified to generate focused codes. These codes were then grouped into broader categories to develop the theoretical framework of the study (Charmaz, 2014; Howell, 2013).

**Theoretical Coding**

The final coding stage of the grounded theory analysis was theoretical coding. Theoretical coding facilitated theory formation by interlacing focused codes with the participant's described perceptions (Charmaz, 2014; Maxwell, 2013). Theoretical codes were conceptualized by the underlying data patterns, fostering the working relationship between focused codes and the emergent theory (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser, 1992; Howell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). Theoretical coding involved synthesizing and refining the concepts developed during the initial and focused coding phase into a coherent and comprehensive theory.

The researcher generated theoretical codes by analyzing the relationships between the focused codes, connecting the concepts, and identifying their interrelatedness. The theoretical framework developed in this study identified the factors influencing the
Theoretical Sensitivity

Theoretical sensitivity is a critical aspect of grounded theory methodology that refers to the researcher’s ability to identify and analyze data to develop a theoretical framework (Charmaz, 2014). Theoretical sensitivity involves the researcher’s ability to identify patterns in the data, make comparisons, and develop conceptual categories (Charmaz, 2014).

In this study, the researcher utilized theoretical sensitivity to develop an in-depth understanding of the experiences of staff of color in community colleges and identify the factors influencing their recruitment and retention. Theoretical sensitivity was achieved by constantly comparing data, identifying patterns and relationships between the data, and refining the concepts developed through the initial and focused coding phases.

In conclusion, data collection and analysis are critical components of grounded theory methodology. Data collection and analysis rely on one another and work concurrently in grounded theory research. In this study, data were collected through a survey, individual interviews, and focus group interviews. The data collected were analyzed using the three phases of grounded theory analysis: initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding. Theoretical sensitivity was used to develop an in-depth understanding of the experiences of staff of color in community colleges and identify the factors influencing their recruitment and retention. The theoretical framework developed
in this study identified the factors contributing to the increasing staff of color recruitment and retention in community colleges in the Pacific Northwest.

**Researcher's Positionality**

Everyone is born into a complex world with a lack of understanding, meaning, and consciousness. As people age, they become conditioned and influenced by the division of race, class, religion, and other manifested social groups. There are various levels of understanding at play by me as a researcher, participants in this study, and readers who hold privileges, perspectives, and interactions that influence our collective interpretation. When positioning myself in this research, my lived experiences, values, and worldviews shape my understanding and meaning of data and existing theories (Bhattacharya, 2017; Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

There is no way to erase the preconceptions I hold, but instead, highlight the multiple realities, reflect, and consider them when I form a theoretical framework based on how I interpret the realities of other people (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Maxwell, 2013). I am well-positioned to bring clarity and depth while studying this phenomenon because of the various theoretical perspectives.

As a young, Black, cis-gendered, middle-class, able-bodied, married male born in Seattle, WA, I hold biases due to lived experiences and how I show up in society. I have significant experiences with community colleges as a student and a professional, and I did not expect my experiences to be significantly different from my experiences as a
student. When I attended community college as a student, I had a very positive experience.

As a student, I had unwavering support from the few staff of color employed at that time, and the limited number of staff of color at these institutions changed my life as a student. These few staff of color served me as mentors, advocated for me, provided me with opportunities and resources, and helped me navigate the educational landscape. I always thought they were so inspiring and motivational. I always thought they were going above and beyond for myself and other students of color. Although it was a small group of staff of color, I did not realize their numbers did not reflect the student body because of how close they were and how they interacted with me and my peers. They were one of the reasons why I wanted to work in higher education. I had no clue about the reality of being a person of color working at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest.

I've worked in higher education for eight years at two different community colleges, and I lost all my passion for this line of work. As a professional, I've experienced adversity and challenges, including the feeling of isolation, unwelcoming environments, and lack of appreciation; I was the target of stereotypes, offensive humor, insults, and more. In addition, I have witnessed and heard similar stories from staff of color who feel undervalued by their institutions. Being a staff of color in a predominantly white space is challenging, so when I started working for the community college I
attended as a student, the same staff of color group welcomed me as a professional. It was then when I understood their closeness.

My experiences working for community colleges in the PNW negatively impacted my life and perceptions of the higher education system. These negative experiences shaped how I view these institutions, interact with my peers, and navigate the educational landscape. I have a personal connection to this research and want to increase the racial staff diversity for myself, my colleagues, and students of color. I recognize my ideas derive from my experiences which negatively impacted me; however, my role as the researcher is to recognize these biases while interpreting and making sense of participants lived experiences and perceptions (Berg, 2001; Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Lune & Berg, 2017; Maxwell, 2013).

My professional experiences have trained me to consider multiple perspectives and understand the complex dynamics between myself and others. I understand my biases and continuously reflect on where they come from and how society has conditioned me. Traditional qualitative research often uses established theoretical frameworks to form preconceived codes; however, constructivist grounded theory understands that researchers hold biases, values, and historical experiences and use pre-established theoretical influences to validate (Bhattacharya, 2017; Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lune & Berg, 2017; Maxwell, 2013). Therefore, the findings in this study may or may not differ from my experiences and perceptions; however, theoretical sampling methods require the researcher to be
open-minded and open to exploring concepts derived from the inductive data when collecting, analyzing, and reporting the developed theory.

**Chapter 3 Summary**

Chapter three, methodology, provides a detailed description of the methodology used to explore the experiences of staff of color working in community college in the Pacific Northwest. The chapter covers the research design, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, and the researcher’s positionality. The study was conducted using a constructivist grounded theory approach, and data was collected through individual interviews and memo writing. The initial coding process was followed by focused coding and theoretical sampling, leading to the development of a substantive theory. The researcher’s positionality is acknowledged, and its impact on data interpretation is considered throughout the research process. Overall, the chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the methodology used to conduct the study, emphasizing the importance of reflexivity and flexibility in qualitative research.
Chapter 4: Presentation of Results

Introduction

Chapter 4 presents the result of this study, which investigated the experiences and perceptions of staff of color at Pacific Northwest community colleges regarding institutional commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The purpose of this study was to explore the factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of staff of color at Pacific Northwest community colleges to develop a framework that can guide community colleges in their efforts to increase racial staff diversity and foster an environment that is conducive to staff of color success. As introduced in Chapter 3, the grounded theory approach interweaves data collection and analysis to identify emergent themes. In this study, the results section presents the emerging codes that informed the emergent theory based on the simultaneous data collection and analysis process. The emergent theory resulted from the codes identified in the initial, focused, and theoretical coding phase.

Through the codes identified, this section of the study reveals that the primary challenge facing community colleges in the Pacific Northwest is not recruiting staff of color but retaining them. In other words, these institutions struggle to retain staff of color, which hinders their efforts to increase racial staff diversity. The results presented in this section offer insight into understanding staff of color experiences at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest, informing how they can improve their retention rates and create a more diverse and inclusive work environment.
This chapter describes the methodology used in this study, which included an initial coding phase, focused coding phase, and theoretical coding phase to analyze survey data from 43 Pacific Northwest community college staff of color and individual and focus group interviews with 10 participants selected from the survey data phase. The data collected from these phases were analyzed using comparative methods to identify themes, focused categories, and theoretical codes, which informed the development of the emergent theory, Double Dutch Retention.

The emergent theory, Double Dutch Retention, which is a metaphor for the community centered nature of this phenomena, will provide PNW community college institutions with a framework to increase racial staff diversity on their campuses. The framework presented in this chapter is grounded in the voices of staff of color and illustrates the journey these institutions must take to increase their staff's racial diversity.

Question 1: How do Pacific Northwest community college staff of color perceive their institution’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, given a significant disproportion between the numbers of staff of color and their white counterparts?

This study found that staff of color perceived their institution’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion as lacking. They feel their institutions to not care about racial staff diversity rather they are demonstrating a commitment for funding or political gains. Staff of color perceive a severe lack of representation within critical areas of their institution such as human resources and leadership, which contributes to inequitable treatment. Ultimately, staff of color saw the significant disproportion between the number
of staff of color and their white counterparts as evidence of systemic barriers and implicit biases within institutional policies and practices, especially hiring and internal promotional processes.

**Question 2:** What experiences motivate staff of color to continue working at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest, despite systemic barriers that exist for employees of color in higher education?

Staff of color were motivated to continue working at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest by a sense of purpose and dedication to their students, and a desire to create positive change within their, while also finding support within communities at their institution. However, they also faced significant challenges related to toxic environments, lack of institutional support, and feelings of isolation, which impacted their job satisfaction and retention.

**Question 3:** What recruitment and retention practices do Pacific Northwest community college staff of color perceive as essential to their institutions' ability to increase the number of racially diverse staff on campus?

Community college staff of color in the Pacific Northwest, perceive recruitment and retention practices such as targeted outreach, mentorship programs, and opportunities for professional growth and advancement as essential to their institutions' ability to increase the number of racially diverse staff on their campuses. Additionally, staff of color highlighted their institutions need to showcase a sense of both valuing and celebrating racial staff diversity, addressing systemic barriers and institutional bias, and
prioritizing equity in hiring, promotion, and salary were seen as important steps towards improving staff of color retention and increasing diversity on campuses.

Survey & Initial Themes

The Results section presents the emerging codes that informed the emergent theory, which is based solely on the data collected in this study. In the initial phase of this study's coding process, data collected during the survey phase served as the basis for identifying initial codes. The survey responses provided rich illustrations of the experiences and perceptions of staff of color in Pacific Northwest Community Colleges, which formed the foundation for the subsequent focused coding phase. In addition to identifying initial codes, the survey responses provided valuable data for conducting descriptive statistical analysis. The identification of commonalities and patterns from the survey data presented below enables this analysis and eventual emergence of theoretical codes.

DEI Goals and Strategic Communication

Participants were asked whether their college had included DEI in its goals, vision, mission, and strategic plan, see Table 1. The majority of survey participants, 84%, reported that their institutions highlight diversity, equity, and inclusion in strategic communication channels such as goals, mission statements, strategic plans, and core values.

Table 1. Survey Data 1

Is diversity, equity, and inclusion highlighted in your community colleges’ goals, vision, and mission statement, strategic plan or core values?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total n = 43

This data suggests that community colleges in the PNW take an official position integrating DEI into their institutional aspirations and strategic planning. However, survey participants called out the inconsistencies between their institutions' stated plans and policies and their actual implantation, as one survey participant noted:

My employer has developed and highlights diversity, equity, and inclusion in the community college’s goals, vision, and mission statement, strategic plan, and core values, as well as promoting a high level of commitment to fostering DEI. In other words, the plan and policies that are in place; the practice and implementation is lacking.

This statement implies a potential gap in the lived experiences of the staff of color at these institutions. While the PNW community colleges may publicize a strong commitment to DEI in their strategic communication, the real-world experiences of staff of color might differ significantly, potentially leading to a feeling of disconnect or alienation.

Such sentiments are further echoed by a second survey participant who departed from their institution stating, “I left precisely because I did not feel that I belonged there and that diversity, equity, and inclusion were not prioritized by leadership.” Although PNW community college’s may demonstrate their DEI goals via institutional strategic communication, some participants decided to leave their institutions, due to reasons
connecting back to the issues of DEI implementation—a feeling of not belonging and a perception that leadership does not genuinely prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion.

While majority of survey participants indicated DEI is embedded in their institutions’ strategic communication, there was an added layer of complexity with 16% of survey participants selecting *somewhat*. This added layer suggests that respondents perceive DEI values in their strategic communication, however, it may not be as robust, consistent, or impactful as they could be. These responses might also indicate a perception of incomplete or partial communication, where these institutions recognize the importance of DEI, but may struggle with thorough and effective integration into all aspects of their mission, vision, and strategic planning.

Furthermore, the absence of *no* responses in this survey indicates that DEI language is somewhat present in all institutions represented. However, the presence of DEI in an institution’s communication does not necessarily equate to a strong commitment, as illustrated by various survey participants. Hence, the interpretation of *somewhat* responses and the absence of *no* responses call for a deeper exploration into how institutional commitment to DEI is communicated, implemented, and perceived in PNW community colleges.

**Institutional Commitment to DEI**

When assessing the degree of institutional commitment to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion, shown in Table 2, in PNW community colleges, survey data indicates a significant level of dissatisfaction. Although 9% of the survey participants
perceived their institutions were fully committed to fostering DEI, the majority, representing 89%, felt the commitment was only somewhat demonstrated or was merely performative.

Table 2. Survey Data 2

*What is your institution’s level of commitment to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not committed at all</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performative</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat committed</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fully committed</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total n = 43

Several survey participants illustrated their institutions performative commitment to DEI. A survey participant stated:

*My impression is that these institutions feel obligated to recruit and retain people of color if they do not want to lose budgets, but not because some leaders really want to work with people of color.*

This impression is corroborated by another survey participant who asserts that higher education institutions DEI commitment efforts may come across as tokenistic, leading to professionals of color feeling used, as stated:

*Colleges and universities, like many other institutions, are feeling the pressure to demonstrate a measure of commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion following the murder of George Floyd. However, it is harmful to be ‘used’ as a means to an end and professionals of color are smart enough to not allow themselves to be treated as such. Thus, why we leave these institutions.*

This participant also raises insightful concerns about their institution using DEI commitments in response to societal pressures.
Similarly, other participants perceive their institution’s commitment to DEI as lackluster or inadequate as a second survey participant addresses stating, “there is a lack of multicultural understanding and a lack of commitment starting from leadership and trickling through every facet of the institution. They lead with a ‘color blind’ model.” This underlines the ‘color blind’ model that is pervasive in higher education, leading to institutional practices that fail to authentically appreciate and integrate various racial identities. A third survey participant captures the culmination of these sentiments, stating, “institutions in the PNW are unable to move past the performative gestures because they don’t honestly value DEI.”

Although survey participants perceive DEI as part of their institution’s strategic plans, this data suggests there is room for improvement. The lack of trust exhibited by survey participants raises questions regarding the authenticity of their institutions’ DEI commitment. Given this data and the quotes provided, it appears that a perceived lack of genuine commitment to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion is a significant concern by the PNW community college staff of color who responded to this survey, and may play a substantial role in the experiences, satisfaction, and retention of staff of color.

**Recruitment & Retention of Staff of Color**

The survey explored the efficiency of institutions’ ability to recruit and retain staff of color. While most community colleges in the Pacific Northwest can recruit staff of color, there is an alarming struggle to retain them. The lack of support for staff of color working at community colleges within the Pacific Northwest, was a common theme
among survey participants, with several noting the need for culturally competent policies, practices, and procedures to create an environment conducive to staff of color thriving.

When asked about their institution’s efficiency recruiting staff of color, Table 3 indicates the responses, whereas Table 4 indicates the responses the efficiency of retaining staff of color at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest.

**Table 3. Survey Data**

*How efficient is your institution at recruiting staff of color?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Struggling</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amazing</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total n = 43

Both tables indicate that the majority of the respondents feel their institution is struggling to recruit and retain staff of color; however, Table 3 suggests that a small proportion of participants feel their institution is able to recruit staff of color. While some may feel that their institution can recruit staff of color, no respondents feel their institution is doing a good job at retaining staff of color, suggesting that retention is a bigger challenge than recruitment for institutions seeing to increase their racial staff diversity. The breakdown of each question is as follows.

According to Table 3, 23% of survey participants reported that their institution is *struggling* to recruit staff of color, 33% rated their institution a *two* on a scale of one to five, 30% rated their institution *three*, 9% rated their institution a *four*, and only 5% rated their institution as *amazing* at recruiting staff of color. This data suggests that the
majority of respondents do not perceive their institution as highly efficient at recruiting staff of color.

**Table 4. Survey Data**

*How efficient is your institution at retaining staff of color?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Struggling</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amazing</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total n = 43

In regard to retaining staff of color, Table 4 shows, 51% of survey participants reported that their institution *struggles* to retain staff of color, 40% rated their institution a *two* on a scale of one to five, 9% rated their institution a *three*, and none rated their institution a *four* or *amazing*. The differences in ratings between the perceptions of recruitment and retention of staff of color at these institutions indicate various factors contributing to this phenomenon.

**Recruitment Efficiency**

Survey responses indicate the efficiency of community colleges in the Pacific Northwest to recruit staff of color can depend on various factors, some of which participants highlighted in their survey responses. The 14% of participants who selected “4” and “Amazing,” work in more urban, metropolitan areas in Washington with more diverse racial demographics, while most of the participants who selected “2” and “Struggling” are institutions in Oregon, with racial diversity that is significantly less than the metropolitan areas of Washington. Interestingly, a metropolitan institution in Oregon,
and an institution in one of the most diverse areas in Washington, both appear to thrive in staff of color recruitment in the literature; however, were perceived by the survey participants as struggling in recruitment efficiency.

The mixed responses of PNW community college recruitment efficiency in recruiting staff of color, are further expressed by survey participants in qualitative responses indicate location is a huge factor. One survey participant in particular assert that the recruitment strategies for BIPOC [Black, Indigenous People of Color] in rural areas are inadequate, and when BIPOC staff are hired, they lack the necessary support, leading to frustration and turnover as shown:

Often time the lack of recruitment strategies to recruit BIPOC [Black, Indigenous People of Color] in rural areas is blamed on a lack of POC [People of Color] within the local population. If BIPOC are hired, they are often not given the support they need causing them to get frustrated and eventually search for a different job.

Lack of POC within the local population seems to be used to justify the lack of effort to recruit or support staff of color, by predominantly white institutions. This trend can be perceived as a form of gatekeeping as described by another survey participant:

There is no specific [staff of color] recruitment effort. Our HR [human resource] department, predominately white presenting women, act as gatekeepers and will not even allow position experts to vet candidates for minimum requirements for complex jobs that require supervisor expertise to understand how specific KSAs [knowledge, skills, and abilities] might translate. HR seems to be an issue and barrier to hiring. Retention is hard because we pay the lowest wages, have the highest performance expectations, and leadership can be all over the IDI [Intercultural Development Inventory] continuum, with some bosses being horrible and breaking EEOC [U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission] laws and others being beacons of hope and development. Inconsistent is a theme here and staying is hit or miss. Student Services lost 100 people in the last 12 months. Nearly 100% turnover.
The predominantly white human resource departments and college leadership seems to be a crucial factor participants highlighted due to their institutions’ Human Resources (HR) department’s unequitable policies and practices, fostering nepotism, pay inequities, and unrealistic hiring expectations, as shown by this participant who was directly impacted:

As a person of color, I struggled to get a job that I was actually qualified for, so I got a job that was entry level, and I worked alongside people in higher positions with lower experience and education.

This illustrates the personal struggles staff of color experience to secure a job fitting their qualifications, indicating a systemic issue within these institutions.

Furthermore, survey participants acknowledge the ability for PNW community colleges to recruit staff of color, however, they also acknowledge the lack of support and ineffective retention strategies, illustrated by a survey participant:

Recruiting is one thing, showing staff of color they are valued and providing opportunities for growth is another. Staff of color seem to get the short end of the stick when it comes to professional development.

Cultivating the idea that BIPOC will not relocate to Pacific Northwest, or a rural area sets a precedence for a lack in effort recruiting and creating an environment conducive for staff of color to thrive, further perpetuating this cycle of low racial staff diversity. As a result of low racial diversity and high staff of color turnover, these community colleges justify their inefficient recruitment and retention, placing blame on racially diverse staff. Additionally, they place blame on rural location in which are often largely populated by LatinX communities, serving as gatekeepers, further contributing to their inability to recruit staff of color.
Retention Efficiency

Survey participants underscore the distinction between recruiting staff of color and valuing this population once they are part of the college. While most community colleges in the Pacific Northwest are able to recruit staff of color, there is an alarming struggle to retain staff of color. 91% of the survey participants perceive their staff of color retention efforts to be close to struggling, while no participant’s views it as close to amazing.

There is a clear difference between participant’s perceptions of their institutions’ recruitment efficiency compared to the retention efficiency as expressed by this participant, “I think we talk more about recruitment, without factoring in retention.” The over emphasis on recruitment with little focus on retention strategies, further feeds into the performative nature of these institutions, which a survey participant emphasizes, “I feel that they talk a good game, but once staff of color are hired, there is not much support.” Another participant echoed similar sentiments, “There seems to be some effort placed on recruiting diverse hires. However, little effort and planning are given to how institutions can retain racially and ethnically diverse talent.”

Although Pacific Northwest community college’s strategic communication and performative actions indicate a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, still staff of color perceives these institutions are stagnant in their efforts and continue to leave. Survey participants commented on their institutions’ ability to recruit, while also highlighting the lack of support or care for staff of color with no retention efforts. By
overlooking this need staff of color can be exposed to hostile environments that are hidden during the recruitment and hiring process.

Several participants discussed the struggles of staff of color from places with larger non-white presence. The performative nature of staff of color recruitment efforts, coupled with the lack of retention efforts by PNW community colleges, often results in racial gas lighting, cultural encapsulation, and staff of color attrition. A survey participant provides a detailed illustration of these the effects of performative recruitment with no retention efforts:

“[OCC] knows what to say to prospective staff of color to get them in the door. Some hiring committees will even talk about how [OCC] does have a problem with retaining staff of color, and how [OCC] is historically and continues to be a PWI. But they buttress those statements by saying 'we're working on it' and may talk about some initiatives and affinity groups that have been ongoing. This, of course, is all performative. While individual white staff may grow and learn how to be less racist, more inclusive, etc., the institution itself is nowhere near improvement. Recruitment and retention of staff of color, specifically Black staff of color, who are not familiar with the PNW and come from places with more of a Black and/or non-white presence, tend to struggle more here, in my opinion. While [OCC] may tout all the ways they are working to make Black staff feel more welcomed, etc., again, performative, they do not acknowledge that when work is over, we have to also deal with [external issues] a city that is declining fast -- elevated hate-based racial violence, overall increase of crime and gun/weapon violence and deaths, houselessness, mental illness, as well as Oregon's history of race. [OCC] seems to function as if it is exempt from these issues and facts, and in turns gives an impression, I believe, to Black and POC staff when recruiting that these are peripheral issues which somehow don't affect [OCC], their staff, and students, and that these issues can be compensated by enjoying Oregon's forests, coastlines, and nature trails.”

This response highlights how institutions may not acknowledge or address external issues and social isolation and instead presents as if exempt from our racially constructed society, which may create misleading impressions for prospective staff of
color, especially Black staff. Acknowledging and addressing the unique challenges staff of color may experience in a predominantly white society is pivotal to increase racial staff diversity.

**Active Staff of Color Retention and Recruitment Practices**

Despite the Pacific Northwest community colleges’ commitment to fostering DEI, the responses to whether these institutions actively recruit and retain staff of color are concerning, as shown in Table 5. Analyzing the responses from the survey data, it is evident that there’s a stark difference in the perception of active recruitment and retention practices in the PNW community colleges represented. Only 40% of respondents felt that their institutions had implemented such practices, while a notable majority, 60%, responded negatively. While 40% of respondents answered yes, indicating their institution implements practices to actively recruit and retain staff of color, the remaining 60% of survey participants selected no, suggesting their institutions do not have staff of color recruitment and retention practices in place.

**Table 5. Survey Data 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does your institution implement practices to actively recruit and retain staff of color?</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total n = 43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This survey data suggests that a significant proportion of Pacific Northwest community colleges are not actively working to recruit and retain staff of color, which
may contribute to the lack of racial staff diversity at their institutions. Furthermore, this lack of action may be attributed to several factors, such as a lack of resources or a failure to prioritize DEI initiatives.

This finding is significantly mirrored by a respondent who stated “whatever they're doing to recruit and retain staff of color is not working.” It aligns with the perspective of the majority of staff do not see their institutions actively implementing recruitment and retention practices for staff of color. This sentiment is further supported by a participant who stated, “basic recruiting strategies won't yield us greater diversity, neither will ignoring toxic culture. Institutions have to do more than what they've done in the past in order to be better and yield greater results.”, which challenges institutions to evolve beyond basic recruiting strategies and address any existing toxic culture.

While another respondent shifted the focus to discuss the burden placed on staff of color in driving change at institutions “I feel that a lot of the burden of making change at the institution falls on staff of color, who end up burning out and leaving.” This implies an element of emotional labor and pressure that might not be equitably distributed among staff and can contribute to a high burnout rate among staff of color, undermining retention efforts.

An additional dimension of retention that respondents highlighted is remuneration. It highlights perceived disparities in how workload and additional responsibilities are compensated, suggesting that white faculty and staff are more likely
to receive stipends for additional work than their colleagues of color. This inequity could undermine efforts to retain staff of color.

White faculty and staff are more likely to get stipends for additional workload than faculty and staff of color further widening the pay inequities and labor distribution within higher education. During my time at [WCC], I have received one retention bonus of $500 connected to the work of integrating equity, diversity, and inclusion into the culture of student engagement. More Vice Presidents need to recognize the contributions of staff and faculty of color and provide a monetary value in the form of a retention bonus.

This concern is further emphasized by relating the issue of pay inequity to the broader socioeconomic context of the Pacific Northwest. The respondent outlines that the cost-of-living increases are not being reflected in the compensation of staff of color, which extends beyond higher education and into broader society due to historical issues.

I think the Pacific Northwest is growing really fast, economy wise. Our cost of living here is starting to mirror that of California within the next decade or so. Our cost of living is going up here in the Pacific Northwest, but this does not reflect how we are paying staff of color in higher education. In addition to our pay, communities of color here are grossly underpaid beyond higher education compared to our white counterparts. It is still affordable and livable here in the Pacific Northwest for white communities who benefit from generational wealth while the rest of us do not. So, this is one example of how staff of color being underpaid goes beyond being a Higher Ed[ucation] problem but this is also a historical problem as well.

Finally, respondents define the "training institution" phenomenon, where staff members often leave for better opportunities, pointing to potential issues with both recruitment and retention practices “[WCC] has been deemed a strong training institution where staff leave to seek leadership opportunities and/or higher salary for the same job”.

While this could suggest the institution is preparing staff of color well for career
advancement, it might also indicate a need to review institutional policies on promotion, remuneration, and career development to retain skilled and experienced staff.

**PNW Community College Sense of Belonging**

The survey data suggest a mixed sense of belonging among staff of color at their institutions. Only a small proportion (5%) of participants reported feeling a strong sense of belonging. The majority of respondents felt a moderate level of belonging (37% selecting "Three") or less than that, with 30% selecting "Two" and 14% expressing they do not feel a sense of belonging at all.

Table 6 presents participants responses to the survey question regarding their sense of belonging at their respective institutions. Out of the total 43 responses, 14% participants reported *not at all* to feeling a sense of belonging, 30% rated their sense of belonging a *two* on a five-point scale, 37% rated their sense of belonging a *three*, 14% rated their sense of belonging as *four*, and only 5% rated their sense of belonging as *very*. This lack of belonging could negatively impact staff morale, productivity, and retention, as staff of color who do not feel a sense of belonging may leave the institution, exacerbating the already low number of racial staff diversity.

**Table 6. Survey Data 6**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you feel a sense of belonging at your institution?</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very!</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total n = 43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A total of 81% of participants rated their sense of belonging in the middle to lower end of the scale, indicating that significant changes are required at these institutions to foster a sense of belonging among staff of color. Interestingly, the two participants who rated their sense of belonging as very perceived their institutions’ DEI stance as performative. This suggests that sense of belonging extends beyond the institution itself and may be associated with the community that staff identify with. While institutions may be performative, staff of color may find a sense of belonging within a supportive community, particularly one that includes colleagues of color.

These responses are echoed in the collected quotes. Survey participants point out a gap in support and development initiatives for staff of color, implying that this lack of targeted resources can harm their sense of belonging. “I think Pacific Northwest Community Colleges need to do more to support their staff/faculty of color with intentional race and equity centered development and support.” The call for "intentional race and equity centered development and support” directly addresses the majority of survey respondents who reported a lack of belonging.

Another survey participant built on this by illustrating the expectation to conform to dominant cultural practices. This expectation to assimilate can act as a barrier to fostering a sense of belonging among staff of color and instead may promote feelings of alienation. The respondent also notes that these issues were exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, which may be an important factor to consider. As this survey Participant stated:
Feels like there is a push to get folks in and then an expectation to conform to the dominate culture practices to be considered a leader as a staff person. If you are faculty, there is a little more space but not a large sense of community. This has been exacerbated due to COVID.

The paradox of tokenism and the silencing of voices when staff of color attempt to point out and address inequities was highlighted by another participant. This experience can contribute to feeling excluded and marginalized, which correlates with the moderate to low sense of belonging indicated by survey participants.

Everyone wants to hire us, to have us on committees, to have us serve in visible roles. But whenever we point out inequities, challenges systems of oppression, try to make systemic changes, we're suddenly perceived as a threat to the status quo. We're ‘radical’, ‘not team player’, the ‘Debby downers’ always looking to play the victim card. Anything that's put in place to support us is challenged on the grounds of preferential treatment ‘why do they get a resource or support group or opportunities when white, poor, LGBTQ, etc., don't?

Ultimately, "staff need to feel supported and valued." This statement connects to the sentiments expressed across the survey data and other quotes, emphasizing the role of institutional support and recognition in cultivating a sense of belonging.

Overall, the survey data, coupled with the shared experiences in the quotes, underscores the need for institutions to foster a genuine sense of belonging for staff of color. This can be achieved through intentional, equitable support structures and initiatives, as well as addressing systemic biases and cultural expectations within the institution.

The complexities of this survey response highlight several important points regarding the realities of experiences affecting staff of color retention. First, the institution may be performative in its efforts to recruit and retain staff of color, presenting
itself as actively working to address issues of diversity and inclusion while not actually making significant improvements. Staff of color’s sense of belonging is an essential component of recruitment and retention. It is imperative that these institutions value their staff of color and avoid tokenizing this population. Several participants expressed feeling undervalued and continuously denied upwardly mobile opportunities, overworked, unheard, and often dismissed when advocating for themselves, colleagues, and students of color.

**Conclusion: Survey & Initial Themes**

This study’s survey data and initial coding phase laid the essential groundwork for the subsequent data collection and analysis phases. The thorough analysis of survey responses from 43 staff of color at Pacific Northwest (PNW) community colleges yielded 56 codes grounded in their lived experiences and perceptions. These codes coalesced around four prevalent themes: *organizational culture and leadership*, *cultural competence and belonging*, *community and support*, and *professional growth and equitable practices*. These initial themes, integral to the emergent theoretical framework, informed the focus coding phase.

The focus coding phase drew upon a constant comparative method between initial codes and individual interview data. This iterative process identified 28 focused codes, offering more profound insight into the experiences and perceptions of PNW community college staff of color. After analyzing the most significant trends and patterns, four categories representing an institutional commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion
emerged: *performative DEI stance, normative DEI stance, celebrating racial diversity,* and *valuing racial diversity.* Eventually, these focused categories, coupled with data from focused group interviews, added valuable insight into how PNW community colleges can bolster racial staff diversity. The culmination of these analytical steps steered the research into the theoretical coding phase and the formation of the emergent theory: Double Dutch Retention.

**The Emergent Theoretical Framework: Double Dutch Retention**

The emergent theoretical framework of this study, Double Dutch Retention, was developed through a rigorous data collection and analysis process. The initial themes and focused categories shaped the theoretical codes, which are essential components of the emergent framework: *dismantling toxic culture, facilitating equitable change, investing in professional growth, and embracing cultural influence & community engagement.* These components outline actionable steps institutions must undertake to foster a more welcoming and supportive environment conducive to racial staff diversity.

The Double Dutch Retention framework, presented in Figure 2, offers a roadmap for enhancing racial staff diversity at PNW community colleges. It illustrates a continuum of institutional DEI commitment, delineating a shift from a *performative* DEI stance to a *normative* DEI stance. The messaging and actions of these institutions shape this continuum highlighting specific institutional challenges in increasing racial staff diversity and fostering DEI. Participants categorized these actions as *celebrating* or *valuing* racial diversity, forming measurable indicators. These
measurable indicators link institutional actions within the framework's inner circle, dubbed the "improvement conditions," to the continuous continuum of DEI commitment. These conditions denote the theoretical codes and pinpoint four areas where PNW community colleges must improve to recruit and retain staff of color effectively. Central to this framework is improved *staff of color morale*, determined by their sense of belonging, passion, community, growth, and comfort.

**Figure 2. The Double Dutch Retention Framework**

Although the Double Dutch Retention framework stems from this study's participants' experiences, it maintains adaptability and transferability to other institutional contexts. It represents a significant advance in addressing the enduring challenge of racial staff diversity in higher education, recommending strategic shifts toward equitable and inclusive decision-making. In essence, the framework spotlights the necessary
transformations in institutional practices and policies to recruit and retain staff of color in higher education.

The Double Dutch Retention Metaphor

The term "Double Dutch Retention" is introduced as a metaphor, interweaving the values and concepts inherent in the sport of Double Dutch with the strategies Pacific Northwest community colleges need to enhance the recruitment and retention of staff of color. Initially introduced in the U.S. by Dutch settlers in the 1600s, Double Dutch transformed its white European foundation and emerged as a central element of Black urban communities and hip-hop culture, especially among Black girls (McCabe, 2022; McCollum, n.d; National Double Dutch League, 2023). This interactive sport, often celebrated as "Black Girl Magic," represents not just a game but a vibrant embodiment of community, collaboration, innovation, learning, and empowerment. It is a symbolic space for Black girls to nurture their dreams and ambitions and foster a vibrant sense of identity and community (McCabe, 2022).

Double Dutch, an intricate weave of music, dance, and self-expression, offers a sanctuary from societal stereotypes and negative perceptions. The sport allows Black girls to navigate beyond the prevailing culture's demeaning views and prejudices. As cited in McCollum's work, KG says, "Black girls could be all they wanted to be devoid of the gender stereotyping and anti-Black sexism elsewhere" (McCollum, n.d., para 15). This sentiment resembles the experiences of participants in this study, who are often
subjected to microaggressions, punished for speaking up against unjust practices, or accused of being 'unprofessional' for asserting their identity.

Despite Double Dutch's essential role in shaping hip-hop culture, it became marginalized within the history of hip-hop due to male-centric narratives that dominated its evolution. This marginalization resonates with the experiences of community college staff of color who, despite their invaluable contributions, often encounter disregard, oversight, or hostility in their workplaces (Harden, 2016; Levin et al., 2014). This struggle mirrors the journey of Double Dutch, which transitioned from its Eurocentric origins to a vital element of Black culture and community. Likewise, Pacific Northwest community college staff of color strive to establish their space within these educational institutions. The participants in this study expressed hope for their institutions to shift historically Eurocentric policy and decision-making practices toward an environment that includes, centers, and values the unique experiences, perspectives, and inputs of staff of color.

The metaphor of Double Dutch underscores the systemic omission of staff of color from higher education literature and exclusion from higher educational leadership. It reflects the need for collaborative learning and empowerment to counteract the pervasive underrepresentation of staff of color at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest. It showcases how attributes such as encouragement, continuous learning, hope, community support, and collaborative decision-making, all central to Double Dutch, are the same qualities echoed in the voices of this study's participants. These
qualities are desirable and critical for these institutions to transition from performative gestures of diversity, equity, and inclusion toward a genuine normalization of these principles in their policies and practices.

**The Continuum of Institutional DEI Commitment**

The Double Dutch Retention framework presents a continuum of institutional commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), ranging from performative to normative. The survey data echoed by participants' stories suggest that staff of color at Pacific Northwest community colleges often perceive their institutions' commitment to DEI as largely performative. These perceptions stem from various intentional and unintentional actions, including recruitment and retention initiatives, responses to racial injustices, hosted programs and events, strategic communication and messaging, and the treatment of staff of color. These current performative actions primarily feature testimonies validating the improvement conditions of the emergent framework.

During individual and focus group interviews, many participants expressed their desire for their institutions to transition from a performative to a normative stance on DEI. They illustrated the impact of their institutions' performative actions on their mental and physical health, confidence, and personal identities and how it stems from obligation at their institution. Participant 2, for example, shed light on the prevalence of performative actions funneled down from institutional leadership:

I think it becomes performative at the dean level and higher because that's when you can start to see how they cater to white people. All the messaging about inclusiveness, BLM [Black Lives Matter], disability rights, and awareness is all
performative. They perform when they need state and federal funding, and check off boxes to ensure they continue to receive funding.

This participant alludes to the concept of 'centering whiteness,' a critique many participants made about institutions claiming to support DEI but continuing to uphold systems, policies, or practices prioritizing the experiences, values, or perspectives of white staff over racially diverse staff.

A shift to normative DEI involves proactively embedding diversity, equity, and inclusion systems into the institutional structure. This change would promote belonging among staff members who identify with systemically marginalized groups. Participant 4 described their institution's current state as somewhere between normative and performative, pointing out the intent to create inclusive systems:

Normative to me is building systems of diversity, equity, and inclusion into the very structure of an institution or organization-proactively. As a person who holds systemically, marginalized identities, I would feel like I belong. My current institution is somewhere in between normative and performative. The values are there, and I feel like they really want to create these systems, however, there are barriers like state legislation which can sometimes force administration and faculty to act in a performative manner. They are tiptoeing around the issue as to not upset the state or the board.

While participants hoped their institutions would normalize DEI efforts, they acknowledged external factors that occasionally compel administrators to adopt performative measures. The Double Dutch Retention framework captures these sentiments, mapping out the path for institutions to foster authenticity in their DEI initiatives. The following sections delve deeper into participants’ perceptions of institutional performative and normative DEI practices.
Performative DEI Stance

Participants in this study refer to the term 'performative' as a trend prevalent among the Pacific Northwest (PNW) community colleges. This trend consists of institutions that present superficial commitments to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives, typically failing to induce substantial systemic changes. These institutions demonstrate performative actions in various forms, including responses to trending events and imposing on staff of color a need to adopt professional identities constructed by the dominant society.

Institutional leadership is a significant source of this performative behavior, often seen perpetuating systems fostering white supremacy, cultural encapsulation, plantation politics, and gatekeeping through unjust policies and practices. Consequently, this study's participants struggled to trust their leaders and raised doubts about the potential for significant institutional reforms. For instance, Participant 9 provides a telling account of their institution upholding white supremacy, regardless of input from their staff of color, including themselves:

If change is going to happen, it's to come from the top down, and, we are seeing time and time again what the true colors for our leadership, where their values and priorities are. And by now we don't feel like it's to support faculty and staff of color really dismantle the white supremacy culture here, the systematic racism we have, and you know we have a lot of very political folks, donors, etc. we are serving those folks.

In some cases, institutional leadership attempts to create systemic changes through a DEI council but often falls short due to a lack of cultural competence.

Participant 8's experiences at a rural institution serve as a case in point:
I definitely felt tokenized as part of the DEI council, the President would come to us and say 'hey, you're people of color. Can you help write this statement about this incident, to make me look good?' I played into that role, because I was new, and then George Floyd happened, protests across the country. And I was looking at my institution wondering why they weren't saying anything. And do I brought it up, and I helped with that statement. Then it became, 'we'll ask the DEI council to be the voice.' I said no, this is a collective, let's be collaborative, and that never got traction.

Such tokenizing tactics for performative efforts were not unique to Participant 8 or their institution; it was an experience echoed by several other participants. A telling example comes from another rural institution, which, despite having fewer than five employees of color, established a Diversity committee without any representatives of color. Participant 6, when asked about their institution's commitment to fostering DEI, responded:

There is a couple things they are doing. One is they always check in with me asking, 'What can we do to serve our students, especially the Latino students?' That's one thing. The other is that they are doing a lot of surveys to look at what we can be done better. What clubs would you like to do things like that. They allowed me to create a club for Latinx, and one of my co-workers she's doing another club for LGBTQ. We are creating a lot of Spanish signs around campus and they also have equity and inclusion committee, where they talk about how they can do better. They invite me to meetings, to tell them about what people are talking about in the community.

These participants’ experiences underscore the critical need for institutions to transition from superficial DEI commitments to tangible actions that instigate systemic change toward a normative DEI stance.

**Normative DEI Stance**

The normative DEI stance is an emergent category centering on PNW community college's genuine efforts to embed DEI into the organizational fabric of the institution.
The normative DEI stance goes beyond mere performative gestures, focusing instead on developing and institutionalizing initiatives that reflect equitable norms. It is essential to highlight that a normative DEI stance is not adopted to avoid criticism or legal repercussions. Instead, it stems from a genuine dedication to displaying actions toward systemic change. This commitment is manifested in transparent communication, diverse leadership, equitable practices, and inclusive policies, which collectively challenge and rectify institutional biases impeding the progress of staff of color.

Participant 1 highlights the difference between performative and normative DEI commitment, expressing the necessity for tangible change and action. To them, commitment transcends mere lip service, reflected in substantial changes to policies and procedures that demonstrate an earnest pursuit of equity and inclusion. Participant 1 argues that systemic change should not solely fall on the employees of color to address, but rather, it is the responsibility of college leadership:

The fact that we had professionals, specifically Black professionals leaving this institution, and that it had to be escalated by Black employees, to senior leadership, rather than the other way around. This shouldn't be coming up from the bottom, this should come from you. You should have convened your employees of color and said 'we see it, we are aware, what can we do?' That's leadership! Putting your head in the ground and hoping things will go away is not, that doesn't demonstrate leadership nor does it demonstrate the commitment that you say you have.

In this light, normative DEI actions must begin with proactive leadership; something as simple as initiating discussions and addressing the concerns raised by racially diverse staff can make a difference.
Another manifestation of a normative DEI stance is institutionalizing DEI practices within the institution's structure and fostering a culture of accountability among all employees. Participant 5 narrated how their institution, under the guidance of their first Black College President, has institutionalized an annual DEI Day dedicated to DEI work:

Dr. [College President] has implemented our DEI Day where the campus is closed. Every faculty and staff member is participating in DEI work that day. So it's institutionalized. It's part of our yearly calendar training. Which again, like I said, is good for those who are new to the system, a nice refresher. You know, reset, buckle you up, because there's always something in society or political, [DEI Day] will allow you to equip yourself for the upcoming year.

This approach allows the institution to prioritize DEI, equipping its staff with the necessary tools to navigate challenging conversations while setting a yearly reminder for continual commitment.

A normative DEI stance intertwines DEI into the institution's very fabric, permeating every decision made. It highlights the importance of genuine efforts in fostering an inclusive environment instead of performative actions. By implementing and adhering to the normative DEI stance, PNW community colleges can boost staff morale, retain staff of color, and promote diversity on their campuses.

**Centering Staff of Color Morale**

At the center of the Double Dutch Retention framework lies the critical element: increased staff of color morale, which stands as the primary retention factor and controls the framework's functionality. 'Staff of color morale' refers to the satisfaction, motivation, and sense of belonging that staff of color experience on their campuses. As PNW
community colleges seek to boost racial staff diversity and normalize DEI, participants suggested the critical component of uplifting staff of color morale.

Despite survey data indicating that many participants feel a sense of belonging in their institutions, a significant proportion does not. During the interviews, participants elaborated on their experiences of trauma, fear, self-discovery, healing, and mental well-being and how these aspects influenced their morale and longevity at their institutions. Participant 10, for instance, shed light on the persisting institutional trauma experienced by the staff of color at their institution and the pressing need for healing. They broached the uncertainty of staying at the institution due to their fear, signifying the impacts of diminished morale on the retention of staff of color:

There's some departments that desperately need, just really amazing leadership, to kind of get that morale back up, and I just don't see a lot of that happening. And so I think that's where a lot of the fear comes is like, is this gonna be something that can sustain me? Can I stay here? Or do I have to look for a job again?

This sentiment echoes another participant's perspective on the institution's performative DEI actions. Participant 7 questioned the needs for institutions to shift from performance to concrete, beneficial action, “how can I spark some thought that's going to lead into something else? That's more concrete. Right, that's gonna lead to some tangible actions. That's not just performative. Because performativity goes over really well here.”

Reflecting on their experiences with administrative support, or lack thereof, Participant 3 shared their feelings of being pushed aside, likening the institution's atmosphere to a corporate environment:

The shift that I saw [WCC] from when I started, it didn't make me feel like I really needed to stay. While there was still support within our own two
departments [equity centered]. Support from administrative leadership isn't and it wasn't there. And so I feel like... it would just be a big shift. And I also felt that our leadership team wasn't being supported as well, because we had so many interim positions in our departments, that it just felt like we were being pushed aside, it started to feel more corporate in a way.

There seems to be a disconnection between administrative leadership and staff of color expressed by several participants. The corporate shift highlighted by Participant 3 indicates an institutional move to prioritize more business-oriented focuses on profit or image by leadership.

Similarly, the impact of institutional dynamics on morale is evident in Participant 9 reflection on how the work environment led them to question their self-worth:

The constant overlook and gas lighting, made me, I kind of start thinking about, like, what I've been doing and my work performance, and other things, really questioning my self-worth for a moment. They got me down to a space where I started doubting myself a little bit.

Thus, improving staff of color morale is critical for retaining these valuable employees and ensuring institutions' successful transition towards a normative DEI commitment, which calls for concerted action in several areas, including dismantling toxic cultures, facilitating equitable change, investing in professional growth, and embracing cultural influences and community engagement. These actions directly affect morale and, if not adequately addressed, can influence staff departures across various institutions.

**The Inner Circle: Improving Conditions for Staff of Color**

Pacific Northwest community colleges' transformation from a performative to a normative stance on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) relies on four improvement
conditions: dismantling toxic culture, facilitating equitable change, investing in professional growth, and embracing cultural influence and community engagement. Interwoven and interactive, these four conditions are integral to bolstering staff of color morale and retention.

The first step, dismantling toxic culture, acknowledges the often-hostile working conditions for staff of color and challenges these institutions to establish initiatives to facilitate the much-needed equitable systems change. The next step, facilitating equitable change, involves creating practices and policies that alleviate promotional barriers and correct pay inequities for staff of color. At the same time, investing in the professional growth of staff of color is the third step in this journey to nurture the skill of racially diverse staff and provide opportunities for career advancement. Through this step, institutions can cultivate a diverse, empowered community, bolstering institutional knowledge while fostering the skills that empower staff of color to take up future leadership roles.

Finally, embracing cultural influence and community engagement entails recognizing and valuing the unique perspectives and contributions that a diverse staff body brings. It involves creating a culture that appreciates differences and encourages a more nuanced understanding of the world, contributing to a more prosperous, inclusive learning environment that values collective decision-making.

The continuous prioritization and integration of these four dimensions are essential for institutions aiming to create work environments that genuinely support staff
of color. More importantly, by doing so, they ensure that their staff feel recognized, valued, and celebrated, significantly improving their morale and increasing the likelihood of retention.

**Dismantling Toxic Culture**

The initial step in fostering improvement conditions is to *dismantle toxic culture*, which involves intentionally addressing racial issues that guarantee the safety and respect of staff of color, including acknowledging and challenging systemic racism, confronting power dynamics in hostile environments, and eradicating maltreatment of staff of color.

A stark illustration of a toxic environment comes from Participant 2, who described an incident at their urban institution that compelled them to work remotely out of fear for personal safety:

Someone sent me a racist email like enough to scare me to the point where I started working from home. I have not been back on campus since that email came in May. I'm like, I'm starting to get racist emails directed to me, and the response from leadership was, 'so when do you think you feel comfortable coming back to campus?'

Following their receipt of a racially abusive email, allegedly from a white supremacist student, the institution's leadership was notably dismissive. The hostile situation drove the participant to assert, "we get treated like shit, but I am here to help," highlighting the double burden of experiencing discrimination while simultaneously striving to instigate equitable change.

A similar lack of institutional commitment to dismantling toxic culture led to Participant 8's decision to leave their rural community college. They recounted several
colleagues of color exiting the institution around the same time, with the leadership's failure to address racial tensions as the critical factor. Participant 8 shared:

I don't think anybody, not once asked me how I was feeling. Like a friend yes, but leadership? No, no, they don't check in there's no room for negative emotions. Everything is 'we're doing great'. There was a time when the President sent out a message that I did not feel, gosh. To me, it was the beginning of the end, I think that it really just denied any institutional accountability, or, like, owning, you know, that racism is happening here. I told the president how these events [national and local racial incidents] can impact people or color, our students, our community. He really said, 'there's nothing we can do about other incidents happening', like in the national scene, just and really prioritize like, the center of whiteness. Yeah, definitely, it's a lot of toxic positivity. Like, 'everything's great, we're doing these are all the things', 'here's a list of things we're doing to fix this and make it great'. And I was like, you just undermine everything I'm here it blew my mind just Yeah, everything's great. Is the mantra.

The leadership's hollow reassurances, exemplified by an ethos of "everything's great," lacked an authentic commitment to acknowledging and addressing institutional racism, further exacerbating the toxic environment.

In another experience, Participant 4 recounted the challenge of navigating racial tensions while still striving to maintain productivity and support the broader college community. They said, "we were going through bad press around racial tensions on campus. And, I was facing racism and discrimination. But also, I was able to still, do my work." Despite the adverse conditions, many staff of color remain committed to their communities and driving systemic change.

**Facilitating Equitable Change**

The second essential improvement condition is facilitating equitable change, which requires a firm commitment to justice, interweaving equity and inclusion in all system transformations. The facilitating equitable change improvement condition ensures
institutional policies and practices are fair to staff of color. Key aspects of this condition include confronting power dynamics, rectifying discriminatory hiring practices and pay inequities, promoting diverse leadership, and providing mentorship and necessary resources to support staff of color.

Embedded racial biases within the PNW community college system lead to systemic obstacles that hinder the progress and advancement of staff of color. Illustratively, Participant 5 outlined the systemic oppression they face despite holding positions of power stating, “when you're a person of color part of a system that's designed to have barriers, regardless of your positionality in higher education, that system of barriers is always going to put us below the standard.”

Participant’s stories suggest, many institutions perpetuate inequitable practices, marked by overwork, pay disparities, and challenges to advancement. Notably, Participant 3 relayed their personal struggle with upward mobility:

I think one thing that would have kept me at [WCC] is if I would have been able to move upwards, which was no foul of my direct supervisors or my associate dean. They were doing everything they could to bump me up, but we were given million and one excuses as to why not. And we had a lot of interim positions for people of color, while a lot of white folks were getting bumped up right away, I never saw those positions open for interview processes or anything, but I do know that the positions within the departments that I work for, will need to go through an interview process.

Simultaneously, Participant 3 expressed frustration over seeing white colleague’s move effortlessly into permanent roles, while their peers of color were subjected to formal interview processes. The inequitable practices highlighted by Participant 3 further illustrated institution's human resources department serves as a barrier stating, “for us at
[WCC], it is our human resources department. Our hiring processes are inequitable, the way that we promote and grow employees from within there is literally no formal way to grow employees of color.”

Participants' testimonies consistently echoed concerns over unfair hiring practices. For instance, Participant 1 spoke about the inability for Black people to get permanent positions, despite serving in an interim role and doing the job:

We tend to also be put into interim roles. So we'll apply for an interim role, the permanent position will come along, and they won't hire the Black person that's been holding that space doing the job… ‘I've been doing this job, I've been here for years have been dedicated. I know the ins and outs, what are you talking about’, and not having a path for institutional growth for a number of our folks, a lot of our employees of color are in classified positions, and there's no pathway for them to grow.

Participant 1, also highlighted the continuous placement of Black people in lower level positions, such as classified roles that do not position them for institutional growth. However, once staff of color managed to rise to positions of power, they often face scrutiny and judgement upon being promoted, largely due to their racial identity.

Participant 5 highlights the burden of proving their worth:

We're fighting in a system that's already been in place. And when you are a person of color, and your put in a higher position of power, you're looked at twice as hard from your peers, like you're not doing enough. And not fast enough. And then by others saying, Oh, you're only getting more support because you're a person of color, when actually you're the right, fit for the position. That's why they chose you.

There is a persistent issue of bias, both unconscious and conscious, embedded within institutional culture. Participant 10 points to a pattern where white candidates are often preferred over equally or more qualified candidates of color, implying systemic
racism raising the issue of favoritism or nepotism in the hiring process by stating, “there was a lot of just like, hiring a white person over, somebody that was qualified, and they're a person of color, but it was like, oh, ‘this person knows somebody’ or, ‘they went to this school’…”

To counteract the perpetuation of white supremacist ideologies, it is essential that the process of dismantling toxic culture be coupled with facilitating equitable change. This improvement condition, facilitating equitable change, emphasizes the importance of recognizing and addressing systemic inequities, inconsistent hiring practices, unequal expectations, and more which is vital to investing in the professional growth of staff of color.

**Investing in Professional Growth**

Professional growth, career advancement, and personal development are fundamental aspects of job satisfaction and overall career success, and have proven to be critical for staff of color retention, illustrated by this study’s participants. For example, a lack of growth opportunities or being "stuck" in a role can lead to a high turnover rate among this group, as voiced by Participant 1:

The reason why I'm at [OCC] is because one, I actually have had growth opportunities. Like, I have had three different roles in three years. So, I think that for some people in the Black community, they've been around for 10 plus years and they get stuck in a certain at a certain level, or stuck in a certain role. But for me, growth opportunities is what kept me. I can see how if a person got stuck in a certain role, how they would leave, because I would to, I like to grow. I believe many of us have a lot to offer, but we're not always given the opportunity. Other colleges in Oregon and Washington are similar to [OCC]. I talk to a lot of people, and many of them have to go to other colleges to grow.
Furthermore, Participant 1 stressed the need for institutions to be intentional about internal growth, stating, "we as an institution, and I think institutions have to be intentional about growing from within; instead of going outside of the organization, create pathways for your own employees to grow."

Further expanding on this, Participant 5 elucidates the common career trajectory for people of color in higher education. Starting in low-wage roles, they often have to leave their current institutions to gain leadership experience and may eventually return in elevated positions. As stated by Participant 5:

I don't think it's common, for POC [people of color] to be promoted continuously. But I think it's common to start off as 1000 an hour to get full time employment in higher Ed. Then maybe have to leave the institution. Like most like most people of color, have to leave the institution, become a leader, and then possibly come back in a director role, a VP role.

The lack of continuous promotions within the same institution could be a key factor influencing this trend. It's important to understand that this not only represents a barrier to professional growth but also a waste of institutional knowledge and experience that could be retained if better career advancement pathways were established.

The necessity of leaving to grow implies a lack of professional development support within the institution. Participant 10 echoes this sentiment, while also envisioning the creation of a professional development group specifically for staff of color. As Participant 10 states:

I personally would love to see a faculty and staff of color, development, like, professional development kind of group. I think that could also really help, if we're talking about how to negotiate salaries, let's talk about, what it means to be a person of color, especially a black person or a brown person in higher ed., you know? But then we can also tack on advocating for more salary for people of
color on campus, whatever that looks like. Because in my career, I've never had a mentor. I never had somebody over me that would be like, 'hey, this is what I learned', and if I did, they were usually white and horrible. Like so or they just weren't able to help me.

Such a platform could be instrumental in discussions about salary negotiations and shared experiences of navigating the often tricky racial dynamics in higher education. This could also serve as a platform for mentorship, a crucial aspect of career growth and advancement. A shared experience in racial identity could foster deeper connections and understanding in a mentor-mentee relationship.

A lack of quality mentorship was a lamentation voiced by Participant 10, especially considering their negative experiences with white mentors. Indeed, not having anyone to look up to or guide one's professional journey can make the path seem more daunting, particularly when encountering challenges related to race. In navigating this landscape, Participant 6 brings up the concept of the "magical Negro" or being the exceptional person of color, where they mention how individuals who distance themselves from their racial identity and causes often find themselves in high administration. Participant 6, highlights:

One of the things I speak about in my presentation on allies, is the magical Negro. I borrowed this from the Key and Peele skit, and I feel here, if you want to be the only one, if you want to be the only magical Negro, you know, it kind of goes to your research, I think you'll do just fine. If you don't want to advocate for other staff, faculty, fellow recruits, I think you find yourself in high administration. If you distance yourself, you know, 'there's the Negro folk’, from other Black folks, And Black causes, right, and do like the mere token effort I think there's a future for that type of folk.

This notion illustrates the potential pressure on staff of color to assimilate or conform to white culture to be accepted or advance in their careers. Participant 8 echoes
this notion, commenting on the subtle cultural undertones that favor "whiteness" and discourage the expression of one's cultural identity. They mention how they've felt the need to seek BIPOC spaces to resist the pull towards cultural assimilation and the subsequent erasure of their identity.

The culture here doesn't allow you, if you don't act white. They're like, get out. That's how the school culture is and it's, it is subtle. I think that is opening up like for students, because if students are saying, ‘we want to have a multicultural club, they're [the institution] very supportive. If staff or like, the adults are saying, I want to act, in my culture, there are undertones of like, ‘that's not how you act here'. Like, you're not professional, this is an institution. Or it's just not supportive... Even I can be white passing and now I'm more aware of it. So I feel myself going towards that when I'm in that environment. So I have seek out like by BIPOC spaces, so that I'm not doing that as much and I'm learning the difference. So yeah, it was just this cultural pull and I left but the specific things that my new job has, a team of BIPOC people, I felt myself accommodating whiteness and didn't want to do that.

In contrast, Participant 4 found that their authenticity was welcomed and appreciated by other BIPOC individuals, creating a sense of connection and mutual support. By mentoring others in new administrative roles and encouraging them to embrace their identity, they provide an alternate narrative to the pressure to conform, embracing the value of mentorship and connection in fostering an environment of professional growth for staff of color. As Participant 4 states:

What I’ve gotten from mostly people of color, ‘thank you, thank you, yeah, thank you for being yourself, because it gives them permission to be themselves. So mostly, that's what I've gotten, like a connection between other BIPOC folks who are wanting to be themselves, and also I mentor other people in newer administrator roles, and things like that, and I tell them all the time, you need to come in as yourself, because our students need to see you, our staff needs to see you, other people, in yourself. And I haven't necessarily received a ton of pushback, except from some folks who feel like I should act a certain way in [leadership]. But other than that, it's like, mostly people are grateful.
To further facilitate career advancement and development, Participant 5 describes the positive impact of initiatives like the Administrators of Color Leadership Program and Dean's Academy. They speak of the value of these programs in expanding their networks, learning from others, and gaining crucial leadership skills.

One thing that helped me was professional development, I did the FSOCC [Faculty and Staff of Color Conference], NCORE, National Conference on Race and Ethnicity. One year did the Admin of Color Leadership Academy. I did the Administrators of Color Leadership Program. I did that. There's a Social Justice Institution. I haven't done that yet. But that's on my to-do list. I did Dean’s Academy. That was good cohort, we had a lot people of color. That's one thing I appreciated if you have folks that are looking for opportunities to learn from other folks, those are two great opportunities Dean’s Academy and also Administrators of Color Leadership Program. You have to apply for them, and your institution can pay for it… When I came into my [leadership] role, overseeing [department], I knew that none of the staff attended anything outside of [WCC]’s PDD. So I was like, alright, let's make sure you go whenever they start applying for make sure you apply and I'm gonna push for you to go. I also introduce them to people from other colleges to expand their network, I try to position them to get better jobs once they leave here.

Additionally, Participant 5 talk about the importance of networking, introducing their staff to people from other colleges to help them advance in their careers.

All these narratives emphasize the need for institutions to invest in the professional growth of their staff of color. Participants made it clear that a change is required at an institutional level, promoting professional development programs, creating pathways for career advancement, and encouraging mentorship and network building for the betterment of racially diverse staff.

**Embracing Cultural Influence and Community Engagement**

*Embracing Cultural Influence and Community Engagement,* draws on personal anecdotes and individual observations of professionals navigating their roles within
predominantly white institutions. As we delve into these narratives, interview participants made it evident that a shift towards a more inclusive, collaborative decision-making process is sorely needed, with racially diverse leadership at the helm.

Commencing with Participant 8's perspective, there is an apparent frustration with the lack of real influence among the staff of color. Efforts to impact policy changes have been met with little substantive advancement.

We don’t have any influence. We'd ask to work with HR, to make policy change, and they just wanted us to read and revise and not create. It didn't feel like we were really implementing changes to change the institution. It very much felt like we were there to check boxes… It was just a really challenging space to be in honestly, it didn't feel like we were really implementing changes or are empowered to change the institution.

Participant 9 echoes this sentiment, highlighting a lack of inclusion in decisions from higher-ups, most of whom are white.

The system has been very reactive, a lot of decisions come from above without any inclusion of our diverse population, and the majority of our leaders are white. They sent out a campus climate survey and nothing came out of that. I went off on that thing. I felt like it was a safe place to disclose things and to advocate for change, and nothing would come out of it.

Despite campus climate surveys, tangible actions or changes seem absent, leaving many to question the institution's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. This lack of institutional influence for staff of color reinforces the urgency for a shift in decision-making structures and inclusion practices.

Digging deeper into the issue, the tokenization of people of color in leadership roles, as revealed by Participant 9, exacerbates the institutional inertia.

With the whole BLM movement we finally embraced what DEI truly is, and created an Executive Diversity Officer, and it was just handed to our Director of
the Diversity Equity Inclusion Center, that rubbed a lot of people the wrong way, the way this person went about their leadership was not inclusive and just was only benefiting self. This person was a very a safe hire for [WCC]. What was clearly seen is the puppetry for lack of better word. It was very shady, you could not trust saying something to this [person], and they were just given the Executive Diversity Officer position. A lot of us were very upset, A LOT OF US, because we knew the magnitude of this position and what it can accomplish on this campus. We clearly saw, just where the institution is at…

A disturbing pattern of puppetry and gaslighting is brought to light, with the promotion of a 'safe hire' to an Executive Diversity Officer role raising eyebrows. The absence of transparency and inclusion further impedes the transformative potential of such a significant position.

The journey of Participant 6 reveals the recurring struggle for staff of color representation and the need for their institution to understand how to effectively recruit and retain a racially diverse staff. As Participant 6 explains:

I think [OCC] realize that because they've been talking a lot about that, like, we need to find a person who is at the front desk who speaks Spanish, we need to find one or the other library, you know, they always been talking about that. And I feel like they realize that, but they don't know how to get them, like how to recruit them. They always come to me and ask me, ‘Hey, [Participant 6], do you have people who speaks Spanish you think they are interested in these jobs?’ And so that's why I say they I made a commitment to change… I don't know. The only person that they hired was white and speaks Spanish… But what I was thinking, that oh, they always asking me, ‘please send us people, please. Like any people to apply for this job, like, especially if they are Hispanic or Latino and all that, and they never hire them. I would like to have more people of color there to help me with my job and work with LatinX students, and also I would kind of feel more comfortable that more people like me are there but I don't know.

The ability to serve the needs of diverse student populations is considerably enhanced when the institution’s personnel reflect those populations. However, amidst
these institutional challenges, the power of community building emerges as a beacon of hope.

Participant 7 and 5 both emphasize the importance of forming communities among staff of color. As Participant 7 explains a factor that contribute to their retention:

Another thing that keeps me at [OCC], you know, the people that I'm able to build community with, when I'm in spaces like this, where I see other brown folks or other people who have a, you know, some culture connected to them. You know, I'm pretty fair skinned, so you know, always have to be super bright. But I love seeing people of color. And having us just have a chance to just talk about our experiences, you know, those are safe spaces for me. And so that is what has actually kept me not necessarily, anything else. So I think when people don't have a sense of community, it is definitely harder, especially like a state like Oregon.

Participant 5 echoes the sentiments of Participant 7 and describe how they foster a culture of community:

I think I would say it's not more sort of the institution itself, but the culture of our staff and staff of color at [WCC] is strong. Like, we have our like, I have my team or my folks who I could just, you know, our Black and Brown committee like our meetings are fun, heartfelt, will we get our work done, right. So I think are having the community to be around your people is number one and highlighted for me. Whether it be in a meeting or non-meeting, the committee work, the support for each other is there and it's strong.

These connections provide a sense of belonging and an avenue to discuss shared experiences, thereby enriching the work environment. Emphasizing the strength of community, Participant 2 brings forth a poignant observation of how people of color value community, whereas individualism is value of white supremacy culture:

We are all conditioned to believe that community colleges are for the ‘community,’ and that they are more accepting and welcoming to ‘non-traditional’ students, i.e. older, poor, Black, of color, immigrants, DACA [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals], disabled, etc. Often ‘community’ is code for BIPOC [Black and Indigenous People of Color]… But you scratch the surface and see that community colleges are no different than four-year schools,
at the admin level “Equating community with BIPOC is the notion of ‘I’ is steeped in white supremacy culture—individualism. The notion of “we” as in community is generally how people of the global majority operate. So when you hear ‘community’ college most people don’t equate that to a community of white people…

Although community colleges are touted as more inclusive spaces, the administrative structures often mirror the white-majority bias present in four-year schools.

The conversation about embracing cultural influence and engagement cannot be complete without tackling the controversial topic of ‘white adjacency’ and ‘white passing’. Participant 1 observes that while hiring and promotions might give an impression of diversity, many of the individuals in these positions identify more with whiteness. The erasure of Black individuals from leadership positions particularly amplifies this concern.

If you were to look at the optics, visually, it might look like we actually have promoted and hired a number of people of color, right. But a lot of the people of color are white adjacent, or their white passing, just gonna be really honest. Culturally, they may even identify more with whiteness. But they could technically also be considered a person of color, they are not Black, though, at the same time we have done this reorg. And visually, it may seem that we’ve promoted a number of Hispanics, and we have, like a number of other folks of color like Indian and, people from Brazil or Pakistan, or what have you. We have literally erased Black people from leadership. We had [Black] people that were directors and campus presidents and just managers. And if you look at our reorg now, it’s like, ‘where’d the Black people go?’ which to me is phenomenal.

Participant 2 circles back to the systemic issue that perpetuates these challenges - a predominantly white institution that claims to want change but doesn't act to bring it about. This participant passionately advocates for a decisive move away from the practice of tokenism. The 'band-aid' solution of creating new positions without relinquishing
control undermines the substantive reform that could genuinely foster diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Because we work in a predominantly white institution that says they want to change the system, but they won't and are against it in their actions. And if you don't have the support to make these changes it’s not going to happen. I would love to have things change. I would love to change the system, but when you work in a PWI that doesn't understand what they are doing and are not willing to make sacrifice needed, to not be a PWI, we cannot change. Make sacrifices! White people need to vacate positions and fill them with Black and Brown people, and people with disabilities; whiteness needs to become the minority. They continue to add band-aids, like in this reorg, they not giving up positions, but creating new positions, which lowers the budgets, and now taking away from DEI budgets and closing these programs.

Through the stories of participants, a shared vision that PWN community colleges should authentically embrace the influences, inputs, and ideas presented by staff of color. Furthermore, this vision calls for a shift from monolithic decision-making to collaborative decision-making, with an intentional commitment to developing more racially diverse leadership.

**Links: Measurable Indicators**

*Measurable indicators* emphasizes the significance of celebrating and valuing racial diversity as the pivotal elements linking the four conditions for improvement to the continuum of an institution's commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). These measurable indicators, central to the ongoing institutional commitment journey, shape how staff of color evaluate their institutions' DEI initiatives and messaging. The four conditions for improvement work interchangeably and are assessed through these indicators.
While the institutional DEI commitment serves as a continuum, reflecting how institutions demonstrate their dedication, the measurable indicators operate in two modes: celebratory and value driven. Rather than treating these as mutually exclusive categories, PNW community colleges institutions should strive to celebrate and value racial diversity concurrently, thereby bolstering the morale of staff of color. Emphasizing this point, it's crucial to note that as community colleges in the Pacific Northwest adopt a normative DEI stance, staff morale improves, resulting in better retention rates and increased representation of staff of color.

To delineate the difference between celebrating and valuing racial staff diversity, participants consider celebrating racial diversity, as acknowledging and praising racial diversity and the benefits racially diverse staff bring to their institutions. On the other hand, valuing racial diversity, implies an authentic and deliberate investment in these staff of color, providing them with opportunities for growth and influence within institutional decisions.

By employing these measures, institutions can create a sense of belonging and community for staff of color. This, in turn, encourages the incorporation of cultural influences, paving the way for systemic change. These measurable indicators are a critical tool for PNW community colleges to evaluate their progress in fostering DEI through institutional messaging, programs, initiatives, and practices that demonstrated either a value-driven or celebratory approach, as highlighted by Participants’ experiences.
Celebrating Racial Diversity

Celebrating racial diversity revolves around important themes such as: institutions performing "lip service" without sincere action, insufficient recognition of important cultural occasions, the need for embracing and learning about other cultures, and setting aside white fragility. Many interview participants in this study acknowledge a disconnection between the words coming from their institutions and the action behind these words.

The train commonly referred to as "lip service," was prevalent throughout the experiences and perceptions of the PNW community college staff of color who participated in this study. Participant 7 describes a situation where the rhetoric of inclusivity does not translate into meaningful action.

I think for me it is with our institution, to talk the talk, but we’re not walking the walk. I’m like your actions are not matching up with your rhetoric. And, over the summer, we had a Black cultural festival here, there was a pride celebration here, there were different cultural events that took place, over the summer, and we don't often have a leadership presence within those cultural events.

Events like a Black cultural festival and pride celebration took place without consistent leadership presence, signaling a lack of genuine commitment from college leadership. Further expanding on the lack of genuine commitment, Participant 8 observed a lack of authenticity in the celebration of diversity by the white administration, highlighting how such events often feel performative rather than sincere.

You know, celebrating diversity, I feel like when I'm in BIPOC spaces, I feel the authenticity of that. A multicultural space we’re really trying to listen and create a new culture, right. Whereas the white admin won’t participate and that's because it's so performative for them. They're like, ‘Okay, here's your day, but I'm not gonna adapt or change anything I'm doing except for that one day to show up.’
That to me is the piece where there's this huge disconnect like they are not changing their culture or are willing to.

Participant 8 noted the discrepancy between the multicultural spaces that attempt to foster a new inclusive culture and the dominant white administration that is often unwilling to adapt or change their practices.

Participant 9 observed how diversity is often only acknowledged superficially through brief and non-substantive messages. They argue that the celebration of diversity should go beyond the performative and instead translate into intentional action plans.

I use the term celebrated as the lip service acknowledgment of diversity on campus. ‘You all play a huge part in the success of our students, here is an email about Cinco de Mayo, etc., and then move on. However, no action. I believe if you value something, then you will do an intentional action plan for it. There is no value in the sense of helping diversity, inclusion and help with belonging grow within. Meaning, no addition of classes that different communities of students can gravitate towards to learn more and see themselves in and no intentional professional development for faculty or staff of color.

Simultaneously, Participant 9 also highlight the lack of effort in providing an inclusive curriculum and professional development opportunities, which are vital to fostering a sense of belonging and growth among racially diverse staff.

Continuing, Participant 9 then mentions the introduction of culturally inclusive signage around the campus and related communications, indicating a degree of progress. However, they express dissatisfaction with the sporadic and selective nature of these celebrations, as not all communities are equally recognized or celebrated.

There's some signage now around campus with the, you know, ‘Indigenous Celebration’ of ‘Black, African American Celebration,’ just kind of signage, like, posters showcasing art, like, indigenous art, things like that. They are starting to send communication through email like, ‘hey, Happy, announce indigenous people’s day, things like that and educating what that means, and why we should
celebrate it. So there's a communication plan from the DIC you know, a lot of, not every, a lot of different ethnic celebrations and events. Its this 'we're gonna share out and educate the campus about it, and celebrate it like happy, you know. In my campus climate survey, I have said that I don't feel a sense of belonging, because my ancestry is never celebrated or listed on email. And again, we just had, and we're in, Latinx heritage month, and we had our Mexican Independence Day. Nothing, and it's been nothing for the past four years since I've been here. Not my people. Not at all.

Representation of all marginalized communities is an essential component of celebrating diversity. However, representation with correct information and physical representation from someone of that community is even more important. The Cinco De Mayo example given by Participant 10 illustrates an instance where a cultural celebration was reduced to a superficial party, devoid of its real meaning. They suggest that involving community groups, like the LatinX affinity group, in the planning of such events would help to ensure authenticity and prevent cultural misrepresentation.

A department was doing something for Cinco De Mayo. But it was like, oh, they wanted to like focus on what is really means, I was like, okay, I can I can take that. Of course it's all white people, and a few other people of color that weren't Latino, they are international. And so I was like, Okay, this is weird. But also it was just like a Cinco De Mayo party. There was like, slides going, and was just like, this is why we do this. But I was like, oh, but you'll have a mocktails of margaritas and a piñata. I'm like, no,” “I get what you were trying to do. But it didn't work. And next time why don't you partner with the LatinX affinity group? Its done for international students, which is fine. But again, it's like the International Department head is a white male, and I know him, but Cinco de Mayo is like exclusive to the U.S., and its racism” is like exclusive to the US. Thank you. And it's racism.

Finally, Participant 5 stresses that celebrating diversity is not only required but essential; however, they perceive white fragility as a barrier to embracing diverse cultures, and they urge for open-minded learning about other cultures' norms and nuances. They critique the dominant "American culture" narrative and advocate for a
deeper appreciation of diverse cultures as a part of the institutional commitment to diversity.

Celebrating diversity is needed and required, right? Everyone should be celebrated, and that's the place where fragility comes into place. We celebrate us and I mean, I'm talking about all of us here. We celebrate us so much, and they [white colleagues] get in their feelings. You don't have no damn culture. Let's be honest, what is American culture? Right. I mean, we can define what America culture is based on of our history books, right? America's culture is stealing, bloodshed, incarceration, enslavement, genocide, right? And the fact they want to change our history books is the problem. But that's what's so dope about celebrating diversity, you get to see, not only you, you get to see other people’s cultures and you can learn more. There's some things I am going to do, that’s gonna offend somebody unintentionally. There are other cultural norms and cultural innuendos that we are not aware of.

The experiences and perceptions of the PNW community college staff of color who participated in this study echoes the importance for their institutions to move beyond lip service and performative gestures in celebrating diversity. Furthermore, this study’s participants highlight the need for sincere, action-oriented commitment to celebrating racial diversity, and challenge their institutions to embracing learning about other cultures, setting aside white fragility, and ensuring equal recognition of all communities in cultural celebrations progressing to a state of valuing racial diversity.

**Valuing Racial Diversity**

Going beyond merely acknowledging the presence of racially diverse staff, *valuing racial diversity* involves intentionally investing in and nurturing their development. It entails cultivating an environment where staff of colors’ unique experiences are heard, validated, and used as a springboard for systemic improvements. Valuing diversity also means advocating for fair compensation. This not only ensures
economic justice but also sends a powerful message about the organization's commitment to acknowledge and rewarding the unique skills, perspectives, and contributions that staff of color bring to the table. Institutions must proactively address pay inequities and ensure that their reward systems are commensurate with the talent and efforts of their racially diverse workforce.

Participant 1 introduces the idea of financial investment as a clear indicator of value. They emphasize that the organization needs to back its statements of valuing diversity with tangible investments, not only in various initiatives but also in the people who make up the diverse workforce. As Participant 1 mentions:

You show what you value where you put your money, what you invest in, so that's a weird challenge in our organization with we're like we see you if you say you value this then you have put some money towards it. Period! And that includes your people.

Further elaborating on this theme, Participant 5 addresses the lack of financial recognition for staff of color who contribute to the organization's success with passion and dedication. They highlight the need for adequate payment and growth opportunities as forms of value, criticizing the existing system for its failure to meet these requirements.

For the folks who do this work for the passion. Why are you not a valuing them? Value should come in the form of payment and growth, but the system is not set up that way. If we find the right folks of color that can be on our campus, who are student center, why are we not paying them? And that's, that's the issue at [WCC]. Despite all of the accolades, we are the lowest paid in the state.

Participants express the importance for institutional leadership to recognize and validate the staff of color. Participant 4 points out how feeling undervalued led to their
decision to leave the organization, “you need the leadership who value you and your experience and are saying, okay, yes, like, what you have is important, you're valuable. I would have stayed if they valued me”. This statement highlights the potential consequence of institutions failing to show staff of color that they are valued: losing valuable employees.

Sharing their own experience, Participant 8 emphasizes the need for a supportive community within their institution, suggesting that such support can help validate employees of colors’ experiences and make them feel valued.

I did not have community at the community college I was at, and so nobody to really understand my experience or to debrief with and be like, I'm not crazy, this is really happening, so that was missing. Also, our administration did not show they valued they low number of staff of color they had. Show you value through institutional and professional growth, or supporting DEI initiatives, supporting my work, right?

Participant 8 advocates for institutional and professional growth, support for DEI initiatives, and recognition of their work as vital expressions of value.

Further supporting, Participant 8’s advocacy, Participant 9 offers an insightful comparison between two institutions they've worked at.

I'm a product of being homegrown. My philosophy on growing folks within the organization comes from [first WCC] during the five years of my career. I was home grown there. They developed me beautifully, got me these opportunities, conferences, etc., invested in me, which shows they care about me. Here at [second WCC] I don't feel like it's an organizational value to grow their employees, especially the employees of color. It takes it an organizational philosophy and I haven't seen in any of that. I had to push for it [professional development opportunities]. They don’t realize investment equals value and the action of that. Because one thing is lip service, the other thing is the action that comes with that lip service. After that, you could tell me you value me all the time.
Participant 9 contrast the nurturing, growth-oriented environment of their first institution with the perceived lack of similar values at the second. They emphasize the significance of investing in employees, especially employees of color, as a show of value and care. They caution against empty words without action, reiterating the theme of "lip service" discussed in the previous section.

Finally, Participant 3 brings the discussion back to the issue of pay equity, another strong indicator of value. They lament the loss of valuable employees due to inadequate compensation and call for greater efforts to retain diverse talent.

And not effective way I would say is just pay equity. Pay Equity sucks at [WCC], read the bottom of the ladder, when it comes to looking in our system, whether that'd be a leadership role, or it's an advisor or classify a role, oftentimes people of color are on the lower end. We lost a lot of great people, to other institutions, for leadership roles, and of course, everybody can’t grow in the same institution, but it sucks not to be able to retain them.

Valuing racial diversity encompasses several, also means however, fair compensation is essential. Fair compensation not only ensures economic justice but also sends a powerful message about the organization's commitment to acknowledge and rewarding the unique skills, perspectives, and contributions that staff of color bring to the table. Institutions must proactively address pay inequities and ensure that their reward systems are commensurate with the talent and efforts of their racially diverse workforce.

The stories by those who participated in this study collectively urge institutions to go beyond mere rhetoric and demonstrate their value for racial diversity through tangible actions. These include fair compensation, growth opportunities, validation of
experiences, support for DEI initiatives, and creating an environment conducive to community building and learning.

**Chapter 4 Summary**

In conclusion, the emergent theory, Double Dutch Retention, provides a comprehensive framework for addressing the persistent challenge of fostering racial staff diversity in higher education. Pacific Northwest (PNW) community colleges must transition from a performative stance to a genuine, normative institutional commitment to racial staff diversity. Such commitment involves valuing and celebrating racial diversity, not as an afterthought but as a fundamental part of the institution's identity.

The improvement conditions within the core of this framework offer a roadmap to crafting a supportive and empowering environment conducive to the success of staff of color. These conditions hinge upon embracing cultural influences and community engagement, facilitating systemic and equitable change, investing in professional growth, and dismantling toxic culture. By doing so, these PNW community colleges can create a climate that nurtures a sense of belonging, fostering a work environment where staff of color feel valued and heard.

The findings from this study have practical implications for practitioners who are working to enhance racial diversity among staff at PNW community college campuses. The key is to prioritize actions over mere words, ensure fair compensation, listen to the lived experiences of staff of color, and provide robust support for their professional growth.
Increasing racial staff diversity in higher education institutions calls for an intricate, multifaceted approach that genuinely considers and values the experiences, contributions, and needs of staff of color. By doing this, institutions not only cultivate a diverse and vibrant community, but also tap into a broader range of perspectives and talents that can only serve to enrich the educational experience they offer.

Through the effective implementation of the strategies proposed by the Double Dutch Retention framework, PNW community colleges can create an environment that bolsters staff of color morale. In the long run, these efforts will lead to a significant increase in racial staff diversity, contributing to a more dynamic, inclusive, and equitable academic landscape.
Chapter 5: Discussion of Results

This study focused on understanding the experiences of Pacific Northwest (PNW) community college staff of color to identify strategies to increase racial staff diversity at these institutions. Chapter five of this dissertation is dedicated to an in-depth discussion of the findings of this study, connecting the emergent theoretical framework, Double Dutch Retention, to surrounding literature. This chapter dives into the implications of this study for practical applications and possible areas for future research exploration. This chapter consists of multiple sections, each centering on the findings of this research and contributing to higher education literature.

The first section of this chapter summarizes the study, analysis, and results of the emergent theoretical framework, Double Dutch Retention. This exploration describes the functionality of the framework and its various components, encompassing the continuum sequence of institutional diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) commitment from performative to normative actions, centering the four improvement conditions.

The following section, situated in a larger context, contextualizes the applicability of the Double Dutch Retention Framework in addressing the perpetual challenge of higher education institutions fostering racial staff diversity. Furthermore, this section situates this study's findings in the context of literature surrounding higher education, the recruitment and retention of employees of color, and diversity. The discussion in this section pertains to the potential influence of these recommendations on institutional
policies and practices and their broader implications on the landscape of higher education.

The last section of this chapter adds recommendations for practical applications and strategies for PNW community colleges to adopt, grounded in the experiences and perceptions of staff of color. Along with the recommendations, this section introduces future directions for research, warranting further exploration and investigation, including the impact of the emergent theoretical framework on the retention rates of staff of color, followed by highlighting the potential applicability of this framework to various institutional types and phenomena.

**Summary of Study and Results**

This research study addressed the significant underrepresentation of staff of color at community colleges in the PNW, focusing on the complex obstacles these institutions encounter in retaining and recruiting non-white, non-instructional staff members in Oregon and Washington. This study sought to shed light on strategies to enhance the capacity of these institutions in attracting and retaining racially diverse staff. To achieve this, purposeful, convenient, and snowball sampling methods were employed to recruit participants, enabling data collection through surveys, individual interviews, and focus group discussions. These methodologies were instrumental in capturing the perceptions of staff of color regarding their institutions' commitment to fostering DEI, understanding factors influencing staff of color retention, and identifying essential measures for PNW community colleges to promote racial staff diversity.
The data analysis process consisted of three coding phases: initial, focus, and theoretical coding. The initial coding phase generated 56 initial codes, identifying four primary themes: organizational culture and leadership, cultural competence and belonging, community and support, and professional growth and equitable practices. These themes guided subsequent data collection and analysis, including the focused coding phase that refined the initial code into 28 categories, grouped into four distinct areas: performative DEI stance, normative DEI stance, celebrating racial diversity, and valuing racial diversity. Building upon these categories, the theoretical coding phase culminated in developing the emergent theory, 'Double Dutch Retention.'

The theoretical framework emerged as a comprehensive approach to addressing the ongoing challenge of enhancing racial staff diversity at PNW community colleges. The framework embodies four essential conditions that institutions need to improve to increase their staff of color population: dismantling toxic culture, facilitating equitable change, investing in professional growth, and embracing cultural influence and community engagement. These improvement conditions, embedded in the theoretical framework, can serve as a valuable guide for institutions seeking to progress along the continuum of intentional DEI commitment from performative to normative.

The findings of this study have significant implications for leaders, policymakers, and practitioners in community colleges. Moreover, they offer a valuable contribution to the existing body of literature in higher education, particularly in recruiting and retaining staff of color. By prioritizing the voices and experiences of the staff of color in PNW
community colleges, this research provides a critical perspective on the challenges and opportunities in promoting racial staff diversity.

**Interpretation of Data**

The data collected in this study discovered three fundamental conclusions regarding perceptions and experiences of staff of color in the PNW community college and their institutions' commitment to DEI. These fundamental conclusions substantially respond to our research objectives, shedding light on and giving meaning to the data collected.

1. There is a perceived representation disparity between staff of color and their white counterparts within PNW community colleges. Participants attribute this imbalance to the institution's performative actions, messaging, and approach toward embracing racial staff diversity.

2. Despite systemic barriers, participants remain motivated to work within PNW community colleges. Their motivation primarily stems from their community and desire to positively impact the lives of students of color and the broader community, fostering a sense of belonging and providing opportunities for personal and professional growth.

3. Participants have identified fundamental recruitment and retention practices essential to enhance racial diversity among staff. These practices include recognizing the value of staff of color, establishing equitable pay practices, fostering professional growth and leadership advancement for
staff of color, and diversifying college leadership and human resource departments to boost cultural competence across the institution.

Participants stressed the importance of prioritizing DEI in PNW community colleges' hiring and advancement processes within human resources and college leadership. Additionally, participants expressed a need for more robust data and analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of DEI initiatives and cultural climate within their respective institutions. These findings contribute to the literature on retention and recruitment of staff of color within higher education but mostly speak to the need to address racism in the U.S.

Colleges and universities must shift their strategic communications and actions to prioritize racial staff diversity. This prioritization demands a transformative approach that considers the impact of microaggressions, racial bias, and the lack of equitable policies and practices on staff, faculty, and students of color. The data supports the need for sustained efforts to embrace a culturally inclusive educational system that encourages critically evaluating staff of color's experiences and sense of belonging.

The experiences of the staff of color within PNW community colleges mirror broader systemic issues related to racism in the U.S. It emphasizes the need for comprehensive education reform that centers on intersectionality and racial justice to address racial biases and dismantle structures of inequality. It is critical to recognize that entrenched cultural values and behaviors may continue to conflict with the culturally responsive direction of our global society.
Key Findings & Themes

The data analysis uncovered four key themes that construct the core of the emergent theoretical framework and correlate with the essential findings and existing literature surrounding employees of color in higher education.

Organizational Culture & Leadership

The organizational culture and leadership deeply impact an institution's values, practices, and responses toward DEI actions, influencing other aspects such as professional growth, fostering community, and promoting authenticity. A positive and inclusive organizational culture and effective leadership lays the groundwork for successfully implementing other elements. Key findings include: accountable leadership demands that institutional leaders take ownership of hostile conditions and practice integrity; racially and culturally diverse administrators ensure the representation of staff of color at all institutional levels; heterogeneous human resource departments promote racially inclusive advocates on hiring committees and rely on position experts in hiring; transparent organizational strategies foster open communication and collaboration, centering faculty, staff, and students from underserved backgrounds.

Cultural Competence & Belonging

Establishing cultural competency and a sense of belonging is critical for staff of color's connection and sense of belonging within their institution. Key findings include cultural sensitivity training enhances understanding and appreciation of colleagues' cultural differences and input; embodying authenticity empowers staff to bring their
whole selves to work, boosting productivity; affinity-based networks foster connections among colleagues with similar experiences and backgrounds; cultivate a culture that promotes healthy social justice training and education for all staff and faculty, including leadership.

**Community & Support**

Forming community and support institutes a supportive environment that recognizes the importance of work-life balance and the holistic nature of staff of color. Key findings include community engagement establishes trust with people from underrepresented backgrounds; community empowerment strengthens the connection and trust between the institution and communities of color; providing support and cultural resources alleviates culture shock and helps staff of color acclimate to the community; professional mentorship guides and supports staff of color in navigating predominantly white spaces.

**Professional Growth & Equitable Practices**

Centering professional growth and equitable practices increases job satisfaction of staff of color, contributing to higher retention rates. Key findings include developing leadership academies empowers staff of color with the necessary leadership skills and knowledge allowing room for upward mobility; streamlining pathways to administration clarifies progression routes for aspiring staff of color to leadership roles; pay equity ensures fair compensation for the work of staff of color; acknowledging systemic racism
involves recognizing the historical and systemic barriers that have impeded the advancement of staff of color.

**Situated in a Larger Context**

To fully appreciate the significance of the insights gathered from this study, it is essential to place them within a broader context that considers theoretical literature and practical implications. Doing so fosters a culture that normalizes equity and inclusion. By situating the findings within a broader range of understanding, they become more meaningful and gain greater significance. This section builds on the literature review conducted during the research and explores how the findings align with existing scholarly work. This examination enables a deeper exploration of connections between the study's discoveries and the existing body of knowledge. Conducting this comprehensive investigation facilitates a more thorough understanding of the future implications that may arise.

The application of conceptual frameworks provided a valuable structure and perspective that facilitated this research's design, analysis, and interpretation, guided by a constructivist worldview. The conceptual framework highlighted key themes, categories, and factors that influence the retention of staff of color. The theoretical integration of Harro's (2000) Cycle of Liberation is incorporated into this analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of staff of color. This integration aligns seamlessly with the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2, Harro's (2000) Cycle of Socialization, and offers valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by staff of color.
in higher education settings. Intertwining these cycles sheds light on the potential for institutional transformation and the transformative power of embracing a normative commitment to DEI.

The Double Dutch Retention framework argues and informs existing theories and concepts to pinpoint convergence, divergence, or extension, thereby strengthening the theoretical foundation of the study's overall framework. Furthermore, this section explores components of the Double Dutch Retention Framework, formulated in Chapter 4, as a comprehensive roadmap for PNW community colleges in their pursuit of normalizing a commitment to equity and inclusion. This exploration sheds light on how the framework intersects with the Cycle of Liberation and other relevant theories.

The subsequent sections delve into the analysis and interpretation of the data, exploring the ramifications of these findings for higher education, academic literature, and their relationship to racism in the United States. This comprehensive analysis will enhance the understanding of this study's implications and pave the way for future research and action in pursuing an authentic commitment to DEI in higher education institutions.

The Cycle of Liberation in Context

The Cycle of Socialization, a concept introduced by Harro (2000), was used as a theoretical lens in this study to comprehend the experiences and perceptions of staff of color concerning the lack of racial diversity in higher education institutions. This framework and its counterpart, the Cycle of Liberation (Harro, 2000a), illuminates why
the PNW needs to address the significant underrepresentation of staff of color at all levels.
Figure 3. The Cycle of Liberation

Source: Developed by Bobbie Harro
The Cycle of Socialization critically analyzes societal roles in perpetuating systemic oppression. In contrast, the Cycle of Liberation, shown in Figure 3, depicts the ongoing efforts to eradicate oppression through social change. Furthermore, the Cycle of Liberation aims to transform the Cycle of Socialization by integrating psychological, sociological, theoretical, analytical, and practical concepts, resulting in a manageable system that fosters societal change driven by diversity and community. The latter cycle validates the conceptual foundation for addressing power dynamics, fostering an environment that values staff of color, and working intentionally towards justice in a mutually beneficial system.

Liberation is a 'critical transformation' that spurs significant social change by identifying and challenging flawed systemic assumptions, structures, rules, and roles. It calls for increased awareness to transform habits, encouraging systemic-level thinking (Freire, 2000; Harro, 2000a; Love, 2014). The heightened understanding of oppression motivates individuals to question existing systems, promoting transformation and collective liberation (Duhigg, 2012; Freire, 2000; Harro, 2000a).

Harro's (2000a) Cycle of Liberation model presents an intentional approach to addressing systemic oppression and achieving social change. It arises from the frustrations experienced by socially conscious individuals who recognize the necessity of system-level transformations. The model identifies common patterns and traits that contribute to successful liberation efforts. Rather than a strict step-by-step process, it offers a guiding framework that institutions can utilize to promote social change and
empowerment. While the process is nonlinear, it offers a navigational structure for individuals as they embark on their paths toward liberation, acknowledging diverse starting points and various progress speeds. The model consists of eight stages facilitating social change on individual, interpersonal, and systemic levels. Each stage aligns with various aspects of staff of color experiences as expressed by participants in this study:

**Stage 1: Waking Up**

The process of liberation unfolds when individuals undergo a transformative shift in their perception of themselves and the world around them. The "waking up" phase challenges deeply ingrained beliefs and assumptions, whether triggered by a critical incident or gradual realization. In this study, participants expressed their "Waking Up" when they started questioning and recognizing the often oppressive practices and policies within their institution. Several participants reported institutional practices perpetuating racial bias, such as assigning staff of color to interim roles while directly appointing their white counterparts or favoring white Spanish-speaking candidates over an equally qualified person of color.

**Stage 2: Getting Ready**

The "Waking Up" process often initiates a "getting ready" stage, where individuals consciously deconstruct and reconstruct aspects of themselves and their worldview based on newfound understanding. This stage involves continuously raising consciousness through education, reflection, and exploring different perspectives. It entails dismantling erroneous or limiting beliefs, addressing discriminatory attitudes, and
adjusting behaviors that hinder professional growth and the well-being of others.

Concurrently, individuals strive for coherence and authenticity by aligning their beliefs, values, and actions. In the context of this study, staff of color actively questioned various institutional processes, rules, norms, and policies. They sought professional development, engaged in self-reflection, and sought mentorship to make sense of their experiences and perceptions. Many interview participants expressed that their increased self-worth allowed them to show up authentically and genuinely in their work, resulting in improved morale and productivity.

**Stage 3: Reaching Out**

During our "getting ready" stage, individuals must seek experiences beyond their own, validating their new perspectives and embracing a broader range of diversity. This phase involves actively practicing their skills and tools, expressing their evolving views, and speaking up when disagreeing instead of remaining silent. Through this "reaching out" stage, individuals receive valuable feedback on how others receive their transformed worldview. While the status quo may pressure some to conform, others actively offer support and forge new connections to take a stand on previously avoided issues. In this study, participants demonstrated the "reaching out" process by actively seeking various perspectives and challenging their existing realities and ways of thinking. These participants engaged in self-reflection and skills development to assess how their colleagues perceived their newly developed worldviews. Many participants also took part in professional development opportunities where they shared their experiences and
connections with other staff members of color. Some participants expressed how their genuine selves and shifted positions resulted in positive responses from colleagues with increased impact.

**Stage 4: Building Community**

A shift in social values characterizes the interpersonal phase of the liberation process and engages with each other, focusing on building community and dialogue. This stage involves two steps: connecting with individuals who share similar experiences to gain support and learning and engaging in conversations with different people to foster understanding and form alliances. These dialogues create a space for exchanging views, listening, and valuing diverse perspectives, leading to a sense of belonging, and shared commitment to change oppressive systems. It requires challenging stereotypes, finding common ground, and recognizing the impact of oppression on both the empowered and disempowered populations. In this study, participants emphasized the importance of community in fostering critical change. Some interview participants surrounded themselves with social groups aligning with their identities and engaging in courageous conversations. Most interview participants participated in diversity councils and committees to challenge leadership, advocate for their colleagues, and support their communities.

**Stage 5: Coalescing**

After forming alliances and dismantling barriers, the coalescing stage builds on motivation and rallies with allies to actively move in a direction that challenges and
disrupts the system. Through establishing avenues of support through social groups, allies, organizations, or diversity workgroups, change agents gain the confidence, hope, trust, and power needed to overcome oppressive barriers. The participants in this study called out their institutions' performative actions that negatively impacted their experiences. A specific example was when a participant raised concerns about the mass exodus of people of color, bringing this experience to leadership's attention. However, some participants mentioned the backlash they faced in response to their advocacy efforts.

**Stage 6: Creating Change**

In this stage of the Cycle of Liberation, individuals leverage their critical analysis and coalition power to transform oppressive systems. Creating change involves creating a new culture with revised assumptions, structures, roles, and rules prioritizing social justice and equity. Worldviews shift to embrace the values of a diverse and united community, forging partnerships across differences to amplify shared power and influence. Through leadership, risk-taking, and guiding change, there is a profound transformation where nothing remains unchanged. Creating change involves shifting power dynamics, healing from past trauma, and redefining organizational leadership and collective power. Many participants felt empowered to speak up against biased-based policy; however, they discussed their lack of institutional influence and, how their comments, and suggestions are often overlooked or not implemented. They highlighted how the leaders of color often assimilated or did not advocate for people of color and
emphasized the need for college leadership and human resource departments to intentionally hire people of color in positions that can drive systemic change.

**Stage 7: Maintaining**

Ensuring systems change requires ongoing reinforcement, monitoring, and integration into daily routines. The maintaining stage capitalizes on the resources, perspective, and creativity to strengthen, monitor, and integrate new perceptions and policies into societal norms. It recognizes that no institution will be perfect but allows room for making inclusive alterations through working together to pursue the common goal. Participants expressed their desire to normalize an environment conducive to staff of color, with some participants in leadership positions highlighting the importance of authenticity and their decisions to not assimilate to white supremacist professional standards and serving models for younger professionals who may feel pressured to conform. They also mentioned creating race-based affinity groups and complementing initiatives like "Diversity Day" implemented by a new community college president of color.

**Stage 8: Core of Cycle of Liberation**

At the heart of the Cycle of Liberation lies a set of qualities that sustain and evolve throughout the process. These qualities exist individually and collectively and grow stronger with each phase and human connection. Liberation entails an unwavering commitment to critical transformation, equity, and justice and is rooted in love, and embracing others with their differences. Liberation also encourages balance, increased
competence, a belief system based on successes, joy, togetherness, a commitment to continuous change, and compassion within our coalitions. The final stage turns liberation into a self-propelling system. The core aligns with the most significant findings of this study regarding staff of color morale, contributing to the increase of racial staff diversity at PNW community colleges. This core is where normative institutional DEI actions permeate through every institutional level.

Harro's (2000a) Cycle of Liberation serves as a counterpoint to the Cycle of Socialization, illustrating how institutions can break free from systemic oppression and engage in transformative action. This study draws upon both frameworks and clarifies the complexities of recruitment and retention and the barriers PNW community colleges face while highlighting their agency and capacity for resistance and change. With a strong correlation to the Double Dutch Retention framework, the Cycle of Liberation strengthens the analytical foundation of this study.

**The Double Dutch Retention Framework in Theory and Practice**

Integrating the Double Dutch Retention framework into existing literature illuminates the vital connection between theory and practice. It highlights the critical need to address systemic barriers that hinder staff diversification within higher education. Previous research discussed the challenges colleges and universities face in recruiting and retaining employees of color. This study reinforces existing literature by further exploring staff of color retention and introduces the Double Dutch Retention framework as a strategic approach to address these challenges. This framework's components resonate
with existing literature, strengthening the potential to address the persistent underrepresentation of staff of color in higher education. The parallels between the framework's elements and the stages of the Cycle of Liberation further validate the findings of this study. Incorporating the Cycle of Liberation stages into the Double Dutch Retention Framework, we can draw the following direct connections:

**Practice: Performative vs. Normative Institutions**

Performative actions emerged as a common theme throughout the data collection and analysis phases. It refers to the superficial support privileged individuals show towards marginalized causes without taking real action. Morris (2020) highlights the harm and inaction associated with performative allyship, which often serves as a cover while projecting support for marginalized groups. In higher education, performative DEI is pervasive, where institutions prioritize appearances over addressing systemic inequities (Smith, 2019). Participants in the study shared their observations of their institutions engaging in performative actions to secure funding or political gains. These observations align with Morris' (2020) argument that organizational leaders may resort to performative allyship to safeguard their institution's reputation without implementing substantial changes.

Performative allyship actions are often disingenuous, harmful to marginalized groups, and serve as a shield to avoid criticism (Morris, 2020; Smith, 2019; Turner & Myers, 2020). By connecting these perspectives, it becomes clear that PNW community
colleges must move beyond performative actions and strive for a normative DEI stance that genuinely values and supports racial staff diversity.

The "Waking Up" stage aligns with identifying performative DEI actions. In this study and existing literature, staff of color recognizes patterns of inequitable practices, hostile working conditions, tokenism, and the pressure to assimilate, sacrificing their identities (Aiello, 2020; Flaherty, 2020; Steele, 2016; Solomon, 2018). They experience the reality of performative DEI, where diversity and inclusion are projected for optics but lack tangible actions or meaningful system changes. For higher education institutions to transition from performative to normative DEI stance, staff of color must not only be aware of inequitable policies and practices within their institutions but also require higher education administrators and leadership to be aware and take action (HECC, 2016; Flaherty, 2020; Steele, 2016).

**Practice: Dismantling Toxic Culture**

The need to dismantle toxic culture is critical to addressing systemic racism and power dynamics within higher education institutions and aligns with the literature (Higher Education Coordinating Commission, 2016). Unfortunately, many community colleges foster monolithic institutional practices that discount the perceptions and experiences of staff of color (Griffin, 2020; Levin et al., 2014; Dalton & Thompson, 2019). As a result, many staff of color work in hostile work environments that produce burnout, eventually leading to their departure (Aiello, 2020; Flaherty, 2020; Harden, 2016; Levin et al., 2014). This improvement condition embraces the 'Getting Ready' and
'Creating Change' stages of the Cycle of Liberation due to the nature requiring a shift in questioning societal messages and to create meaningful system change (Flaherty, 2020; Harro, 2000; Levin et al., 2014; Love, 2000).

As expressed by participants, this recognition of toxic work environments fostering white supremacy necessitates concerted efforts to dismantle toxic work environments. There are significant costs associated with change, such as with white staff experiencing fragility and accusing any equitable changes as reverse racism, in fear of being replaced or losing power (DiAngelo, 2018; Harro, 2000; Blake, 2021; Bump, 2022; Garcia-Navarro, 2021; Irving, 2014; McIntosh, 1988; Miller-Idriss, 2022).

Consequentially, participants reported facing racial gaslighting, forced assimilation, and tokenism and receiving significant backlash for speaking up against racist acts, consistent with other community college employees of color nationwide (Aiello, 2020; Levin et al., 2014; Harden, 2016; Solomon, 2018). DiAngelo (2018) termed the concept of, White Fragility, as a state in which a small amount of racial stress becomes intolerable for white individuals, leading to defensive reactions such as anger, fear, and guilt, instigating behaviors such as arguing, remaining silent or existing situations. Racial stress occurs when there is a disruption to what is racially familiar with triggers such as questioning a white person's viewpoint, people of color sharing their racial perspectives, or people of color not prioritizing the racial feelings of white individuals in a white dominant environment (DiAngelo, 2018; Harro, 2000; Tatum, 2017; Irving, 2014; McIntosh, 1988).
Participants highlighted that more white colleagues and colleagues of color are educating themselves and engaging in introspection about societal conditioning; they begin to question established processes, norms, and policies. This reflective and critical process creates the conditions necessary for dismantling toxic cultures, setting the stage for genuine systemic change.

**Practice: Facilitating Equitable Change**

Harro (2000a) highlights the transformative potential when individuals gain a deeper understanding of their role within an oppressive system, leading to motivation for social change and liberation. This perspective becomes relevant when staff of color, aware of their positions and the power dynamics within their institutions, take steps towards effecting social change and embark on a journey towards empowerment.

The Double Dutch Retention framework principles are echoed in the "Creating Change" stage of the Cycle of Liberation, highlighting the need for equitable policies and practices to address pay inequities, biased hiring, and advancement barriers faced by staff of color—issues frequently discussed in the literature. Pay equity emerged as a critical factor for promoting the equitable practice in alignment with numerous studies that indicate employees of color are significantly underpaid (Burke, 2020; Lumpkin, 2007; Wilkinson, 2007). Participants in this study expressed their experience often serving on multiple committees, mentoring students of color, and proving to be valuable assets to their institutions, and therefore deserve higher compensation for their substantial contributions (Harden, 2016; Steele, 2016; Konrad et al., 2006; Wilkinson, 2007).
Despite facing inequitable pay and other challenges, staff of color serving at PNW community colleges indicated a strong passion and motivation derived from community empowerment.

Several participants in this study expressed empathy for new hires, rejecting the idea of subjecting them to inequities and toxic conditions (Moody, 2004; Lumpkin, 2007). The participants in leadership leveraged their positions of power and understanding of oppressive systems to instigate equitable change within their institutions. They challenged power dynamics, promoted a culture that authentically embraced diverse identities, and advocated for their fellow staff of color. These actions align with the principle of the "Creating Change" stage of the Cycle of Liberation.

Facilitating equitable change calls for intentional actions from college administrations and leadership (Hughes, 2015; Lumpkin, 2007; Turner & Myers, 2020). To enhance recruitment and retention efforts, Wilkinson (2007) suggests organizations should provide the necessary support to top candidates of color, ensuring they receive the salary and resources they need.

Aligning with this approach, the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Committee (2016) and the Washington Student Advancement Council (2013) advocate for incorporating diversity and inclusion into strategic planning efforts while establishing supportive structures for staff from underrepresented backgrounds. When combined with components of the Double Dutch Retention framework, this improvement condition emphasizes the urgent need for PNW community colleges to establish equitable practices.
Practice: Investing in Professional Growth

As suggested by participants in this study, the Double Dutch Retention framework advocates the importance of investing in the professional growth of staff of color to cultivate the development of racially diverse leaders internally while retaining institutional knowledge. While the Double Dutch Retention framework emphasizes the importance of investing in professional growth, it does not directly correlate with the stages of the Cycle of Liberation. However, it encompasses various components of all improvement conditions and aligns with the principles of the Cycle of Liberation.

Burke (2020) and other researchers (Dobson & Conway, 2003; Aiello, 2020; Levin et al., 2014; Steele, 2016) have pointed out the underrepresentation of staff of color in positions of power, with many occupying lower-level service positions. Research indicates that staff of color frequently face challenges in their career progression, with evidence suggesting that they often experience being overlooked for promotional opportunities compared to their white counterparts (Levin et al., 2014; Steele, 2016; Moody, 2004; Lumpkin, 2007; Trower & Bleakney, 2017).

Interestingly, in this study, participants mentioned how they and their colleagues sought promotional opportunities but were turned down. Participants also often found themselves and colleagues serving in interim positions or having to leave their institutions and return to serve in higher positions. Further, several participants in this study discussed their college’s reorganization that wrote leaders of color out of positions of power and replaced them with white-passing or assimilating leaders of color. Despite
these barriers, participants demonstrated commitment to personal and professional
growth and persistence in obtaining promotional opportunities.

The value of staff of color professional growth opportunities is vital for promoting
staff of color retention within PNW community colleges (Harden, 2016; Hughes, 2015).
Steele (2016) argues that providing professional development opportunities that lead to
promotional advancement can significantly improve staff of color retention rates. A few
participants attributed the opportunities they have to what is keeping them at their
institutions and highlighted their experience starting as a part-time employee and working
their way to a high-level position. Along the way, these participants mentored and
uplifted other overlooked colleagues of color, Acknowledging their path was uncommon;
they attributed their success to their mentor, continuous professional development
opportunities, and leveraging their involvement on various committees without
compromising their cultural identity. Multiple participants expressed their appreciation
for their institutions promoting continuous professional development which shows the
colleges are investing in their professional growth.

**Practice: Embracing Cultural Influence & Community Engagement**

The improvement condition, embracing cultural influence and community
engagement, recognizes the importance of centering the needs of racially diverse faculty,
staff, and students in every institutional decision-making process. Centering the needs of
racially diverse staff, faculty, and students includes reaching out to and building trust
within the local community, developing inclusive programs and initiatives, and
promoting campus-wide cultural competence to ensure equity in every policy and practice (Collins & Williams, 2018; Trower & Bleakney, 2017; Harro, 2000a). The Higher Education Coordinating Committee (2016) emphasizes the need to address systems of power and privilege, recognizing the influence of individuals in these positions on college social and learning environments and promoting intercultural exchange with diverse higher education professionals. Similarly, participants emphasized the need for institutional efforts to go beyond superficial measures such as listening sessions and surveys and instead take intentional actions led by a diverse college leadership to effectuate real change.

In the “Creating Change” stage of the Cycle of Liberation, it becomes pivotal to cultivate a culture that embraces diverse identities and equitable perspectives, shaping policies, practices, and organizational development (Trower & Bleakney, 2017; Flaherty, 2020; Harro, 2000a; Steele, 2016; Levin et al., 2014). Simultaneously, the “Maintaining” stage works in this improvement condition highlighting the importance of authenticity and cohesion in the relationship between institutions and staff of color. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that staff of color should not shoulder the burden of leading diversity efforts without proper compensation, resources, and authority (Harden, 2014; Konrad et al., 2006; Levin et al., 2014; Steele, 2016; Flaherty, 2020).

Participants in this study emphasized the lack of cultural and institutional influence they face, with their voices often going unheard and their inputs disregarded. Despite being sought after for their expertise by college leadership and diversity
committees, they encounter resistance, dismissal, and insufficient support and resources in their efforts to effectuate change (Aiello, 2020; Levin et al., 2014; Steele, 2016; Flaherty, 2020). However, if the unique experiences and knowledge of the staff of color are valued and supported, they can offer diverse perspective-based approaches that enrich institutional decision-making (Aiello, 2020; Burke, 2020; Flaherty, 2020; Flaherty, 2021; Griffin, 2020).

Participants also highlighted the importance of community empowerment and the value of collaboration through building partnerships beyond the college. They emphasized that community engagement is not a priority within institutional contexts and how some participants lack institutional support when hosting diversity programs and events where they collaborate with community partners and involve students to promote cultural relevance and inclusivity. The participants involved in the greater community that received institutional support reported how it benefited their students; for example, they highlighted how instructors would take their whole classes to cultural events and programs so that their students are informed and learning.

Participants in this study value collaboration with the community, colleagues, and other community partners, yet staff of color experience alienation due to a lack of community, which drives them to seek safe external spaces, highlighting the impact of individualism within the institutional culture (DiAngelo, 2018; Levin et al., 2014; McIntosh, 2018). It is critical to acknowledge that staff of color often feel compelled to compromise their social and cultural identities, and their perception of institutional
culture differs from that of their white counterparts, significantly shaping their experiences within the professional world (Harden, 2016; Levin et al., 2014; Steele, 2016). Integrating these diverse perspectives in college leadership and fostering a mutual understanding to achieve collective systemic change can create an environment that inspires hope and nurtures a genuine and safe atmosphere for staff of color (Trower & Bleakney, 2017; Flaherty, 2020; Harro, 2000a; Steele, 2016; Levin et al., 2014).

**Practice: Celebrating & Valuing Racial Diversity**

The celebration and valuation of racial diversity are essential components of the Double Dutch Retention framework, as participants often brought up concepts around “celebrating” and “valuing” racial diversity. Participants pointed out that celebrating diversity can sometimes appear performative, notably when it lacks a genuine commitment to adapt or change the multicultural space. This discrepancy suggests a correlation between the superficial celebration of diversity and a lack of substantive efforts to address systemic issues or foster meaningful cultural change within the institution. In this context, the concept of value goes beyond symbolic gestures and requires recognizing the importance of diverse perspectives and contributions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Harper & Quaye, 2009).

Participants highlight numerous diversity-focused events and programs such as Unity Week, MLK Week, LGBTQIA Week, and Indigenous People Day, which serve as examples of celebrating diversity within PNW community colleges. However, a recurring theme across these reflections is the perceived disconnect between a superficial
celebration of diversity and the absence of substantive efforts to address systemic issues or create meaningful cultural change within the institution. Furthermore, participants emphasized that actions speak louder than words, suggesting that directing resources and investments reflects true value.

Participants in this study expressed a strong desire for intentional and tangible actions that center racial diversity in every institutional decision-making process. This desire shows their deep commitment to promoting and valuing racial staff diversity. The qualities found in the “Maintaining” and “Core” stages of the Cycle of Liberation align with these measurable actions, as they are essential in fostering a culture of celebrating and valuing staff of color. At these stages, the goal is to reinforce and integrate new perceptions, policies, and practices that value and normalizes diversity and justice at all instructional levels (Harro, 2000a; Love, 2000). Achieving liberation requires finding balance within collaborative agendas, facilitating progress toward shared goals, and establishing a self-perpetuating system. It is important to note that liberation is not an individual journey but a collective one built on mutual support, encouragement, and trust (Harro, 2000a; Love, 2000). Therefore, community college leadership needs to recognize and acknowledge the importance of diverse perspectives, the experience of staff of color, and their working contributions.

Integrating theory and practice provides practical strategies for improving staff of color experiences and representation in PNW community colleges, ultimately fostering a more diverse and inclusive educational environment. This integration of theory and
practice provides practical strategies for improving the representation of staff of color in PNW community colleges. Participants express a strong desire for tangible actions that align with stated values. The Double Dutch Retention framework, consistent with the literature, emphasizes the importance of moving beyond performative gestures and invites higher education institutions to truly celebrate and value racial diversity by promoting authentic inclusion, active acknowledgment of the value of racial staff diversity, and the creation of inclusive and affirming environments (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Harper & Quaye, 2009).

Concluding the Situated in a Larger Context

This study bridges theory and practice by intersecting the Double Dutch Retention framework with the Cycle of Liberation, highlighting the pressing need for systemic changes in PNW community colleges. This integration reinforces this study's contribution to understanding staff of color recruitment and retention in PNW community colleges and provides a practical, implementable framework for increasing racial staff diversity.

The subsequent section explores the implications of these findings, offering further insights into the Double Dutch Retention framework’s practical utility for PNW community colleges and its broader potential to influence higher education.

While exploring these components, the theoretical implications interweave with the practical possibilities for real change. The study extends the understanding of recruiting and retaining staff of color by providing a research-backed blueprint to combat underrepresentation. This alignment of the Double Dutch Retention framework with the
Cycle of Liberation and existing literature reinforces the study’s theoretical rigor and applicability, spotlighting its potential to bring meaningful, enduring transformation within PNW community colleges and beyond.

Finally, this study points towards potential avenues for future research, including exploring how the Double Dutch Retention framework could be implemented and assessed in other higher education contexts. It also raises important questions about the role of leadership in fostering normative DEI practices and how institutions can effectively dismantle toxic culture. By continuing to explore these and related issues, future research can build on this study’s foundation and contribute to a more inclusive and equitable future for higher education.

In the specific context of the PNW, the study opens up new avenues of action for community colleges grappling with staff of color retention and recruitment issues. By incorporating these findings into their strategic planning, these colleges can disrupt the cycle of underrepresentation and create equitable, inclusive environments that genuinely value racial staff diversity. Beyond the PNW, this study contributes significantly to the broader discourse on diversity and inclusion in higher education, offering a model that other institutions can adapt to their contexts.

In conclusion, integrating the Double Dutch Retention framework with the Cycle of Liberation offers valuable insights for disrupting the cycle of underrepresentation in higher education. By embedding these insights into practical strategies, PNW community colleges—and higher education institutions more broadly—can promote meaningful,
sustainable change, fostering an environment that truly values, celebrates, and empowers staff of color.

**Implications for Practice & Research**

The findings from this study carry significant implications for higher education, retention and recruitment, and the existing literature on employees of color. These findings provide valuable insights into how PNW community college staff of color perceive their institution can increase racial staff diversity. The research raises critical considerations in practice and research, resonating across higher education, retention and recruitment, and the literature on employees of color. The research questions focused on understanding staff of color's perceptions of their institution's DEI commitment, their motivation to continue working despite systemic barriers, and effective practices for recruiting and retaining racially diverse staff. The following outline summarizes the implications of the findings for each research question:

**Research Question 1:** The perceptions of staff of color regarding their institution's commitment to DEI reflect the need for more concrete and genuine efforts to address racial disparities. The findings highlight the importance of moving beyond performative actions and implementing normative practices that foster an inclusive and equitable environment.

**Research Question 2:** The motivations of staff of color to continue working at community colleges in the face of systemic barriers emphasize the significance of supportive and empowering work environments. Institutions should prioritize creating
opportunities for personal and professional growth, cultivating a sense of community and belonging, and valuing the contributions of staff of color.

Research Question 3: The identified recruitment and retention practices provide valuable insights into practical strategies for increasing racial diversity among staff. Institutions can benefit from adopting targeted recruitment efforts, establishing mentorship programs, providing cultural competence training, and implementing inclusive policies and practices to attract and retain diverse talent.

The implications of this research extend beyond the immediate context of the study; by considering these implications, researchers and practitioners can contribute to creating more equitable and inclusive environments in higher education institutions.

Implications and Future Directions for Staff of Color Recruitment and Retention

The findings of this study reveal significant implications for the practice and future policies of community colleges in the PNW. These implications do not extend to staff of color but also to faculty and students of color, signifying critical actions for improving conditions and retaining these populations. These findings, grounded in the experiences and perceptions of staff of color, illustrate the need for these institutions to make a concerted effort to prioritize the voices of their diverse staff.

Such a priority can materialize in various ways. Addressing areas of concern, such as predominantly white human resource departments and leadership lacking cultural competence, lays the groundwork for lasting change. Community college leaders can host listening sessions, conduct interviews, or administer surveys crafted by staff of color who
have direct familiarity with these experiences. These preliminary measures would work to confront institutional and personal biases, overhaul inequitable practices, and dismantle systemic barriers, thereby initiating a process that could revolutionize the education system. Most importantly, PNW community colleges need to incorporate feedback from staff of color into their practices and policies. Implementing systemic changes based on this input would foster a sense of value and recognition among staff of color, thereby boosting morale and retention.

Another significant implication is diversifying leadership and human resources departments to move away from replicating existing systems and towards fostering racial staff diversity. This direct action is essential to address racial disparities, systemic racism, power imbalances, and the need for transparent communication. Similarly, providing professional development opportunities, recognizing and appreciating diverse cultures, and promoting inclusive initiatives are paramount.

Creating an inclusive environment devoid of toxic cultures and supportive of staff of color is integral for staff morale, retention, and recruitment. Fair compensation, diverse leadership roles, and opportunities for career progression are vital to attracting and retaining employees of color. Encouraging cultural competence, fostering a sense of belonging, and creating affinity-based networks also enhance recruiting and retaining employees of color.

A greater appreciation for cultural identity, support networks, and inclusive practices are crucial for the well-being and success of employees of color. Lastly, the
findings of this study resonate with existing literature, reinforcing the necessity for normative DEI commitments, and shedding light on the challenges faced by employees of color in adverse work environments. It focuses on issues such as pay inequity, biased-based hiring practices, and the significance of professional growth and advancement.

These insights are the foundation for the subsequent section, which focuses on actionable recommendations for PNW community college administrators, leaders, and policymakers.

**Recommendations**

The Double Dutch Retention Framework, developed in this study, provides a comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges of staff of color retention and recruitment in PNW community colleges. This framework encompasses various interconnected components that create an inclusive and supportive environment for staff of color. These components represent a continuum of institutional DEI commitment, ranging from performative to normative institutions. They encompass areas of improvement conditions, dismantling toxic culture, facilitating equitable change, investing in professional growth, and embracing cultural influence and community empowerment in alignment with measurable actions grounded in celebrating and valuing racial diversity.

The following section presents a set of recommendations based on the findings of this study. These recommendations aim to provide tangible actions and strategies that institutions can implement to improve the conditions to demonstrate a normative
commitment to DEI and increase racial staff diversity. Each recommendation will be accompanied by specific steps, ensuring they are actionable and practical for implementation. By incorporating these recommendations, institutions can proactively address the challenges identified in the Double Dutch Retention Framework:

**Recommend: Dismantling Toxic Culture**

1. Recognize, acknowledge, and educate all staff, focusing on white staff, on the perceived differences and experiences between staff of color and non-staff of color.
2. Develop a culture of transparency where staff feel comfortable sharing their experiences and perceptions to foster trust.
3. Host town hall for and lead by staff of color to identify areas of institutional challenges and barriers.
4. Increase access to resources and support that help address the unique needs of staff of color and promote their success.
5. Establish a continuous learning and improvement culture amongst white staff, addressing racial biases.

**Recommend: Facilitating Equitable Change in**

1. Dismantle systemic barriers by reviewing and revising policies and procedures that may contribute to cultural encapsulation and gatekeeping.
2. Review and revise pay scales to ensure staff of color receive equitable compensation.
3. Develop clear policies and procedures to ensure fairness in hiring and promotional practices.

4. Include the perspectives and suggestions of staff of color in all decision-making processes and institutional policies.

5. Incorporate anti-racist pedagogy into the curriculum of employee onboarding and classroom practices.

**Recommend: Investing in Professional Growth**

1. Establish a pipeline to leadership fostering professional growth to diversify administration.

2. Develop clear pathway guidelines to create opportunities for career advancement.

3. Provide administration and management training for all staff, centering collective leadership.

4. Create mentorship programs to guide and support staff of color navigating a predominantly white institution.

5. Offer healthy professional development opportunities, such as self-care and work-life balance workshops, that center staff of color experience.

**Recommend: Embracing Cultural Influence & Community Engagement**

1. Establish regular community-building events to promote cultural sensitivity and a sense of belonging.

2. Build strong ties with the local community to engage with and involve them in campus events and initiatives.
3. Create affinity-based networks to provide support and community for staff of color.

4. Develop and promote collaborative spaces encouraging diverse perspectives, ideas, and decisions.

5. Streamline communication between HR and staff to ensure open transparency and accountability.

In conclusion, the recommendations presented in this section hold valuable insights for various stakeholders involved in higher education institutions, including administrators, policymakers, faculty, and staff. These key individuals and groups must pay close attention to the results and consider implementing the suggested strategies and actions to improve retention and recruitment for staff of color. Furthermore, researchers and practitioners can disseminate these findings through diverse channels such as conferences, professional development workshops, publications, and online platforms, ensuring this knowledge reaches a wide audience and encourages broader discussions and implementation efforts.

**Limitations of the Study**

While this study offers significant, profound, and insightful findings, several limitations exist. One major limitation is the specific focus on PNW community college staff of color. To enhance this study's generalizability to a broader landscape, the voices of staff of color from community colleges nationwide warrant attention.
Notably, the relatively small population of staff of color in the Pacific Northwest resulted in a limited sample size, potentially constraining the broad applicability of the findings. Additionally, the diverse employment classifications of participants, ranging from entry-level to management and administration, led to inconsistent trends and patterns in the findings. Furthermore, the absence of representation from staff of color in service-level positions is regrettable, as their perspectives could have influenced the outcomes and need exploration.

Another consideration is the potential bias among participants from campus departments focused on equity and inclusion. Given their vested interest in racial equity and advancing systemic change, their viewpoints might not reflect the realities of staff of color with a limited understanding of racial microaggressions and their impact.

Lastly, these findings highlight the non-monolithic nature of racial experiences, as anti-Blackness emerged as a recurring theme throughout data collection regardless of the racial identity of the participant. While this study offers valuable insights, scholars must conduct additional research to address these limitations and expand on these findings.

**Future Research**

Future research could aim for a more diverse sample size across community colleges nationally. A more focused approach could extend to affinity-based groups, including race, employment classification, gender and sexuality, and disability. Expanding the research to a broader range of institutions, such as K-12 education systems, manufacturing, the tech industry, and other government entities, would provide
valuable insight. Scholars who expand on this research could explore the practical application of the emergent theoretical framework to assess its effectiveness.

This study uncovered several areas that warrant closer examination, such as the intersectionality of race and gender in staff experiences, the role of mentoring and support networks in career progression, the impact of institutional policies on staff well-being and job satisfaction, and the long-term effects of the recommended strategies on overall institutional climate and culture. Exploring these areas in greater depth will enhance understanding while contributing to the ongoing conversation surrounding staff of color retention and recruitment in higher education.

By addressing these research gaps, scholars and practitioners can continue to refine and broaden the body of literature, paving the way for future advancements in dismantling white supremacy within the U.S. education system. Moreover, while this study relies on self-reported data, future research might incorporate other methods like observations or document analysis for a comprehensive understanding. The study's findings could help institutions worldwide better celebrate and value their racially diverse staff.

Chapter 5: Concluding the Dissertation

The underrepresentation of staff of color in community colleges across the United States is troubling, especially given the large number of students of color who predominantly attend these institutions. This concern is particularly relevant in the PNW, where the staff racial demographics need to reflect the diversity of the student body.
Despite the importance of this issue, the current literature has a significant gap, with most studies focusing on faculty of color in four-year colleges and universities. Consequently, the experiences of non-white, non-teaching employees in community colleges remain significantly underexplored. This research explores the experiences and perceptions of staff of color at community colleges in Oregon and Washington to address the gap in higher education literature regarding this population.

The primary objective is to identify strategies community colleges in the PNW can use to enhance racial staff diversity on these campuses by gaining unique insights into these staff of color's 'perspectives. Chapter 1 sets the stage for this exploration, situating the context and illustrating the significance of considering the perspectives of staff of color in community colleges. The chapter outlines the problem statement, introduces the purpose of the study, and discusses the research goals and questions. It further defines the key terms pertinent to the study and briefly overviews the research methods employed. By offering a clear roadmap of the study, Chapter 1 invites readers to explore how community colleges can work toward a more racially diverse staff.

Chapter 2 delves into the existing literature on racial staff diversity, emphasizing its impact on community colleges' recruitment and retention of faculty, staff, and students of color. It highlights the disparity between the number of students of color and staff of color. It addresses the challenges faculty and staff of color face in higher education and the lack of research literature centering staff of color.
Chapter 3 describes the research methodology, including the research design and the researcher's positionality. Using a constructivist grounded theory approach and various data collection methods, such as surveys, individual interviews, focus group interviews, and memo writing, facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of staff of color. The data analysis process involved initial, focused, and theoretical coding that worked together to create a theoretical framework grounded in the indicative data. Through rigorous data collection and analysis, this study identified four primary themes: organizational culture and leadership, cultural competence and belonging, community and support, and professional growth and equitable practices that informed the development of a theoretical framework, Double Dutch Retention.

Chapter 4 introduced the Double Dutch Retention model as a theoretical framework to address the ongoing challenge of racial staff diversity in higher education. The developed Double Dutch Retention framework offers a continuum sequence of institutional DEI commitment linked to an inner circle of 'improvement conditions' that address specific challenges institutions face in increasing staff of color on their campuses. The improvement conditions within the framework provided practical recommendations and strategies for celebrating and valuing racial staff diversity. It emphasized the need for PNW community colleges to shift from their performative approaches to normative institutional commitments to racial staff diversity.

While this study provides valuable insight and recommendations for improving racial staff diversity at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest, the scope of this
research is limited. Future studies could expand the scope of this research to include a more diverse sample size, both geographically and institutionally, to provide a broader understanding of staff of color's experiences. Further research in this area has significant potential to address the substantive racial disparities among higher education staff.

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the broader issue of performative commitment to DEI in higher education institutions, despite its specific focus on PNW community colleges. The findings and the Double Dutch Retention framework serve as a blueprint for educational institutions nationwide to support their racially diverse staff better.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Hello *********,

My name is Dominique S. Austin, and I am a candidate for a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from Portland State University. I am currently working on my dissertation research, which focuses on how community colleges in the Pacific Northwest recruit and retain staff of color. This study aims to identify how community colleges in the Pacific Northwest can increase their staff racial diversity through the perceptions of staff of color. Thus, I am reaching out to request your assistance.

Research shows that faculty and staff of color are critical to the recruitment, retention, and academic success of students of color. Furthermore, colleges and universities significantly benefit from having a diverse faculty and staff, which is why many institutions prioritize employee of color recruitment; although some community colleges in the Pacific Northwest can recruit faculty and staff of color, they still struggle to retain them.

As most higher education literature in this area focuses on the recruitment and retention of faculty of color, specifically at 4-year universities, this study centers on the experiences and perceptions of staff of color at community colleges.

Participation in this study will consist of:

1) An online questionnaire to assess if you meet the criteria to participate in this study and to ask about and the effectiveness of your community college's commitment to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion. Completing the questionnaire does not require participating in interviews as there is a section to opt-in or out of interview participation.
2) If interested and chosen, an initial one-on-one interview via a private zoom link through my PSU student account (only ten participants will be selected to interview one-on-one.). This interview will take about 60-90 minute.

   a. One-on-one interviews may require follow-up interviews for deeper analysis

3) A focus group interview with four other participants from various community colleges across Oregon and Washington. This focus group will take about 60-90 minutes

All interviews will be recorded via zoom, downloaded, and saved to a personal encrypted drive. In addition, I will transcribe interviews using transcription software, will de-identify personal information about the participants, and will replace names with pseudonyms. Furthermore, interviews will take place between of 2022. If interested, participants can request a copy of their individual-interview transcript to review and check for accuracy.

Please see the attached emails for a copy of the participation form for the study's description and a consent to participate in research form that serves as consent to participate. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please contact me directly via email or phone.

Respectfully,

Dominique S. Austin
Appendix B: Survey

Email: _______________________
Name: _______________________

**Question 1:** Do you identify as a person of color? Yes or No

**Question 2:** How do you identify racially?

**Question 3:** What is your employment status with community colleges in the Pacific Northwest? Currently employed or Was employed between now and January 2021

**Question 4:** What is (was) your full-time employment classification? Staff or Faculty

**Question 5:** What state are you representing? Oregon or Washington?

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**Section 1: Washington Community Colleges**

**Question 1:** What is the name of your institution?

**Question 2:** Is diversity, equity, and inclusion highlighted in your community college’s goals, vision and mission statement, strategic plan, or core values? No, Somewhat, or Yes

**Question 3:** What is your institution’s level of commitment to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion? Not committed at all, Performative, Somewhat committed, or Fully committed

**Question 4:** Does your institution implement practices to actively recruit and retain staff of color?

**Question 5:** How efficient is your institution at recruiting and retaining staff of color? Range of 1, Struggling to 5, Amazing

**Question 6:** Do you feel a sense of belonging at your institution? Range of 1, Not at all to 5, Very!

**Statement 1:** Please list anything you feel is important to know about the retention and recruitment of staff of color at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest.

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**Section 2: Oregon Community Colleges**

**Question 1:** What is the name of your institution?
**Question 2:** Is diversity, equity, and inclusion highlighted in your community college’s goals, vision and mission statement, strategic plan, or core values? No, Somewhat, or Yes

**Question 3:** What is your institution’s level of commitment to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion? Not committed at all, Performative, Somewhat committed, or Fully committed

**Question 4:** Does your institution implement practices to actively recruit and retain staff of color?

**Question 5:** How efficient is your institution at recruiting and retaining staff of color? Range of 1, Struggling to 5, Amazing

**Question 6:** Do you feel a sense of belonging at your institution? Range of 1, Not at all to 5, Very!

**Statement 1:** Please list anything you feel is important to know about the retention and recruitment of staff of color at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest.

**Section 3: Next Steps**

**Question 1:** Are you interested in participating in further research? No or Yes, the one-on-one interview and focus group interview

**Question 2:** Would you prefer a pseudonym for this study? Yes or No

**Question 3:** Preferred pseudonym?

**Statement 1:** List the names of any other community colleges you have worked for.

**Statement 2:** If you know anyone who may be interested in completing this survey, or participating in this research, please feel free to list their names and emails below. If you do not know anyone, put N/A.
Appendix C: Consent to Participate in Research

Project Title: A Grounded Theory Study on the Perceptions of Staff of Color at Community Colleges in the Pacific Northwest

Population: Adults, Staff of Color, Employed by Pacific Northwest Community College’s

Researcher: Dominique S. Austin, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy, College of Education, Portland State University

Researcher Contact: doaustin@pdx.edu |

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information below highlights the main information about this research for you to consider when deciding to participate in this study, or not. Please carefully review the information provided on this form. If you have any questions regarding the information, please feel free to ask, prior to participating.

- Voluntary Consent. You are being asked to volunteer for a research study. It is up to you whether you choose to participate or not. There is no penalty for choosing not to participate or deciding to discontinue your involvement.

- Purpose. Identify how community colleges in the Pacific Northwest can better recruit and retain staff of color, to increase the overall number of staff of color on their campuses.

- Duration: Your participation should last no more than three months. Grounded theory uses theoretical sampling, a research process that requires continuous involvement between the researcher and participants based on data findings. The research process will consist of a one-on-one interview (up to 90 minutes) and participation in a focus group interview (up to 90 minutes). All interviews are opt-in, meaning you are not required to participate in any amount of interviews. As a participant, you are at liberty to review any portions of the research transcripts, which would require extra time.

- Procedures and Activities: By opting in to participating in this study, you will be asked to:
  1. Review the Consent to Participate in Research
  2. Agree to complete a brief survey
  3. Agree to participate in an initial one-on-one interview via zoom, for approximately 90-minutes.
  4. Agree to participate in an focus group interview via zoom, for approximately 90-minutes
5. Agree to suggest other potential participants as part of the snowball sampling method.
6. Agree to have zoom interviews recorded. While recording the interview, I will also take handwritten notes to triangulate with the zoom transcription.

- **Risks.** Some of the possible risks or discomforts of taking part in this study include reflecting on professionally difficult or harmful past experiences. Focus group interviews are with colleagues of color from community colleges in Oregon and Washington, which may be someone you know or are associated with.

- **Benefits.** Some of the benefits that may be expected include a contribution of information to community colleges literature, regarding the perceptions of staff of color. Findings from this study will serve as a template and/or guide community college in the Pacific Northwest can use to better recruit and retain staff of color. There are no direct benefits for participating in this study.

- **Options.** Instead of taking part in this study, you could still suggest colleagues of color as possible participants who may be interested in this study. Also, you can choose to only participate in the initial interview or focus group interview, however, all forms of participation are optional and completely voluntary.

**Who is doing the research?**

The researcher, Dominique S. Austin, a doctoral candidate from Portland State University is asking for your consent to conduct this research.

**Why is this research being done?**

The purpose of the research is to listen to the voices of staff of color, and their perceptions of how community colleges in the Pacific Northwest can increase the racial diversity of their staff. You are being asked to participate because you are a staff of color working at a community college in the PNW, who will provide valuable information needed to increase racial staff diversity. A questionnaire will be sent out to an unidentifiable number of potential participants, however, a total of ten people will participate in individual interviews, and two focus group interviews—five participants in each.

**How long will I be in this research?**

Your participation in this study will only require a few hours of your time. This study will be completed during the 2022-2023 academic year.

**What will I do if I decide to take part?**

If you agree to participate in this research, you will be asked to participate in a brief questionnaire, and if selected, a one-on-one interview and will have the option to participate in a focus group interview, via zoom. During the interviews you will be asked
a series of questions about your experiences and perceptions as a person of color, working in a non-teaching position at a community college in the Pacific Northwest. We will ask you how you perceive your institution’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and how you perceive they can increase the racial diversity of staff. We will tell you about any new information that may affect whether or not you want to continue in this research.

**What happens to the information collected?**

Information and interviews will be recorded and stored on a USB drive. The interviews will be transcribed via a transcription service, and this data will also be stored on the USB drive. Data collected for this research will be used to identify themes, trends, and a framework that will assist community colleges in their recruitment and retention of staff of color.

**How will my privacy and data be protected?**

We will take measures to protect your privacy including using self-selected pseudonyms and generalizing your institution, and location. Despite taking steps to protect your privacy, we can never fully guarantee that your privacy will be protected.

To protect all of your personal information, we will store your data on an encrypted USB, which will be locked in a drawer of the primary researcher’s home office. Despite these precautions, we can never fully guarantee that your information will not be revealed.

Individuals and organizations that conduct or monitor this research may be permitted access to inspect research records. This may include private information. These individuals and organizations include the Institutional Review Board that reviewed this research and research committee.

**What are the risks if I decide to join in?**

The risks or discomforts of being in this research include revisiting past experiences that may have been traumatic. Also, by participating in a focus group interview with people from various institutions, there is the potential of a leak of identity.

**What are the benefits if I take part in this study?**

You may benefit from institutional change, however, there is no direct benefit from being in this research. Potential benefits of taking part in this research include institutional change and connection with staff colleagues across the PNW.

**What other choices do I have besides being in this research?**

It is your choice to decide whether or not you want to join in research. You have the option not to participate, opt out, or select which phase of interview (one-on-one or focus group) is more suited for your needs.
What if I want to stop my part in this research?
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to take part in this study, but if you do, you may stop at any time. You have the right to choose not to take part in any study activity or completely stop at any point without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision whether or not to join in will not affect your relationship with the researchers or Portland State University.

Will it cost me money to take part in this study?
Taking part in this research will not cost you anything.

Will I be paid for being in this research?
You will not be paid for participating in this research.

What if I am injured because of being in this research?
There is no risk of injury by participating in this research.

Who can answer my questions about this research?
If you have questions, concerns, or have experienced a research related injury, contact the research team at:

- Dominique S. Austin, Researcher
doaustin@pdx.edu
- Heather Burns, Ed.D.
  Dissertation and Research Chair
  Portland State University
  hburns@pdx.edu

Who can I speak to about my rights as a part of research?
The Portland State University Institutional Review Board (“IRB”) is overseeing this research. The IRB is a group of people who independently review research studies to ensure the rights and welfare of participants are protected. The Office of Research Integrity is the office at Portland State University that supports the IRB. If you have questions about your rights, or wish to speak with someone other than the research team, you may contact:

- Office of Research Integrity
  PO Box 751
  Portland, OR 97207-0751
  Phone: (503) 725-5484
  Toll Free: 1 (877) 480-4400
  Email: psuirb@pdx.edu
Consent Statement

I have had the opportunity to read and consider the information in this form. I have asked any questions necessary to make a decision about my taking part in the study. I understand that I can ask more questions at any time.

By signing below, I understand that I am volunteering to take part in this research. I understand that I am not waiving any legal rights. I have been provided with a copy of this consent form. I understand that if my ability to consent for myself changes, either I or my legal representative may be asked to provide consent before I continue in the study.

I consent to join in this study.

Name of Adult Participant   Signature of Adult Participant   Date

Researcher Signature (to be completed at time of informed consent)

I have explained the research to the participant and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understands the information described in this consent form and freely consents to participate.

Name of Research Team Member   Signature of Research Team Member   Date
Appendix D: Individual Interview Questions

1. Tell me about how you came to be working at a community college in the Pacific Northwest, like what is your story and what brought you here?

2. What do you think are the most important reasons why you remain employed in this system? Like, what factors are influencing your decision to work for community colleges in the Pacific Northwest?

3. Can you describe how you typically feel after a day of working with your colleagues, administration, sitting in meetings discussing inequities in education, your role in the college, and your sense of belonging?

4. When you think about your institution's commitment to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion, what comes to mind?
   a. In what ways has your institution demonstrated this commitment?
   b. Does it feel authentic or do you think it is performative allyship?

5. If you were offered a job from a company or university, right now, would you leave your position at the community college?

6. Thinking about your employment experience, especially as it relates to diversity, equity, and inclusion, if you could change one thing about your institution, what would it be and why?
Appendix E: Focus Group Interview Questions

1. Break into small groups and answer the question, my ideal community college would look like…
   a. Regroup and Discuss

2. What are some current best practices your institutions are implementing to recruit staff of color?

3. What are some current best practices your institutions are implementing to retain staff of color?

4. If I were the president of your college, and I came to you today, what is the 1 thing you would say, if I asked “what is the one thing we need to do to keep you here for the next 10 years?”

5. Is there anything else you all think I should know to understand why community colleges in the Pacific Northwest have a low racially diverse staff, and what they would need to increase these numbers?