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Chess, Not Checkers: How Chief Diversity Officers Navigate the Political Terrains of the University Leadership Structure

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Education

by

Matthew Griffith

2023

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2023

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Chess, Not Checkers: How Chief Diversity Officers Navigate the Political Terrains of the University Leadership Structure

by

Matthew Griffith

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2023

Professor Mitchell J. Chang, Chair

Advancing diversity efforts in higher education has long been a complicated, nearly impossible political terrain for senior leaders to navigate (Kezar, 2007). Though still politically fraught, institutional and organizational investments reflect the growing institutional responsibility and accountability around DEI work (Havey et al., 2022; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). However, with these investments come heightened expectations, heightened consequences, and heightened discourse. In recent years, with the emergence and focus on Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs) as senior-level leaders within institutions, the conversation and focus have shifted toward them and their role in creating change. While these roles are commonly viewed as solutions to improving and forwarding institutional responsibility to DEI efforts (Arnold & Braun, 2015), there are ongoing questions about their access and relationship to power and their ability to successfully work toward their institutional charge.

The central charge of this study was to examine power and agency in institutional leadership and the unique ways in which CDOs understand, experience, and navigate their dynamics. Additionally, it sought to examine how institutional structures and practices advance

or impede CDOs' navigational needs and tactics. The study findings illuminate the various ways in which CDOs understand, experience, and navigate power and agency within their institutional contexts. Moreover, the findings reveal a more nuanced perspective on institutional power dynamics than typically asserted about CDOs and further illustrate how the role is evolving within the university leadership structure. This study contributes to the emerging body of literature on chief diversity officers and qualitative social network scholarship.

The study finds that while CDOs have ascended into the senior and executive leadership circles, and thus they hold greater access and sometimes greater influence within the institution, they do not hold unilateral power. Moreover, they oftentimes cannot make the broad, bold changes they may want to make to move efforts forward. Instead, this study finds that through relationship and relational power, even in difficult political terrains, CDOs navigate and create conditions where they can do meaningful work on behalf of their respective institutions. While scholars have long characterized the CDO role as complex because of its unique positioning and institutional charge (Nixon, 2017), this dissertation study is particularly significant as it explores these institutional dynamics directly, seeking to provide more color and specificity to extant scholarship. More directly, it makes a case for political acumen and understanding institutional context as core competencies or needs in these roles. These points build off one another as this political acumen must be situated in contexts that both empower and disempower as CDOs navigate complex, varying, and ever-changing institutional and organizational dynamics. Moreover, it highlights the need for more scholarship, more discussion, and more support for CDOs on managing these interpersonal relationships and their varying orientation to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work. Moreover, as more CDOs' roles take office in all sectors, this study seeks to extend the discussion about the role of the chief diversity officers in university

leadership structures, their power and agency, and the extent to which our systems are willing to change. My hope is that this work, along with the current and emerging scholarship, will be critical in moving forward discussions of DEI leadership, power, and organizational change.

The dissertation of Matthew Griffith is approved.

Eddie Rice Cole

Na'ilah Nasir

Miriam Posner

Cecilia Rios-Agular

Mitchell J. Chang, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2023

DEDICATION

to

Alberta L. Benn-Edwards (Grandma),

William Lander Griffith (G-Daddy), and

All the many other ancestors who stand beside me every day

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This section will be short. It's not for the lack of people to thank— it's quite the opposite. As I sit here reflecting on all the people who have been with me on this journey, I am full of deep gratitude. I am also overwhelmed. I need an acknowledgment book— not an acknowledgment statement! This is to say— to better manage my anxiety about leaving people out and to avoid writing another full dissertation, this section is very "you know who you are" vibes. Is that a cop-out? Maybe. Will you love me regardless? I'm banking on it.

To Mitch– The one person I must name, by name, is the advisor with the most-est, Dr. Mitchell J Chang. I know I can be a little self-indignant and self-righteous (emphasis on a little), but also know that I can be insightful and thoughtful. Thanks for always pulling on the latter to make me a better scholar and human. I wouldn't do this journey with anyone else.

To my committee, Cecilia, Eddie, Miriam, and Na'ilah— I seriously have the most legit committee ever. Not only are you all brilliant— you all are such good people. Even when I've submitted drafts that were a little more than rough— your responses were always with love, compassion, and encouragement. I will forever be in debt to you. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

To my family: Oh, Mom and Dad, oh my dearest sisters, oh G-Mommy, oh dearest godmother Aunt Gwen, oh all, I mean all, of the aunts, uncles, cousins, (I have a lot of family)… what to say but thank you. Thank you for always supporting me, even when I know that you don't understand what I do and why I'm still in school. Thank you for instilling the love of family in me and always having my back. A special shout out to my parental unit (Mom and Dad), thanks for instilling a love of learning and value in education in me. It's your encouragement over these years that's made the difference– I love you.

To my friends/chosen family: You know how you are. Thanks for always lifting me up and loving me through it. Even when there are gaps in talking, our connection is real and forever. I love you, deep.

To my academic and professional family: Honestly, a good amount of you is in the group above— I just needed to make the distinction because y'all really helped get me through this experience. Thanks for always answering my dumb questions that I should know the answer to. Thanks for always giving me feedback even when I did not want to hear it. And finally, thanks for being my friend— you have truly been the anchor to this experience. Also, special thanks for the UCLA folks, thanks for all the LA adventures.

To the city of Detroit— There's an ongoing joke about me always mentioning that I'm from Detroit. And, you know what, I own it. I'm a little Black boy from Detroit and a proud K-12 product of Detroit Public Schools. It's the city— the people, the culture, the love— that made me into the man that I am today. So, I will always wear it as a badge of honor. Thanks, Detroit. Finally, my mind shifts to the people who are no longer here.

First is my G-Daddy, my paternal grandfather, William Lander Griffith. He passed away right after my hooding ceremony, so I never got to share pictures with him. While I did not get to share that moment with him, I am just so grateful for the man that he was. At his funeral, I've never seen so many older, middle age Black men crying in my life. But, "Coach Griff" was their father, too. His impact is undeniable. This is a man from *very* humble means who built a life, a career, and a family that would better position his children and children's children… so that many years later, his loudmouth grandson can earn a Ph.D. He is the catalyst. During these last rounds of edits, I'm pretty sure it is him and his drill sergeant ways that have been getting me up

in the morning so I can get to work. Well, I appreciate it, G-Daddy, hope you're having fun up there. (P.S. As you know, I started playing numbers— pull a few strings and help me out.)

The second person, I think of, oddly enough, is Mike Rose. I was not one of his students, I never took his infamous writing class, and we mostly spoke in passing— but he meant a lot to me. In my first year, Mike read a vignette that I wrote about an asset-based perspective on Detroit schools, and he really liked my writing and reached out to me. Over the years, we'd mostly talk in the hallways of Moore Hall about everything from new writing projects to travel plans to general life updates. Each time, he'd always end the conversation with some type of affirmation, like *you're on the right track*, or *keep it up*, or *that's important work*. Now, this goes without saying, but academia can completely decimate your self-confidence. I am no different. Sure, I think I'm smart, but many times, during this process, I felt like a fraud— *smart, but not Ph.D. smart*. But, every time I'd run into Mike, I got a little assurance that I was on the right track. I never got to say thank you. So, here it is— thanks, Mike– you're the best.

Finally, one thing I feel compelled to share is the importance of my late grandmother in this whole Ph.D. process. In one of our last lucid conversations, (before her dementia kicked in), I told my grandmother that I really liked higher education as a career path and could see myself getting a Ph.D. sometime in the future. That moment in the summer of 2010 will always be sacred to me and has served as the fuel when I wanted to stop. I know she's been right beside me this entire time saying, "you can do it." Welp, I did do it, Grandma, and it's all thanks to you.

Alright, I have to stop here because if I don't this section will be longer than the study, itself. Many thanks and deep gratitude.

VITA

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Havey, N., & Griffith, M. (2022). Book Review of Free Speech and Campus Civility: Promoting Challenging but Constructive Dialog in Higher Education. The Professional Educator.

Griffith, M. L. & Regassa, G. (2019). Race, Student Activism, and the Role of Schools to Seek Racial Justice. Presented at the SXSW EDU Conference (South by Southwest Education), Austin, TX.

Griffith, M. L. & Halimah, E. (2019). Managing the New Norm: Free Speech Discourse on College Campus Today. Presented at the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), Los Angeles, CA.

Griffith, M. L. (2019). Black Political Identity Development in the Trumpian Era. Presented at the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), Los Angeles, CA.

(*Contributor*) Bain, B. (2019). 21st Century Harriet Tubman: An Interview with Susan Burton. *Harvard. Black Law Journal.*, *35*, 27.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Five years ago, I was working at UC Berkeley as the Project Manager for Chancellor's Campus Climate Initiative. After a campus-wide climate survey revealed that minoritized communities were more likely to feel disrespected, isolated, and excluded on campus, the Chancellor's office allocated funding to activities that would increase the sense of belonging and community and create space for sustained campus dialogue on race and difference. Though named after the Chancellor, the initiative was placed in the Division of Equity and Inclusion, where I worked. Some of the activities included a speaker series, faculty training on inclusive classrooms, intergroup dialogue series with students, and the establishment of a Black student center on the campus.

Given the initiative's work, I wanted to be proactive and reach out to students of color—I wanted them to know what the initiative was doing and feel ownership over it. In short, I did not want it to seem like a bureaucratic communications ploy, but something meaningful and necessary. Therefore, we established a student accountability task force with key student leaders who would meet regularly on the initiative's progress and other efforts to forward diversity, equity, and inclusion at the institution. To illustrate the importance and high level of visibility, I got the Vice Chancellor for Equity and Inclusion (the institutional designated Chief Diversity Officer) to attend all the groups' meetings. I worked tirelessly to make a good impression, in order to get buy-in and excitement for the impact that this initiative would bring on the campus. The initial meeting went well— *sort of.*

While the meeting itself was filled with light-heartened, positive energy, it was really hard. After providing updates, the students did not really care about the initiative—- they were looking for structural change and accountability. They wanted the institution to take a stance and

hold faculty accountable to racism, they asked questions about budget allocation and institutional resources, and they wanted the institution to work towards dismantling Prop. 209 (affirmative action). Lastly, as the initiative was named the Chancellor's Campus Climate Initiative, the students wanted the next meetings to include the Chancellor and hear directly about his commitment to these efforts. After the meeting, I walked the CDO to her next meeting to do a quick debrief and talk next steps. When talking about the students' request for the Chancellor to join those meetings, she retorted:

"*It seems like they appreciate what you're doing, but they want to talk to where the power sits."*

Years later, this offhand comment stuck with me. I have realized that the students were thinking much deeper than the implementation of some short-lived diversity initiative. They were asking questions like: Where does power sit in an institution and who has access to it? Which institutional structures breed racism and inequity and who has the power to do something about it? And what's the institution's relationship to diversity, equity, and inclusion beyond its mission statement and how far is it really willing to go? As I sought to process these questions, I thought: "*Shouldn't some of this power sit with the CDO, herself*?" She was there, and while perhaps not being able to make unilateral decisions, there were certainly some things that fell squarely in her jurisdiction.

I have learned in my professional and scholarly career that it is more complicated than that. While *chief* implies a high level of power and agency in the institution, for Chief Diversity Officers, the weight and vastness of their institutional charge oftentimes far outweigh the amount of institutional power allocated to enact it. Given this serious limitation, it has made me think critically about how CDOs understand their role within the broader context of their institution— how do they understand and experience the power and agency as members of

senior leadership, what ways do they navigate their political landscapes, and what conditions expand and constrain success in their local environment.

This interaction and others like it have led me to the following dissertation study.

Problem Statement

We live in a time where diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work seems to matter more than ever before: there are heightened expectations, heightened consequences, and heightened discourse. Whether a corporate social responsibility strategy or a student demand, Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs) are commonly viewed as solutions to improving and forwarding institutional responsibility to DEI efforts (Arnold & Braun, 2015). Through the emergence of CDOs in campus leadership, campus budgets and institutional oversight has grown exponentially as an integral part of campus efforts; these investments reflect the growing institutional responsibility and accountability around DEI work (Williams &Wade-Golden, 2013). These positions do not come out of thin air, but rather out of generations of activism and incidents of injustice.

Though a popular 'student demand' or crisis response tactic, these jobs and the people who serve in them are often met with high skepticism and cynicism. Phrases like "*what do they even do*?" or "*they are just a university talking piece*" are common critiques from faculty, staff, and students, alike. These perspectives reflect the high visibility, lofty expectations, and difficult political terrains placed on CDOs to bring about and facilitate transformational change to their respective institution (Marshall, 2019; Williams, Berger, & McClendon, 2005; Griffin et al, 2019). And yet, while these jobs are heralded as being agents for transformational and institutional change, they, in actuality, have limited oversight to implementing necessary changes. From hiring diverse faculty to managing controversial student speakers, many issues

CDOs face exist outside of their institutional jurisdiction (Williams, 2013). Therefore, their job is not just about managing a division, but partnering, influencing, and advocating for the 'right' decisions.

The reality is that CDOs do not hold absolute control— in fact, no leader holds unidimensional power. They must partner, broker, and negotiate power in and throughout the institution to be able to do their jobs effectively (Tierney, 1987). And while it is a common experience for institutional leaders, CDOs' recent proliferation, their ascendance into senior leadership status, and the historical challenges of enacting change in higher education institutions make it paramount to explore relational power through their lens. Given this reality, the intent of this dissertation study is to examine how CDOs understand, experience, and navigate power, agency, and broader institutional dynamics and issues by examining relationships.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is twofold. First, this study seeks to examine the politics of relational power in institutional leadership and the unique ways in which CDOs leverage, broker, and/or navigate it to effectively do their job at their respective institution. Secondly, the study investigates how this relational power interplays with their unique lived experiences in their institutional context and creates opportunity or constraint in their work. The study is guided by the following questions:

- How do chief diversity officers (CDOs) understand and leverage power and agency in their roles as they navigate their institutional context?
- What distinctions do chief diversity officers (CDOs) form when making meaning of their institutional power dynamics and hierarchies?

- What are some organizational barriers and opportunities chief diversity officers (CDOs) experience when seeking out and navigating issues of institutional agency?

This study is not about *why* institutions create CDO jobs, nor is it about whether CDOs hold symbolic or real power within the institution. I find this line of questioning to be reductive and trite— it is my perspective that this work, and these positions matter. The real investigation is about *how* CDOs navigate the institutional political landscapes and *how* power operates within that context. By virtue of examining the "*how*," this study explores the embedded knowledge, context, and expectations that shape these jobs and gleans insight into their possibilities. Overall, this study seeks to unearth the complexities of negotiating power and agency while doing diversity work within these historically racist institutional structures. As the study seeks to hold a networked approach in exploring power, it focuses primarily on positional power within university administration leadership structures, meaning there is an acute focus on power dynamics with other administrators. This focus does not negate the importance of other important groups within the institution (i.e., students, and faculty).

More explicitly, this study seeks to challenge conventional paradigms in diversity scholarship. There is significant literature on CDOs— including job function and expectations, and institutional navigation and strategy (Leon, 2014, Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013; Worthington et. at, 2020). It is built upon a long history of scholarship that has meaningfully investigated the efficacy of various diversity efforts (i.e., diversity curriculum, initiatives, programs, etc.) as a means to advocating for its institutional importance and success (antonio et al., 2004; Jayakumar, 2008; Denison & Chang, 2009; Hurtado, 2007). However, while researchers and practitioners have sought to improve the ways in which diversity efforts function in an institution, the discourse is framed in a way that suggests the issue lies with the diversity

effort itself. Questions like "*how is the diversity initiative implemented?*" or *"how is it organized*?" are common. This research has been paramount to the important progress made within research and practice. However, through investigating the implementation and organization of an effort, this body of research centers its questioning toward the effort itself—which has forwarded the premise that diversity efforts are the problem.

This study has a different premise— what if we studied the landscape itself as the possible problem? The 'mapping of the political terrain' is pulled from Bolman and Deal (2003) and applied to higher education leadership issues about diversity through various works (i.e., Kezar, 2008; Adserias et al., 2017) where scholars examine resistance and navigational issues from forwarding a diversity agenda. Through investigating CDOs' power and agency in their institutional context, the study provides insight into to what extent institutions are designed for diversity efforts as opposed to how diversity efforts are designed for the institution.

Methodological Overview

Using narrative inquiry, this qualitative study will use document collection and semi-structured interviews with CDOs to explore its research questions. Interviews were 60-90 minutes, and organizational charts were the documents collected. I recruited and selected (6) participants—five current Chief Diversity Officers and one senior leader who works closely/coaches CDOs. To participate in this study, the following is required:

Participant Criterion
• **High institutional Rank**: 1) Must report directly to campus president and/or provost; 2) Must serve on the university's executive leadership team

- **An Established Tenure**: Must have served at least one year as campus CDO
- **Oversight Responsibilities:** Must oversee reporting offices and programs (i.e., portfolio or unit-based office configuration)
- **Similar university setting**: Public university institution

Given the various forms of CDO roles, I recruited high-ranking institutional leaders with considerable staff and resources, as these positions have broader institutional influence, are more integrated on campus-based issues, and typically have higher visibility (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). I used purposive and snowball sampling and leaned on personal networks to navigate accordingly (Creswell, 2009).

There were three phases to the data collection. They were as follows:

Pre-Work: Pre-Interview Check-Ins. Before collecting any data, I conducted 15-minute check-ins with each participant to develop rapport and build trust. Participants were asked to send organizational charts and reflect on a campus incident in which they were uniquely involved.

Documents: Organizational charts and other institutional documents. I reviewed each participant's university organizational chart—this visual aid was used to clarify relationships and develop interview questions for clarification or greater detail on their relationships and power dynamics within the university leadership structure.

Interviews. I conducted six semi-structured individual interviews with each participant. Interviews ranged from 60 minutes to 90 minutes. The objective was to contextualize, reflect, and make meaning of their experiences with power and agency within their institutional role. Through interviews, I will be able to understand the personal strategy behind participants'

institutional navigation and directly investigate their experience of the role of power, influence, and agency within their institution.

A note on the "campus incident." In the interview, there was a focus on selecting a specific campus incident. Study participants selected a campus incident and/or issue that they were significantly engaged in managing. Examples could include a controversial speaker on campus, student demands, or a major bias incident. Campus incidents play a crucial role in how CDOs are utilized in campus administration (Parker, 2017), and selecting a singular event sought to illicit clarity and specificity in the participants' organizational power dynamics.

Contribution of the Study

This study contributes to the limited yet growing body of scholarship on CDOs. While diversity officers have had a long presence within institutions, the concept of a senior-level professional leading these efforts is still fairly new and thus the scholarship on these roles needs considerable development (Griffin et al., 2019). Moreover, the extant scholarship on CDOs explores these roles at all levels within the institution as these roles have just recently achieved senior-level designation and access within many institutions. This study is more focused in that it explores the new landscape where these roles have more access and positional power, which has long been a limitation (Leon, 2012). The emergence of CDOs is not only an educational trend but has quickly become popularized and institutionalized in various sectors (Shi et al., 2018; Parker, 2019). Higher education institutions and Fortune 500 companies alike are trying to solve the "diversity problem" and are increasingly being pushed by the public to do so (Shi et. al, 2018). As this emergence becomes normalized in all types of organizations and sectors, this study is not only necessary and timely, but it has the potential to deepen understanding of how these jobs

function within their context and has the potential to inform practice as CDOs continue to become more established.

Additionally, this study uniquely examines power and agency in the context of diversity and institutional leadership. While examining power is inherent in studying organizational leadership, the unique focus on diversity officers is critical and has broadly been under-investigated in diversity management and leadership scholarship (Nguyen, 2019). These positions come with rich histories—often disempowered ones— and are frequently led by diverse leaders— that being leaders from nondominant backgrounds (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). While there is a rich body of literature on the politicization of diversity and the experiences of diverse leadership, this study is unique in examining both phenomena in this modern, challenging context.

Significance of the Study

When I began my doctoral studies, I said the following was my guiding question for future research: H*ow does one create structural equity and inclusion in an institution that is built on inequities and exclusion?* And now, years later, while my understanding has developed and deepened, the question and its aim remain steadfast. One of the things this study is investigating is how the work and the people who lead it forge ahead. Racism is endemic and many scholars have discussed the various ways it functions, operates, and reifies in higher education and out (Patton, 2016; Delgado & Stefancic 2017; Bell, 1987). And yet, while, racism persists, the fight against it must persist, as well. From the exploitation of slaves to popularized notions of meritocracy and scarcity, the idea of diversity, equity, and inclusion is seemingly antithetical to the origins and canon of the higher education institution. Though antithetical, the existence of CDOs and other diversity functions reframe and reconstruct these long-held traditions and

paradigms within the institution of higher education. Now, these positions may not hold an abolitionist perspective or other critical frames that seek to undo systemic oppression, but they have historically been a part of driving meaningful change and shifting paradigms. Therefore, the empirical exploration of these roles reveals something much greater than a bureaucratic administrator role. It illuminates and extends the long history of the persistent struggle of the fight against oppressive systems while existing within them. This study has the potential to unearth how CDOs can persist and be effective in their work despite the inherent racist roadblocks they face.

Moreover, this study's significance is rooted in its ability to further theory, research, and perhaps most notably, practice. Whether in the world of tech or your local nonprofit, there is a real need to understand how these roles work, how they can be successful, and what that looks like in relation to creating a more just future. Researchers have documented how CDOs must complete their work in environments that can often be hostile to the general ideology and principles of diversity (Bryant, 2015, Nixon, 2017; Wilson, 2013). Therefore, CDOs are often doing their work in organizations that are averse to forwarding equitable changes or even advancing actively oppressive policies and practices. And while all leaders incur limits to their power and agency, do they exist in institutions that are hostile to their work and inhibit their ability to do their job? Are university CFOs (Chief Financial Officers) asked to take an anti-capitalist approach when they are leading and mapping out the university's financial health? They are not. Here, CDOs' institutional charge is paradoxical to the norms and standards of the institution of higher education. Therefore, what makes this study especially significant, is the opportunity to understand CDOs in context— creating a more complex, nuanced understanding of their experiences and navigation within the university leadership structure.

Driving Motivation

Lastly, I would be remiss not to reflect on the time period in which I conducted this study and how it is shaping my understanding and motivations for this work.

From initial chapter writing to completing final edits, this dissertation was completed spring 2020 to fall 2022. As I began my writing, the murder of numerous Black bodies at the hands of the police (George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, etc.), and its subsequent global uprising, upended racial discourse and challenged notions of what can be. For example, the idea of Defund the Police came into focus, a movement that sought to redefine public safety in America. Activists proposed ideas like reallocating money to social workers and public good operations, rethinking policies that disproportionately affect minoritized populations— and through this, decentralizing the power that police have in communities. This idea is parallel to what those student leaders were advocating just five years ago. Much like the student leaders, activists were asking hard questions about our institutions and reimagining what is possible. This activism pushes back on reformist notions of change, and forwards concepts that seek to provide a foundation for a new, re-imagined anti-racist institution; re-imagining institutions in a way that mitigates and/or abolishes practices of harm that are connected to systemic racism.

In contrast, during the week of the scheduled defense of this dissertation, two new cases– *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*, and *Students for Fair Admissions v. the University of North Carolina*– started their arguments at the Supreme Court. Given the current composition of the Court, it is commonly believed that the cases result in the rollback or even removal of race-based admissions in higher education, a critical tool in advancing diversity on college campuses.

In the short span of writing and conducting this dissertation, I have gone from seeing potential and promise to the real potential that foundational policies will regress or go away completely.

So, what does this mean? From my professional experience to today, transformational change cannot happen without a robust discussion on power— therefore, researchers and practitioners alike must center and understand power, how and where it operates, and consider what it means to dismantle or radically shift what it looks like. Institutions are not neutral— they are deeply powered, and deeply raced— and our collective work (including CDOs) is to push these institutions and structures to do things differently. Meanwhile, as we reimagine, there are real efforts that seek to not only block (what I believe to be) advancements in diversity but rather to completely undo previously established progress. Given this, my intention is twofold. First, my aim in this study is not just to improve what exists today, but to support, forward, and inspire scholars and practitioners to reimagine what equity can look like in these institutions of the future. Secondly, there is an importance in forwarding practical takeaways and guidance for diversity leaders as the broader political landscape for CDOs is more fraught than ever. More than anything, my motivation in conducting this study is to contribute. I believe in the possibility of CDOs work being meaningful and transformative— if they're allowed to.

Definition of Terms

As several concepts and terms used in this study are defined and employed across academic disciplines and contexts, this section seeks to provide operational definitions to provide clarity and consistency for the study's readers. They are as follows:

- *Chief Diversity Officer (CDO):* "The CDO is a boundary-spanning senior administrative role that prioritizes diversity-themed organizational change as a shared priority at the highest levels of leadership and governance. Reporting to the president, provost, or both,

the CDO is an institution's highest-ranking administrator. The CDO is an integrative role that coordinates, leads, enhances, and [...] supervises formal diversity capabilities of the institution in an effort to create an environment that is inclusive and excellent for all." (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013, p. 32).

- *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion work or Diversity work:* These are institutional programs, initiatives, and efforts that support, advocate, and advance minoritized communities and forward systems of accountability and action with distinct orientations to achieving equity (Hurtado et al., 2012; Nguyen, 2019).
- *Power:* A force that gives one the ability to affect and/or change another social actor's behavior or outcome within a context (Pfeffer 1994; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1974).
- *Agency:* The ''activities of actors who have an interest in particular institutional arrangements and who leverage resources to create new institutions or to transform existing ones'' (Maguire et al. 2004, p. 657).
- *Racism:* System of dominance, power, and privilege rooted in historical oppression based on race (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Harrell, 2000; Omi & Winant, 2015; Tatum, 1997). "In the United States, this system benefits White people and disadvantages or constrains people of color. In this system, White people maintain structures preserving their power while excluding people of color from power" (Nguyen, 2019).
- *Anti-racism:* Focuses on exposing institutionalized racism, interrogating and tracing the origins of long-standing patterns and structures of inequality and prejudice, and intentionally seeks to fight against racist ideology *(*Alderman et. al, 2019; Troyna, 1987)

Organization of the Study

This dissertation study contains five chapters. The purpose of this chapter (i.e., Chapter 1) provided the reader with an overview of the study's concept and establish its relevance and importance in the larger educational and societal context. The accompanying chapters will discuss relevant scholarship, selected theoretical frameworks, methodological approach and design, findings, and discussion/implications. Chapter 2 will both review and synthesize relevant literature to the study and discuss the theoretical frameworks used for the analysis. Chapter 3 will present the methodical approach to the study, which includes the research design, participant selection, and researcher positionality. Chapter 4 will review the study findings and Chapter 5 will engage in a discussion on the study's findings, implications, and other considerations for future research, policy, and practice. Finally, at the end of Chapter 5, I will provide a conclusion to culminate this dissertation study.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW & STUDY FRAMEWORKS

This chapter explores the relevant literature and frameworks used to conceptualize and frame institutional power dynamics. The chapter is split into two parts.

First, I review the supporting literature for this study into three distinct sections. The first section is named *'The Chief Diversity Officer.'* In it, I will explore the foundations of the chief diversity officer role scholarship, from its earliest exploration as research of the topic of interest to how the role is operationalized in the higher education context. Next, the second section is '*Diversity Origins and Historical Limitations.'* This section will explore the historical origins of diversity in both organizations and higher education and further explore the ways different entities (e.g., law, policies, organizational design) limit and/or create constraints on its capacity. Finally, the third section is titled '*The Paradoxical Nature of Politics and Management of Diversity at Universities*.' Here, I review literature that situates CDOs and other diversity efforts within the higher education context. In it, I will look at how diversity and the people who lead its efforts navigate politicized landscapes and the paradoxical nature of their work.

In the second part of the chapter, I will close with a discussion of the study's theoretical and conceptual frameworks that help situate and frame the findings. In it, I will review the two theoretical frameworks (*Racialized Organization* and *Network Theory of Power*) and the conceptual framework (*Tatli and Özbilgin (2009)'s model on Understanding Diversity Managers' Role in Organizational Change*).

PART ONE: THE CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICER

The Chief Diversity Officer as a professional title originated in the corporate structure (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998). Dexter (2010) defines the CDO as "a critical player in orchestrating the change that will lead to a new [...] culture" with a direct line to C-suite or the CEO itself (p. 5).

Further arguing, they play an essential role in leveraging human talent with diverse backgrounds, attaining benefits associated with workforce diversity (e.g., enhanced creativity), and enabling a better understanding of changing demographic trends (Dexter, 2010; Shi et al., 2018). Moreover, while these roles gain prominence and visibility across sectors, these roles have been positioned and understood as purely symbolic or facilitative in function (Ng et al., 2020; Pittard, 2010). In fact, many organizations will hire CDOs from underrepresented backgrounds to visibly illustrate their diversity commitment or can hold importance as an example of the CEO/president's legacy and progressive ideals (Ng et al., 2020). Therefore, as CDOs become more commonplace in higher education, the dimensions of their roles have become informed through the setting.

Chief Diversity Officers in Higher Education

Higher education scholars developed significant literature and organizational infrastructure around the CDO, unlike many other sectors or disciplines (Williams, 2013). Affirmative action and its corresponding legal decisions *(i.e., Bakke vs. University of California*) created more diverse college campuses and work environments— cultivating a need for more diverse faculty, staff, and administration to meet the needs of this changing environment. Positions like Director of Minority Affairs and offices that centered the needs of "diverse" non-normative students became commonplace, namely through the demands of student activism. Student demands have called for an institutional advocate who will extend greater accountability for the university, which has manifested itself as the CDO and/or increased responsibility in diversity offices (Chessman & Wayt, 2016; Parker, 2019). Williams & Wade-Golden (2013) define chief diversity officers as:

> "The CDO is a boundary-spanning senior administrative role that prioritizes diversity-themed organizational change as a shared priority at the highest level of leadership and

> governance...The CDO is an integrative role that coordinates, leads, enhances, and in some instances, supervises formal diversity capabilities of the institution in an effort to create an environment that is inclusive and excellent for all" (p. 32).

In general, the CDO in higher education is broadly conceived as the senior-most leader for leading the institution's diversity charge (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). However, all positions are not created equal as institutional title and positionality vary depending on the institution. Beyond a definition, organizations like the National Association for Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE), a subsidiary of the American Council of Education, have worked to establish core functions and principles as CDOs become more commonplace in institutional leadership structures (2020). As it considers itself to be the "preeminent voice for diversity officers in higher education," NADOHE (2020) forwards the standards of practice for CDOs and the conceptual framework for these practices (see FIGURE 1 and TABLE 1). These principles seek to institutionalize and legitimize the work of the Chief Diversity Officer to ensure that colleges and universities empower these positions to take on their significant institutional charge. Furthermore, the principles were constructed to support hiring as characteristics of the profession continue to expand (Worthington et al., 2014). Moreover, the increased professionalization of Chief Diversity Officers not only creates more standardization but also further legitimizes the CDO as a necessary institutional leader, much like other traditional senior leaders (i.e., CFO or head of development).

Though conceptual models like these standardized practices, the role of the Chief Diversity Officer remains difficult. Pittard (2010) found that CDOs serve in a facilitative role with senior leaders and key stakeholders (e.g., student activists and adverse faculty members), and therefore they must bridge gaps in the discourse to seek resolution. Mitchell, Mitchell,

Whitmore, & Varner (2018) posit that these positions are "situated somewhere between being the 'Chief Campus Revolutionary' and "Cover Your Administration" officer (p. 81). This illustrates CDOs must hold onto the mantle for advocacy and operate as agents of the institution (Williams, 2013). Therefore, for universities and CDOs to be successful in their approach, both are "tasked with understanding the very real and complex challenges that impact the everyday experiences of faculty, staff, and students of color and other diverse, historically marginalized members of the campus community" (Mitchell et al., 2018, p. 83) and simultaneously demonstrating the care, concern, and action toward mitigating inequities.

FIGURE. 1: NADOHE Standards of Practice

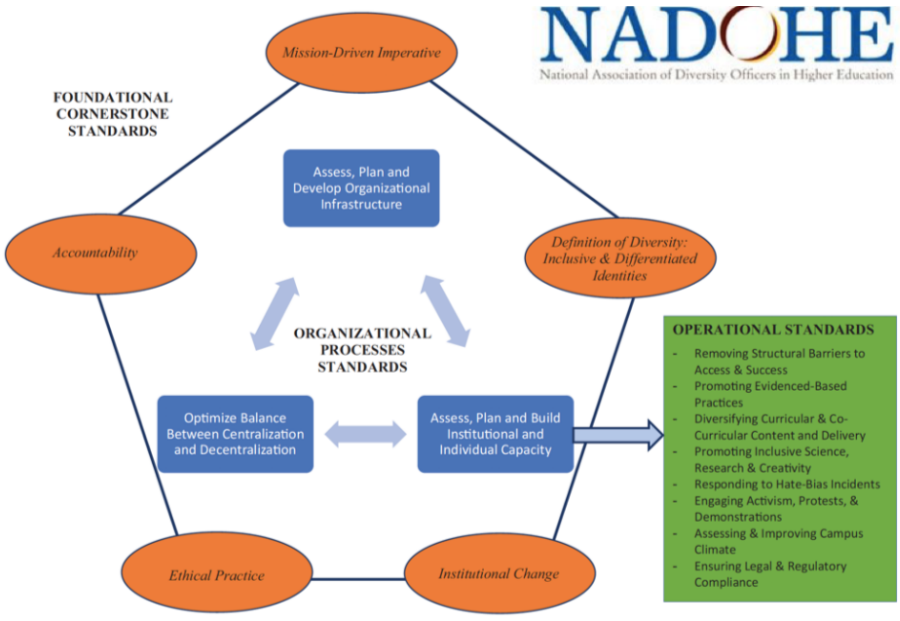

Figure 1. Framework for NADOHE Standards of Professional Practice.

Table 1: NADOHE Standards of Professional Practice for CDOs (NADOHE, 2020)

Standard	Description		
One	*Chief diversity officers have ethical, legal and practical obligations to frame their work from comprehensive definitions of equity, diversity, and inclusion—definitions that are inclusive with respect to different identities, differentiated in terms of the focal issues addressed, and complex in terms of intersectionality and context.*	**Nine**	*Chief diversity officers strive to optimize the balance between centralization and decentralization of efforts to achieve equity, diversity, and inclusion throughout the institution.*
Two	*Chief diversity officers work to ensure that elements of equity, diversity, and inclusion are embedded as an imperative in the institutional mission, vision, and strategic plan.*	**Ten**	*Chief diversity officers work with other senior administrators and members of the campus community to assess, plan, and build institutional capacity for equity, diversity, and inclusion.*
Three	*Chief diversity officers are committed to planning, catalyzing, facilitating, and evaluating processes of institutional and organizational change.*	**Eleven**	*Chief diversity officers work to ensure that institutions conduct periodic campus climate assessments to illuminate strengths, challenges, and gaps in the development and advancement of an equitable, inclusive climate for diversity*
Four	*Chief diversity officers work with other senior campus administrators to revise or remove the embedded institutional policies, procedures and norms that create differential structural barriers to the access and success of students, faculty, and staff who belong to marginalized and oppressed groups.*	**Twelve**	*Chief diversity officers work with other senior administrators and campus professionals to develop, facilitate and assess protocols to address hate-bias incident response, including efforts related to prevention, education, and intervention.*
Five	*Chief Diversity Officers work with faculty, staff, students and appropriate institutional governance structures to promote inclusive excellence in teaching and learning across the curriculum and co-curriculum.*	**Thirteen**	*Chief Diversity Officers work with other senior administrators and campus professionals to facilitate and assess efforts of mentoring, education, and response to campus activism, protests, and demonstrations about issues of equity, diversity and inclusion.*
Six	*Chief diversity officers work within a community of scholars to advocate for inclusive excellence in science, research, creativity and scholarship as fundamental to the mission-driven work of the institution.*	**Fourteen**	*Chief diversity officers are committed to accountability for advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion throughout the institution.*
Seven	*Chief diversity officers are committed to using evidence-based practices in their work for equity, diversity, and inclusion.*	**Fifteen**	*Chief diversity officers work closely with other senior administrators to ensure full implementation of the legal and regulatory compliance-based requirements for the institution.*
Eight	*Chief diversity officers work collaboratively with other senior campus administrators to plan and develop the organizational infrastructure for equity, diversity, and inclusion to meet the needs of the campus community.*	**Sixteen**	*Chief diversity officers engage in their work in ways that reflect the highest levels of ethical practice, and pursue self-regulation as a profession within higher education contexts.*

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While significant work has gone into legitimizing the CDO position, scholars also assert that this responsibility is not just for CDOs to carry. Chun and Evans (2009) observed that for diversity to become fully integrated into higher learning institutions, members of the campus community must be empowered to play a leadership role, accountability must be evenly distributed, and decision-making must be democratic. Chun and Evans (2009) identified various key organizational members, including senior-level leaders (e.g., boards of trustees, presidents, and CDOs), academic and other administrative leaders, and other 'campus constituent groups who must be engaged with institutional efforts. However, there is still a heavy burden placed upon CDOs and they are now becoming more integrated into leadership structures to advocate / be involved in key decision-making (William & Wade-Golden, 2013; Worthington et al, 2020).

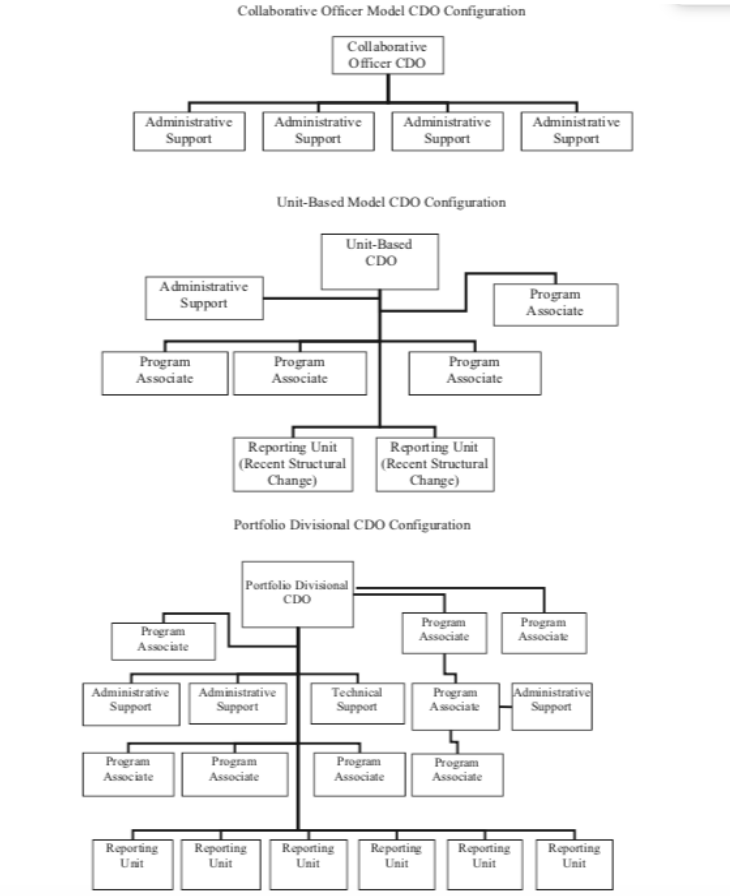
Therefore, the next section will explore how CDOs have become a part of the universities' leadership structures by exploring their different configurations, ranks, and portfolios.

CDOs, higher education, and institutional context

CDOs configuration. Not all CDOs are created the same. First, there are different organization models, and subsequently different institutional influences for a CDO's position, office, and accompanying portfolio. Williams &Wade-Golden (2013) identify three models of CDO configuration, seen in FIGURE 2. Though many diversity efforts happen outside of these structures and therefore does not define an institution's efficacy toward diversity issues, these different configurations can reveal the varying level of institutional power that CDOs have at their disposal (Williams, 2013). Moreover, the accompanying table below illustrates each vertical model structure's common characteristics, adapted from Leon, 2014. In it, Leon (2014) found that the collaboration model holds the least amount of institutional power, the portfolio model holds the most, and the unit-based is in the middle. These positions and constructions have shown to play an important role in these offices and their great diversity charge. Parker (2017) found that organizational structure (i.e., roles and functions, relationships, tasks, etc.) played a significant role in influencing office functions. Research that focuses on the organization of the office offers insight into the higher education community regarding social practices, structures, and behaviors (Scott & Davis, 2007). Thus, Parker (2017) contends that centering structuralism when investigating CDO offices, can reveal mechanisms essential to organizational efficiency. Moreover, this configuration informs their relationship to rank, reporting structures, etc., and identifies who their institutional peers are (Leon, 2014). The higher their rank (i.e., portfolio-based configuration), CDOs institutional peers are senior university leadership, changing the relationship between the CDO and other senior leaders from 'reporting

up' to senior members in the organization and advocating and cultivating relationships as institutional peers and colleagues.

FIGURE 2: CDO Configuration Model (Leon, 2014; derived from Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013)



Chief Diversity Officers: Archetypes of Vertical Authority
Collaborative Officer CDO Model Characteristics *- One-person office with small support staff (secretary, student employee) - No reporting unit structure/no supervision of lower-rank diversity officers - Limited budget and narrow span of priorities - High value on building personal relationships on campus*

- *Rarely involved in implementation of diversity initiatives at ground level* =

Unit-Based CDO Model Characteristics

- *Presence of additional staff (e.g., administrative support professionals, program assistant, research assistant) to sponsor diversity initiatives*
- *Supervision of lower-rank diversity officers*
- *No reporting unit structures*
- *High value on building personal relationships on campus*
- *Direct collaboration with diversity and no diversity-related units*

Portfolio Divisional CDO Model Characteristics

- *Most cost-intensive model (staff and resources)*
- *Direct collaboration with high-ranking administrators*
- *High value on building personal relationships on campus*
- *Presence and supervision of lower-ranking diversity officers*
- *Direct relationship with reporting units (e.g., multicultural affairs, ethnic and gender studies)*

Rank, portfolios, and reporting structure. In university leadership structures, where one sits and whom they report to matters (Birnbaum, 1988). Reporting to the president and/or provost signals institutional importance, for the leader and the concept of diversity, alike. These reporting units can help these leaders to reach above, below, and beyond those who directly report to the CDO (Leon, 2014). This type of work is essential because it helps the CDO break "institutional silos." For example, CDOs with high rank become a part of their university's senior leadership spaces, meaning they have access to important networks and can elevate diversity issues to the highest levels of their institution (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Leon, 2014). A CDO's rank can vary greatly, depending on their institutional context— Leon (2014) distinguished a dean or special assistant rank as low-level, associate, assistant, or vice president/ provost/chancellor rank as mid-

level, and vice president/provost/vice chancellor rank as high-level (p. 81). It is important to note that high institutional rank does not ensure compliance from campus partners, but rather it "means that the CDO has the opportunity to bring diversity to higher levels of discussion within the institutional hierarchy (Leon, 2014, p. 83). Along with portfolios, CDOs are also a major symbol of their institutional status as a "healthy operating budget can alter the degree of autonomy, authority, and influence of any CDO" (Leon, 2014, p. 84). In fact, Williams & Wade-Golden (2007) identified "entrepreneurial strategies" as a core function of the CDO role as they found that CDOs had to be creative in funding through grants and providing services to schools and colleges. Parker (2017) asserts that "recent formations of diversity offices are relatively more extensive and comprehensive than former diversity offices and units, often possessing wide-ranging regarding diversity-related responsibilities and accountabilities" (p. 14). Expanded portfolios and additional institutional oversight add to positions' presumed influence and status—and it matters. One's rank, portfolio, embeddedness, and organizational structures act as artifacts that symbolize and legitimize the person and the role of diversity at the institution (Camargo, 2021).

Summary and Moving Forward

This section was intended to review the extant literature on chief diversity officers in higher education. More than exploring who CDOs are as individuals, the intention was to consider how these roles exist within their own respective contexts by using literature that investigates CDOs' institutional function, positioning, and standardization. As CDOs have become popularized, the role has become increasingly defined, standardized, and legitimized as commonplace in university leadership structures. While this context defines and establishes the

norms and values of the organization, context can also constrain or narrow. The next section will explore the various ways diversity work gets constrained through organizational context.

PART II: DIVERSITY ORIGINS AND HISTORICAL CONSTRAINTS

The previous section established that Chief Diversity Officers exist within a given organizational context. Now, this section seeks to discuss and reveal the ways in which institutional and organizational contexts can define, narrow, and ultimately constrain issues of diversity, in and out of higher education. These constraints create limitations to what diversity work can be and the level of agency diversity leaders may have. More specifically, this section is organized into three different parts. First, I will discuss the origins of diversity and how it has been thrust into public discourse and debate, and the subsequent efforts to narrow its scope. Next, I will discuss how previous management practices and scholarship have influenced the way diversity leadership functions within organizations. Finally, I will discuss organizational culture in higher education as a context (i.e., norms, expectations, and internal and external pressures) as it sets the tone for the environment by which CDOs and diversity work can exist.

History as Organizational Context or The Narrowing of 'Diversity' in Higher Education

Origins. The origins of what is now called *diversity* are directly tied to the civil rights movement's activism and the history of affirmative action (Skrentny, 2018). While the fight for civil rights and Black civil disobedience has existed since the Transatlantic Slave Trade, many things came to a head in the 1960s (Wilder, 2014). In the 1960s, the gradual gain of Black social and political capital, the passivism of nonviolent protests, and the emergence of television exposing the violence and vitriol of American racism were vital factors in creating a political moment where sweeping civil rights legislation could be passed and enforced (Pratt, 2017).

Notably, the images from the Birmingham campaign of 1963, where police released hoses and dogs on school-age children, Bloody Sunday horrified the world and created the political opportunity for primary legislation for equal rights and justice (Pauley, 1997). Because of images like this, politicians were facing increasing pressure to pass legislation that better protected Black Americans in all aspects of their day-to-day lives (Pratt, 2017; Pauley, 1997). Three significant pieces of legislation came from this era: *Executive Order 10925, Executive Order of 11426*, and the *Civil Rights Act*.

Signed by President Kennedy in 1961, EO 10925 states that employers must "take affirmative action to ensure that applicants are employed and that employees are treated during employment without regard to their race, creed, color, or national origin." Executive Order of 11426 superseded it, which was signed by President Johnson in 1965 and prohibited federal contractors from "discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin" and that contractors will "take affirmative action to ensure that applicants are employed and that employees are treated [fairly] during employment, without regard to their race, color, religion, sex or national origin." More directly, while Kennedy coined the concept of affirmative action, Johnson's Executive Order provided compliance regulations that forced contractors to take specific measures to ensure equality in hiring. And yet, even with these new regulations, "affirmative action" was not clearly defined or provided proper guidelines; similarly, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 "outlawed discrimination without defining the term or providing guidelines for compliance" (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998, p. 963). Given these policies' ambiguous nature, organizations and universities alike struggled to identify the right course of action appropriately.

Historians and scholars have noted that there was no systematic approach to implementing affirmative action in the 1960s as administrators sought to create a system to address discrimination and the historical exclusion of opportunity (Skrentny, 2018). With federal regulation with little guidance, universities began to review their admissions policies, creating a quota system for targeted recruitment and enrollment of minority students (Skrentny, 2018). Dissenters immediately argued that these policies were "distort[ing] the meritocratic processes" of higher education (Kroffman, 2000, p. 964) and provided special treatment to minority applicants. Similar to how the Executive Order that coined the phrase "affirmative action," another legally binding document popularized the word "diversity" (Moses & Chang, 2005). This was the Regents of the University of California v. Bakke, 438 U.S. 265.

Diversity as a 'Narrowed' Compelling Interest. As soon as affirmative action was introduced to college campuses, it was debated in the American legal system. Its language was criticized for being ambiguous and too vague, as many of the policies resulted from well-meaning white administrators seeking to meet the moment of the Civil Rights era (Skrentny, 2018). Dissenters saw this ambiguity, the added anxieties of being viewed as out of compliance, and their general disagreement of 'redistributive justice' to take it to the courts. After various district-level cases, affirmative action finally went to the Supreme Court with Bakke vs. The Regents of the University of California. After being rejected from UC Davis Medical School, Allan Bakke sued the University of California for being a violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause as he believed their affirmative action policy (that provided racial quotas for underrepresented groups) discriminated against him— a white applicant (Harris, 2018).

In this case, there were four core arguments from the University of California–Davis (UC–Davis) to justify its medical school's use of two separate admissions processes. These arguments were: 1) increasing the disproportionately small number of minority medical students, 2) countering the effects of societal discrimination, 3) striving to improve the number of physicians who might practice in communities that lack adequate medical services; and 4) pursuing the educational benefits that flow from a racially diverse student body. In the deciding split decision, Justice Powell found constitutional support for just one of the four: UC–Davis's broad-based interest in pursuing the educational benefits that flow from a racially diverse student body. In analyzing the decision, Moses and Chang (2006) assert:

> "Powell stated that the First Amendment allows a university the freedom to make its own judgments regarding education, which includes the selection of its student body. [...] the attainment of a diverse student body broadens the range of viewpoints collectively held by students and subsequently allows a university to provide an atmosphere that improves the quality of higher education through greater speculation and experimentation. [...] Because such goals are essential to the nation's future and are protected under the First Amendment, Justice Powell concluded that race-conscious admissions practices, when narrowly tailored, serve a compelling educational interest" (p. 7).

Coined as the "diversity rationale," Powell's decision "provided the theoretical legal basis for diversity as a compelling state interest and expanded on the educational foundation for the diversity rationale" (Moses & Chang, 2006, p. 7). In turn, this decision declared setting quotas as unconstitutional. While this landmark decision solidified affirmative action and the concept of diversity, it also created a rigid, narrow lens to how admissions and, more broadly, how diversity work can be completed, rejecting that it can be used as a corrective measure (Aguirre &

Martinez, 2003). Through Powell disregarding the three former arguments from UC Davis, the court rejected Justice Blackburn's dissent that argued that "[i]n order to get beyond racism, we must first take account of race. There is no other way" (Harris, 2018). Therefore, the diversity rationale is "not only as a legal strategy to shape educational policy but also as an intellectual tradition," which, through its practice, both hinders and promotes progress (Patton, 2016, p.332).

Though narrow, affirmative action created meaningful pathways that extended and expanded the population of the campus community and even integrated diversity into the social justice lexicon as it was typically applied to the sciences biology (e.g., biology or biodiversity) (Aguirre & Martinez, 2003). More directly, it is through administrators and practitioners strategizing and seeking to comply with equal opportunity and affirmative action policies that birthed various diversity practices that are now commonplace at companies and universities alike (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998). While it did not change the white majority and white male-centric domination on college campuses, it changed the college admissions process, institutional representation, and makeup and made way for greater democratization of higher education (Guinier, 2003).

Though Bakke's decision is broadly viewed as a 'win' for affirmative action and diversity, Powell's argument "represents a self-conscious judicial choice to present affirmative action in a way that will advance and protect minority rights in a political system that systematically denies underrepresented minorities the ability to lobby for more substantive change" (Morales, 2006, p. 233). However, the decision also created a foundation where scholars were able to complete extensive empirical work on the importance and benefits of diversity as being a positive, crucial learning outcome for students and team dynamics (Gurin, 1999; Gurin et al., 2012; Gunier, 2003; Chang, 2005; antonio et al., 2004; Jayakumar, 2008). It is through this

empirical work that diversity policies have been protected as several studies have been cited as supporting the importance of diversity in higher education institutions (Bok & Bowen, 1998).

Since the Bakke decision, the legal efficacy of affirmative action/diversity policies and practices remain commonplace in courtrooms and in public discourse. Though diversity has become deemed as a shared value, cases like *Hopwood vs. Texas (1996), Grutter vs. University of Michigan (2003), Gratz vs. University of Michigan (2003), and Fisher v. University of Texas (2016)* have persisted, and in recent years, their arguments have taken a new form. For example, in the *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard (2019)*, the anti-affirmative action argument has progressed from unfairness to white students to racial discrimination against Asian and Asian American students. Powell's narrow conception of the diversity rationale created a landscape where diversity practice could emerge but also created rigid constraints that made practices restrictive and overly legalized (Aguirre & Martinez, 2003). This builds a complicated relationship with diversity and the legal system as it creates a space where its legality is commonly questioned and creates a context where administrators think about diversity through a legal and/or compliance lens, rather than a "corrective," justice-based lens (Patton, 2016; Berrey, 2011). Therefore, as diversity practices became popularized after the Bakke decision, the political discourse surrounding diversity became richer and more conflicted as some viewed these practices as meaningful progress and others viewed it as a reactionary, neoliberal response to blowback against affirmative action (Herring & Henderson, 2011, p.632; Berrey, 2007).

Post Bakke and contemporary discourse and debates on diversity. After the Bakke decision, the precedent was that diversity was a "compelling interest" for all organizations. And while the quota system or a reparation system was unconstitutional, diversity and its practices expanded quickly. Universities created minority affairs offices and even began to target their

recruitment and retention efforts (Parker, 2017). Furthermore, universities promoted multiculturalism, which aimed to change the experiences of students of color by promoting assimilation or increasing sensitivity from majority group populations to reduce prejudice and improve intergroup relations (Chesler et al, 2005). Beyond racial and gender lines, other underrepresented groups became a part of institutions' diversity practice, like centers and services for LGBTQ, people with disabilities, undocumented students, first-generation college students, etc. (Herring & Henderson, 2011; Hamer & Lang, 2015). And yet, while these strategies promoted an understanding of cultural differences and traditions of different racial-ethnic groups, they have failed to challenge the majority of students' views about the priority of their own cultural traditions in work or about the ways in which institutions and organizations perpetuate inequality (Chesler et al., 2005, p. 19-20). By the 1990s, scholars were finding that multicultural approaches did little to challenge the status quo or directly confront the differences in educational experiences between students from dominant groups and underrepresented groups (Chesler et al., 2005).

Managerialism as Organizational Context

As discussed, the Chief Diversity Officers originated in corporate structures as means of compliance and developed through human resources as organizations sought to interpret vague regulations on equal opportunity and affirmative action (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998; Dobbin, 2009). Given these origins, there is rich scholarship in management and organizations on diversity's function in organizational contexts. In fact, the emergence of CDOs to improve diversity outcomes is a prime example of managerialism in management literature, which believes that the performance of all organizations can be optimized by the application of management skills and

theory (Klikauer, 2015). In turn, this section will consider the CDO as an organizational manager and discuss the possibilities and limitations that arrive through this process.

Managing outcomes. Broadly, diversity management literature centers on and investigates outcomes, global markets, and "specific programs, policies, and practices that organizations have developed and implemented to manage a diverse workforce effectively and to promote organizational equality" as creating authority structures is one of the most effective strategies to increase diversity (Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014; Prasad & Mills, 1997). As it primarily focuses on outcomes, financial performance, and diversity as a method to expand market share or add to the 'bottom line,' this body of literature is less mission-driven (Herring, 2009). Scholars have shown that diverse teams create better products and are overall more effective, especially when a manager is culturally competent so that they can contextualize differences and manage team dynamics accordingly (Page, 2007; 2010). Beyond team dynamics, implementing diversity practices can influence the broader institutional environment and reshape organizational norms to be more inclusive (Yang & Konrad, 2011). And yet, while there is significant literature on how diversity management can improve organizational outcomes (i.e., team performance, and financial gains), there is a lack of empirical data that supports diversity programs' ability to improve outcomes for underrepresented groups. Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly (2006) posit that the best practices in diversity management are more like "best guesses" and act as "to inoculate themselves against liability or to improve morale rather than to increase managerial diversity" (p. 610). More specifically, Kalev et al. (2006) found that most pursued diversity initiatives focused on bias reduction, even though such initiatives were expensive and relatively ineffective because of whites' perceptions of "reverse discrimination" (p. 611). These negative perceptions can cause real issues for diversity programs, as Nadiv & Kuna (2020) reveals that diversity programs and

practices can create tensions in an organization. These tensions go on to undermine these efforts' successes while simultaneously creating a greater need for diversity interventions (Nadiv & Kuna, 2020). Thus, diversity can be positioned instead of the organization's core mission, creating organizational paradoxes such as necessary change vs. desire for stability, bureaucratic control vs. flexible procedures, and long-term business gains vs. short-term losses (Nadiv & Kuna, 2020). Though those se challenges persist, diversity has become increasingly viewed as important and necessary in organizational structures. Though this literature is perhaps less moralistic, it has played a significant role in building the argument for diversity in organizations (Cutter & Weber, 2020). As the argument was successful, it has become replicated in other organizations and sectors alike.

Playing the middle 'man.' Before there were CDOs, there were diversity managers, evolving over time and at times, including equal opportunity officers, affirmative action coordinators, and equity advisors. Parker (1999) claims that these positions act as "double dealers" continually navigating between public perspectives on justice and private interests to stakeholders and profits; this is positioned in between their personal beliefs and value system. Due to this complicated role, scholars have situated these roles as organizational change agents (Dobbs, 1996; Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2000; Jewson, & Mason, 1986; Williams, 2013). However, Tatli and Ozbilgin (2009) contend that dominant literature "conceives change agents as autonomous, decontextualized, and apolitical beings" and further argue that this conception oversimplifies diversity managers' agency in organizations and discounts how they must code-switch or "package their language" to appeal to others in the organization (Dutton & Ashford, 1993, p. 253). Furthermore, they assert that agency for diversity managers can be examined through their situatedness, relationality, and praxis. Therefore, they assert that studies on

diversity managers must consider their organizational landscape (i.e., situatedness), the complexity of relationships and networks within their context (i.e., relationality), and/or through practical means like organizational progress or through the strategies they employ (praxis). Lastly, as they are embedded in multiple structures and maintain relationships with different levels on the organizational networks, diversity officers must hold well developed "interpersonal skills"—such as negotiation, facilitation, communication, and networking, as it is the most frequently cited category of competencies in the change agency literature (Tatli & Ozbilgin, 2009; 2011).

Becoming the 'diverse' or 'diversity' executive leader. After diversity managers were established, organizations sought to symbolize their elevated commitment to diversity by designating an executive role committed to diversity and compliance (Dexter, 2010). The literature on executive leadership is divided: some argue that executive leadership is significant in cultivating organizational outcomes (Peters & Austin, 1985). Others argue that it holds little to no importance on organizational development (Meindl & Ehrich, 1987; Pfeffer, 1977). Day & Lord (1988) argue that executive leaders are significant, but that empirical studies and theoretical frames are underdeveloped due to micro-level analyses and the challenges in collecting data. However, as diversity efforts have been launched since the birth of affirmative action, executive leadership remains white and male-dominated, in both numbers and in how we primarily conceive leadership (Gündemir et al., 2014). Therefore, Chin, Desormeaux, & Sawyer (2016) assert that "there is little research conducted to examine what diversity leadership is or to include the perspectives of diverse leaders" and further argue that leadership literature and theories draw from a narrow sample of leaders—mainly that of white, heterosexual men" (p. 51). While scholarship is limited, there is significant literature on women and people of color climbing the

ladder in an organization. Collins (1993) found that the people of color who can succeed within white management hierarchies but have limitations in their upward mobility has been delineated racially. Furthermore, even as more diverse leaders become ingrained in the structure, the workplace culture remains the same (Collins, 1997). In short, management scholars have conceptualized the executive leader as white, and therefore, when non-white, non-male executives 'climb the ranks' they must fit into white frames to be successful and downplay their differences in an effort to be viewed as a legitimate leader rather than a "diversity hire" (Collins, 1997; 2011; Herring & Henderson, 2011). These distinctions are difficult to identify as a significant issue in the literature is that it conflates diverse leaders (generally meaning non-white, non-male) with people leading diversity efforts. This conflation implies that no matter the role—a minority leader is always responsible for improving diversity or 'cultivating change' (Herring & Henderson, 2011).

And while there is lacking research on executive leadership, managerialism, and diversity, there is clear evidence to suggest that these positions may lack agency and opportunity to continue to rise through the ranks. COOs and CFOs. Larcker & Tayan (2020) found that 90% of internally promoted CEOs served in a role that held profit or loss responsibility or CFO experience. In contrast, only 5% of CEOs were promoted from functional groups, like marking and human resources. More directly, Martins (2020) posits that: "Even when there is diversity within an organization's leadership ranks, senior leaders may signal a lack of inclusion that reinforces the social subjugation of women and minority leaders in the organization's hierarchy, in various ways. For instance, women and racial minorities may be placed in senior leadership roles that have little influence over operations (e.g., HR, Chief Diversity Officer), leading to optical rather than participatory diversity" (p. 1119).

The University, Organizational Culture and Organizational Constraints

In this section, I will broadly explore the organizational culture at colleges and universities. While identifying a general culture in higher education institutions is impossible, as it greatly depends on the institutional type (Griffin & Hurtado, 2011), this section will explore how structures, governance, and pressures inform higher education's organizational culture.

Structures, values, and norms. Keeling, Underhile, & Wall (2005) assert that "the organization of institutions of higher education has been seen as operating with ambiguous purposes in vertically oriented structures that are only loosely connected" (derived by Cohen and March 1986; Weick 1976; Mintzberg 1979). This 'siloed' approach allows institutions space to cultivate creativity and to respect and allow for autonomy. Thus, creating an environment more focused on promoting their own internal goals and objectives than on adhering to, elucidating, or accomplishing broader institutional purposes (Keeling et al. 2005; Kuh 1996). These vertical structures create a context for institutional bureaucracy and hierarchy to be rigid and ever-present in higher education settings (Berger & Thanh, 2000). Built on the assumption that organizations exist to accomplish rational goals, bureaucracy is the "formal social networks dedicated to limited goals with a hierarchical structure that maximizes coordination and communication" (Berger & Thanh, 2000, p. 126; derived from Weber, 1947). Using this perspective, university structures are designed to foster specialization, delineate divisions of labor, and organize power through hierarchical authority (Berger & Thanh, 2000). Centering ideal bureaucracy, higher education institutions' practices include the recognition and focus on rank, exclusive employment, and security through the tenure system.

Oversight through governance. However, there are systems to keep power in check, namely through governance. In general, governance is understood to consist of the explicit and

implicit procedures that allocate to various participants the authority and responsibility for making institutional decisions (Hirsch and Weber, 2001; Benjamin, 1993). More specifically, shared governance is considered a "delicate balance" between faculty and the university, providing a mechanism to participate in planning, decision-making processes, and administrative accountability (Olson, 2009). Whether shared governance seeks to provide "checks and balances" or universities seek to provide autonomy as a professional organization, it is organized under a notion in which unequal power dynamics persist (Kaplan, 2004). Dominant groups continue to hold significant power in these governance structures and can be resistant to institutional change or ideas that challenge the status quo (Chesler & Crowfoot, 1989; 2005; Kaplan, 2004). For example, Kezar (2008) uses an example of a group of white faculty who write a letter to the Academic Senate to express their concerns about the decline in faculty hiring standards. Kezar (2008) explains: "In this situation, the interest group is a set of White faculty, and the way they are exerting power is through writing down their concerns and sending them to a powerful group on campus with whom they believe they have influence. They have defined their interests as declining standards in hiring faculty" (p. 408). The example shows how dominant groups hold institutional power, tacit knowledge, networks, and strategies to mitigate, subject, and undermine efforts that they want to resist (Chesler & Crowfoot, 2005).

External Pressures. External pressures are also significant factors in higher education. While public image has been important in the past, higher education has become much more beholden to public opinion and private interests (Mcclustsky, 2017). Scholars have documented the decrease in funding to higher education in the 21st century and its effects on its operations and plan. Mumper, Gladieux, King & Corrigan (2016) found that federal regulations can accrue additional costs and create additional work for institutions as it provides no additional funding to

account for these provisions. However, the decision to not comply with federal charges can also accrue additional costs, specifically legal costs if the federal government seeks legal options. Mumper et al. (2016) illustrate that the federal government can change its political agenda with no funding. Beyond financial pressures, public opinion plays a role in how universities function. Universities have long sought to construct narratives about their campus experience through communications and have empirically been viewed as misleading (Bradley, 2013; Pippert & Matchet 2010). Moreover, there is significant attention to managing optics after significant racial or bias incidents (Parker, 2019). Thomas (2018) summarizes that while colleges and universities drive progressive social norms, they are also responsive to larger social, economic, and political forces. Declining state support, rising tuition costs, a new emphasis on corporate "best practices," and new metrics for evaluating students' "return on investment" reveal the impact of these larger forces in shaping the American university landscape" (p. 732).

These "professional bureaucracies" hold a high degree of decentralization, and through their vertical structures, senior administrators silo off values, programs, and efforts into various workflows and portfolios. This approach can create problems for the universities' broader institutional values— like diversity, equity, and inclusion, which have historically been undervalued, resisted, and undermined (Berry, 2019). Therefore, institutional goals and functions of diversity (i.e., CDOs) require a "delicate balance" (Keeling et al., 2005, p. 127) as too little structure "hinders efficiency and accountability" (Keeling et al., 2005, p.127) and too much structure constrain and even dehumanize efforts (Berger & Thanh, 2004).

Summary

This section discusses the broader history of diversity within institutions and organizations. First, through exploring diversity's evolution, I review how diversity has become

defined (and narrowed) through institutional and structural decisions, interpretations of law, and various organizational contexts. In the next section, I review scholarship on how the construction of diversity managers (many serve as the precursor to the CDO role) has created a focus on outcomes and barriers (i.e., pathways and pipelines) in many of these roles, but does not address issues of agency and structural issues. Lastly, the final section explores University culture and how diversity/diversity leadership is situated. Largely, it is highly bureaucratic, slow-change, and vertically siloed thus providing a complex, difficult landscape for diversity work to occur. Given the discussion of the institutional context of CDO's and diversity's many limitations, the role of the Chief Diversity Officer "highlight[s] the complexity of politics and related bureaucracy of navigating a large complex system such as higher education that by design is inherently racist sexist, and homophobic" (Mitchell et al., 2018). Therefore, the final section will explore this "complexity" by discussing literature on the political landscape at universities for diversity as an ideal and CDOs, alike.

PART III: THE POLITICS OF DIVERSITY (AND HOW IT'S MANAGED)

As illustrated through the discussion of its origins, diversity is a deeply political, racialized concept. The previous sections discuss CDOs in higher education and how context can create constraints in their role. However, in the last section of this literature review, I will explore the political landscape that diversity and its advocates exist. While diversity discourse is often positioned as a solution to improve racial climates (Berrey, 2011), it also has become a 'buzzword,' holding little to no significant progressive utility (Harris et al, 2015). While student activists lament that university diversity efforts are exploitative and underwhelming (Lerma et al., 2019), conservative groups criticize universities as liberal bastions (Burch, 2018, Havey, 2021). Therefore, I will explore political discourse surrounding notions of diversity in higher

education and how it creates the landscape by which CDOs must navigate. I will first review the various critical scholarship on diversity and CDOs. Next, as critical scholarship has unearthed discrepancies in institutional commitments to diversity, I will then discuss various paradoxes and tensions that higher education holds given its purported commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Lastly, given these conditions, I will close by discussing the unique challenges CDOs face in this difficult political terrain.

Problematizing neoliberalism in diversity

As discussed, diversity has faced ridicule since its inception; however, it is not just one-sided. Numerous critical scholars have argued that diversity is more than an unfulfilled promise, instead that it is reductive and weakens efforts towards racial equity. Bell (2003) argued that diversity efforts in higher education act as a 'distraction' to addressing racial inequity. Diversity enables courts and policymakers to avoid addressing the barriers of race and class" (Bell, 2003, p. 1622) directly and further discusses ways in which diversity discourse is used to have disparate conversations about complicated issues. While diversity initiatives promote 'happy talk' and offer positive examples of progress, structural inequities persist and, in some ways, are getting worse than the initial progress of the 1960s and 1970s (Bell & Hartmann, 2007; Thomas, 2018). For example, Kidder & Gandara (2015) found that, after a statewide repeal of affirmative action, UC Berkeley and UCLA never recovered to the same levels of diversity that they had in the early 1990s, despite high investments to advocate for diversity.

Moreover, diversity has become reoriented from a progressive leftist political lens to an equality politics of contemporary neoliberal practices (Duggan, 2003; Matus & Infante, 2011). Because of neoliberalism, when diversity is incorporated, it is positioned as apolitical, which then "[neutralizes] ways of talking about power and privileges in society" (Matus & Infante,

2011, p. 298). Therefore, they found that curricular practices seeking to integrate diversity for teacher preparation programs desired to remain neutral and believed that this approach "supports and incites a conservative and anti-intellectual analysis of issues of difference in educational contexts" (p. 298). Though its origins are from the civil rights era, scholars have found that diversity has diverged from its origin cause. In fact, Harper, Patton, and Wooten (2015) suggest that the power of diversity has lost its roots in civil rights and become 'watered down' to interest convergence, arguing that institutional diversity is complicit with agents of racism (Bell, 2003). Berrey (2011) further asserts that diversity is a "taming" of Black radical activism. Now that diversity has transformed into a 'safe' topic in the discourse, what does it functionally do to change environmental conditions?

Diversity is now viewed as "largely palatable to administrators in power" rather than fighting against racism as its "token incrementalism [...] does not substantially threaten generations of institutionalized racial privilege" (Harris, et al 2015. p. 25). Therefore, scholars hold the critique that diversity simply does not do enough (Nunn, 2008; Bell, 2003; Berrey 2007, 2011). Patton (2016) argues that diversity initiatives can "diminish the significance of race, become synonymous with race only, and/ or place a huge burden of the work toward racial diversity on racially minoritized groups" (p. 332). Patton, Sánchez, Mac, & Stewart (2019) forward that "DIEJ initiatives in our present context do not significantly differ from initiatives of the past. There is an increasing number of programs and efforts on college campuses today, but in general, they are implemented in response to the same needs expressed by students over the last 50 years" (p.191). So, just as Patton (2016) posits that it is "dangerous to believe the cure for racism/White supremacy is contained in law and policy alone," a growing body of scholars is critical of the value of diversity in higher education today (p. 332).

Politics and Diversity: Paradoxes and tensions of diversity and higher education

Given the emergence of critical scholarship on diversity, there is a growing body of literature seeking to understand the ways in which diversity work may foster inaction or underwhelming results. Moreover, scholarship explores how diversity may be undervalued and undermined through institutional structures and norms. While there are various examples of this paradoxical organizational behavior or misaligned values, I will investigate two specific examples from the literature: 1) diversity speech and 2) notions of merit in higher education**.**

Example 1: Diversity, Speech, and the Art of Saying Nothing.

Speech, statements, and symbols as inaction. Significant studies have explored how universities conceive diversity through mission statements, strategic plans, and other institutional texts (Williams & Clownery, 2007; Williams, 2013). These statements hold importance as they provide guidelines to campus constituents' norms and further signal expectations for outside stakeholders (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). Squire (2017) suggests that these statements "provide broad, but intentional, messaging from which university community members can direct their day-to-day efforts and outside constituents can understand the university's purpose" (p. 730). Moreover, Morphew & Hartley (2006) found that institutions' statements can be crafted to speak toward the institution's unique challenges and reality and their given context. Wilson, Meyer, & McNeal (2012) found that universities both included diversity in their respective mission statements, and some crafted specific diversity statements that spoke directly to differences along racial, gender, and international lines. However, Wilson et al. (2012) found that universities often frame "diversity as the integration of 'others' rather than a transformation of us all" (p. 138). This conceptualization illustrates what critics would argue is centering diversity rhetoric around whiteness, tokenism, etc. (Berrey, 2011). While these statements appear to hold significance in

institutional settings, leadership circles, and when managing campus discourse (Kezar, 2011), there is more scholarship that is critical of the use of statements and a lack of specific action.

Critiquing communications. There is a growing body of empirical and theoretical work centered on diversity and inaction through communications and various procedures. Ahmed (2006) forwarded non-performativity, which conceptualized communications and symbols of discourse as methods to name and identify key issues, but ultimately does not cultivate action. Building on non-performativity, Ahmed (2012) coined institutionalized diversity, where she asserts that institutions fail to achieve diversity goals because they have no interest in actually achieving their goals. 'Diversity work' at the university acts to protect and preserve institutions from external pressures without having to actualize efforts fully. Therefore, institutional efforts are no more than symbolic action (i.e., non-performative) and managing optics for colleges and universities. In these theoretical frames, Ahmed is ostensibly asking: *why do things not change?* Numerous scholars are using these critical frames to investigate institutional statements and the subsequent action (or lack thereof) on diversity, racism, and othering (Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016; Squire et al. 2019; Thomas, 2018). Cole and Harper (2016) found that presidential statements after racial incidents "address[ed] the racist but rarely the racism" and that they "hardly mention[ed] the racial incidents, [made] perpetrators the focal point, and rarely situate[d] racial incidents within larger issues of systematic and institutional oppression" (p. 326). Moreover, these statements use diversity rhetoric and practices to deflect criticism from student activists demanding institutional change (Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016; Cole & Harper; Cho, 2018). This reveals diversity's institutional value as high on signaling, but fundamentally lacks accountability and is further situated as a neoliberal solution to racism (Berrey, 2007). Again, this illustrates the over and under of the promise of diversity, which is often communicated

through texts and statements as driving change, but rarely is practiced through action (Ahmed, 2012).

Pushing Boundaries: Speech codes. One of the first ways universities sought to express diversity, equity, and inclusion as a part of the social fabric of their institutions was through *hate speech codes*. As universities and colleges grew more diverse post-Bakke, racial conflict emerged, and administrators began managing more incidents of discrimination, intimidation, and bias for students of color (Allen & Solorzano, 2000). In response, universities created hate speech codes, community standards, or policies that concretized an affirmative statement against hateful speech and created a formal conduct process to better handle issues of discrimination (Olneck, 2000). Immediate and considerable opposition emerged as dissenters viewed it as a violation of the First Amendment of freedom of speech (Chemerinsky & Gillman, 2017). The courts agreed with this stance as hate speech codes as a form of compliance did not hold up in court, as they were deemed too vague and not clear on violations of putative measures (Gould,1999; ABA, 2017). In turn, universities eliminated codes, instead of adopting campus statements to "respect" and "difference," or crafting a "policy of inclusion" with no system of accountability (Chelser & Crowfoot, 1989). Even these watered-down, non-compliant-based points are met with dissent from conservative and right-wing groups. Gould (1999) argues that hate speech codes (though similar to the upheld Title VII's sexual harassment law) are ruled unconstitutional due to political explanations like hate speech codes being viewed as racial preferences from white students. While not an excuse, universities' failure to live into their stated commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion is complicated by the legal system.

Example 2: Individual Merit

Diversity vs. meritocracy. Another prominent example of institutional values that rub with diversity is meritocracy. Alvarado (2010) defines meritocracy as "a social system that allows people to achieve success proportionate to their talents and abilities, as opposed to one in which social class or wealth is the controlling factor" (p. 11). Higher education historically serves as a space and symbol where individuals can cultivate individual's expertise, talent, and hard work—therefore, making higher education a major social institution where one can earn merit, legitimacy, and social mobility (Lui, 2014). In short, higher education is a part of the traditional American success narrative that no matter one's background, individual skill and hard work determine their success (Guinier, 2015). The concept of merit is included everywhere in the language of higher education, like a merit-based scholarship or merit-based promotions seen in the tenure and promotion process. So, how does this concept differ and even contradict the idea of diversity? This was one of the first objections to diversity policies and practices like affirmative action (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998), which leads dissenters to argue that diversity is beginning to matter more than one's merit (poll on against affirmative action). However, there are a number of examples in and throughout history to illustrate which values 'win' out.

Legacy admissions. While affirmative action has received heavy ligation and robust debate, the same cannot be said for legacy admissions. Scholars refer to it as the oldest form of affirmative action as it affords a privilege to applicants of alumni (Patton 2015, Harris, 1993). It values not only generational access to power but also values generational access to whiteness as it disproportionately benefits white and wealthy applicants, primarily at elite universities (Guinier, 2015; Murphy, 2019). And yet, affirmative action has faced non-stop legal and public debate with non-stop lawsuits and protests (Guiner, 2015). The Supreme Court has never addressed legacy admissions, and the policy is seemingly thriving as Harvard's 2023 admitted

class was over one-third of legacy applicants (Martin & Blumberg, 2019). Guinier (2003) asserts that legacy admissions encounter less ridicule because it preserves power for elites and ensures that power can be maintained throughout generations. Original iterations were explicitly designed to limit Jewish students in elite east coast universities in the 1920s and later as a tool of discrimination against Black applicants in the 1960s (Karabel, 2005; Murphy, 2019). Legacy admission is a "meritless system that has discriminated against those most vulnerable since its racist founding" (Murphy, 2019, p. 339), and yet it still thrives. Meanwhile, affirmative action and diversity are intended to provide opportunity and access to historically underrepresented populations, but are ridiculed, restricted, and often characterized as meritless (Chang, 2002, Murphy 2019). This illustrates that while universities commit to diversity, there are structures of exclusion and manipulation of power that not only contradict its commitment to diversity but also contradict merit— supporting arguments that higher education is an "unfulfilled promise" and designed to preserve power (Thomas, 2018).

The legacy of WEB Du Bois. Another example of contradictions in merit in higher education is the intellectual legacy of WEB DuBois. Born in the 1860s, Du Bois successfully navigated the explicit racism of the American college system of the late 19th century, became the first Black person to obtain a Ph.D. from Harvard, and used his knowledge to become the public intellectual of his day, helping to build the empirical foundation for the field of sociology as it stands today. However, his contributions are rarely cited. In the book, *The Scholar Denied: W. E. B. DuBois and the Birth of Modern Sociology*, Aldon Morris (2015) asserts that this is not an oversight, but rather a systematic erasure. While Robert Park and the University of Chicago are lauded as the birthplace of empirical sociology, Morris provides a counter-narrative. He reveals that DuBois's and his work at Atlanta University (a Black college, now an HBCU) posited many

of the foundations in empirical sociology and that his peers erased his merit as they were both prejudiced and resentful of his success and notoriety. The book refutes higher education's myth of meritocracy— illustrating that even when people of color can accumulate the necessary merits and perform accordingly, their contributions can be systematically undervalued, unseen, or completely erased. Though historical, these examples illustrate how merit is defined and redefined to exclude people of color and preserve whiteness, working in direct contrast to diversity as a mission (Bell, 2003). But one must ask: does it? Ahmed (2009) asserts that "Diversity becomes about changing the perceptions of whiteness rather than changing the whiteness of an organization" (p. 45).

***CDO & institutional influence**.*

So does this political landscape affect CDOs? As higher education institutions increase CDO visibility and rank and expand their institutional charge (Parker, 2019; Leon, 2014), scholars have found that CDOs still face considerable constraints. On an individual level, 'social identities affect how each of the CDOs experiences and enact their roles' (Nixon, 2016, p. 306). For example, women of color CDOs experienced isolation, opposition, and tokenization from colleagues because they were seen by others as the 'institution's conscience concerning diversity' (Nixon, 2016, p. 9). Nixon (2016) illustrates that as most CDOs are people of color, they also can hold other marginalized identities. Institutional barriers to CDOs in/ability to enact inclusion and equity included limited financial resources, ambiguous role expectations, and a lack of support from campus constituents, including faculty and other campus professionals (Griffin et al 2012; Harvey 2014; Nixon 2016). Again, this illustrates the importance and value of collaboration and power brokering in diversity work. Moreover, even as institutional partnerships are important, they can cause tensions between different perspectives (LePeau,

2015). Due to their hierarchical frame, CDOs are viewed as holding the most power around issues of diversity, equity, and justice that many other members of the campus professionals do not hold. This frame, however, does not change existing power imbalances that exist in university leadership. Therefore, CDOs influence depends on support and resources from presidents and other senior leaders and administrators who sit in positions of power within institutional hierarchies in the change process (Williams, 2013). Though important, the singular focus only on CDOs' role in forwarding of campus equity may "perpetuate understandings that the actualization of equity in U.S postsecondary contexts is the lone job of CDOs, and not the responsibility of all campus professionals" (Harris, 2020, p. 512). Though these expectations are prescribed to them, Griffin and colleagues (2019) found that CDOs understood the limitations of their reach and "described themselves as integral parts of a larger change process" (p. 691). CDO's institutional influence is perhaps a part of the universities window dressing of diversity as it overstates and over-symbolizes the value of diversity without material resources and appropriate control (Pittard, 2010).

So what results are CDOs yielding? And is it good enough? CDOs are expensive and institutions and scholars alike question the output (results) hiring a CDO yields. Bradley, Garven, Wilson & West (2015) found that executive-level CDOs did not improve faculty and administration recruitment over the span of 15 years. Moreover, as systemwide CDOs are becoming popularized, recent data from the University of Michigan suggests that localizing diversity efforts (i.e., academic, school-based CDOs) may yield greater results for the recruitment of diverse faculty (Flaherty, 2019). The high cost with a seemingly low return, some label CDOs as 'diversity bureaucrats' (*The Economist*, 2018). However, given the recent political climate (Mizzou, Charlottesville, BLM uprisings), universities could be focusing more

on building legitimacy rather than producing clear diversity outcomes (Parker, 2019). This relationship is not new. Chang (2005) asserts that "In the end, thinking about diversity as a dynamic process rather than as a fixed numerical outcome suggests that the work related to diversity—and very difficult and demanding work at that—is ongoing and ever-changing" (p. 13). In this dynamic process, diversity professionals must manage power dynamics in their efforts to promote change. While hired to address and move the institution forward on diversity goals, they are rarely situated in positions where they can make unilateral decisions about institutional functioning that all will follow (Ahmed, 2012). CDOs are seen as both diversity fixers and as such unsuccessful or ineffective when they are unable to instigate widespread organizational change by students and institutional leaders (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013; Worthington et al., 2014). It is important to acknowledge the influence of extant power structures within colleges and universities and institutional hierarchies. Therefore, as we seek to understand CDOs' results, one must investigate the power structures that diversity professionals work within and how these structures can mitigate their ability to be the sole drivers of organizational change (Griffin et al., 2019).

And while scholars have worked to complicate understandings of CDOs, their role, and their institutional capacities, some still hold that this is not good enough. An example of this type of literature is Thomas's (2018) concept of diversity regimes. Inspired by Acker's (2006) inequity regimes and Ahmed's (2006; 2012) non-performativity, diversity regimes are a set of meanings and practices that work to institutionalize a benign commitment to diversity, and in doing so obscure, entrench, and even intensify existing racial inequality by failing to make fundamental changes in how power, resources, and opportunities are distributed (Thomas, 2018). Further, he established three ways to discount diversity: 1) condensation dissociates diversity

from being an identity-centered, redistributive justice perspective (i.e., people with left hands are diverse); secondly, through decentralization as it provides a lack of coordination across the campus, and lastly 3) staging difference is the strategic deployment of people of color to signify institutional change. Thomas (2018) found that through the process of hiring a CDO all three concepts came up. More importantly, this scholarship furthers the argument that there needs to be a more critical approach and perspective when conceptualizing diversity in organizations (Herring & Henderson, 2011). This critical scholarship pushes discourse beyond the efficacy of CDO roles, but rather asks questions that reimagine institutions' relationships to equity and justice, more holistically.

Summary

Kezar (2011) asserts that diversity is an 'organizational interest' that creates conflict, discord, and mobilization, forwarding an environment where it becomes highly politicized. Therefore, the role of the CDOs must navigate institutional roadblocks and enact agency in complex, interlocking systems, and often must leverage the collective of the institution toward long-term diversity outcomes (Nixon, 2013; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2008). Given the scholarly discourse, scholars must do two things: 1) examine the possibilities and limits of power and agency in diversity through the lens of the CDO; and 2) examine and possibly reimagine the possibilities of diversity and equity beyond the confines of institutional constraints. Nunn (2008) argues that "the token importation of a relatively few, powerless, people of color into a predominantly white institution can do little to change the existing power or cultural dynamics in that institution" (p. 725). While no one person can completely transform an institution, CDOs play a crucial role in advancing diversity at their respective institutions (Williams, 2013), and in return institutions are increasingly hiring and investing in these positions (Cutter et al, 2020).

How do these 'powerless people of color' find the power to "advance and center diversity" in these preexisting power dynamics? Given this question, it is paramount to understand the power in the institution, how CDOs navigate and negotiate these dynamics accordingly, and moving forward, consider ways to re-envision these frames.

SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review sought to explore and inform the upcoming study. Its three sections sought to synthesize and articulate the key points:

1. The Chief Diversity Officer role exists within a given organizational context. This context helps define and establish its main goals, functions, and traits. In higher education, scholars have focused on clearly defining the role as a system of institutional accountability and transformation change.
2. Diversity has a rich and complicated origin story. This section establishes that there are structures and systems in place that set limitations that counteract or restrain broader diversity efforts and the capacity by which leaders can lead these efforts.
3. Diversity is, inherently, political, and universities, themselves, are political entities. Therefore, CDOs work is both deeply political while navigating a deeply political environment. Moreover, this ecosystem/context that is paradoxical to its mission diversity ideology, efforts, and leadership (i.e., CDOs) must navigate accordingly**.** As CDOs become more significant and visible in leadership structures, their influence and agency are not guaranteed, especially as many of these leaders hold minoritized identities.

In closing, this literature review reveals that there is a breadth of scholarship, empirical research, and theorizing on universities as organizations and the complex ways in which they function,

operate, and impact issues in society. In the book *Managing with Power: Politics and Influence in Organizations*, Jeffrey Pfeffer argues:

> Norton Long, a political scientist, wrote: People will readily admit governments are organizations. The converse— that organizations are governments— is equally true but rarely considered." But organizations, particularly large ones, are like governments in that they are fundamentally political entities. To understand them, one needs to understand organizational politics, just as to understand governments, one needs to understand governmental politics. (Pfeffer, 1993, p. 8).

Here, Pfeffer (1993) argues for that when seeking to understand how an organization functions, one must investigate power and organizational politics. The university, a large complex organization, is a political entity. Higher education institutions are one of the oldest institutions in American society— existing before the US Constitution, higher education's history is rich, complicated, and problematic (Byrd, 2017). So how do diversity and the people who do diversity work fit into its preexisting structures? And what is its relationship to power and politics in the university? What does it need to look like moving forward? As the last two sections have explored diversity more broadly, this section turns the focus on the institution itself: the university. Given this literature review, the next section will explore the frameworks I will use to explore these questions.

THEORETICAL & CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK(S)

Theoretical Frameworks. I draw upon two theoretical frameworks for analysis.

I first rely on the **Network Theory of Power**. In it, it defines power as a relationship (i.e., relational capacity) and not as an attribute (Castells, 2011). It is through relationships that social

actors are able to influence the decisions of other social actors in ways that favor the empowered actor's will, interests, and values. These relationships exist in a networked context. As power is relational, communication is the most powerful tool within network societies to reveal the nature of actors' relationships and how power may be operating in a particular context (Castells, 2011). Furthermore, an actor's networks of collective relationships can provide or deny access of information and resources to others (Castells, 2011). Castells (2011) identifies four types of power: 1) networking power (control over who/what is included in a network), 2) network power (control over protocols in the communication), 3) networked power (control over certain nodes over other nodes inside a network), and 4) network-making power is the capacity to set-up and program a network by their owners and controllers of the larger network. More than the types of power coupled with its core conceptualizations, Castells (2011) establishes power in social structures as dynamic, as it is exchanged and navigated through people, policies, and context.

Secondly, as DEI efforts are historically and intrinsically linked to issues of racial justice and equality, I will also rely on **racialized organizations** as a core theoretical frame. Ray (2017) argues that racialized organizations are "meso-level racial structures central to contestation over racial meaning, the social construction of race, and stability and change in the racial order" (p. 46). The theory argues that through seemingly mundane organizational processes, institutions reinforce race and racism and affect how material and social resources are distributed. Racialized organizations: (1) expand or inhibit *agency*, (2) legitimate the unequal distribution of *resources*, (3) treat Whiteness as a *credential*, and (4) decouple *procedures* in ways that advantage dominant racial groups. A product of CRT ideology, racialized organizations posit that "discrimination, racial sorting, and an unequal distribution of resources are not anomalous but rather foundational organizational norms" (Ray, 2019, p. 47). This framework establishes that

institutions, namely universities and colleges, are not race-neutral, but rather racism, inequity, and whiteness shows up in all the crooks and corners of the institution.

I am using these two theories to establish three concrete perspectives to this study:

1. **Power is relational and it exists in a networked context.**
2. **Universities are racialized organizations.** Ray (2019) established that race is foundational to organizational structures, processes, and hierarchies. In short, this perspective clarifies that CDOs are working in environments that reward and advance whiteness. From resources, credentials, and policies and procedures, universities make up functions of whiteness and reproduce racial inequity.
3. Finally, these theories combine to illustrate one profound point: **CDOs networks (and their institutional position) are racialized.** Given the limitations on their networks, their institutional power is limited. (Through CDOs institutionalization, their power and agency become a racialized norm). Together, these theories suggest that race and its dynamics go beyond the formal power structures of institutions, and that race is important in the kinds of networks that CDOs maintain and navigate in their pursuit to access power. As higher education institutions are infamously bureaucratic, hierarchical institutions, there is an everlasting pursuit and need to legitimize one's power, influence, and autonomy in an institution (Ray, 2019). Together these theories provide a strong foundation that establishes institutional dynamics as being raced.

Conceptual Framework.

Moving forward in the analysis, I sought a framework that would investigate the interplay of CDOs as actors within their larger institutional context (units, policies, programs) they interact

within. Therefore, I utilized a relational approach, which examines how actors, mostly in key positions, experience and navigate a network (Stein et. al, 2018). This research is noted to reveal relational patterns of collaboration, competition, and strategies for boundary drawing and integration (Japersen et. al, 2019). Relational theory is an approach to understanding complex large inter-organizational networks and flows in relationships. Stein and Jaspersen (2018) argue:

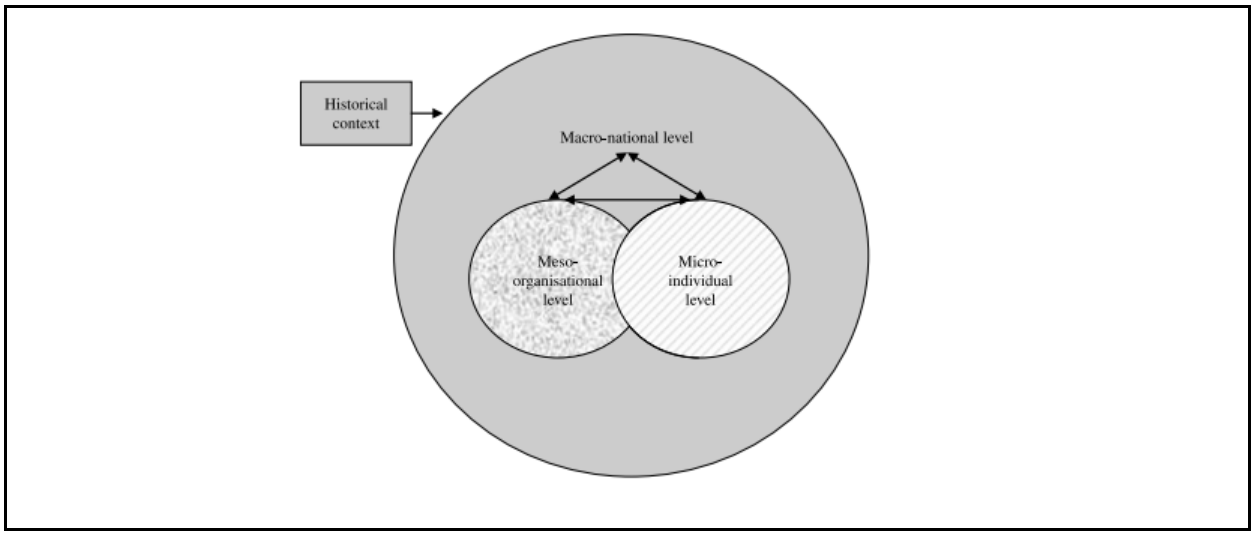
> "Drawing on relational theory, such research combines an exploration of relevant patterns of relationships with an investigation of the meanings that actors attribute to them (Fuhse & Mützel, 2011; Molina et al., 2014). This usually involves an in-depth investigation of relationships using qualitative data, yielding detailed and situated accounts of how actors experience and engage with the network in which they are embedded (Desmond, 2014; Hollstein, 2011). As trajectories of shared experiences, relationships are "storied" and give meaning to past interactions and prescribe rules for future engagements (Crossley, 2010; White, 2008). Relational narratives provide "descriptions of relationships … but more than this – they are the discursive processes through which relationships are formed and maintained in the first place" (Crossley et al., 2015, p. 125)."

Given the complexity of universities as an organization and the focus on relational power, I sought to hold a relational approach when selecting a conceptual framework for this study. Before selecting a framework for the study, I reviewed various examples of relational approaches utilized in diversity and/or management literature to better illustrate and crystallize key concepts in this study. They were:

- Ex 1: A relational perspective of diversity management (Syed & Ozbilgin, 2009)
- Ex 2: A framework for relational analysis of nexus governance (Stein & Japersen, 2018)

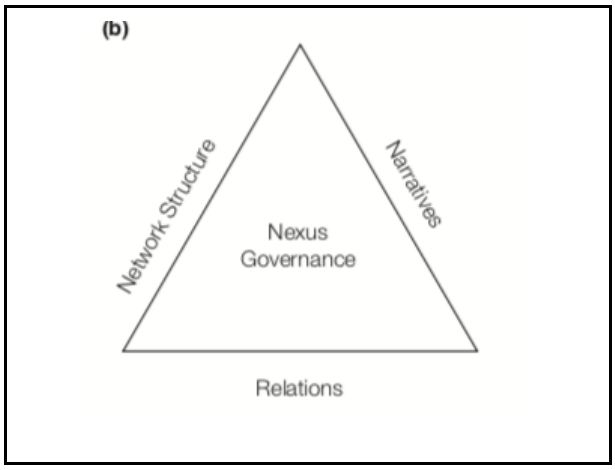
- Ex 3: Conceptual Framework of Higher Education Chief Diversity Officer Study (Nixon, 2013)

Frame 1: A relational perspective of diversity management (Syed & Ozbilgin, 2009)



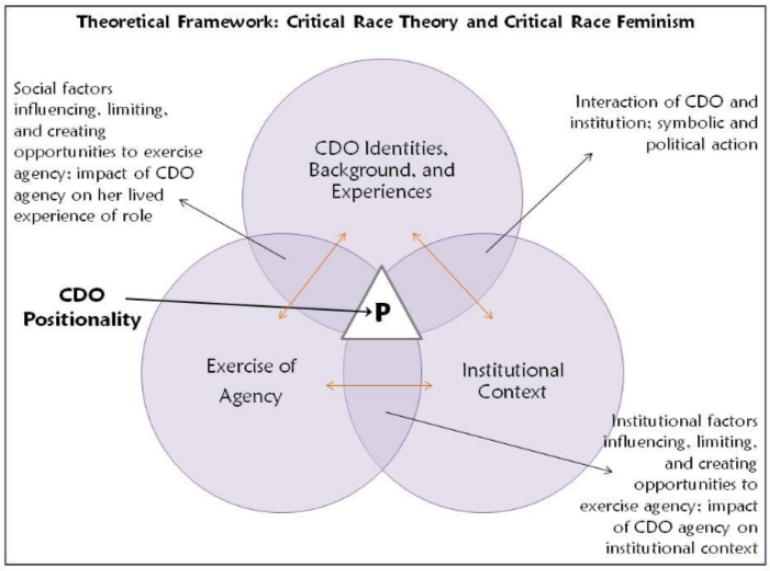
Syed & Ozbilgin (2009) argue diversity management literature holds mainstream, single-level conceptions that are bounded by their environment (region, nation, and/or culture). In turn, it fails to illustrate the relational interplay of structural- and agentic-level concerns of equality based on its culture. Therefore, they created this framework to explore how individual choices (micro), organizational processes (meso), and structural conditions (macro) work together in diversity management. At the macro-national level, the relational framework observes national structures and institutions, e.g., laws, social organization, religious strictures, and gender and race relations. At the meso-organization level, it considers the organizational processes, rituals, and behaviors at work that establish the rules and policies. At the micro-individual level, the frame looks at individual power, motivation, and agency to affect change, all of which are gendered and racialized phenomena.

Frame 2: A framework for relational analysis of nexus governance (Stein & Japersen, 2018)



In this framework from geography literature, Stein & Japersen (2018) argue that the water, energy, and food sectors are linked and forward the concept of "nexus research" as a means to discuss the integration of their disparate governance systems. Stein and colleagues 2018) define nexus governance as "the relational structures and processes that connect actors across sectors, governance levels, geographical boundaries and/or public, private and civic spheres, and that provide steering mechanisms for the integration of management and governance systems across different policy domains" (p. 379). In short, this frame seeks to better understand how stakeholders navigate inter-organizational networks. The frame combines three dimensions in its relational framework: network structure, relations, and narratives. Through a structural analysis of a wider governance network, Stein and colleagues (2019) investigate patterns of relationships through which key actors structure and navigate the network and use their narratives to articulate the integration of governance systems across policy domains and sectors.

Frame 3: Conceptual Framework of Higher Education Chief Diversity Officer Study (Nixon, 2013)



Nixon (2013) examined the positionality and agency of women of color serving as Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs) in colleges and universities. This research is situated in an organizational context of higher education diversity leadership and the theoretical frameworks of critical race theory (CRT) and critical race feminism (CRF). In this framework, Nixon seeks to "integrate the intersectionality of race and gender, the tension between institutional structure and human agency, and recognition of organizational and identity-related positionality" (p. 49).

Reviewing these frameworks seeded key concepts to explore and understand while performing the analysis. To not overcomplicate, I elected to not create a framework, but rather, I chose to center a framework that centers power and agency for diversity leaders (i.e., the core of the study) and review and consider other themes throughout my analysis. In this study, I used Tatli and Özbilgin (2009) *Understanding Diversity Managers' Role in Organizational Change*.

This Study's Conceptual Framework: Tatli and Özbilgin (2009). Understanding Diversity Managers' Role in Organizational Change

In the conceptual framework, Tatli and Ozbilgin (2009) argue that agency for DEI leaders is often falsely conceived as "autonomous, decontextualized, and apolitical beings" (p. 253). Therefore, they argue that diversity management research should "embed issues of agency as [it is] relevant to the processes and outcomes." In doing this, researchers must "incorporate the interplay between diversity structures and diversity managers' agency in a situated context" (p. 257). Their conceptual framework asserts that there are three dimensions that can be examined to better understand this phenomenon. They are situatedness, relationality, and praxis.

- **Situatedness** refers to the broader context, and individual leaders exist "within historical, economic, social, and organizational settings" (p. 248).
- **Relationality** explores the complexity of relationships and "the interplay of the self, others, and structures" (p. 250).
- **Praxis** denotes the tactics and strategies implored, given their context and relationships.

Below is a chart from Tatli and Ozbilgin (2009) where resources (positive opportunities) and organizational constraints (challenges) are identified as possible examples that help better situate diversity leaders' agency within their organization. This chart helps to establish specific examples and possible metrics for each dimension. Though constructed for diversity leaders, Tatli and Ozbilgin argue that diversity leaders are not the only organizational actors who are shaped by these dimensions—and therefore, the framework can be applied to leaders in various functional areas. This framework will be used throughout the study and will be critical in the coding and analysis process. There is greater detail in chapter 3.

TABLE 3: Tatli and Ozbilgin's (2009) Organizational Resources and Constraints

Dimensions	Resources	Constraints
Situatedness	*Social field*	
	Progressive laws	Conservative laws
	Supportive political environment	Unsupportive political environment
	Economic growth	Economic decline
	Culture of equality and inclusion	Culture of discrimination and backlash
	Organizational field	
	Cultures of inclusion	Regimes of inequality
	Supportive structures of management	Absence of structures for management
	Management support	Management disengagement
	Integration of diversity management	Marginalization of diversity management
	Financial and nonfinancial resources	Lack of resources
Relationality	*Micro level relationality*	
	Understanding of diversity issues	Lack of awareness of diversity issues
	Meso level relationality	
	Membership to networks	Absence of networks
	Macro level relationality	
	Understanding of the diversity context	Lack of awareness of diversity context
Praxis	*Doxic reflection*	
	A wide heterodox space	A narrow heterodox space
	Strategic action	
	Access to different forms of capital	Lack of necessary capitals
	Ability to use strategic discourses	Lack of ability to use strategic discourses

Chapter Summary

In summary, this study addresses the gap in the literature on CDOs and institutional commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. First, it builds upon the knowledge of CDOs in higher education and their institutional role. Secondly, it establishes and builds upon the historical constraints placed upon diversity ideology and work within organizational structures through various means (i.e., law, policy, and organizational design). Third, it addresses the complex political landscape of enacting diversity practice and leadership within politically driven institutions of higher education. Finally, through addressing these gaps, I will use my theoretical and conceptual frameworks to explore and understand the complex power institutional dynamics CDOs experience and navigate as well as the interplay between their experience and their institutional context to conditions and constraints for CDOs within higher education institutions.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

As discussed in Chapter 1, the purpose of the study is twofold. First, this study seeks to examine the politics of relational power in institutional leadership and the unique ways in which CDOs leverage, broker, and/or navigate it to effectively do their job at their respective institution. Secondly, the study investigates how this relational power interplays with their unique lived experiences in their institutional context and creates opportunity or constraint in their work. The research questions are as follows:

- How do chief diversity officers (CDOs) understand and leverage power and agency in their roles as they navigate their institutional context?
- What distinctions do chief diversity officers (CDOs) form when making meaning of their institutional power dynamics and hierarchies?
- What are some organizational barriers and opportunities chief diversity officers (CDOs) experience when seeking out and navigating issues of institutional agency?

In this chapter, I will discuss the research design and methodology for this study. First, I will review the methodological approach. Secondly, I will discuss the participant criterion and selection process for the study. Next, I will discuss the data collection and analysis. Finally, I will close with an exploration of critical considerations for the efficacy of the study (i.e., researcher positionality, limitations, etc.).

Methodological Approach

This is a qualitative research study that utilizes narrative inquiry in its approach. Narrative inquiry allows one to focus on stories lived and told (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This 'story-telling' provides a collaborative experience for the researcher and participant as it provides agency to reflect and construct their past lives or current experiences and researchers

get access to participants' innermost thoughts, understanding and interpreting their personal stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Riessman, 1993). Moreover, this approach is a fruitful means to investigate one's professional career and to identify the relationship between personal and professional lives (Clandinin & Connelly 2000). Therefore, using this approach, I was able to paint a complex, layered analysis to understand CDOs' lived experiences in their context.

Moreover, this study leveraged a networked approach throughout the study. A social network is an elusive construct that tries to capture the complex and dynamic structure of agents and the relationships between them (Jack, 2010). Moreover, qualitative social network design is still emerging as it is traditionally only used in mixed methods along with quantitative data as more scholars are using a networked approach to completely qualitative projects (Hollstein, 2011). For example, Small (2013) uses graduate students' social networks to reveal how they make decisions on who and what support structures to lean on in times of need through an ethnographic, completely qualitative approach. This approach like this holds a relationalism stance— an interpretivist lens that examines the network from an insider's perspective and focuses on the meaning and experience of relationship structure (Erickson, 2013). I leaned on this work to help guide my approach to this dissertation study.

In this study, the networked approach is primarily held through the focus on university leadership structures as defined by their respective university organizational charts. This focus created some boundedness on which relationships were explored in detail and better-defined power relation to institutional positional power. The university organizational chart served as both an organizational artifact and a tool to establish some boundedness in identifying and establishing core relationships. However, participants were able and encouraged to discuss dynamics outside of the chart. While the study falls short of a true qualitative social network

study as it needs more boundedness in its network, leaning on its principles advances a network approach to this study that helps the study.

Participant Criterion and Selection

Participant Overview	
Participants	• Six (6) currently serving Chief Diversity Officers
Criterion	• **High institutional Rank**: 1) Must report directly to campus president and/or provost; 2) Must serve on the university's executive leadership team • **An Established Tenure**: Must have served at least one year as campus CDO • **Oversight Responsibilities:** Must oversee reporting offices and programs (i.e., portfolio or unit-based office configuration) • **Similar university setting**: Public university institution

I recruited six (6) participants for the dissertation study. There were four key criteria that interview subjects needed to meet to be a part of this study. First, the individual must hold a high institutional rank, which is defined as reporting directly to the president and provost and serving on the campus's executive leadership body. Secondly, individuals must have an established tenure as CDO, which will mean holding their position for at least one year before participating in the study. Third, the individual must hold managerial and oversight responsibilities as a part of their role. Finally, with these participants all serving public institutions, the criteria seek to identify established CDOs in a similar context with significant experience and significant institutional power.

The criterion was carefully selected to identify CDOs who are more likely to be involved and integrated into their current leadership structures. As discussed in chapter 2, the role of the CDO greatly varies depending on the institutional context. There are CDO roles that serve as internal advisors with little institutional responsibility and there are CDO roles that serve as

executive/senior leaders with large portfolios and institutional access. This is to say: there are vast differences in CDO positions across the higher education landscape— access, resources, and institutional power. Most extant literature does not make clear distinctions in the type of CDOs roles they are investigating. Additionally, the literature asserts that access to leadership is a common challenge for CDOs that are not senior leaders at their institution (Leon, 2014). Therefore, the participant criterion both creates a standard by which CDOs exist in similar institutional positioning and makeup and targets a specific type of CDO that is getting lost in the current scholarship. Given that CDOs are ascending into senior leadership circles, it is important to understand them in this new context that many of they are now operating.

Participant Recruitment and Selection. I employed purposive and snowball sampling and leaned on personal networks to select and navigate accordingly (Creswell, 2009). More specifically, CDOs were recruited through a pre-existing relationship with connections from the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE), NCORE (National Conference on Race and Ethnicity), and my personal and professional networks. I crafted personal emails for each participant along with a standard message with more study details. See APPENDIX A for recruitment communications. Participation in the study was voluntary, and no compensation was provided.

Research Design: Data Collection and Analysis

In this study, I collected two forms of data: individual interviews and documents. Below is the three-step data collection process after a study participant was identified.

Pre-Work: Pre-Interview Check-Ins. Before collecting any data, I conducted 15-minute check-ins with each participant— these meetings were held on separate days from the interview. The tactical objective of the check-in was to give context for the study and answer any

questions that they may have. More importantly, given the sensitive nature of their role, these discussions were intended to develop rapport and build trust between myself and the participant. Once they agreed that they felt comfortable moving forward, I requested two things. First, I asked for them to send an updated university organizational chart(s). Secondly, as the study design centered on the participant identifying a specific incident, I asked them to reflect and have a specific incident ready to share for the upcoming interview. APPENDIX A is the agenda for these discussions and was shared with each participant beforehand.

Documents: Organizational charts and other institutional documents. Before the interview, I reviewed each participant's university organizational chart. In observing their charts, I was able to create questions to clarify relationships and use them as a visual aid before and during the interview. They frequently held small idiosyncrasies that led to new questions or lines of inquiry during the interviews. For example, some illustrated dotted line reporting between different business lines and others made distinctions on leadership status or classifications (i.e., presidential cabinet members). Finally, a select few participants shared with me other documents/information to better help me understand the critical incident or campus initiative. It was not required but it was encouraged. These documents included emails, university reports, and news articles.

Interviews. I conducted semi-structured individual interviews with each participant. The objective was to contextualize, reflect, and make meaning of their experiences with power and agency within their institutional role. Through interviews, I was able to understand the personal strategy behind participants' institutional navigation and directly investigate their experience of the role of power, influence, and agency within their institution. Interviews ranged from 60 minutes to 90 minutes.

In the interview, there was a focus on selecting a specific campus incident. Study participants selected a campus incident and/or issue that they were significantly engaged in managing. Examples could include a controversial speaker on campus, student demands, or a major bias incident. Campus incidents play a crucial role in how CDOs are utilized in campus administration (Parker, 2017), and selecting a singular event sought to illicit clarity and specificity in the participants' organizational power dynamics. Beyond providing an example, centering a specific incident furthered the narrative inquiry approach to the study as gave space for storytelling in the interview protocol. APPENDIX B is the interview protocol.

Analysis and Coding. I employed both an inductive and deductive approach to this study as I will identify patterns, themes, and regularities in the data (Saldana, 2013). Audio recordings of the interviews will be sent to a third-party transcription service. Once complete, transcripts will be reviewed to ensure accuracy. I used a code-encrypted, external hard drive to store all materials connected to this study, like the interviews, documents, transcripts, and audio/video recordings. Multiple analytical memos and descriptive memos were created for each interview. Analytic memos are "jottings in the margins" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 22), or notes made before and throughout the coding process, while descriptive memos provide specific details and insight into the participant's responses. Moreover, I wrote narrative reports for each participant, where I was able to list, track, and theme the various stories and experiences that were shared through the interview.

I employed various coding methods throughout the analysis process. In my first round of coding, I utilized provisional coding as I leverage the preset group of codes that were informed by the conceptual framework (Saldana, 2016) to begin analysis. After several rounds of coding, I combined axial and narrative coding to create and identify themes and concepts that linked

directly to the participants' experience. This study's conceptual framework guided the exploration of the first research question as it established preset codes around power and agency for diversity officers that frame analysis. For the second research question, I took a different process. First, I created a specific analytic memo based on institutional relationships where I took listed and took note of each specific relationship that the participants mentioned in their interview. Next, I added descriptive notes to each relationship in how they characterized their relationship and/or perceived this individual in the larger institutional context. After all the memos were completed, I utilized pattern coding to identify central themes in how these relationships were created. Finally, as constructing an understanding of data is iterative, I reviewed my notes, memos, and transcripts throughout this process. Furthermore, throughout the analysis, I reflected on the documents (organizational charts) and other contextual information that was collected as a reflexive exercise.

Study's Considerations

Trustworthiness. As this dissertation is a qualitative project, it is important to consider approaches to check the analysis and interpretation of the data. For this study, I used member checks and thick, rich descriptions. In member checking, "data and interpretations [go] back to the participants in the study so that they can confirm the credibility of the information and narrative account" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). This process enables researchers to systematically check the data and the narrative account at the same time. Given this, I shared the preliminary findings with study participants so they could review how their stories were being represented and offer insights as necessary. Additionally, I used thick-rich descriptions throughout to extend the validity. Creswell & Miller (2000) assert that using deep, detailed descriptions help contextualize the individuals and the various situation they are explaining.

Furthermore, this approach extends credibility as *"*it enables readers to make decisions about the applicability of the findings to other settings or similar contexts" (p. 129).

Positionality. As a researcher and practitioner, I have become acutely aware that my positionality matters. Before beginning my doctoral studies, I worked for the University of California system on diversity, equity, and access issues as the Manager for Strategic Diversity Initiatives, where I led system-wide efforts to improve climate and equity-based issues amongst the UCs and worked directly with UC Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs). Prior to that, I worked at UC Berkeley, working on several diversity issues in both student programs and administrative planning. Prior to that, I was a student at the University of Michigan, working on various programs and policies to increase student of color recruitment. And so, while I have never been a Chief Diversity Officer, I have worked directly with them and have seen secondhand the challenges and roadblocks they face in trying to bring change to their institutions. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 2, diversity is not an apolitical concept and the people who advocate or work toward it in organizations are not apolitical beings. In writing this statement, my objective is to be very clear: I am not apolitical. I hold steadfast in my belief that diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice should matter in organizations. And so, while the data will reveal itself through the analysis, my belief about the importance of DEIJ and CDOs will not change and will color my perspective.

Limitations. There were a number of limitations to this study. The first and perhaps the most prominent are the conditions by which the study is being completed in— during a global pandemic. With COVID-19 changing everyday life, it was unclear if the pandemic would affect this study's findings. Given the current health conditions, all data collection had to be completed virtually. Though I collected via email and Zoom calls, it would be beneficial to do some of the

interviews in person as it would allow me to create a space of trust and extend methodical approaches (for example, it would have been interesting to do an in-person observation). Secondly, I want to make sure participants' confidentiality is maintained and that they feel comfortable sharing their experiences. All the participants serve in high-profile institutional positions—therefore, I have some concerns about creating trust and encouraging participants to be transparent with their experience. While I will use pseudonyms in the findings, removing identifiable information could limit my ability to share the complexity of their roles, their institutional context, and their relationships with stakeholders. Lastly, as the study leveraged a networked approach, the institutional relationship focus is squarely on positional power (roles found/prominent in the organizational chart). While the organizational chart creates boundedness, there are other organizational actors who hold power, agency, and influence outside of institutional positions. Though the organizational chart provided a strong structure for the study, its focus on positional power is limited—perhaps there are other visual guides that establish boundedness and include groups like students, faculty, and Academic Senate.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I will review the findings of the study. As a reference, here are the study's research questions:

- How do chief diversity officers (CDOs) understand and leverage power and agency in their roles as they navigate their institutional context?
- What distinctions do chief diversity officers (CDOs) form when making meaning of their institutional power dynamics and hierarchies?
- What are some organizational barriers and opportunities chief diversity officers (CDOs) experience when seeking out and navigating issues of institutional agency?

The findings are organized to be in sync with each study's questions. The first section identifies key themes in how CDOs understand and experience power and agency in their organizational context. The second section looks more directly at institutional relationships and makes distinctions and differences in perceptions of positional power within the university leadership structure. Finally, the third section identifies themes around the conditions for success within a particular institutional context. I will close with a summary of the findings and transition to the discussion and implications chapter. Before I begin the review of the findings, I will first provide background information on the research study's participants to better contextualize and understand the results.

BACKGROUND

This section will provide background information for each participant to better understand their perspectives in this chapter. As noted in the previous chapters, these individuals hold highly visible, politicalized roles at their institutions. Therefore, confidentiality is central to this study. I have omitted institutional names, key descriptors, and other details as a measure to

reduce identifiability. Instead, I will speak more generally about the study participants' background and their institutional makeup. Moreover, before publishing, participants will be sent their excerpts for approval or feedback on their identifiability.

Of the six, five were currently Chief Diversity Officers at their respective institutions. There was one participant who was not a CDO but rather served as a senior leader in a university system who advises and works closely with many CDOs on developing their strategy and implementation as a part of their role. As for the five other participants, they were all currently serving as CDOs with the organizational title of vice president or vice provost. Their tenures range from one year to nine years. Four participants report directly to their respective president/chancellor, and one reports to the provost, but all were members of the university's leadership team (i.e., the President's cabinet). They serve at public research universities with four of the participants at R1 institutions and one participant serving at an R2 institution. All were identified as people of color with only one participant also holding a tenure-track faculty appointment. They represent five different states, spanning from the west coast to the east coast. A brief description of the six participants in the study is provided below.

- Alain is a CDO with significant experience in student affairs or student-facing work at the R2 institution..
- Alberta is a senior leader for a public university system where she works closely with campus CDOs and has extensive experience in developing and supporting a campus CDO office.
- Barack is CDO with a law and compliance background; he has served as a CDO for several public institutions that have been at the center of national coverage and debate.

- Ketanji is a CDO for a public research university. She is a scholar-practitioner who has significant oversight and influence within her leadership team. She cites her previous experience as an Associate VP at another institution before becoming a CDO in helping her navigate her current institution effectively.
- Langston is in his second CDO position now at an R1 university. He is an active member of various professional organizations and has a national profile in leadership for a CDO organization.
- Nina is the only CDO in this study that holds a faculty appointment, she serves at an R1 university. She also is the longest-serving CDO in this study.

Note: In the findings, there are several times where I refer to an individual as "one participant." This could be any of the listed participants, and their pseudonym is withheld out of an abundance of caution as those remarks may be critical of their institution or colleagues.

PART I: Understanding Power within the Institution (and Navigating Accordingly)

In this first section, I will identify and explore general themes revealed in the data on issues of power and agency in institutional leadership and how CDOs navigate accordingly. This section seeks to directly answer my first research question: *How do CDOs understand and navigate power and agency in their roles?* As a framing for analysis, I will utilize Tatli and Ozbilgin's (2009) conceptual framework to contextualize and situate my findings. In the framework, they argue that agency for DEI leaders is often falsely conceived as "autonomous, decontextualized, and apolitical beings" (p. 253). Therefore, they contend that diversity leaders' agency should be assessed through three distinct means: situatedness, relationality, and praxis.

- **Situatedness** refers to the broader context, and individual leaders exist "within historical, economic, social, and organizational settings" (p. 248).
- **Relationality** explores the complexity of relationships and "the interplay of the self, others, and structures" (p. 250).
- **Praxis** denotes the tactics and strategies implored, given their context and relationships.

For this chapter, I will use this framework to identify and better contextualize the study's themes/findings.

SITUATEDNESS

Tatli and Ozbilgin (2009) define situatedness as the broader social context in which leaders are positioned within, specifically "within historical, economic, social, and organizational settings" (p. 248). In this section, I found two points: 1) national events shift institutional power dynamics/local campus contexts, and 2) contextual information informs how CDOs can do their work. Here, I identified themes related to how participants discuss their understanding of how they are positioned in their institutional and social context. Overall, participants discuss how context is central to how they navigate the institution—it is not just a background, but it is a roadmap.

Current events influence context. All participants mentioned the tragic murder of George Floyd and the racial uprisings of 2020. Each of the participants gained additional funding or received additional work after the summer of 2020 (examples include the creation of a university-wide DEI committee, faculty hiring incentives, and increasing funding for minoritized students). They reflected on how it affected their campus climate and culture around diversity, equity, and inclusion. Langston recalled: "Things shifted…everyone wanted [to meet with me]. I'm talking, you know, people who like never paid me [and my team] much attention…were

coming up with all these priorities and asking for my help." It appears to have been a meaningful time for many of the CDOs to forward proactive discussions and action, as many mentioned this time being a time of increased visibility.

Nina discussed how George Floyd's death seemingly created a space for "increased courage." Ketanji even said, "There's only so much a work plan will do. This is about courage; it's about having the political will to bring change to our campuses…and the death of George Floyd cracked the door for being able to embark on work that is more transformative. Barack also expanded: "It didn't change my day-to-day, but it put us in focus…which you know can be challenging but presented some opportunities for us to have discussions we wouldn't have otherwise." To this point, most participants discussed being appointed to new leadership opportunities or having a heightened role due to the national climate. Many spoke about their charge to spark or resurrect a senior-level diversity committee and/or cabinet. Alain talked about his charge to rebuild the University Senior Diversity Cabinet, and how the Provost has been paramount in its success. He adds—

> "I think the success of the committee has…is in some part due to the Provost. He's very active, I mean he really prioritizes it. Now with the Cabinet, we work very closely together…it has increased my exposure to other leaders. So, it's important for these leaders to come into spaces where I am leading the discussion…I'm the subject matter expert. And the Provost is just there as a member It's a powerful signal to send and it helped me establish my role as a senior-level leader."

While major sociocultural events can shift the climate on campus, participants discussed feelings of exhaustion and frustration at these times. Nina jokingly said that she becomes "the most important person on campus" when major bias-related incidents happen. However, while these

incidents help push toward change, it can be draining and difficult on a personal level for the CDO to navigate. In the same breath, she says seriously, "This work can take a personal toll on you." After working on her university's response to a national event, Nina shared her experience.

> "We got good local [news] coverage. You know, the Board was very happy because so many…other schools were blowing up. So, and you know, we had some serious things going on […], but relatively speaking, we came off looking good."

However, upon deeper reflection, when dealing with a racial incident, Nina reflected on the tensions she felt when 'doing her job.' She continued–

> "I kept things off [the President's] plate [and] shielded him…I basically stood in front of him. […] You know, if I'm honest, I'll say that inside me has been the sense of [regret], and I realized that I've never forgiven it."

Here, Nina reflects on her role in defending and/or protecting the university. She shares regret as she feels like she shields and protects the university from responsibility. This idea of being the face or shield is problematic. Several talked about how taxing this period was for them on a personal level, while having to perform at a high level for their respective institution. Seemingly, when the university is forced to address inequity, there are fewer barriers for CDOs and sometimes even more resources. But what harm does this have on the CDO themselves? This example illustrates that during these intense racial incidents, CDOs of color must navigate their landscape as minoritized groups and consider their role as institutional leader in charge of the leading response.

Beyond the complicated intrapersonal feelings, participants still faced roadblocks. Many discussed the process of crafting university messaging during this time (and after), revealing embedded power dynamics and general challenges within the institution. Alain says–

> "The idea of harm…restoring harm in our community and the kind of communication that is needed with our community...for impacted communities to feel heard, valued, listened to, cared about by our leadership. But even when they care [and we craft that message] …it gets vetted out through editing, language, and the removal of compassion from our communication. And honestly, that individual [a senior adviser to the President] has too much power amongst our senior leaders."

This example demonstrates some of the frustrations that arose for several participants at the decision table. While in these spaces, they must also negotiate other perspectives who don't hold expertise in DEI; however, some of these individuals have more influence and keep longer institutional standings. There have been real issues when CDOs have not been in these conversations. Barack mentioned how botched communication in the summer of 2020, which he was not involved in, caused ripple effects. He said, "It got national attention. I'm talking New York Times. They had to keep reissuing statements. I told them…we can't do anything about it now; the harm has been done…since then, I've been tagged in on many more communications and engaged earlier." To this point, Alberta added: "It's important for communications to realize that CDOs aren't here to clean up their mess. So, [if] you don't engage people from the start, that's on you. And people have had to learn the hard way."

The emergence and ascendence of the CDO as a senior leading presidential cabinet member was a development before the racial uprising of the summer of 2020 (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013; Ruiz-Mesa, 2022). However, 2020 was significant for all the participants. Perhaps it is an exceptional example, but it directly illustrates how campus and national events can change what is politically possible within an institution. Thus, this changing landscape is something they must commonly evaluate. But at what end? Langston, who serves in senior leadership for a national

organization for CDOs, discussed the profound fatigue facing many leaders as some progress happens. He says–

> "So many groups on campus [including faculty, staff, students] are taking action. But I think the other thing is that…it's placed fatigue and had a significant impact on several leaders. So, our chancellor has announced that he's going to step down, so we have some leadership transition. And I've seen that across the country folks are fatigued…not only the push for racial equity, but the pandemic has been really has been difficult for me…so with this new opportunity comes [exhaustion]."

This is an interesting time to be doing this work and conducting this study. There is just now emerging scholarship revealing the effects of the pandemic and racial uprisings of 2020 (Anderson, 2021; Cho & Brassfield, 2022). Moreover, it will take time to understand the real effects of this period. While CDOs gained more attention in university discussions in and after 2020, has it really changed their standing and ability to create change? Indeed, it presented new opportunities; however, structural barriers persist and so they must continue to advocate.

Context is Knowledge. And Knowledge is Power. The data also revealed the importance of understanding the institutional context. Understanding power dynamics is not just the role; it is a crucial competency and function of the part. Alain perhaps said it best when he said:

> "The work is contextual. […] You must learn the context you're operating in. That, if there is not…. yes, you can bring skills, you bring expertise, you bring knowledge, you bring theory, grounding. But if you don't understand the institutional context you're operating in…the history, the politics, the…relationships, the dynamics overall, and how that sits within a broader landscape of higher education…it's going to be very difficult to evaluate the environment contextually you're operating in and make decisions and

choices that are received in a way that can be heard [and] in the way that you'll need it to be heard to advance the project. You have to learn the context that you're operating in." Universities are complex organizations with rich, complicated histories. Moreover, the role of the CDO typically has its institutional history, filled with struggle, crisis, and deep conflict because of institutional racism and marginalization of student and community activists (Parker, 2017). Because CDOs are often positioned as a response to institutional inequity, there is an urgency in expectations that are often forwarded to them. In contrast, Barack discussed the importance of starting slow. "There is an expectation to hit the ground running and start ticking things off the list immediately…. that's a mistake. The most important thing for you to do is… [listen]. Build those relationships, get perspective… [get differing] perspectives Moving too fast can also be dangerous." Connected to this idea, Alberta noted that it is important for CDOs to always know their audience and hold space for nuance on issues. She says: "For one thing, there will be one million different responses… you [have to be able] to cut through the noise…. but also, not [invalidate] people's thoughts." Here, Alberta illustrates that there are multiple histories, contexts, and perspectives on any given topic. Even when discussing constituencies like students, faculty, and other administrators it is important to not characterize them as a monolith. As Ketanji concisely says: "My values, my authenticity can't change […] but how I say things, how I translate things to different groups is something I have to be mindful about."

Therefore, as CDOs seek to enact action and change, they must understand the context in which they are operating. And while they aim to make things better at their institutions, their work can often be in direct contrast with the institution. Ketanji shared an example—

> "A group of colleagues were working on something, and one said —'we need to really invite [Ketanji] to get her opinion on this.' And apparently, [another colleague] said —, '[Ketanji], slows things down. Do we have to include her?'"

She continues—

> "It is not my intention to slow the wheels of progress. It is my intention to encourage you to slow down and do an impact analysis, right? And yes, that takes time. Too many times at the university…we sacrifice quality and inclusive decisions where we're trying to save money and be efficient and go fast, right? So, like, what did Foucault say…'power is everywhere all the time, and there's always some negotiation happening' or something? Well, it's constant [negotiation] for me"

The centering of the institutional context for many of the participants was about being able to create informed decisions. As institutions lean into neo-liberalistic notions of efficiency and cost-effectiveness, CDOs must negotiate the pressure to implement bold actions, while trying to disrupt the status quo. But as Ketanji suggests in the previous quote, the status quo is perpetuated when the urgency to act makes leaders overlook the unintended outcomes that actions can have on minoritized groups within the institution. This point seems particularly salient as Nina mentions that the position of the CDO counteracts the foundation of the higher education institution.

> "Turning this place upside down, inside out…that is the only way that it's going to change. This place functions under a racist, sexist, homophobic framework, and the saddest thing about it is that the people who lead it don't know that. And, to the extent that they're becoming aware of it, they will only go so far…and so my role is to go is to do as much damage as possible to the existing hierarchy of this place and institutions like

it, so that they change, radically change, [and] don't take forever because people are suffering in the meantime…and so, what I'm saying is that my job is also to start fires."

Here, Nina names that the institutional context of higher education is more generally fundamentally and deeply flawed. And though not all participants in this study articulated her direct conviction and orientation to the institutional responsibilities of CDO, they would agree that these institutions were not built on or for diversity, equity, and inclusion. In fact, one may argue that they were constructed explicitly against those values (Ray, 2017; Alcaraz, 2022). Therefore, the context they are negotiating (as Alain asserts is "their work") will always be politically fraught.

RELATIONALITY

Tatli and Ozbilgin (2009) define relationality as the investigation of the complexity of relationships for social actors (i.e., "the interplay of the self, others, and structures" (p. 250). Overwhelmingly, participants discussed relational power as a foundational element in navigating the political landscape. Here, I begin identifying relationships and narratives around dynamics between other senior leaders. Therefore, this section will discuss relational dynamics more broadly. This section first explores the importance and centrality of the relationship between the CDOs and their respective college presidents. Then, I explore other central relationships that participants identified and how they leverage and cultivate them as they navigate their institutions.

An audience of one: The President. Perhaps the most salient finding in this study is the importance of the relationship between the university president and the chief diversity officer. All participants, most at length, spoke about the central role that their university presidents play in establishing and forwarding their legitimacy as crucial and well-utilized institutional leaders.

As Langston, who has served under two presidents, concisely put it:" Leadership starts at the top…[the President] has to make [DEI] a priority because that validation makes [other leaders] take note." Therefore, when participants spoke about their institutional role, the description often referenced their position directly related to the President (i.e., reporting to them, serving on the Presidential cabinet, etc.).

As Alberta asserted, CDOs "can go as far as [the President] wants to go on diversity" and, when discussing the importance of strategic plans, even said, "it's just a Word doc if you don't have [senior leaders] who will…get behind it and make sure you can execute the things in it." Similarly, Barack spoke about his experiences under multiple presidents, saying: "I have worked under several…[there's] a huge difference in what you're able to achieve […] and what's even a possibility. Having that institutional buy-in, especially at the top of the organization, is necessary. So, a lot of my job is making sure we [CDO and the president] are on the same page and sticking to what we've committed to…." Here, Barack forwards the importance of cultivating institutional buy-in with the university president to gauge one's opportunities for change (Williams, 2012). Moreover, this finding is supported by Ng (2020), who found that the foundation of a CDO's perceived success is connected to the relationship with their respective chief executive.

These examples reveal the complexity of the CDO's agency within their institution and reiterate the difficult landscape for visioning and decision-making for diversity officers (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013; Worthington et al., 2020). As participants explored their relationships with Presidents, there was considerable discussion on the Presidents' relationships with other constituencies–and the immediate effect on the CDO. Alberta shared an experience she had at a previous institution, sharing–

> "[One former president] thought of our student activists as opponents…or almost like [adversaries] and was quite honestly offended by their protests. He took it as a sign of disrespect […] and didn't want to…reward what he thought was, you know, what he'd call [bad] behavior. So, it was a contentious relationship. We'd try to work with [the students] to improve that relationship, but that wouldn't happen because [the President] wasn't changing his perspective. So, we were stuck in the middle…that makes the job nearly impossible…it becomes a lose-lose."

Here, Alberta discusses how CDOs are put into difficult positions to repair and restore harm they may not have enacted. This tension between whom 'one serves and advocates for' versus whom 'one is accountable to' given their institutional role can be exceptionally challenging and create discord and conflict (Kezar, 2008). In this example, Alberta later shares that this tension between the President and students took considerable time and focus away from other, more pressing issues. Indeed, CDOs are, in part, positioned as institutional fixers and mediators across points (Griffin et al. 2019) — however, these interpersonal transgressions can affect their credibility with key constituents and limit their ability to enact their broader vision as it shifts their daily priorities. So, the presidents' actions matter significantly—and while they hold positional power, who Presidents are and how they show up also matters for the CDO and the relationships they build. In this example, Alberta shared that this President, in particular, stepped down and returned to the faculty for several reasons— one of them being his poor relationship with key campus consistencies, like students.

I found the centrality by which the CDOs spoke about their university presidents particularly interesting, as these presidents are held accountable to their respective governing boards. Shouldn't CDOs focus on their boards' opinions? Well, it turns out even the individuals

who oversee presidential responsibilities must be careful, as seen when Nina discussed trying to find allies on her governing board. She said:

> "And when [I had a strong ally on the] Board of Trustees initially…I had a number on speed dial and would call and engage. The current board chair and I have an ongoing conversation [who's also an advocate], but he's afraid to lose the President so that he won't go…he will go only so far."

In this one example, there are some unclear power dynamics happening, but what is clear is that Nina's President has significant political power with their board. So much so that the person who is supposed to provide "oversight" must be careful about their decisions. These examples illustrate the centrality of the university presidency. Alberta later argued that "the President really should be considered the CDO…they are the face. And they need to own diversity as a real issue." She later compared the role to the Chief Development Officer/Vice President for Development, who plays a critical role in leading the development strategy and fundraising, but the President is still referred to as the university's chief fundraiser. This argument builds the case for the President-CDO relationship as being central to their navigation but also central to how they can practice their institutional role.

So far, this section has explored the various ways university presidents are central to how CDOs spend their time and navigate through the institution. In the following two subsections, I will explore how a president's vision and perspective on DEI can expand or limit a CDOs impact on the institution.

Empowering and expanding access. Given the centrality of the President in university leadership discussions, participants argued that many of the opportunities to expand their reach

happened because of presidential support and advocacy. Alain shared a recent conversation he had–

> "[Several] institutions are starting to do work of capacity building with their [Board of Trustees]. And I'm really excited because my President [heard about this and] came to me and said, 'Let's start thinking around how we can plant some seeds'…he's like, 'it's going to take a while, but [let's get started].'I was really excited to hear my President actively wanting me to start doing some work with our board. […] Never in a million years would [people] have thought that my President would have been saying that to me [when I was first hired]."

Here, Alain is excited about the prospect of working directly with the Board of Trustees, which has never happened at his institution and before he was hired would have been considered impossible. Through working and helping to shift the perspective of the president, Alain has increased his access within the institution and has the potential to deeply affect change. Similarly, Alberta shared how asking a series of questions to her President helped spark a new initiative and expand her purview.

In the example, Alberta got an email from a colleague asking for an update on the status of campus policing after a series of high-profile incidents. While this was an issue that would usually be under the Chief Operations Officer's purview, she became interested in wanting to see if she could lead this review and help put together recommendations and guidance for the future. Her President not only encouraged her but assigned one of his staff to help with committee planning. In reflecting on this experience, she says–

> "One of the questions…in the beginning was, 'is this a reform? are we just trying to change a few things? Or are we trying to build and create something new?' He looked at me and said 'I think it's the second one.' So, I took his lead."

From there, Alberta assembled two committees, one for oversight and one for project management and action. However, her colleague, a senior leader in Operations with whom she had a "great working relationship" caused issues for her.

> "What was challenging was that we were all on a different page about how far we can go [with several members having a more traditional perspective on on-campus policing]. But I kept saying was…it was coming from [the President], our charge is to go past simple reform efforts. His [vision]…propelled the project…to be the gift that keeps on giving. […] This isn't a part, you know…this is a duty as assigned [project], but it was a meaningful [assignment] which doesn't always happen when you start a committee."

Alain and Alberta's examples demonstrate how Presidents can easily encourage and expand a CDO's reach within the university. In Alain's example, his president saw value in DEI and wanted to advance proactive discussions with leadership. In this one quick decision, the president has elevated Alain's work to the very top of the institution. In the Alberta example, the president was able to reframe what typically is viewed as an operational issue as an equity issue. Alberta said, "others would have just handed it over to Operations, and that's it," but because he had a more expansive view of the role of DEI in the organization, Alberta was able to contribute and elevate equity in a meaningful way.

Given the increased direct relationship with CDOs, many participants discussed that their president's leadership played a role in whether they accepted the job offer. For example, Ketanji

was very cautious about what kind of President she worked under, so she was intentionally observant during her interviews. She says–

> "I caught a glimpse of the kind of leader that would be during my interview, and I was like, I can work with him. He is very blunt. He is very honest. He's very strategic, and he holds people accountable. You don't show up to a meeting with him if you have not eaten your Wheaties...so I have a deep regard for the rigor, the seriousness, and the real ownership he has for the success of the overall institution. And while he has his blind spots around EDI issues…that's my job to help him grow in that area. He will say something indelicate or flat-out inappropriate, and I'll be like, 'don't say that anymore.' And he listens."

Ketanji mentioned that she likes a straightforward, blunt approach to communication. Their honesty with one another has helped build a relationship that empowers them.

> "I think it is critical to my success that…he [the President] trusts me and clears the path for me to do my work. I can disagree with him fiercely behind the scenes […] we'll be on the phone, and he can say something, and I'm like, 'no, that is not how I see this. Let me offer a different perspective.' [And after those disagreements], we can call each other, text each other, and we can joke with each other. I think that's important and healthy."

As a direct example of their strong working relationship, Ketanji later adds that the President will not endorse or approve any new DEI initiative from other campus leaders without her review or consent. She jokingly retorted, "And don't try to lie [and say I approved it] because he'll text me about it." This an exceptional example of empowering CDOs to be able to have visibility and authority in their roles. Unfortunately, not all the participants were empowered in their role, and many discussed having significant barriers in their place to influence institutional decisions.

Disempowering: Stay in your lane. On the other side, participants also shared experiences where their role can be limited due to a President's decision or the 'chain of command.' One participant shared that when working on various faculty diversity issues, she can come into challenges, she shares: "I've had to defer to others because of where things sit [in the institution], and you know, it can be really frustrating. But then, I'm in spaces, and the first thing people ask me about is what am I doing about faculty diversity." Though a CDO's institutional charge is vast, their institutional oversight is limited (Williams, 2008). This is where CDOs need senior leaders to advocate for them– especially their presidents. However, there were several examples of how the university President can diminish a CDO's vision for their role. Langston said, "I can advise and advocate, but there have been times when I've been told…we're not going that far." In a standout example, Nina shared a story about faculty recruitment that illustrates CDOs' limitations in their roles. Nina discusses the unique challenges of recruiting Native/Indigenous scholars to her faculty in the example. She starts–

> "I am trying to basically change the narrowness of how scholarship is defined on our campus. As we try to recruit more faculty who are Native, we're running into this issue…their production of knowledge is discounted [viewed as service or engagement rather than scholarship]. […] Native scholarship, we have to do it, the way native scholars do it, and if you define scholarship in a way that excludes very good work, then we can't even recruit these native scholars…So, we're recruiting for native anthropologists… And what is happening right now is, we have a pool full of white candidates […] that just defeats the purpose."

Here Nina is making the case that the way the institution is defining scholarship is creating active barriers to Native scholars. As she was charged to work on expanding faculty diversity efforts, she sought to address the issue from a structural perspective. She continues–

> "So, I have a good colleague on the Senate and had a discussion with the Senate; they invited me to talk to them about it. And the President was there, as well as the Provost…and I, and I made the argument that before we can deal with service, we have to deal with scholarship. […] If we continue to declare as service things that are scholarship…that's the equity problem, in and of itself."

While the argument got applause and interest from members of the Academic Senate, Nina's president was less than enthused.

> "In my follow-up meeting with the President, he then said, 'I need to deal with something with you, that is um… uncomfortable.' […] And then he explained to me why I should not have been talking about that…that that is the provost's job and that I should reference the provost as the final authority on this. [He went on to say] …'I think…it's a winning argument. It's one that, you know, I think you even got applause from the people, he said. 'But I don't believe in [it]…you know I'm a [academic] purist, and all this is kind of foolish.'"

In this rich example, Nina illustrates how the core values of the higher education institution (like research and scholarship) can hold deep prejudices and inequities. While she unearthed and argued it as an inequity, she was scolded because it was not under her jurisdiction organizationally. But was it really because of how the university was organized? The President admitted to her about being an academic "purist," thus implying that he upholds the status quo which is in direct opposition to Nina's role as the chief diversity officer. Here, this is not merely

a limitation but creates a real restriction in Nina's ability to bring change to her institution—Bhattacharya (2016) would even call this vulnerable academic. She says– "What you learn in doing this, this type of job, is to find out what is the agenda of the President for you […] and the agenda of [this] particular President, for me, is largely window dressing…and [he] doesn't even realize it."

All the President's Men. Participants identified beyond the President themselves that the President's staff and close advisers play a unique role in the institutional leadership structure that many must navigate. When discussing her over 20 years of experience working in central administration on DEI issues, Alberta said, "[The President's staff] drive the vision…they drive the institutional priorities and can have much influence." However, she also retorted one specific dynamic, "… they are mostly [older] white [men]…who you know, can sometimes think of diversity stuff as a risk or taboo, you know, they don't want to push it." This characterization rang true for several of the study participants as they discussed issues, particularly with the Presidential communications team on addressing equity issues. One participant chalked it up to "that individual just having too much power amongst our senior leaders."

However, it's not always adversarial. These roles can also act as translators and reiterate the CDO's broader vision or plan for the institution. Nina shared an example of hiring more diverse psychologists and how she was assisted by working with the President's chief of staff. She said—

> "A few years ago, I noticed this increase in the need for mental health professionals [for communities of color]. So, I called the Chief of Staff, the president's Chief of Staff. I said, 'you know we need to hire some experienced psychologists to this campus, and I know some folks we can hire, so I'm going to…'He cut me right off, and he said he that

> ‘You cannot… You cannot go around hiring your psychologists.’ (laughs) And I’m like, ‘well, students are suffering.’”

During the conversation, Nina and the chief of staff discussed possible options and resources and the chief of staff asked for “some time to elevate the issue and get it to the right people so [they] could have a more robust plan.” She says: “Maybe, soon after that, probably, about a year or so later, they started expanding the people they brought in, Black and Native and Latinx…before we only had white and Asian psychologists at the Center.” Here, the president’s chief of staff helps to bridge the gap and elevate the issue across various constituencies, using the influence of the President's office. It is not the President directly advocating for change but rather individuals leveraging the power of the office to address the needs of underrepresented populations on campus. Therefore, while the President is seemingly at the center of CDO institutional navigation, they are certainly not the only actor.

Ketanji extends this idea of the president's staff to include her role. She says–

> “Having learned from [my previous institution] and watching so many leaders crash and burn. When I came in, I told my Chancellor right away…‘here's how I want you to introduce me to the campus community— she is part of my team.’ If you’ve got 10 people on your team, then [I’m] your 11th employee. If you got 5 people, I’m your 6th employee. Deliberations, whether they are consequential or small, almost always have an impact for some EDI implications… so you [the Chancellor] have to require people check in with [me].”

Here, Ketanji is strategic in how she frames her role and connection to the President’s office and the President himself. As seen in the data, the President’s staff holds a compelling and influential space in the institutional leadership landscape. Ketanji’s proposed alignment to that team

provides a link to how CDOs must be creative in situating themselves with others within the institution.

Presidents are not omnipotent: An audience of many. While the president and their office were central to how participants navigate institutional power dynamics, it is important to note that they do not hold unilateral power and while they enjoy broad influence, it greatly depended on the audience. For example, in the previous section, Nina leverages the needs and voices of student activists to get diverse mental health professionals on their campus. Nina makes clear that while her relationship with the chief of staff helped move the initiative along—it was the concern that if things were not addressed, students would organize against the administration. This brief example illustrates that there are multiple power sources and it is important for CDOs to understand how these different groups play off of each other. Therefore, participants discussed the many relationships that are critical in their institutional navigation.

Participants also discussed establishing and maintaining lateral and peer-level relationships, as these relationships are crucial to their success and provide various venues to engage in university issues. One theme discussed was the importance of having colleagues committed to DEI who work outside the DEI structure. Alain talked about his relationship with the Executive Director of Institutional Research (IR). He said–

> "That's been critical in terms of connecting the data to our strategy, and we're fortunate to again have a champion on DEI leading out our office of Institutional Research, which again alleviates the burden and responsibility for my division to carry that responsibility but, rather, be a partner and a collaborator."

Participants talked at length about identifying and leaning on colleagues who were ready to take on DEI as a shared responsibility. Langston agrees as he posits, "Having other people who

view…equity as their core, maybe it's not in their [job] title, but at their core… changes everything." Castells (2013) would argue that this is a strategy for building capacity as these relationships influence the decisions of others in ways that favor the CDO's will, interests, and values. Williams and Wade-Golden (2013) argue that capacity building through institutional partnerships is a central competency for CDOs.

Participants spoke positively of many of their peer-level colleagues if there was not a reorganization or change in reporting. Higher education institutions are known to be bureaucratic, hierarchical institutions. There is an everlasting pursuit and need to legitimize one's power, influence, and autonomy in an institution (Ray, 2019). Ketanji shared that at her previous institution, there were five new vice presidents for DEI in five years, as many of them were trying to build a new unit and getting pushback from their more senior, more established colleagues. She says: "What's that Peter Drucker quote: "Culture eats strategy for breakfast" … and in higher education, it's that strong turf stuff that goes on in higher education and people trying to put up real and artificial boundaries…to be set up well, you have to have a defined lane. If not, it can cause issues with your colleagues that you don't want." Alberta added: "You never want to give up reports or offices. It's like university politics 101…and as much as their collegiality, there is also heavy, sometimes cutthroat competition."

One constituency that participants named as key partners in navigating their institutions were Academic Deans. Alberta offers that working with the academic deans can be helpful.

> "You know, [academic deans are] really... the driving force in [university leadership], more so than even the provost…in central administration, there is a lot more red tape, more people to sign off…you are working with [your governing board]. Everything

happens faster at the schools, and deans, especially those that bring in money…have more [autonomy] than most others in [central administration]."

All participants mentioned working with supportive Deans from across disciplines. Alain said, "it's great because out of the group, at least a few will be willing to work with you (laughs)." But what happens when leaders are not interested in partnering with the CDO? Perhaps, Barack likened this dynamic to Kool-Aid flavors; he said–

> "You have people who drink the Kool-Aid right from the beginning. You're going to have some who may not be sure about the flavor but are still willing to try it. So, I'm working on early adopters, and I'm working on converting those already coming to the table, first and foremost […]."

Like many other participants, he focuses on the people who want to work with him. But what about the skeptics? He continued–

> "Those that just have never had interest in the Kool-Aid, I try to determine why, and then I try to determine, are there other things of interest that might be points of intersection they didn't realize, we could be a part of because…if you can get someone interested in something… you have the potential to convert them. But that takes time and effort…I focus on people committed to [DEI]; others will feel left out."

Here, Barack discusses finding and identifying whom to work with within their institution. The maintenance of these relationships with the Deans is what Ketanji called the politics of proximity; she says:

> "I have really good relationships with most of the Deans. I practice what I call the politics of proximity. I show up to meetings where I'm not on the agenda and where my participation is optional because I want them to see me. I want them to be familiar with

me. I'm there to be like, hey, that's a great idea, or give a different opinion. So, the familiarity, the collegiality that we have, the partnership that I have with them makes [disagreements] a lot easier."

Here Ketanji is illustrating the importance of visibility and finding ways to facilitate deeper bonds and providing an ability to influence others. Though not the President or Provost, Ketanji is working to establish collegial bonds. As Barack said, "There's not one thing…it happens through those regular check-ins, going to those [cabinet] meetings, sitting on those [hiring] committees together…it just takes time [to build relationships]".

While there were stories of individuals creating challenges, most of the participants held the mindset that there are plenty of people (and plenty of work) to keep them busy. There were also unexpected partnerships. I was surprised that several of the participants discussed working with the Chief Information Officer (CIO) as a key partner. Alain discussed that their CIO was critical in partnering to develop a new university information system that includes and updates name-affirming information for trans* community members. Nina called their CIO a strong partner in navigating doxing issues for vulnerable faculty. When I mentioned the connection to the CIO surprised me, Alain laughed and said, "Yeah, that's a connection that people wouldn't expect…it just goes to show the breadth of [the Chief Diversity Officer] …and the importance of relationship building."

Beyond work, there is also a need to find a community and support within their institutions. Nina mentioned that she is a part of an informal identity-based affinity group of senior administrators.

"We call ourselves the [Fantastic Four]. We meet offline at least twice a month to discuss the issues that are going on in our respective portfolios and how we can help…and

> basically to provide a sense of community for ourselves here. We meet, we eat together... it's another way of finding information that I would miss because I'm not in all rooms. I used to bemoan [not being in rooms], but that's not [where the President sees my] role, and while he doesn't want me to do that, I can use [my connections]."

Here, Nina has been able to find support and community and gain access to spaces through her relationships with other key leaders on campus. Healthy collegial relationships and a broader social support system are essential for many senior leaders of color as their experiences can be exceptionally isolating (Nixon, 2013). This support extends beyond the campus community. Participants also talked extensively about seeking support from external sources. Ketanji asserts––

> "[I tell new CDOs] to get a mentor and somebody you can call and bounce things off of and outside of your institution is most ideal. Sure, you need some internal folks who are your allies, but external folks [can do what] I call a crazy check. Like, are they crazy, or am I crazy? There is no substitute for it, just for being confident because people are going to be coming at you from six ways from Sunday. And sometimes, you're just going to need to keep your eye on the ball, and…your confidence will speak for itself. [That external] perspective will help you find that confidence."

Here, the quote illustrates how CDOs can get caught up in institutional dynamics/issues, so the recommendation to find outside support and networks for clarity was a significant finding. Langston talked about how joining a professional development organization for CDOs makes him feel "less alone" and gives him additional confidence to be able to assert himself with senior leaders. "I can say: this is happening all over the country; we need to catch up and I know that

because I spoke with my colleagues at these institutions. It's powerful and a useful thing to have in your back pocket."

However, even with great relationships and supportive networks, the role of the CDOs is demanding. That's why several of the participants asserted that even with the right support systems, the CDO job is not for everyone. One quote from Ketanji that was powerful was:

> "I think it's also really important to be willing to leave the job. So, if there are some machinations going on, or if you don't feel supported by leadership, life is too short, and this work just requires for me… it's a calling for me, and it engages my mind, my body, my soul, and my dignity, my credibility. None of that is up for negotiation. So, have a backup plan if you feel like this is not working out for you. I love this work, but it's just that… work."

PRAXIS

Tatli and Ozbilgin (2009) define praxis as the actions individuals take as they "strategically deploy the forms of capital that they possess in order to exert influence in their organizations" (p. 252). In this section, I identify two unique ways in which participants discussed deploying tactics/taking action to navigate their institution's dynamics. First, I will explore navigational and tactical strategies. Secondly, I explore reactive and proactive strategies.

Navigational Strategies.

Collaborators: The In-between. A significant part of CDO leadership and how they fundamentally navigate the institution is acting as a connector and partner throughout their campus with senior leaders and other constituencies. This is supported by extant scholarship as Griffin et. al (2019) frame CDOs as facilitators, connectors, and fixers. While this orientation is seemingly subversive for a senior leader, all participants argued that their work was more than

purely symbolic. Rather, they forwarded a more nuanced perspective of asserting their leadership/authority.

I was struck that all the participants discussed working across issues and departments to find resolutions and how they work to support and empower the institution to make good decisions (Pittard, 2010). Indeed, there was discussion about oversight, authority, and delegation, but many of the participants discussed their role as being in partnership with other leaders. Below is a brief collection of quotes from participants centering their role as a collaborator.

CDOs as COLLABORATORS

Alberta	"An advocate and change agent […] within reason"
Nina	"I consider myself be the senior equity leader"…who's a whisper to the President"
Barack	"We focus on being…convener [and] collaborator, to the extent they want"
Alain	"I partner with everyone. It's important that people feel like they can come to me"
Ketanji	"Though I'm the lead […] I have to partner and depend on others' partnership and commitment to see these efforts through"
Langston	"Bring people together to make the right choices for our community"

Barack said: "I think that's the spirit of this work…it's done in partnership. So, one of the things I'm really focused on is how we work with people." While the partnership is critical to their role, it can cause challenges as university leadership structures are rigid and siloed (Adserias, et

al, 2017). Alberta said, “Like anything, you have to have balance…work with other teams, but you have to run your programs and implement your vision…so building out your portfolio with things [you have direct authority] is important. She added, in a joking tone: “Most ‘partnerships’ was us doing all the work.” The subsequent quotes illustrate that even as CDOs' institutional positioning has increased to the senior-most level, they ***still*** can act as mediators between key constituents, much like the earlier iterations of the CDO officer, who typically held significantly less institutional rank and resources (Leon, 2012). One unique example was shared by Barack where he had to lead his President and disgruntled faculty through a high-stakes mediation.

For context, Barack’s Provost issued a new DEI reporting structure for faculty diversity activities. This announcement caught the attention of a group of conservative faculty and outside groups who condemned these new efforts as an attack on academic freedom. In response, the university president apologized to these groups and rescinded the new DEI reporting structure. The campus erupted, and a coordinated group of faculty, staff, and students formed. As he reflected on this experience, Barack discussed how difficult it was to navigate this landscape. He said–

> “You know, one of the challenges or opportunities, depending on how you look at diversity offices, is that you're often navigating different spaces. On one level, I’m navigating this Community because I had some credibility with this group, so I was able to attend those meetings. But I was also a member of the administration. The President had said in a meeting with his leadership that his decision was final… and anyone willing [and] desiring to go against that…he would accept their resignation on the spot. So, it was tough for a while”.

With both sides at odds, Barack got both parties to agree to a facilitated mediation. While the President was hesitant, "he was looking at a vote of no confidence, so he had to try something." At the mediation, however, things got heated.

> "The [faculty representative] had printed off a list a series of recommendations that they had moving forward…and printed off a copy for the President and herself. And when she gave a copy to the President, the President took it and proceeded [to] throw it on the ground."

He continued–

> "I got everybody to agree to come to this meeting, I felt like...[it was] the end before it began, I saw…felt like my life, my professional life flashed before my eyes, and I thought that that was going to be my last in the job…[I] contact[ed] my wife and tell her that we need to start looking (laughter)."

However, Barack could use his goodwill with the organizing group and his healthy relationship with the President to recalibrate the meeting.

> "[Everyone looked at me to do something.] So, I turned to the President, I [reminded him], you must put your best foot forward. You can't be defensive; you can't be combative. It's difficult to do that if you start this conversation and adversarial relationship by throwing it on the ground. So, I will ask you if you would just bend down and pick up the paper. [Then, I asked the representative to start over, to which she agreed.] He waited for a while; it felt like an eternity, but it was probably, I don't know, a minute or two to pick up a paper, and we started again…and ended up resulting close to a million dollars [for] the resolution of annual support for faculty diversity efforts at the institution."

In this example, Barack served as the link between two worlds and discourse. Here, Barack did not have the authority to overturn an institutional decision, but rather he curated a space where resolution and progress could happen. This example illustrates why Alberta says, “You’re not a superhero and don’t always have the final decision…but that doesn’t mean you are [symbolic].”

Moreover, even when a CDO has veto power and/or the power to say no, they must be thoughtful about how to do so and where to do it. Ketanji shared an example of her work with the Health Services system, which is notoriously independent at her institution.

> “Many of them will come to me to say, ‘here's what I'm thinking about doing.’ So, the fact that they're bringing the idea to me suggests that they respect my opinion. And I don't say NO, injudiciously or frequently…I try to find ways to say yes. If it’s something ridiculous or out of the box: then, NO, we're not doing that. Surprisingly, I have not had a whole lot of wrangled or ruffled feathers around my nose in our health sciences area.”

As she finished that sentence, she was reminded of a time when she had a simple disagreement with a leader in Health Sciences and the tension afterward.

> “In our health sciences area, there's a real culture of arrogance on steroids. And some of them are the only thing between you and death. So, some of them rightly have a little sense of self-importance. I mean…they are important!”

She continues—

> “My counterpart [in Health Sciences]…who probably doesn’t consider me their counterpart (laughs)…he was taken aback when I disagreed with him, stridently in a meeting where many of his subordinates were present. I can't even remember what it was…we just disagreed on whatever it was. And I think by the looks on the other people's faces, people don't disagree with him often.”

Ketanji added that she heard from several people around campus that this colleague was upset about her pushing back and trying to discredit his proposed ideas. She ultimately has made peace with their issues. She says–

> "Look… if I have to feel fearful to speak truth to power…then that's not a healthy work environment for me. I don't think he has ever been right with me after that. Like, he's a little cool [towards me], but I can live with that. If somebody says something inappropriate…and they are a powerful person, I don't think I have that luxury of ***not*** calling stuff out right then and there…because it's my job to do it. But if I sit in the room and don't check stuff at the moment, then it almost makes me appear ineffective because just addressing it privately doesn't serve the greater good. It might preserve that person's feelings. And again, I don't think I do it with any disrespect. It's very important to me that in our dialogue that it's compassionate and that people are left with dignity. Yet and still, sometimes… NO, doesn't go over well with people, and I have learned to be okay with that."

While participants discussed being very careful about how they manage their relationships, Ketanji makes a clear point that the moral obligations of the CDO sometimes call for a willingness to disrupt the status quo. She added: "I also know that I have the support of others [the President, Provost] so I feel empowered to speak up."

Active Strategies. As discussed in chapter 2, the origins of chief diversity officers come from multicultural affairs centers post the civil rights era (Pratt, 2017; Pauley, 1997). These offices were severely underfunded, and the individuals who led them had to be politically savvy, strategic thinkers who could read institutional politics well and navigate accordingly (Ramirez, 2019). This is still very much the case; however, now, CDOs have more resources and better

positioning. Given this, participants in the study not only discussed how to navigate power—but rather posited ways in which they seek it.

Prioritizing fundraising. For one, participants spoke about cultivating donors and securing funding as a strategic priority. When Nina first began her role, securing a major gift donation was a way to "get people's attention." Even in well-funded research universities, people are looking for funding and resources. As Alberta put it, "universities are competitive…and [leaders] are competitive too." Nina discussed the importance of prioritizing initiatives that bring in funding and are highly valued within the institution.

> "You know, and the responsibility of facilitating that diversity plan […] my office partners with basically all the Deans and Vice Presidents on campus. And these [are] not sort of symbolic issues like: Can you help me with the syllabus or reading list? But real, serious problems about the climate in our department or funding opportunities. I'm now working with the Office of the Provost, for example, on a challenge grant for NSF [National Science Foundation]."

She later retorted that this grant was a strategic decision as it would help to "elevate [her] office…and it promotes these issues we're trying to address and makes [others] take notice." Moreover, she said: "And faculty know what the NSF is." Here, Nina is making a calculated decision. Indeed, her office needs the funding, but she is also interested in the attention it will garner from others in the community. Funding acts as a currency, both financially and socially. Development and fundraising are critical parts of the higher education ecosystem, and there is significant pressure on all leaders to think about what they are "bringing in." These examples illustrate that the strategic decision to seek certain kinds of funding goes beyond the money

itself—it is a precious commodity, and a part of that commodity is the social capital one gains from it.

Social Capital. For some of the participants, the power does not come from their title, but rather Nina shared that it directly influenced where she lived–

> "When my husband and I moved here…we wanted to find out [the right neighborhood] that would allow our kids to be educated in the best schools. And so, the down payment for this house costs what my [old house] costs for the whole house. But I was determined to live in this neighborhood because I knew that it would provide my children with access to the best school, and they would give me the kind of gravitas that I needed to do this work. So, down the street, I live from [key donors and senior administrators]. The $1.5 million that I raised? The donor, [lives] a street over from me."

This is an exceptional example. Here, Nina discusses the pressure of obtaining social capital in these leadership circles. This navigation goes beyond the work one does at the university to include social circles: where you live, and to whom you have access. The need to center power does not stop at work, but for Nina, she must center her life around it. As Alberta adds: "Culturally, that stuff matters. Who reports to [whom], who's in your portfolio, what's your budget…people pay attention to that. But it also gets into your network..." I should note, as a woman of color, it was something Nina believed that she needed to do.

Indeed, CDOs must be thoughtful of their standing within the organization and that includes considering the location. One of Langston's first efforts was to move his office—

> "One of the first things I did in coming there was to say, we need to raise the prominence of this office. We were at a building that was…off the beaten path. And I said that's not acceptable. If you're committed to this work, you need to be in the [central administration

> office], which is the prominent building on campus where the other senior officers are, or somewhere else as prominent."

Space allocation on campus is deeply political. The VP for Operations, whom Langston cited as being one of the most influential people in leadership and overseeing all space allocation, was against the move, especially as Langston wanted to have space for his staff as well. He persisted– – elevating the issue to the issue of influential cabinet members who could elevate the issue and advocate on his behalf while investing in his professional relationship with the VP of Operations. Eventually, he and his team were able to move to the central administration building. He reflected–

> "He [the VP of Operations] was not an early adopter, and that's putting it gently…In times where you have folks who don't necessarily adopt or you see them as champions, how do you work a different angle or leverage other relationships to get accomplished what you need to accomplish?"

Space is important, especially for a leader and office that is trying to establish itself on campus (Williams, 2013). While Langston discussed the space in the central administration building as a visibility issue, the effort sought to bring legitimacy to his role and his office.

Proactive and Reactive: Issues of Credibility and Legitimacy. While there were an array of tactics employed, many of the participants discussed building credibility and reputation as both central to navigating power dynamics and obtaining influence within leadership. Participants discussed taking proactive and reactive steps to further their and their offices' credibility. Alain talked about having to tailor his message to senior leaders in a way that would "earn their interest and respect." He discusses leading a strategic plan exercise and says:

> "Well, one thing, [we walked] through the University of Michigan DEI strategic planning toolkit with senior leadership and our [diversity cabinet] in parallel so they could see what a data-driven D&I strategic planning process can and should look like…with metrics with accountability. And for our President, a data scientist, that was very appealing because I think he hadn't experienced DEI work with that kind of framing. I think DEI work felt very political to him, especially with the constituencies and how they were engaging him about D&I-related things. I think it created recalcitrance from those constituencies, especially those that he deemed to be performative."

Making connections to other leaders' research and personal interests helps CDOs gain credibility in their work and the broader goals of DEI at the institution. But this was not a coincidence. Alain chose this strategy after having extensive brainstorms with colleagues (both internal and external) about ways to package the conversation so it would gain the support of the President and others— and it worked. Barack added, "My current President is perfect…because his research scholarship was connected to access, education access, particularly for underrepresented populations, so it comes with that lens. [It doesn't mean] he doesn't have blind spots…but making that connection to [his scholarship] has been helpful in [getting him onboard] with some of our projects."

Like many things in the institution, establishing legitimacy is different for different people. In short, finding credibility as a CDO depends on the status of the CDO. More directly, Ketanji named the decision to choose an administrative route over a tenure track and the complications it can bring.

> "So really, it is about the individual, it is about the institution. I don't know that [I could] be successful at any institution. I feel very successful and empowered here. Right? So,

about power, I think it is about being real about the unevenness on college campuses, where we play the game and co-conspire around who has a higher value and who does not, right?"

She adds—

"With faculty, tenured faculty, having more value, more voice, more prestige…that really gets on my nerves because it's just reifying the value of human beings and devaluing the contributions of so many people who are… some of them are smarter than some faculty. I know some people around here who clean the grounds of this institution, whom we don't call professor or doctor, but they're brilliant."

Here, Ketanji is calling out the uneven power and value faculty are given within the institution. Though participants without tenure seemingly were about to navigate well enough, it was still a point of contention for some. One participant, after sharing a brief story where a group of faculty was inquiring about their credentials, said, *"A better question is what makes them think they can do my job?"* While other senior leaders must also navigate this landscape, one must wonder if it is fundamentally different for CDOs, rather than other leaders. As Alain asserts:

"We don't expect the VP of Business and Finance to be a tenured faculty...You don't expect the Head of HR. But all of a sudden, when it comes to being the senior diversity officer of an institution, that person has to have every faculty credential under the moon. I don't think that's a coincidence…And no one can articulate why it should be a requirement."

Here, Alain is illuminating that CDOs must be deeply credentialed, which contrasts with how they must be referential in their leadership as they partner, facilitate, and collaborate on issues

that may or may not hold direct oversight and authority. However, it does not stop at one's credentials.

One participant, who feels like they have credibility and legitimacy within their institutional ranks, shared frustrations with their CFO and the ways in which others will undermine DEI work. They say–

> "Our CFO, in my opinion, has a lot more authority than I think is appropriate. Case in point, [as a part of our budget process]…here are some of my asks: I want to create a center for staff training…create an office that focuses on faculty…[forward] a strategic plan for inclusive excellence that gives away a million dollars in incentive funds...I shared this with the Chancellor, and he's like, 'yes, go do that.' I share it with the [Provost]: 'Yes, that's great; go do it.'"

However, when they get into the actual budget meeting, which involves the Chancellor, Provost, and the CFO, problems arise. They say–

> "He [the CFO as a colleague] thinks it's okay to start picking apart my ideas and to reorganize my stuff [in front of my bosses]. And I'm like, oh, you're cute, but how about you stay in your lane? No! How about, no…you're not going to tell me how to redo this program because I'm not over here telling you how to do spreadsheets and budgets and stuff. I didn't just throw ideas together…this is a broader strategy based on years of experience and expertise. But remember, who controls the money? So, I'm really careful not to piss him off because he still controls the money. But at the same time, what you're not going to do is tell me how to do strategy in my unit. So those are the kinds of issues that I navigate on a regular basis."

Here, the participant is revealing the double standard that exists for CDOs. While they are subject matter experts, and highly accomplished professionals, others dismiss their role, their expertise, and their contributions. Even when they can respect it, it presents considerable challenges.

Part I: Summary. This section explored key themes in how participants make meaning of power and agency within their institutional context. Using a conceptual framework from Tatli and Ozbilgin (2009), the chart below reviews the key findings.

	KEY FINDINGS
SITUATEDNESS	• Recent national events have elevated DEI efforts in campus discourse and shifted CDOs' social context. However, roadblocks persist. • Understanding the social context is critical for CDOs to be able to do their work.

RELATIONALITY	• The President matters— a lot.
	  ○ If leaders, particularly Presidents, have a bold vision/advanced orientation to DEI, it facilitates agency and empowers the CDO.
	  ○ If leaders, particularly Presidents, seek to maintain the status quo/(traditional) orientation to DEI, it hinders/limits/disempowers the CDO.

	• The President's internal staff and traditional C-suite leaders can be deeply influential in key institutional decisions. • While presidents are central, there is no unilateral power within the university. Finding allies and relationship building is crucial to expanding the institutional reach and identifying personal support for CDOs.
PRAXIS	• CDOs navigate big, complex issues but must partner/broker to influence issues, commonly as the facilitator, partner, or convener. • CDOs must identify and leverage social capital to navigate and to gain credibility and trust.

PART II: Distinctions in Institutional Relationships and Power

In the next section, I will directly address research question 2: *What distinctions do chief diversity officers (CDOs) make in institutional roles and power dynamics within the university leadership structure*? Here, I sought to make clearer distinctions in how CDOs perceive their political landscapes by identifying the types of actors within their university leadership structures. This section will discuss and identify the four relationship themes with an accompanying chart to support the findings. I should note that some of these themes/examples are embedded in narratives shared in the previous section.

While this section seeks to establish themes from these dynamic relationships, it is important to note that these relationships are just that— dynamic. There were clear themes that emerged from the data, but the narratives and examples from participants' storytelling add complexity to how these individuals are positioned within their leadership structure. It is important to keep that in mind when reviewing these findings. This issue will be explored further in this section's, discussion (Chapter 5).

Identifying the Four Relationships

This next section will forward my thematic analysis of the various powered relationships CDOs navigate within the senior leadership ecosystem that emerged from the dataset. TABLE 3 reviews the theme, a brief description, and excerpts from interviews that illuminate these relationships.

1) The Power Holders

The first group of individuals was perceived as being in charge and being at the top of the institutions' bureaucratic system. These individuals are leaders, key decision-makers, and the driving force behind the strategic vision and direction of the university. I will call this group the

power holders. The institutional actors that I have designated as power holders are **President, Provost, and Academic Deans.**

All participants discussed at length the University President as central to institutional dynamics and their role. This was the most salient relationship in all the interviews. Outside of the President, participants then identified Provosts and Deans as influential leaders holding significant authority within the institution outside of the President. While the Deans do not have direct oversight of the CDOs, several participants identified them as having a high level of agency, making it beneficial to partner/collaborate with them. This group could also include the governing board and/or Academic Senate (). There was also a disparate discussion between the governing board and the Academic Senate.

2) Influencers

The second group identified were individuals who held significant influence with the power brokers and/or worked in areas of the university that were deemed 'highly influential on the direction of institutional priorities– I will refer to them as the **influencers.** These individuals include **donors/Presidents of the University's Foundation Board, Chief Financial Officers/business and administration, and general counsel.**

Participants argued that various external pressures help influence how the university runs. Fundraising in some form came up (i.e., donors, a VP of Development, or the President of the University's Foundation) in all the interviews. While donors have no direct role in the institution, institutional decisions are made with them in mind. Participants, along with supporting scholarship, discuss that one of the core functions of the President is to act as a chief fundraiser to the institution. Moreover, while all the study's participants sit on the President's leadership cabinet, several participants acknowledged that other institutional leaders perceive as holding

more status hold given their roles. There was a significant discussion of general counsel as they are responsible for evaluating legality and risk for the institution. These leaders are the institutional peers; however, that may differ in practice. Some of the individuals identified in this role include finance and administration (i.e., the CFO) and Chief Operations Officer– with an emphasis and particular oversight on the financial health of the institution.

3) Gatekeepers

There is a group of individuals who may or may not be considered senior leaders but can be extremely influential in institutional agenda-setting and one's access to emerging issues. The third group will be referred to as the **gatekeepers**. These individuals include **the President's staff (Chief of Staff, executive communications) and other key advisers (general counsel).**

Most of the participants discussed their relationship with the President's staff in significant detail, like the President's team and senior advisors. This includes the President's Chief of Staff, communication lead, and other key advisers (i.e., governmental affairs and general counsel). While CDOs "outrank," they must work with (and under) these advisers and leaders to ensure they can advance their efforts. Many of my participants discussed that it is essential to align with individuals as they help develop the President's agenda and activities.

4) Allies (Adversaries)

Finally, the last group is called**– the allies**. These individuals include **other CDOs at peer institutions and institutional supporters**.

There were different kinds of allies. Most participants discussed the importance of having support networks outside the institution. Finding community and having a 'sounding board' was important for participants. Partners are there for support, but allies within the institution can provide access to spaces and expand the CDO's reach. These allies varied significantly based on

their relationships and who was in the role. For example, a new Academic Dean with a strong background in faculty diversity initiatives could be an ally. A note on adversaries: there was a general acknowledgment by all participants that there are individuals who may not support their efforts, both publicly and privately. However, these individuals did not seem to influence how participants navigated the institution to enact change.

Summary: Part II: I have identified four key themes in relationships CDOs cultivate and explore within the University leadership ecosystem. They are Power Holders, Influencers, Gatekeepers, and Allies.

TABLE 3: CDOs Relationships and Perceptions of Power

Individuals	Description	Excerpts from participant interviews
Power Holders	Individuals who were described as holding significant positional power and authority. They were President, Provost, and Academic Deans.	• "I have worked under several Presidents… [there's] a huge difference in what you're able to achieve […] and what's even a possibility. Having that institutional buy-in, especially at the top of the organization, is necessary. So, a lot of my job is making sure we [CDO and the president] are on the same page and sticking to what we've committed to" • Alberta: "Deans have something you don't really find at the university…autonomy, especially the one that generate revenue like Medical and Business schools. The Provost is providing broad strategy… but most of the decisions are happening at the school level and Deans have a lot of flexibility on [their leadership]"
Influencers	Individuals who were viewed as highly influential in decisions and the inner workings of the university. They were donors/Presidents of the University's Foundation	• Nina on money and optics: "Universities run on money and optics. Therefore…as a leader, I have to … [think about] what's my relationship with these things? How can use them? When shouldn't I? Window-dressing [optics] is a problem for me, but I can partner with donors to do some real good."

	Board, Chief Financial Officers/business and administration, and general counsel.	• Langston mentioning his relationship his CFO: "Before I convinced anyone, I learned that I needed to convince [the CFO]. He has the President's ear… and as much as [me and the President] get along…I also want to make sure I have another [influential] voice in those circles. "
Gatekeepers	Individuals who influence and critical in setting the university's agenda. They include: the President's staff (Chief of Staff, executive communications); other key advisers (general counsel).	• Alberta on adding the President's senior project manager on a key committee: "We made the strategic decision to get [someone on President's staff] on that committee…I want to stay on his [the President's] agenda. This way it's not on my workflow…it literally becomes a part of the president's agenda…" • One individual: "That individual [the President's executive comms] just has too much power… everyone listens to him like he gets the final say. As frustrating and ridiculous as it is, I'm learning to work with him…"
Allies	Individuals who serve as peer-level support and community for CDOs. They include institutional peers, identity-based groups, and CDOs/other	• Nina on a group of other Black leaders: "We call ourselves the [Fantastic Four]. We meet offline at least twice a month to discuss the issues that are going on in our respective portfolios and how we can help…and basically to provide a sense of community for ourselves here. We meet, we eat

	senior leaders outside of their institution.	together...it's another way of finding out information I would miss because I'm not in all rooms." • Langston on involvement of professional development organizations: "In this work, we need each other. So, I talk to a lot of people outside of the institution. That way I can talk freely and hear perspective outside of the university ecosystem. And [my colleagues in a professional development organization] has really helped me create a roadmap and feel confident in work… on campus, I am one person, but in [a professional development organization] I'm one of many."

Part III: Structures as Benefits or Hindrances

This final section seeks to explore how CDOs discuss the conditions that facilitate opportunities and/or pose challenges in their institutional navigation. This section seeks to assess this research question, which is: What conditions do chief diversity officers (CDOs) experience that can empower and/or constrain institutional agency? While Part I and II of the findings also address opportunities and challenges throughout its narrative, this section is crafted with the intention to examine CDOs' perceptions of the structures within their institutional context, like the institutional reporting structure and lines, policies, procedures, etc. However, in the conclusion, I find that participants could not separate the role of individuals in these structures as they establish the foundational conditions.

Conditions that…empower. *Organizational design and efforts that facilitates collaboration*. As stated before, CDOs leverage and access power through collaborative means. Alain says–

> "I think the biggest challenges of many public research institutions like ours is the decentralization culture, and you know, how do you build an institutional strategy…then [move] in an overall direction that supports of the overall institutional strategy? Rather than [some] random stuff happening all over the university that is not connected. [This] tends to be how things go in decentralized institutions where you know the left-hand doesn't have anything to do with the right hand…especially on diversity, equity, and inclusion work."

Therefore, participants noted the importance of having features that support visibility, transparency, and collaboration as tools that support their work. Barack noted that joint work

plans and standing meetings with other business lines help expand their reach into different issues that are happening across the institution. He says: “We have a robust meeting schedule with campus partners… [to new CDOs] you have to go out and build those [communication channels].” Moreover, Barack spoke about the relationship he has been able to develop with Academic Diversity Officers. He says:

> “I benefit from having Academic Diversity Officers (ADOs) at almost every school […] so every school has an Associate Dean for diversity, which wasn't the case when I started. [After George Floyd’s murder], there was a push to articulate an important vision…they have a dotted line to me….To the point that others [other diversity managers in units] see themselves as having much more of a dotted line [to my division and me], so That’s great. You know, you cultivate relationships, where you're seen as a supportive pillar, so much so that they [Academic Diversity Officers] are desiring that connection, which isn't always the case on the academic side, so...yeah, great relationships, I’m appreciative of it.”

ADOs, as briefly discussed in the literature review, are a growing trend on college campuses that identify college-level diversity officers who work within their local unit/school to advance efforts (Grim et al., 2019). Here, Barack has been able to establish relationships that have now become a part of the larger organizational design (dotted lines to each college through their local diversity officers are now denoted on his university’s organizational chart). Langston was more critical of dotted lines as they do not always instill accountability. Rather he said the focus should be on the effort itself, saying: “I think it's about us using those [efforts]… to articulate a shared vision. And so, we… [should focus on] the process of strategizing and putting our technical plan together” rather than the narrow examples.

Another specific model for CDOs is leading large campuswide diversity committees and cabinets, a strategy that several participants discussed. Alain discussed forming a senior university diversity cabinet with representation from all the core offices as helpful. While the Cabinet co-creates and advises, it allows Alain to implement a strategic vision across the institution. Moreover, he noted that with the provost as an active committee member, there is significant interest for leaders and their offices to be engaged. This model (Williams, 2012) provides a pathway for clear communication channels and facilitates CDO oversight in highly decentralized organizations.

Multi-year/long-term funding model. A significant structure that empowers CDOs is a budget line. Increased monetary capital provides increased social capital, and examples like long-term funding (i.e., hiring initiatives and multi-year diversity initiatives) were forwarded. Specifically, moving away from a one-year or limited funding cycle to fund their units is essential because CDOs can extend their strategic vision. Langston shared that when his office received the funding, it felt like he "was finally at the table" and no longer the "forgotten stepchild." Funding for his office also silenced adversaries and distractors. He said, "I have something they want [money]…so they must interact with me." Alberta put it more directly: "I wouldn't take a CDO job that didn't come with a committed [multiple years] budget line […] it's the recipe for failure."

As Langston still feels new to his campus, one of his major accomplishments was garnering a larger budget, which he believes empowers his work and staff while also affirming his office's presence on his respective campus.

> "I was able to solidify a shade over a $1 million dollars of additional resources just from university funds. And so, I think that's an accomplishment and says that

> we're making some progress towards [an institutional] commitment. Primarily, that's going towards staffing…as a way for us to provide additional content area expertise to move work forward and help us grow. But we've got work to do. I think part of it is also us raising our own funds and becoming a revenue generating entity so on the training and education pieces. It's just getting started. But it's getting the attention of a lot of [other leaders] …it's an important message to send— we're not an initiative, we are a real office who's not going anywhere."

While higher education is considered resource-rich, there are limitations. Though one participant shared challenges with CFO in the budgeting process, they were integrated into a process where they were able to make a direct request and were account ed in the university's plans. This stability has not been common for diversity officers. As these roles have become institutionalized if they can get money, but how to navigate and be successful in the budget process is a different question and varies on informal positioning within their leadership landscape.

Conditions that… create challenges. There is no shortage of challenges/barriers that were explored in the participants' narratives. One example that stands out is when Ketanji noted how the university's push to act in the name of efficiency and cost-effectiveness creates unintended consequences. Participants discussed several policy decisions that needed to be rescinded or challenged because administrators did not consider key groups. From Langston advocating for financial services policy changes because new policy adversely affected low-income students or Ketanji's effort to make sure that a new university-wide training was available in multiple languages, there is an overall issue that institutional decisions do not center minoritized people.

Anti-diversity organizing and legislation. The recent emergence of anti-diversity legislation during data collection created potential concern, and several discussed how this changing landscape could create challenges. Alberta reflected on the last few years and how diversity has become politicalized, leaving many different constituents with questions and fear. She said –

> "When Trump was in office, attacking undocumented students…[that] was tough. The phone [rang] constantly about needing guidance and so forth. Oh, then there was the diversity training executive order…. [Ultimately] it didn't change policies or programs…but some of that was a leadership decision. But it didn't change how we operated. [What] it did do…was confuse people…[create] fear and make it tough to [do our jobs]. It was a distraction…it took hours away from other things that [I could have been working on]."

One participant discussed new anti-CRT state legislation that was being proposed during the time of his interview. Though the focus was on high schools, they noted that "there are real concerns about what it means [for our work]." Anti-diversity organizing is not new for college campuses, but its prominence in mainstream media and culture has become more pronounced. Participants discussed how these efforts zap resources and focus and can distract from other projects. These efforts act as those "fires" that Nina discussed having to deal with in the first section. More than changing how the university operates, these efforts create fear and uncertainty— creating a challenging environment to advance diversity work.

People set the conditions. Though most participants did not identify specific policy issues, they named challenges. While the original intent was to expand and explore the interpersonal connections of CDOs and the relationships of institutional structures and CDOs

(i.e., moving from CDOs' relationships with people to CDOs' relationships with the organization itself), the focus shifted. The structural challenges many of the participants identified were people. All participants returned to people and those relationships when identifying opportunities and barriers they experience in institutions. In closing, Nina provided this thoughtful analogy about how she thinks about the CDO work.

> "I don't know if you watch 'THIS IS US,' but the father…goes back into that house. And you know he ends up dying, but because of him, everybody else lives. That's the job of the [CDO]. Burn the damn place down… [remove] mechanisms that keep people chained and keep people oppressing and oppressed, but make sure that people get out safely. Make sure they are safe, attended to, and you know…the best thing for me would be that CDOs cease to exist because their function needs to be embedded in the work of [all] leadership. But the matter is that we are hiring the wrong people to do these jobs [senior leaders]. And because we're hiring the wrong Presidents, the wrong Provosts, the wrong Deans, the wrong Department Heads…we need to see them do better."

She continued–

> "The change is toward the particular end, right? So, would a new [structure] be good? Sure, we can talk nonstop [about] things that could be rearranged, revised, and [re]created. […] But none of that matters if we don't address [the people]."

In short, these structures matter to the extent of the people enacting them. A university can be organized or designed perfectly, and it would still end up short. Indeed, even if CDOs have the right structures and systems to advance efforts, would they really be able to create change given the people who make up the institution? This is the conundrum.

Summary– Part III: Indeed**,** structural opportunities and barriers exist for CDOs in their respective institutional landscapes. However, these structures are established, maintained, and forwarded by its people–many of whom do not need the institution to change.

Part IV: Summary of Findings

This chapter sought to answer this study's research questions directly. here are the study's research questions:

- How do chief diversity officers (CDOs) understand and leverage power and agency in their roles to navigate their institutional context?
  - What distinctions do chief diversity officers (CDOs) make in institutional roles and power dynamics within the university leadership structure?
- What conditions do chief diversity officers (CDOs) experience that can empower and/or constrain institutional agency?

Here are the summaries for each section.

Summary Part I → Research Question

	KEY FINDINGS

RELATIONALITY	• The President matters– a lot.
	  ○ If leaders, particularly Presidents, have a bold vision/advanced orientation to DEI, it facilitates agency and empowers the CDO.
	  ○ If leaders, particularly Presidents, seek to maintain the status quo/ (traditional) orientation to DEI, it hinders/limits/disempowers the CDO.
	• The President's staff/advisers are deeply influential in elevating and harming DEI efforts.

	• Finding allies and relationship building is crucial to expanding the institutional reach and identifying personal support for CDOs.
PRAXIS	• CDOs navigate big, complex issues but must partner/broker to influence issues, commonly as the facilitator, partner, or convener. • CDOs must identify and leverage social capital to navigate and to gain credibility and trust.
SITUATEDNESS	• Recent national events have elevated DEI efforts in campus discourse and shifted CDOs' social context. However, roadblocks persist. • Understanding the social context is critical for CDOs to be able to do their work.

Summary Part II → Research Question 1a. I have identified four key themes in relationships. CDOs cultivate and explore relationships within the university leadership structure. In the university leadership ecosystem, there are Power Holders, Influencers, Gatekeepers, and Allies.

Summary Part III → Research Question 2. Indeed**,** structural opportunities and barriers exist for CDOs in their respective institutional landscapes. However, these structures are established, maintained, and forwarded by its people– many of whom do not need the institution to change.

In the next chapter, I will explore these findings to engage in a deep discussion on the implications these findings have for future research and practice.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

I. Introduction

This chapter will discuss the study's findings and directly explore its future implications for chief diversity officers (CDOs) and higher education institutions. There will be three distinct subsections for each of the questions in each section— 1) a discussion of the analysis and findings, 2) an exploration of study implications and potential futurities for research and practice, and 3) an exploration of the study's broader significance and the conclusion.

II. Discussion on Analysis and Findings

In this section, I will discuss the analysis and findings of this study. After a brief review of the analysis, I will broadly discuss the findings from the study. As mentioned in the previous chapters, the purpose of the study is twofold. First, this study seeks to examine the politics of relational power in institutional leadership and the unique ways in which CDOs leverage, broker, and/or navigate it to effectively do their job at their respective institution. Secondly, the study investigates how this relational power interplays with their unique lived experiences in their institutional context and creates opportunity or constraint in their work. Thus, the discussion will be organized to be aligned with the intended purpose. The section, *"How CDOs Understand, Experience, and Navigate Power and Agency,"* looks closely into the first research question and corresponding findings section. Additionally, the *section "The Interplay of Power Structures and Institutional Context"* explores the second and third research questions/ finding sections. Finally, I close with a section that explores the broader/overall findings of the study.

Analysis. The dissertation study centers on chief diversity officers (CDOs) and issues of power and agency. Though defined and framed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, the terms power and agency have long been debated in scholarly works. There is a significant discourse on the many

similarities and distinct differences between the concepts (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1974; 1977; Singh, 2009). The power of agency refers to "an actor's ability to initiate and maintain a program of action" and agentic power "to an actor's ability to act independently of the constraining power of social structure" (Campbell, p. 410). Narrative inquiry allowed the participants to explore their lived experiences through narratives and allowed them to intertwine the concepts of power and agency as they understood and experienced them (Bell, 2002; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As outlined more extensively in Chapter Three, I used a combination of inductive and deductive approaches when analyzing the data, along with utilizing thematic analysis throughout the study. In order to leverage a networked perspective, I leaned on the interview protocol section that inquired about organizational relationships. Before and during the interviews, I used organizational charts to ask, clarify, and distinguish institutional relationships and positionality. When the data were collected, I first made a list of the individuals and groups participants made a note of in their interviews. Using an analytical memo, I added descriptions to each of the identified parties. From organizational charts and descriptions, I applied thematic analytics to identify relational themes found in the data (Greenwood & Hinings, 1993). Finally, for the third question, I used both inductive and deductive approaches to answer the question.

Objective #1: How CDOs Understand, Experience, and Navigate Power and Agency

This qualitative study leverages the participants' lived experiences and storytelling to examine the greater dynamics they exist within. This finding is primarily explored in the first research question and the first section of the findings section, where participants' narratives are explored and interwoven through Tatli and Ozbilgin's (2009) conceptual framework of *situatedness, relationality, and praxis.*

Situatedness. I first explored situatedness, which seeks to understand the social context "within historical, economic, social, and organizational settings" (p. 248). Here, I investigated the themes that were specific to their institutional and social contexts.

Societal impact. The first finding was a discussion on how recent national events, namely the racial uprisings of 2020, influenced the campus dynamics around diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) issues. This finding has interesting ties to existing scholarship. Parker (2015) found that the local political landscape (i.e., state and regional contexts) and subsequent campus crises have direct implications for the CDOs, as they can define their priorities and influence their relationships with campus stakeholders. Furthermore, national, racial incidents (i.e., murders of Black bodies) have a broader consequence on most diversity leaders throughout the institutions as it affects their schedules, budgets, and program planning (Parker, 2017). Due to this, more scholars are beginning to explore how these kinds of events affect campus culture and leadership capacity (Anderson, 2021) — and while there is promising literature on Student Affairs professionals, it is imperative to expand this research to CDOs and other senior leaders within the institution. Furthermore, national racial incidents affect CDOs' and other senior leaders' schedules and immediate priorities as they enter a crisis response mode, as explored in other literature (Gigliotti, et al., 2017). Interestingly, this finding further asserts that these events also change the organizational landscape for DEI priorities on their campuses. In many ways, it validates isomorphism organizational theory, as it illustrates the significant impact current societal issues and discussions can affect how organizations function (Shi et al., 2018). Moreover, it affirms scholarship and critique that CDOs become central to the institution in times of crisis (Parker, 2017). Further work is needed to explore how critical incidents change the political opportunity for DEI efforts.

Although I found national racial incidents change the organizational landscape for CDOs, they do not undo the power structures, as many participants discussed the challenges of being invited and included in important conversations, specifically on university communications. So, while CDOs notice a shift, one must wonder: how much has actually changed? This failure to address the pre-existing power structures as a part of these efforts is an example of Ahmed's (2012) institutionalized diversity and diversity work. Here, this new work and increased access for CDOs is merely about the preservation of the institution, rather than the work itself. While there are opportunities, basic isomorphism theory posts that universities must take on diversity efforts for its own protection. Therefore, this finding is in alignment with the critiques about the unsustainability of DEI efforts— as racial incidents lose the public's attention, the urgency to change becomes less of a priority (Griffin et al., 2019). Nina spoke about this issue when she spoke about her regret for stepping out in front of these issues for her institution. This idea of protecting the university's reputation was something that came up for several participants— and can be a difficult position to be placed in. When reviewing recent campus racial incidents, Cole (2020) asserts that they "fit a pattern of modern academic leadership more concerned with safety, civility, and reputation management than with enacting meaningful social and racial justice." Overall, while this study suggests that there are shifts, it must be understood more critically— it calls into question how long societal events like national racial incidents can change an institution, if at all given the institution's inability to address and forward meaningful change.

*Social Context***.** Here, I found that to be effective in their roles, especially during crises, CDOs must be highly aware, understand their context, and situate their role accordingly. CDOs expressed the need to understand the why— for example, not just who reports to whom within the organization, but why do they as a CDO report to that person or that office? Exploring more specific questions speaks to the overall need for astute political acumen. Too often, we consider CDOs as institutional actors who are charged with ensuring the university looks favorable to the public and putting out 'fires' (crises). Here, participants suggest that they as CDOs are not just here to put out fires, but also to start them. Their roles, in many ways, counteract the normal business of the university. Thus, this finding broadly articulates and demonstrates the fraught political landscape of CDOs: they are both institutional actors and protectors, while serving as institutional adversaries and co-conspirators. Hence, their understanding of their institutional context is not just background information— it outlines their political realities and the potential opportunities to effectively create change.

A note on participant criterion and situatedness. Before I began data collection, I had to consider the CDOs' social context via the *participant criterion* to provide specificity and clarity to the study. Therefore, to ensure that I was measuring the CDO roles comparatively, I developed a criterion that was generally situated within their organizational setting. One must ask: given the criterion, what's missing? In what ways does the criterion limit and alter the varying context? One major example is that all participants serve at predominately white institutions. Unfortunately, I was not able to recruit a CDO from an HBCU, MSI, or ANNAPISI. In what ways are their perspectives different from those interviewed? Though successful, more variations could have created a clearer distinction for the situatedness theme.

A note on situatedness and racialized organizations. Racialized organizations (2017) is one of the central theories in this study. It challenges the long-held notion that organizations are race-neutral and argues that through its organizational processes, institutions reinforce race and racism, directly affecting how material and social resources are distributed. While all senior leaders need to be aware and thoughtful of institutional dynamics— in my analysis, it appears to be different for CDOs. These roles must hold a high level of political acumen that both are able to disrupt and dismantle but careful enough not to go too far— oftentimes serving at institutions that are hostile to DEI work (Bryant, 2015). These roles are counteracting many institutional values and norms. Given this inherent tension, they must be thoughtful— or even cautious — about how they advance change at their institutions (Mitchell et al., 2014.; Harvey, 2015.; Bradley et al., 2022). In short, their navigation and political landscape are different from other senior leaders. Why is that? Universities are racialized organizations— meaning CDOs are situated in racialized organizations. Though constructed under "neutral" concepts like excellence, rigor, and/or merit, the university reifies these oppressive concepts through its policies, procedures, and design. Racialized organizations explain one of the major limitations of CDOs at universities, and it is their social context/field. As explored in Chapter 2's literature review, this issue does not invalidate the work of the CDO but rather helps to better illustrate the organizational constraints and limitations they must work under.

Relationality. Next, let's discuss relationality, which is described as exploring the complexity of relationships and "the interplay of the self, others, and structures" (Tatli & Ozbilgin, 2009, p. 250). By virtue of centering power in this study, examining relationships is foundational to this study because power is understood as social relationships (Campbell, 2009;

Weber, 1947). First, I'll explore some of the themes revealed in the first research question. Then, I will unpack the relational archetypes identified in the second research question.

The audience of one. Perhaps, the most significant finding was the centrality of the university president in how CDOs understand, navigate, and experience power and agency within their respective institutions. All participants spoke, at length, about their relationship with their President. While it does not directly oppose higher education literature on shared decision-making within university leadership, it does illustrate the power imbalances and dynamics within the decision-making processes (Tessens, 2011). Given that this study finds that the university president is central to how CDOs make meaning of power and agency within the institution—exploring this relationship is paramount moving forward. Future studies must study the CDO and their role through the lens of other institutional leaders to fully understand how they are situated within leadership structures.

Moreover, this centrality raises the issue of "serving at the pleasure of the President." While only one participant mentioned it directly, this specific dynamic is common within higher education (Kezar, 2008). The phrase means that the President can ask (i.e., demand) a senior leader's resignation at any point (Alamo et al., 1998). Though it is unclear if all the participants "serve at the pleasure of the President," this dynamic further complicates the centrality of the leader. If these roles do, in fact, serve at the pleasure of the President, does it fundamentally change who CDOs are in service to? As CDOs have been elevated to senior leaders, how has their relationship with crucial power holders (President, Provost, others) evolved? These questions illustrate there is much more to learn from the president-CDO relationship and the CDO's relationship with other power structures within the institution.

All the President's men. Beyond the President as a singular entity, the President's advisors and central staff hold great influence. Moreover, the study found that individuals with traditional executive positions held great influence on key decisions and the inner workings of the university. While it affirms the bureaucratic nature of higher education leadership, it also raises questions on proximity to power—and the invisible power structures embedded within the university leadership structure. What spaces truly hold power within the university structure? Is it the senior Presidential cabinet? Is it the annual budget meetings that only include the President, Provost, CFO, and President's Chief of Staff (an example study participant Ketanji discussed)? Or is it the President's weekly closed team meetings with his central staff and selected close advisors (an example study participant Nina discussed as she and others do not have access to it)? There is considerable gatekeeping and deep institutional norms around who is "in the room." However, given their new status as senior-level administrators, CDOs have traditionally never been included in these conversations. Future studies ought to look more closely at these relationships.

Other key relationships. Participants discussed establishing and maintaining all relationships (including lateral and peer-level) as integral to building capacity and extending their reach (Stanley et al., 2019). This is not only found as necessary in CDO literature but in literature for various leadership roles like Chief Student Affairs Officer, Provost, etc. (Martins, 2020). Indeed, relationships are important on a personal level, but relationships also provide senior leaders with additional capital and support for advancing their efforts (Williams, 2011; Nixon, 2013). These roles may not have total authority; however, increased access and partnership with senior leaders can have an effect. For example, the Provost might not be able to make a mandate because of the Academic Senate—but by virtue of sitting on their CDO's Diversity Cabinet, more senior leaders

want to attend Diversity Cabinet meetings directly (rather than sending a representative) and in turn, take the meeting and its discussions seriously. This is an example from one of the participants— but it illustrates how CDOs broker relationships to influence and forward conversations (Harvey, 2014; Stanley et al., 2019).

Leveraging networks of support for personal needs also emerged. There is deep importance in identifying and maintaining supportive networks and community— however, more studies need to explore support networks for administrators (Adserias & Jackson, 2017; Kezar et al. 2007). There is significant research on faculty-identifying support networks (O'Meara & Stromquist, 2017). Given that CDOs can be both practitioner-administrators and/or faculty-administrators, there is an importance in better understanding these support networks. Is there a difference between practitioner administrators vs. faculty administrators in how they find support and what resources are made to them? There is much more to understand on whom CDOs seek personal and professional support when they do it, and why.

Praxis. Finally, I will discuss praxis, which describes how CDOs "strategically deploy forms of capital…they possess to exert influence in their organizations" (Tatli & Ozbilgin, 2009, p. 252). In short, this section discusses the tactics CDOs implore to navigate influence within their institutional context. This section reveals the strategic considerations and tactical efforts to navigate their political terrain— exploring the practical ways power exists, is employed and is navigated.

While extant literature rightfully asserts that CDOs do not have the lone institutional power to fix the various inequities, some scholars have argued that this is not necessarily a problem (Arnold & Kowalski-Braun, 2012; Griffin et al., 2019; Marshall, 2020). Nixon (2013) says that CDOs exist in "middle spaces between institutional leaders and those at other levels of the

institution or the community, navigating difficult situations, balancing expectations from various groups, and deciding when and how to engage in conflict" (Nixon, 2013, p. 133). Though some scholars are critical of CDOs' institutional power as partners and facilitators (Griffin, Nixon), participants in this study did not articulate this function as being inherently disempowering. This finding suggests that this phenomenon could be less of a limitation, but rather it is a reality of the position. Some participants did not want more responsibility as they felt stretched enough, while others wanted to push other senior leaders to have ownership.

To be frank, describing CDOs as facilitators, connectors, and fixers (Griffin et al., 2019) originally read as disempowering to me— and while sometimes it can be just that, it also can be helpful and empowering. These roles can have a significant impact, from hosting successful mediations between faculty and the university president or being the catalyst for getting more psychologists of color on campus (both of these examples from the study). Though academia is bureaucratic and complex, collegiality and shared leadership are also values— meaning rarely is there just one person's decision that matters— and thus, CDOs seemingly navigate accordingly.

The other findings discussed collecting social capital to be seen as more legitimate or to gain more authority. Pfeffer (1981) contended that mastering organizational politics requires acquiring, developing, and using power to bring about preferred outcomes where groups do not agree (Huang, 2012). Empirical studies also have illustrated supporting executives in understanding networks and building social capital can benefit their overall success (Burt & Ronchi, 2007; Kezar, 2008). This pursuit of capital and legitimacy is in alignment with many leadership studies. However, this study illustrates the need for greater interrogation of this pursuit for CDOs, the many constituencies they must respond to, and how they reconcile opposing perspectives and needs. This result aligns with Griffin et al. (2019) finding that CDOs

must maintain impartiality between administrators and activists to maintain legitimacy with both groups. CDOs both need to provide space for reflection and support for activists and maintain and support their institutional peers. Therefore, CDOs' pursuit of legitimacy and general institutional navigation is complex as they must leverage different tactics depending on the constituency and be careful to hold a "balanced" approach.

One suggestion is that Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth (2005) could fit well in future analyses and studies as it encapsulates symbolic, navigational, and social capital. For example, Langston shared his example of getting his office moved into the senior central administration building. While he agreed that it was a symbolic effort— he believed that it deeply mattered as it gave his office more gravitas (social capital) and better allowed him to make connections with his colleagues (navigational). These strategies are not just one form of capital. To what extent are their actions symbolic and performative? And when is it necessary? For example, the CDO who shared the story about deciding where to buy a house based on having access to the "right" networks directly connected it to being a Black woman in leadership. This pursuit of cultural and social capital is tied to the person themself.

What strategies and/or tactics are not available to CDOs, given their institutional identity? But perhaps, a more important question is: what strategies and/or tactics are not available to CDOs given their personal social identities? We know identity matters as a senior leader at the university (Larcker & Tayan, 2020; Kezar, 2008; Nadiv & Kuna, 2020). More specifically, there is significant literature on the duality of invisibility and hypervisibility that plague women of color in leadership and the complex ways they must navigate through institutional dynamics (Dickens et al., 2019; Williams, 2011, Williams & Clownery, 2007).

Objective #2: The Interplay of Power Structures and Institutional Context

While this finding is more nuanced and embedded through each of the finding sections, it was primarily explored through the second and third research questions and accompanying finding sections. First, I will discuss the relational archetypes/themes found in the second section of the findings, then broadly discuss the findings from the third section about conditions and/or hindrances to success.

Relational archetypes. Beyond the themes of relationality found in the first research question, relational power, and the various distinctions of relationships in university leadership circles is central to the second research question. There were four key themes identified— here I'll explore each and discuss some of the challenges in this approach.

Power holders. First, I identified power holders as the university president, provosts, and deans. Scholarship easily supports the first two— but there are differences in where to place academic deans. Some scholars classify academic deans as middle managers (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006; Gallos, 2002). In contrast, in this study, participants referred to academic deans as senior leaders as they believed they held a high level of autonomy (Williams, 2013). Moreover, with the proliferation of Academic Diversity Officers (ADOs), localized diversity efforts within schools and colleges are becoming more pronounced in higher education institutions (Grim et al., 2019), where ADOs exist beyond a CDO's oversight but can act in collaboration with them. All participants in this dissertation serve on a senior leadership team, i.e., senior leadership, president council, and executive leaders council. As this study comes from the perspective of a CDO, the idea of who holds power could be dependent on various factors like institutional positioning and history. Participants noted that Deans have more autonomy over their budgets and can help provide impact in a localized area— especially Deans from resource-

rich disciplines. Here, the institutional role of the Dean holds great power, but there are other factors that expand, contract, and/or further situate their power. This example is a theme in all the groups as it illustrates that while positional power/roles deeply matter within the institution, they must also be situated and understood within a broader context of institutional dynamics.

Influencers and Gatekeepers. For the following two themes, there were **influencers** (individuals with a high level of influence on institutional decisions) and **gatekeepers** (individuals who may or may not have positional power but have heavy influence over people in power). Though these are different themes, both appear to be ruled by higher education's external and internal pressures. Financial health, the growing dependence on private funds/donors, and public opinion (i.e., optics) are noted as being priorities and challenges for higher education institutions (Mumper et al. 2016). Given these challenges, people who lead these efforts hold a crucial role within the institution. For example, development and presidential communication teams were identified as influencers and gatekeepers, respectively. When a discriminatory campus incident occurs, the focus is oftentimes centered on the optics, as there is concern about the university's public image. Moreover, could these incidents upset or alienate important donors (Patton et al., 2019; Williams, 2013)? This protection of the university's image is not new, but how CDOs fit into these relationships and communication efforts is somewhat (Ruiz-Mesa, 2022). In fact, several participants shared examples of crisis communications and noted that individuals have more influence on the direction of the response after major racial incidents than they do, or they discussed being brought into response efforts too late (see Chapter 4). The interplay between the influencers and gatekeepers poses the question— what are the real priorities of the institution? Furthermore, where do CDOs and the charge for forwarding

institution change and equity sit in comparison? This is noted as an under-researched area, and scholars should consider exploring this group more explicitly (Hood, 2017).

Scholars argue that being a member of the top management team does not grant legitimacy because of a high hierarchical position, but rather, it denotes pre-existing greater legitimacy (Belmondo & Sargis-Rousse, 2022). Given this frame, CDOs have ascended into the upper echelons of university management structures; yet this organizational design does not ensure they are "equal" to other senior leaders. However, in some contexts, CDOs may be considered influencers or gatekeepers by other senior leaders. For example, Ketanji shared that the President has made it so that all new diversity-budgeted line items to the university budget must be approved by her before he will review it. Ketanji is a major influencer and gatekeeper in this process and it illustrates that while there are clear themes on distinctions in power, there is variation depending on a number of issues— established trust with leadership, the effectiveness of one's leadership, etc. Again, here the leadership issue of navigating individuals who hold strong influence and/or navigating gatekeepers that one must work with and through is an issue that all institutional leaders must negotiate; however, it is under-explored in the context of chief diversity officers and the rub they experience exacting change. This idea of gatekeeping and influencing within university leadership structures is rich and more scholarship is needed.

Allies. Lastly, identifying institutional supporters and/or allies is crucial for senior leaders (Stanley et al., 2019; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013) — beyond navigating power dynamics, it can be critical for mere survival. Participants discussed leveraging on-campus allies to gain access to key issues and broker deals with other leaders for greater impact. Additionally, many discussed the importance of outside networks— this provided clarity and community as there is only one of them at their given institution. As all the participants were people of color, the need

for a support structure is a critical point (Worthington et al., 2020 Parker, 2017). Finding and establishing communities of support is critical for CDOs, and there must be a focus on making sure these leaders have that support. CDOs are typically individuals who hold minoritized identities— therefore, the idea of allyship and support is something that may likely be explored outside of their institutional role. Nixon (2017) found and asserted that there is no decoupling of their personal social identities from their institutional identity as CDO. Furthermore, the examples/ narratives for this theme illustrate that who the (institutional) ally is and how they practice their allyship matters. Is it other institutional leaders who are in the Presidential Cabinet meetings and can back the CDO up when they come to the group with a proposal? Is it someone who holds more institutional leverage and can translate and uplift CDOs' concerns? Langston called his Provost the greatest ally on campus and their high engagement in his diversity cabinet has made all the difference. Support networks are critical to CDOs— not just in identifying them but also in how to leverage these allies in their institutional navigation. While this study begins this exploration, this is a rich topic that needs a more focused investigation.

A note on the importance of the narrative. This final example in the ally theme illuminates a major point when discussing these themes for analysis. In it, the narratives tell a much richer, more complicated perspective on these powered dynamics than these one or two-word distinctions. While these four archetypes emerged in the data, the narratives painted a more complex landscape. Earlier, Alberta shared an example where a previous president had an adversarial relationship with student activists, which created issues with her forwarding relationships with these students. Here, being seen as in proximity to power (the President) caused barriers and she had to find other ways to establish legitimacy/influence with the students. In many ways, proximity to power, or "being in the room where it happens," has been

an important paradigm in CDO literature and profession (Leon, 2014; William & Wade-Golden, 2013). However, this specific example suggests proximity is not everything— in fact, sometimes CDOs may need to create distance from individuals, depending on the context. Is the leader well-respected? Are they effective? If possibly the most important question: to whom are you asking?

Therefore, while these themes make clear distinctions in where and how power sits with university leadership structures from the perspective of CDOs, their distinctions must be understood in the context in which they are associated. For example, Nina's institutional allies, a group they call the Fantastic Four that include other Black senior leaders, is a space to build community— but it also is a space of strategy and power broking. Here she can gain access to new spaces she wants to carry influence in or garner support in shared leadership spaces (i.e., presidential cabinet meetings). What happens when an ally is also someone who could be considered a gatekeeper? Or an adversary is a power holder? These dynamics vary depending on the context.

To this point, while Presidents were central to understanding power dynamics, current events illustrate that this perspective is limited. There are many national examples of "power holders" being disempowered in major ways— from the UVA President incident in 2012 to the more recent issues at Michigan State University between the President and their board (Stripling, 2022). Just as there is no unilateral power source, there is no unilateral perspective on who has power. To be clear, these themes are deeply valuable insights into power roles in the university leadership structures from the vantage point of the CDO— however, these dynamics are much more complex than what one- or two-word themes can denote. Moreover, as these examples illustrate, these dynamics exist beyond the chief diversity officer role. Though CDOs have specific conditions that make their perspective unique, this study could be duplicated, but focus

on deans, provosts, and even presidents. This is why the findings must be understood within each individual institutional context. For future scholarship, perhaps leveraging a case study approach will illuminate these distinctions and provide more data to directly investigate their context.

Conditions for Opportunity or Constraint.

In the final findings section, I sought to understand conditions and hindrances for success that go beyond institutional relationships. While all participants were positioned similarly within their institution (see participant criterion), there were various factors that significantly colored their experience and ability to navigate accordingly.

One example discussed the importance of long-term budget support as vital. Participants discussed that access to funds changed how other leaders perceived them— here, money becomes social capital. Diversity offices have a long history of being underfunded and under-supported. Through long-term budget commitment, there is a level of security and long-term visioning that has been absent in CDOs' political realities. Another timely finding was a discussion on navigating anti-diversity legislation and organizing. There is growing concern about the political climate becoming more politically polarized on anti-diversity efforts (Mitchell et al., 2018). The finding aligns with the current political trend that mischaracterizes and vilifies CRT (Flaherty, 2021). These conditions are changing quickly and being driven by forces inside and outside of the higher education landscape. While diversity has long been political, it is seemingly becoming more polarized and thus creating even more unstable conditions for CDOs to navigate.

My original intention for this question was a focus on structures (policies and practices) rather than individuals. However, as noted in the findings, participants expressed how individuals set those conditions. This finding is particularly illuminating as it is illustrated

through each part of the findings section that institutional strictures are made up of a host of organizational actors. The closing quote from Nina about the "wrong people" speaks to the issue of maintaining the status quo and the normalization of oppressive, exclusionary behavior. As defined through history and the study's theory (racialized organizations), higher education institutions are not race-neutral entities but, through their processes, policies, and procedures, forward inequity. Namely, here creating pathways where "the wrong people" can exist, thrive, and lead in these institutions that purport to value diversity, equity, and inclusion. Through this broader study, it illustrates that there are people who make up CDO's conditions for success— their advocates and allies are their institutional peers, members of leadership (i.e., presidents and provosts), and key members of staff, faculty, and student advocates. However, it also illustrates that there are people who create barriers and challenges to success. And who are those people? They are the same people— their institutional peers, members of leadership (i.e., presidents and provosts), key members of staff, faculty, and student advocates.

As I make meaning of these findings, I reflect that this finding is seemingly the classic "agency vs. structure" debate in sociology (Heugens & Lander 2009). In it, agency (the actor perspective) focuses on the individual—their possibilities of acting and what they can achieve within the social structure. In the meantime, structure focuses on the institutions, traditions, dominant norms, etc., that put limits on what the agent can or cannot do. Though some frame these ideas as in conflict with one another, they act as complementary perspectives as they have a direct interplay. So, what is the connection to this study? Too often, literature on CDOs focuses on the agent (the CDO) without focusing on the structure, processes, context, and, yes, other agents. This finding asserts that leaders (people with considerable power, influence, and agency)

can embody and disrupt traditional institutional norms and beliefs — thus, they act as structural pathways or restraints.

Overall Insight: A more nuanced and evolved perspective of the CDO

In the earliest iterations of this project, several reviewers encouraged me to consider forwarding the question "what do CDOs really do?" or empirically explore the potential value-add that these positions bring to the university. Given my interest in power, there was a continued recommendation to unpack the symbolic nature of their work and the lack of power. However, I found this line of questioning as missing the mark. First, management and leadership are deeply symbolic in nature (Tierney, 1989; Pfeffer, 1981). Second, power is not an attribute, and the focus should center on its broader dynamics. Therefore, to me, the question is not: do they or don't they have power? Or are they just symbolic figures? To me, the greater focus must be an interrogation of how CDOs exist within these power structures, how they experience the power, and to what extent they can cultivate change. While the CDO job is a nearly impossible, aspirational charge, I did not find that the individuals in these roles felt disempowered. These CDOs are very accomplished individuals—scholars, practitioners, and researchers with years of work experience, relationship building, and savvy organizational know-how to help inform their navigation. The study reveals that there is an expert sophistication in how CDOs must think to navigate these roles and their unique positioning. The political terrains are, indeed, challenging, and there are deep organizational constraints/limitations, but the study's findings illustrate that CDOs are far from powerless.

Secondly, the Chief Diversity Officer has evolved. Years ago, CDOs were in the corner office at the end of campus, begging to get meetings with senior leaders to plead for much-needed resources. Now, things have changed. This is not to suggest that resources and access

issues do not exist, but there has been much progress. In fact, several of the participants cited increased political will or courage as the main things that have helped bring change to their respective campuses. However, as much as there is political will and courage, there is also a political reality. And what is that reality? While, indeed, CDOs are institutional change agents, they are also *still* agents of the institution. This lies the fundamental tension. Who do these roles fundamentally serve— the people or the institution? While all the participants in this dissertation study demonstrated a passion and steadfast commitment to minoritized communities, their actions were often colored and dictated by institutional politics and dynamics rather than the needs of those communities. To be clear, I am not discrediting the importance of these roles. However, I am suggesting that with the evolution of the CDO role, our collective understanding and expectations must also evolve.

So, what should our collective understanding evolve into given this dissertation study's findings? Well, first, I would argue that notions about power and agency within university leadership structures must hold more complexity. There is no absolute power at the University, and there is no "one" place where power sits. Even while the university president is central, they are not omnipotent. So, while CDOs ascend into senior/executive leadership roles, they have greater access and perhaps greater influence, but they certainly do not hold unilateral power to make changes that undo inequity at the university. These individuals, who are brilliant, politically savvy, and experienced professionals, will fail if the expectation is to undo white supremacy— that is impossible. However, there are shifts that are possible. This dissertation illustrates that through relationship and relational power, even in very difficult political terrains, CDOs navigate and create conditions where they are able to do meaningful work on behalf of their respective institutions

Institutional artifacts and power structures matter in the confines of the bureaucratic university leadership structure. Things like whom you report to, how big your budget is, and what makes up your portfolio, persist. However, understanding power is deeply more complex than looking at an organizational chart. Relational power is central to building conditions in which CDOs can bring about change to their institutions. And while relationships matter, more specifically, situating and comprehending relationships in one's larger social context is paramount to CDOs' institutional navigation.

III. Implications and Futurities

This dissertation study has many implications for theory, research, and practice, with opportunities to use it as a launchpad for new work. In this section, I will first briefly explore possible implications for theory, research, and action, and then I will propose three specific futurities given the implications and scholarly needs.

For theory. There are two theoretical frameworks in this study: 1) racialized organizations (Ray, 2017) and 2) the network theory of power (Castells, 2011). These two theories were paramount to the study as they provided guidance in the conceptualizing, design, and data analysis. Ray (2017) establishes that institutions are not race-neutral, but rather racism, inequity, and whiteness show up in all the crooks and corners of the institution. In short, it establishes that universities are racialized organizations— and helps to illuminate the 'challenges' that CDOs as actively oppressive structures. This theory is foundational to the study as it marries organizational theory with critical race theory. The Network Theory of Power established that power is relational and exists in a networked context, an essential theoretical lens. While the theory helped provide a network lens, I encourage scholars to leverage social network theory more directly in exploring institutional power dynamics.

For research. I believe there are two areas for the future of this research. The first is in the Chief Diversity Officer literature itself. This scholarship is still growing. Williams (2011) and Williams and Wade-Golden (2013) are foundational works to help establish this unique role within institutions. With this strong foundation, more scholars are exploring this role and asking critical questions. For example, Allen et al. (2020) uses critical race theory (CRT) to make an adaption to the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE) standards of professional practice for chief diversity officers (2014). Additionally, Griffin et al. (2019) coupled Williams' (2013) strategic diversity compass with CRT to examine diversity professionals' responses to racial incidents on campus. In these works, scholars are leveraging and applying a more critical perspective in understanding the CDO and its function within the organization. My hope is that this dissertation study provides new insights and raises new questions about the chief diversity officer, power and agency, and the way they interplay as they seek to advance institutional change.

Secondly, this study contributes from a methodological standpoint with the discussion of qualitative social networks and mapping. Though I was unable to collect the necessary data to complete modeling for discussion and analysis, I believe this dissertation makes a strong case for the future of this work. Leveraging new technologies and using other qualitative forms of data, like calendar data, has potential. For example, by using calendar data, scholars can establish, identify, and analyze an individual's relationships, networks, and navigation (e.g., spatial analysis) (Lovett et al. 2010). There is a growing body of this literature, and I join the many scholars who contend that robust and empirical-sound social network studies can be completed through qualitative data.

For practice. This study has several implications for practice. Again, as a senior leadership position, the chief diversity officer is becoming more prominent, I imagine this work helping inform new or prospective CDOs as they enter their roles. CDOs are becoming more apparent, but it has also become their distinct career trajectory. I hope this work can be used in professional organizations like NADOHE and NCORE to support and influence CDOs in their roles. Additional NADOHE publishes the CDO competencies (Worthington et al., 2021)— I believe this dissertation makes a case for a specific competency for political acumen. Moreover, I believe the study suggests the importance of the broader leadership landscape in empowering or disempowering CDOs' work. Therefore, there need to be more discussions on their interpersonal relationships with diversity leaders and their overall relationship with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

Theoretical Futurity: A deeper exploration of power. Tatli and Ozbilgin's (2009) framework works well as it identifies three areas where scholars can explore DEI leaders' agency within an organization. Though helpful, a closer examination of power could benefit the future scholarship. I recall a quote from Ketanji. In it, her remark suggests another line of inquiry that I believe could be important for the future of this work. She said–

> "I have to think about [power] based on groups…. [As a non-faculty member,] there are ways I have to show up to be seen as more legitimate. In other places, I may show up differently. […] But definitely, as a Black woman in leadership, I'm always thinking about how I show up and what I am conveying."

Ketanji is not just discussing how she makes meaning of power in her institutional context, but instead, she is drawing distinctions between constructions of power. Scholars have long explored the differences between various theoretical and tactical forms of power, like legitimacy,

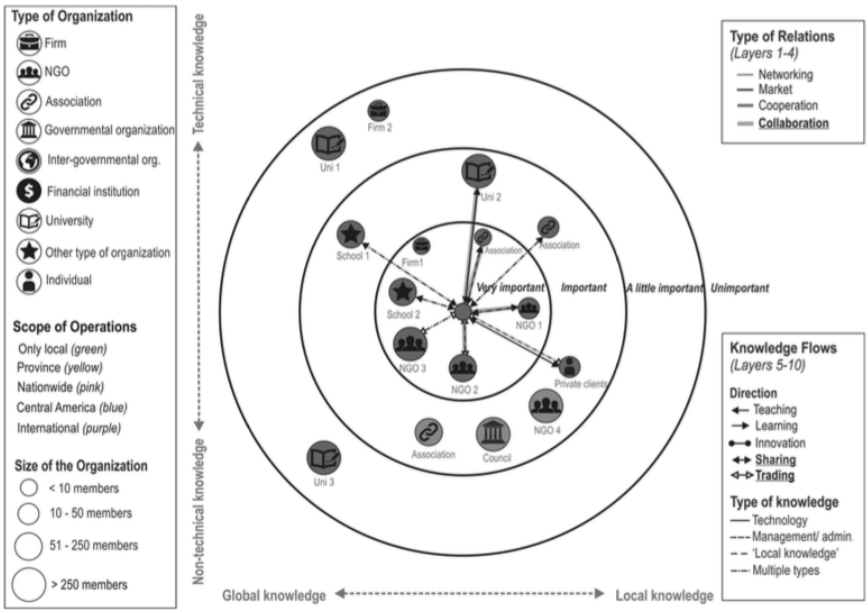
autonomy, and authority (Uphoff, 1989). Given these distinctions and the fact that CDO literature has generally avoided issues of power in the analysis, there are many opportunities available for the line of inquiry. What is the difference between activating legitimacy versus when one seeks to activate autonomy? What is the difference between seeking influence and finding legitimacy? What does that specifically look like for CDOs in the complex, powered institutional context? In short, power is a theoretically rich topic and needs to be mapped over to higher education and leadership literature. Though outside the scope of this study, these questions could add more specificity to how CDOs understand power and agency in their roles.

Research Futurity: Matrices and power mapping. Mapping is a powerful tool for better understanding institutional and organizational dynamics and individuals' positionality (Jaspersen & Stein, 2019). Moreover, it can be used as an empirical tool as well as a tactical tool for practitioners and scholars alike (Schiffer, 2007). Additionally, scholars have begun to use matrixes as ways to map, visualize, and better distinguish how key concepts and issues interplay with one another (; Belmondo & Sargis-Rousse, 2022; Cho, 2018; Solórzano &; Bernal, 2001). Given this emerging trend and the significant changes to the study design due to data access issues, etc., I would like to encourage scholars to consider leveraging mapping in this body of research as I believe there is great promise.

There are multiple ways to utilize mapping— one is a network map. Traditionally completed through participatory action, semi-structured interviews, and/or survey data, a network map is co-constructed by the participant and researcher to visualize, discuss, and analyze an individual's relationships and networks in a bounded social context (Jaspersen et al., 2019; Lelong et al., 2016). Network maps may be created for the collection and verification of relational data or, as an analytical tool, for the analysis of patterns of interdependent or multiplex

relationships and networks (Jaspersen et al., 2019). Moreover, maps created through web-based platforms (i.e., VennMaker) have the capacity to provide quantitative statistical analysis to verify study narratives and results.

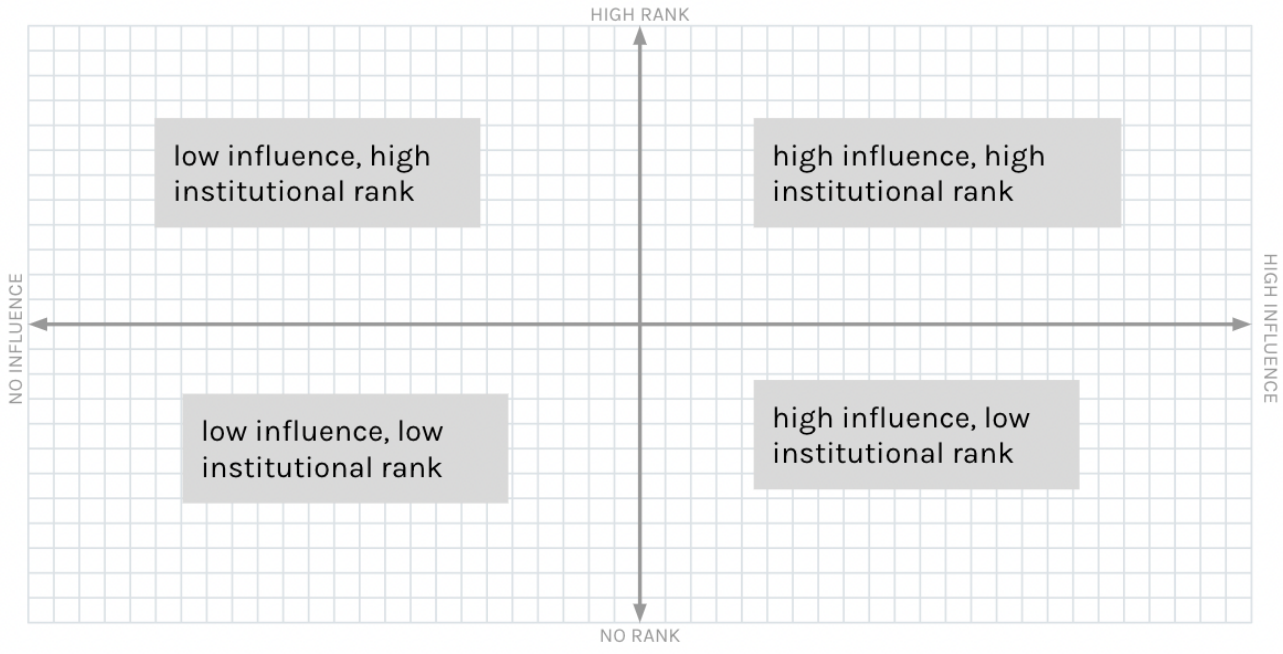
Below is an example from Stein and Jaspersen (2018), where they use a network map approach to complement a study on renewable energy partnerships and international development assistance. The map was created through a three-step process: first, they collected data (primarily through interviews, and researchers used other qualitative data to triangulate); secondly, they began developing the map using a vector graphics editor and overlaying networks to compare the phenomena; and thirdly, they reexamined case records and coded material through memo-writing and finalized the map.



Another strategy is developing matrices to map out relationships. Below is an example of a matrix/mapping exercise to better visualize and understand the intersection between key concepts. Using two central concepts—institutional positioning (hierarchal power based on university organizational charts) and institutional influence (CDOs perceptions) —I created

FIGURE 3, a two-by-two matrix to visualize power differently than institutional organizational charts. Modeled after the transformative resistance matrix (Solórzano &; Bernal, 2001) — it is simple but illustrates two key concepts, their intersection/interplay, and (given their new quadrants) an explanation of what that relationship represents. There are many ways to add nuance and complexity. For example, one could add a third dimension like Cho (2018) in her model Institutional Response Framework. I've added images of both Solórzano &Bernal (2001) and Cho (2018) to Appendix E for reference. Indeed, this matrix will need greater theoretical and scholarly development, but I believe this approach is a powerful and promising method for visualizing relationships/power in a leadership context. As Cho (2020) asserts: "The functionality of visuals and maps is not just an aesthetic addition to the research, but also serves as a way findings can be analytically mapped onto theory and, more importantly, can inform practical action."'

FIGURE 3: Organizational Rank-Influence Mapping



I am using FIGURE 3: Organizational Rank-Influence Mapping as a visual aid to consider key issues of rank and influence as CDO perceived tt. I found that it was a strong model to contextualize the four-themed relationships into the various matrices. To illustrate its utility, I began to map the four actors to the matrix.

- Power Holders (high influence, high rank)
    - These are the people who are at the center of the organization. In this study, these individuals were the university president, provost, and academic deans.
    - Given this configuration, these individuals would be likely placed on the upper right-most quadrant by participants/CDOs.
- Influencers (high influence, no to middle rank)
    - In the matrix, actors who are influencers would likely map onto the right-hand side of the matrix. These individuals have a heavy influence but are not the highest rank. They hold an influence because the institution values/prioritizes its work (i.e., development/fundraising and business and finance).
    - Given this configuration, these individuals would be likely placed on the lower right-most quadrant by participants/CDOs.
- Gatekeepers (high influence, low rank)
    - In the matrix, actors who are gatekeepers would primarily exist in the bottom right quad. These individuals hold heavy influence, but many do not hold institutional rank. These individuals may not show up on the university leadership organization chart but have a specific power.
    - Given this configuration, these individuals would be likely placed on the upper leftmost quadrant by participants/CDOs.

- Allies (no–high influence, no–high rank)
    - Allies are tricky as it just depends on who the ally is. It could be a fellow CDO from outside the institution who holds no influence or rank in the institution. It could also be the university president.
    - Actors can be in any quadrant. It depends on who they are. For example, a peer CDO from another institution with no ties or information to the university would likely be placed in the lower leftmost quadrant. However, if the ally was the university Provost, that would be different.

Overall, the mapping exercises hold the potential to illustrate the nuances that were not available when employing a thematic analysis approach. For example, with matrix mapping, what happens when an individual who is typically considered a "power holder" actually holds little to no influence in a given context? Or how does a CDO navigate working with a "gatekeeper" who holds a high institutional rank differently than a "gatekeeper" who holds little to no institutional rank? These maps offer an opportunity to explore the context in a much richer way.

Practice Futurity: Diversity on the political spectrum. As I reflect on the final finding that people act as structures, I reflect on the different mindsets leaders can hold toward DEI efforts. For example, Nina said–

> "No one [other leaders] is going to say: 'I hate diversity,' and I don't know people's hearts. But some [of the mindsets from senior leaders] around diversity hold us back. [For example…] I have a great relationship with [the Vice President of Student Affairs]. But we don't share politics. So can I really call her an ally?"

Here, Nina directly links mindset/orientation to diversity to one's politics. This suggests that a leader's commitment to diversity is not a simple "for" or "against" question. Instead, the commitment exists on a spectrum and/or continuum with varying orientations to one's belief system toward DEI. There is some scholarship that seeks to complicate how diversity is oriented. For example, Jayakumar and Museus (2012) sought to make distinctions with their Cultural Orientation Continuum. In it, they define three types of campus cultures–

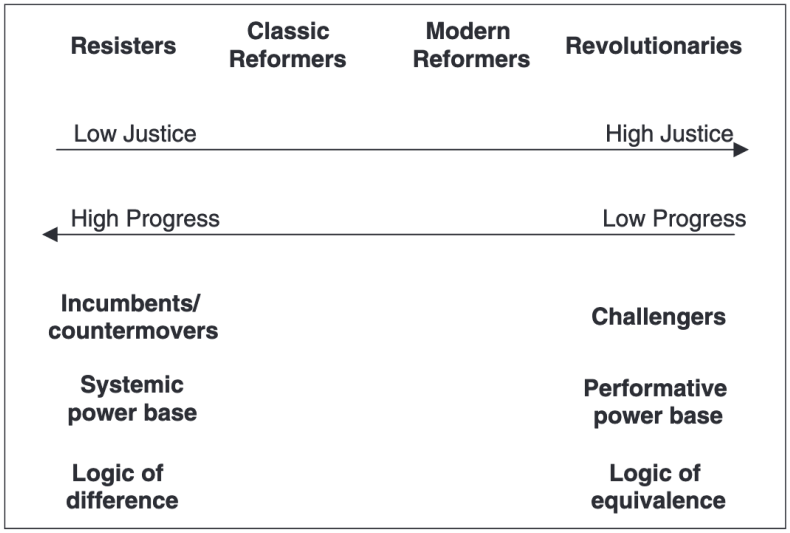
- **Eurocentric campus cultures**: Like white culture, racialized and ethnically homogenous cultures do not espouse diversity as a core value.
- **Diversity-oriented campus cultures** are "ones that have espoused or both espoused and, to a limited degree, enacted diversity values. […]. [Diversity is] … manifest in the student body and some areas of everyday conversation decision-making and curricula. (p.16)" It is mostly regulated to subcultures.
- **Equity-oriented campus cultures** "reflect guiding values and assumptions that recognize the perverseness persisting institutional racism, historical and current exclusionary institutional practices and disparities in the sense of belonging the cultures of the campus educations outcomes" (p. 16).

I forward this distinction because it provides a more nuanced perspective in articulating differences in how DEI is understood and provides a possible framing for how to better make these distinctions.

However, this goes beyond language as it has real practical implications for CDOs. What would it mean for a CDO to hold an equity-oriented perspective on advancing campus culture while their President or other senior leaders have a diversity-oriented perspective? Both can argue that they are committed to DEI, but this seemingly small difference can cause significant

challenges. For example, there is a significant difference between a university President sponsoring a "taste of culture event" where students get exposure to different cultures through food and a university President that encourages and advances policy changes that would eventually abolish campus police.

Most leaders in higher education institutions assert rhetoric on how they value, support, and are deeply committed to diversity issues (Ahmed, 2012). Too often, the question stops at: what does commitment look like? (i.e., actions, proposed changes). However, I am proposing we ask another question after commitment— do we agree on what the commitment is? In short, there are deep differences that exist on a broader continuum— scholars and practitioners must adopt better language and constructs to fully illustrates the broader perspectives. Moreover, practitioners must address the political implications of their work as it continues to be coopted and mischaracterized.



From: Hensmans, M. (2003). Social movement organizations: A metaphor for strategic actors in institutional fields. Organization Studies, 24(3), 355-381.

Broader Significance

There are unique nuggets for prospective, new, emerging, and current CDOs to explore in practice. Moreover, as the conceptual framework discusses, these dimensions and issues of power and agency are not restricted to chief diversity officers.

- **Understand context and mapping relationships** - This study illustrates the centrality of relational power within university leadership circles. While developing strategies that not only cultivate positive relationships is important, CDOs must also be able to map these relationships to the broader context. Beyond my earlier on mapping as a research tool, mapping also is a tactical strategy to explore one's relationships, influence, and understand one's political landscape (i.e., power mapping).
- **Reflecting one's positionality**: There is an importance in understanding who you are, what resources you have, and when/ how to leverage them for power and influence as needed. I am reminded of Nina's intentional decision on where to buy her house, as it would provide social capital, both personally and professionally. All the participants knew who they were as leaders (their strengths, weakness, idiosyncrasies) and how that interplayed with their institutional context.
- **Multiple contexts and histories:** As Alain proclaimed: "The work is contextual." And while understanding context is central to navigating their institutions, the first thing that must be understood is that there are multiple perspectives, histories, and understandings on any given campus environment and on any given issue.
- **Self-care, mental health, and identifying a robust support system**: Though not discussed much in the analysis as it was not the focus of the study, there is a profound importance on managing mental health and valuing self-care. As Ketanji mentions, while she considers this work a calling, "it's not worth your health" and regularly advises new

CDOs to be willing to quit if they need to. Though the participants generally spoke highly of their experiences, there were many examples of frustration, isolation, and gaslighting. Beyond thinking strategically about power, identifying what support looks like for individuals is crucial.

The implications have mostly been discussed from the perspective of higher education. However, this research has reach and significance outside of the ivory towers. Whether it's the new prominence of CDOs in Fortune 500 companies or the multimillion (sometimes billion) dollar investment in racial equity, there is a deep interest in this work (McAfee et al., 2021). These issues are systemic, and therefore we need scholars, researchers, and practitioners in all disciplines and sectors to work together to address these issues.

Conclusion

The central charge of this study was to examine power and agency in institutional leadership and the unique ways in which CDOs understand, experience, and navigate their dynamics. Additionally, it sought to examine the interplay between CDOs' relational power and their institutional context and how it creates an opportunity or forwards constraint in their work. The study's findings illuminate the various ways in which CDOs understand, experience, and navigate power and agency within their institutional contexts. Moreover, the findings reveal a more nuanced perspective on institutional power dynamics than typically asserted about CDOs and further illustrate how the role is evolving within the university leadership structure. This study contributes to the emerging body of literature on chief diversity officers and qualitative social network scholarship. While scholars have characterized the CDO role as difficult because of its unique positioning and institutional charge (Nixon, 2017), this study is significant as it explores the power and institutional dynamics directly and specificity on institutional positioning

than extant scholarship. Moreover, as more CDO roles take office in all sectors, this study plays a role in critical discussion about the role of the chief diversity officer in leadership, the power to which it is allocated, and the extent to which our systems are willing to change. My hope is that this work, along with the current and emerging scholarship, will be critical in moving forward discussions of DEI leadership, power, and organizational change.

APPENNDIX A: Recruitment Email

Hello Dr. XXXX,

My name is Matt Griffith and I am a Ph.D. Candidate at UCLA in the Higher Education and Organizational Change program, working with Dr. Mitchell J. Chang.

I'm reaching out because I am looking for more participants for my dissertation. My dissertation is on former and current CDOs and I was wondering if you would be willing and able to join the study as a participant. The study is straightforward, will take very little of your time, and you will be helping out! As a reference, here is my LinkedIn profile, and attached is my CV for your personal reference so you can learn a little bit about my background.

Below is the basic study information. If you're available, I would like to schedule a quick chat (approx. 10-15 minutes) to help clarify the study and make sure you have all the information you need. **If possible, I'd like to schedule that call within the next two weeks (the week of XXX or XX).**

Let me know what you think and looking forward to hearing from you soon,
Matt

Hello,

My name is Matt Griffith and I am currently a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education and Organizational Change program at UCLA.

I write to you today to inquire if you would be willing to be a participant in my dissertation study. My dissertation study seeks to examine how Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs) manage institutional power dynamics and issues of agency as they seek to leverage, broker, and/or navigate systems toward building institutional change. It is a qualitative study that will employ narrative inquiry and qualitative social network analysis to reveal the proposed phenomenon.

To be eligible for this study (i.e. the participant criterion), individuals will:

- **A Former or Current Chief Diversity Officer (CDO):** Served as a campus CDO within the last five years (i.e., as early as fall 2016)
- **High institutional Rank**: 1) Must report directly to campus president and/or provost; 2) Must serve on university's executive leadership team
- **An Established Tenure**: Must have served at least two years as campus CDO
- **Oversight Responsibilities:** Must oversee reporting offices and programs (i.e., portfolio or unit-based office configuration)

Moving forward, if selected, study participants will provide (or help provide) the following:

- **Interview**. Must participate in a 60-minute individual, semi-structured interview. All interviews will take place via phone, Zoom, or other telecommunication software of your preference.
- **Past meeting schedules**. Provide access to select previous calendar information/meeting schedules. (Note: I will work with participants will not require access to any confidential information.)
- **Documents**. Provide access to select institutional documents (only public-facing docs)

*Note on Confidentialit*y: To ensure your privacy, I will utilize pseudonyms and only include general descriptors for your role. Additionally, the transcriptions of the interview will be shared with you to ensure accuracy and provide space for amendments if needed. For further information, I have included the information sheet for this study.

If you would like to discuss your participation or have further questions or concerns, you may contact me at: [redacted] or [redacted].

Thank you for your consideration and look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

Matthew L. Griffith
Ph.D. Candidate
UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies

APPENDIX. B: Pre-Interview Check-in

Dissertation Informational Meeting

I. Introductions

II. Overview of Study Information

The study examines how Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs) manage institutional power dynamics and issues of agency as they seek to leverage, broker, and/or navigate systems toward building institutional change. It is a qualitative study that will employ narrative inquiry and qualitative social network analysis to reveal the proposed phenomenon. It will be based off:

- **Interview**. 60-minute individual, semi-structured interview. All interviews will take place via phone, Zoom, or other telecommunication software of your preference.
- **Past meeting schedules/calendar data**. Provide access or summaries to select previous calendar information/meeting schedules.
- **Documents**. Provide access to select institutional documents (namely, organizational charts)

III. Process

1) **Select an incident/issue.** Examples could include managing controversial speakers on campus, leading a Presidential taskforce, or creating major bias incident policies/process.
2) **Collect calendar data.** Meeting date, who was in attendance, meeting notes/info.
3) **Conduct interviews.**
4) (Possible) **Mapping participants networks/relationships.**
5) **Analysis and Member-checks**.

IV. Discussion

- Do you have any questions/concerns? Questions on data collection?

V. Next Steps

- Identify contact person for study
- Non-interview data: select incident, collect calendar data and documents (org charts)
- Select interview date

APPENNDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction and Context setting

- Tell me a little about yourself (your role, portfolio, brief trajectory).
- Talk about how your university is organized and its power dynamics. Where do you sit within it?
- What are the opportunities or challenges in how your institution is set up?

Questions about Incident

- Let's talk about the preselected incident. (Examples could include managing major campus initiatives, navigating controversial speakers on campus, or leading a Presidential task force.)
    - What was the incident? Whom did you work with? Strategies you employed?
- Talk about central relationships that came up in this incident:
    - Who were the main collaborators/committee members? What was their role?
    - Allies? (To whom did you go for support?)
    - Who or what acted as a roadblock? How did you move forward?
- How did you decide on whom to collaborate with? What concessions were made? When do you decide to "report up"?
- What power dynamics did you have to consider when navigating this incident?
- How have you learned to navigate institutional politics (or personalities/perspectives)?

Follow-up questions for more detail/clarify on institutional dynamics:

questions will vary based on org chart observations

- Talk to me about how your relationship with various people.
    - President, Provost, other key leaders, direct reports
- Tell me about a time when you weren't "in the room" or able to lead the conversation/initiative. How were you able to assert some influence in the process?
- Talk about a time when you failed to influence a decision/issue. What did you learn from that experience?
- Discuss institutional structures (policies and/or programs) that support your work? Hinder your work?

Closing

- In conclusion, CDOs and their corresponding diversity offices are often viewed as being purely symbolic gestures of change/progress. How do you make sure your role/work has "teeth to it?
- In your experience in university leadership, who or what holds power within the institution?
- What advice do you have for any new CDOs?

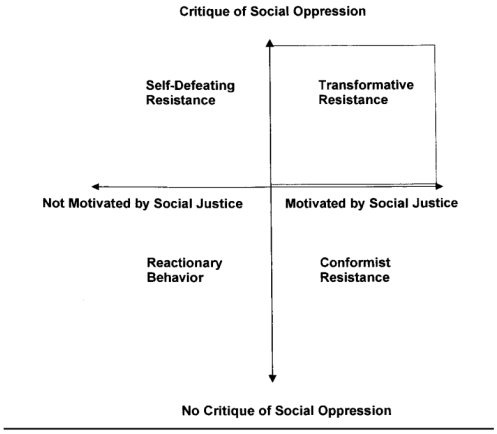
APPENNDIX D: CDO- CRT Perspective (excerpt from. Allen, Rodriegz, and Esters (2020))

Table 2. A Redefining of the 12 Standards of Professional Practice for Chief Diversity Officers from a Critical Race Theory Perspective

Standard	Original Version	CRT Version	Description of Changes
Standard One	Has the ability to envision and conceptualize the diversity mission of an institution through a broad and inclusive definition of diversity	Has the ability to co-construct, co-envision, and co-conceptualize with internal and external stakeholders the inclusion and diversity mission of an institution that represents all social groups (including racial/ethnic, gender, sexual orientation/expression, disabled and other social groups)	Producing an action plan with a team of stakeholders from various cultural groups is essential to ensuring a richer understanding of how the various forms of diversity can be addressed. Furthermore, the original standard fails to mention identity/social groups.
Standard Two	Understands, and is able to articulate in verbal and written form, the importance of equity, inclusion, and diversity to the broader educational mission of higher education	Understands and is committed to continuously educate and articulate verbally and through scholarship the importance of equity, inclusion, and diversity as tools for combating the root causes of racism, sexism, gender bias, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and xenophobia in society	The CRT version explicitly positions the CDO to go beyond a simplistic understanding of diversity and inclusion and provide scholarly products behind the position. Furthermore, the CRT version explicitly mentions common "isms" and phobias experienced by minoritized communities.
Standard Three	Understands the contexts, cultures, and politics within institutions that impact the implementation and management of effective diversity change efforts	Understands different contexts, cultures, and local politics that impact the implementation and management of effective inclusion and diversity efforts	The CRT version allows CDOs to directly address issues affecting minoritized communities, including room to adjust policies to better reflect a progressive society of inclusion.

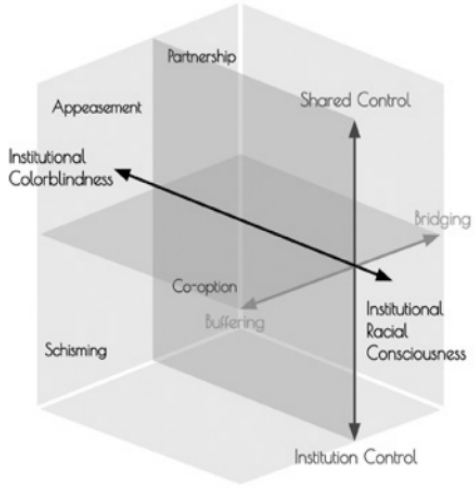
APPENNDIX E: Matrix Examples: Solórzano & Bernal, (2001) & Cho, (2018)

Solórzano & Bernal, (2001)



Cho, (2018)

FIGURE 1: INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE FRAMEWORK



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