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Views from the Margins: A Multiple-Case Study of the Lived Experiences of Black Women Senior-Level Student Affairs Administrators

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VIEWS FROM THE MARGINS:

A MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BLACK WOMEN

SENIOR-LEVEL STUDENT AFFAIRS ADMINISTRATORS

BY

Tamekka L. Cornelius

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Views from the Margins:

A Multiple-Case Study of the Lived Experiences of Black Women Senior-Level Student Affairs

Administrators

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Acknowledgements

Those who tell the stories, rule the world. -African Proverb

In May 2015, I ran my first marathon in 4 hours, 45 minutes, and 4 seconds. To prepare

for this race, I trained for six months. Throughout the training, there were days when I

questioned myself. Why am I doing this? Maybe I should just sit this out. Nevertheless, I

continued training and I ran the race. After the marathon, I felt good; I felt accomplished. I

made a goal, trained for it, and completed it. I picked up my medal at the finish line and

declared, "I did it!" The one truly special thing about the marathon was that I had some very

special friends who ran alongside me. They provided encouragement, mentorship, and

ultimately it was with their help that I persevered.

In August 2015, I embarked on another marathon, one that would begin my doctoral

journey. This one would take me five years and eight months to complete. I experienced some

of the same highs and lows as I did with the actual marathon. I've had some very special friends

who have been by my side throughout this entire journey. I'd like to acknowledge them here.

First, many thanks to the five women who graciously accepted the call for study participants and

allowed me to interview you. You made time for me in the summer of 2020, during the most

uncertain of times, during a period which we now all know as "unprecedented." I appreciate

your willingness to be fully present, to share openly, and to encourage me. At the conclusion of

our interviews, each one of you reminded me that if I ever needed anything to reach out. This is

active representation at work.

To the first cohort, the best to ever do it, Cohort A, we had the best of times on those long

weekends. We are 78% PhinisheD, let's goooo! To my sister circle, you all have made this

journey incredible. Pat, my Soror, the one who led the way, the history-maker. You were the

first to graduate from our program, the first African American woman. There were many times I wanted to throw my shoes at you, but I needed your (un)gentle push. I watched you, you encouraged me, you proved that you could do it and so could I. Kristie, my roomie, I'm glad to call you sister and friend. This journey wouldn't have been the same without you. T. Jai, our honorary circle member, we've shared some great laughs, good times. You were my procrastination partner, and I'll never forget our motto, "Due today, do today."

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Saving the best for last, to my husband Mike, you've been along for this entire race. It's fair to say that you've served as coach, trainer, motivator, nutritionist, and my accountability partner. You have held me all the way down. You made sure that the house was taken care of, you kept my favorite candles stocked, you were my masseuse, rubbed my back telling me it was okay, that I could do it and that you believed in me. You let me vent and cry but didn't allow me to stay there. You were my timekeeper, reminding me when my writing breaks were over, and it was time to get back to it. You did all of this and still took me on dinner dates, vacations, and staycations. I couldn't have survived this process unless I had a happy place. You were that happy place. I love you.

I did it, I finished this run!

Dedication

I give all thanks to God for the grace and mercy he has shown. God is faithful! I dedicate this to some of my guardian angels, whom the colleges and universities in this dissertation were named after.

To my grandmother Nocie Velma Herron-Cornelius, who I lived with during many of my formative years, who always made sure I had my favorite snacks in the house, and made sure I knew how unique and special I was. She was a staple in her church and in my life.

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To my other guardian angels, Aunt Bessie Lawson, cousin Sean William Bush, and Uncle Wilbert King, gone but never forgotten.

Abstract

This qualitative study explores the lived experiences of senior-level Black women student affairs administrators at four-year degree granting institutions. Moreover, this study documents Black women in nonfaculty administrative roles in student affairs at both predominately White institutions (PWIs) and historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). A multiple case study research design was used to investigate this phenomenon. Two frameworks were used to ground the study: Black feminist thought and representational bureaucracy. The following questions guided it: (1) What are the work experiences of Black women in senior leadership positions in student affairs? (2) What barriers/issues to obtaining senior leadership positions in student affairs are identified by Black women? (3) What do Black women senior student affairs leaders attribute to their success? (4) What recommendations and/or strategies do Black women senior leaders suggest to improve the leadership pipeline in student affairs as it relates to other Black women obtaining such roles? Participants included five vice presidents of student affairs representing three PWIs and two HBCUs. Five central themes emerged as a result of the semi-structured interviews: (1) I Have a Right to Be Here; (2) Overt and Subtle Obstacles, -Isms et al.; (3) Creating Social Capital; (4) No Straight Line to the Top; and (5) I'm thinking about the Black girls coming behind me. The study concludes with a discussion of the findings, implications for practice, and recommendations for ongoing research.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Only the Black woman can say when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed

dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special

patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with me. (Cooper,

1892/1988, p. 31)

These words spoken by Anna Julia Cooper, American scholar, educator, educational

administrator, social activist, writer, and advocate for Black women's rights (Giles, 2006),

summarized her voice and stance as an outspoken activist for Black women and educational

excellence. Anna Julia Cooper was unbothered. Born into slavery to an enslaved woman and a

White master (Cooper, 1892/1988; Giles, 2006), she began her quest for seeking an education

and speaking out against sexism and racism as early as nine-and-half years old, when she was

among one of the first students to enter St. Augustine's Normal School and Collegiate Institute

for newly freed slaves in 1868 (Cooper, 1892/1998).

Cooper went on to obtain bachelor's and master's degrees from Oberlin College, and at

age 67 she earned a doctorate from the University of Paris, making her only the fourth African

American woman to receive a Ph.D. (Cooper, 1892/1988). Her success in academia did not come

without challenges and struggles. As a teen, she was discouraged from pursuing ministry in the

Episcopal Church because she was a woman, and in college she rejected taking the Ladies

Course, which was distinctly inferior to the Gentleman's Course, which she opted instead to take

(Cooper 1892/1988). She was forcibly dismissed from her position as principal of M Street High

School for refusing to compromise her convictions and beliefs in exchange for the approval of

her supervisors (Giles, 2006; Hutchinson, 1981). Additionally, as a working professional in the

male-dominated Washington D.C. school system, she was faced with hostility, accused of being

too sympathetic, insubordinate, and expected to uphold a "*proper spirit of unity and loyalty*" (Cooper, 1892/1988, p. xxxv). Despite these obstacles, Cooper was instrumental in preparing her students for college, and she is credited with sending students to universities including Harvard, Brown, Yale, Dartmouth, Amherst, and Radcliffe. Cooper's story remains as an inspiring narrative for African American and Black women[1] today as those who aspire to positions of leadership in higher education continue to face unique challenges (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

Statement of the Problem

The progression of women of Color to positions of leadership has been slow to advance (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). African American women, specifically, are more likely to experience unfair treatment in training, frequently experiencing inaccurate assessment of their work productivity, being excluded from succession planning, disengagement, discrimination, prejudice, and lack of psychosocial and critical support (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). For Black women, the combination of being both a woman *and* African American may result in increased negative stereotypes, tokenism, and unrealistic expectations, lessening chances to attain higher level and leadership positions (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

Institutions of higher education cannot allow the representation of African American women administrators to slack. These women are critical to institutions of higher education, as demonstrated by the increasing percentage of African American women who are entering postsecondary institutions as students (Bartman, 2015). African American women make up an increasingly high percentage of all students entering institutions of higher education (Bartman, 2015). In 2016, they exceeded their men counterparts in undergraduate student enrollment (62 vs. 38%; de Brey et al., 2019). In 2017, 40% of 18-24 year olds enrolled in college were Black

women (McFarland et al., 2019). These numbers suggest a need for adequate and proportional representation in leadership by race by gender. McEwen, Williams, and Engstrom (as cited in Flowers, 2003) argued that

> Particularly within the student affairs profession, it is of great importance for the profession to reflect the increasing diversity of our student populations. Thus, in addition to gender, we must systematically examine conditions within the profession that are not supportive of visible racial and ethnic group persons. (p. 36)

The American Association of University Women (AAUW) released its 2016 report on the status of women in leadership revealing that Black women are still insignificantly represented in leadership positions at predominately White institutions (PWIs; Hill, Miller, Benson, & Handley, 2016). This underrepresentation poses many issues. Senior administrative leaders lead the charge in regard to promoting campus diversity initiatives, recruitment and hiring recommendations, policy development, strategic planning, and fiscal planning (Hendrickson, Lane, Harris, & Dorman, 2013). Additionally, college and university teaching and research missions are better supported when coupled with a diverse student body, faculty, and administrative staff (Bichsel & McChesney, 2017). Further, since the mission of an institution is ultimately advanced by senior administrators (Hendrickson et al., 2013), it is important for Black women to be represented more abundantly.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of senior-level Black women administrators in student affairs at four-year degree granting institutions. Specifically, this study is focused on Black women in nonfaculty administrative leadership roles in student affairs at PWIs and at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). I chose to

include both PWIs and HBCUs, as Black women administrators will have varying experiences based on institution type. Additionally, the institutional missions, philosophies, and campus environment or climate will be inherently different in PWIs and HBCUs, and I wanted to share the voices from both perspectives.

Previous studies on women college and university administrators have primarily focused on Black women's underrepresentation in faculty and academic administrative positions, on staff of Color, or on Black men administrators in higher education (Davis & Brown, 2017; Holmes, Land, & Hinton-Hudson, 2007; Jones & Osborne-Lampkin, 2013; Kaplan et al., 2018; Kosoko-Lasaki, Sonnino, & Voytko, 2006; Price et al., 2005; Steele, 2018; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Walkington, 2017; Whittaker, Montgomery, & Martinez Acosta, 2015). Others have focused on student enrollment and experiences (Bartman, 2015; Constantine & Watt, 2002; Jackson, 1998; Kosoko-Lasaki, Sonnino, & Voytko, 2006; Smith, 2008; Walkington, 2017; Zamani, 2003). Few studies have focused solely on Black women student affairs professionals (Collier-Thomas, 1982; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Hylton, 2012; Moses, 1989; Rusher, 1996; Scott, 2016; Sobers, 2014; West, 2019). The current study adds to the literature base concerning Black women's experience in nonacademic administrative positions. Further, this study explores what these women experienced as barriers and as successes, and the issues they faced as they ascended to their roles, and strategies and recommendations for the future leadership pipeline of the field.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide the study:

1. What are the work experiences of Black women in senior leadership positions in student affairs?

2. What barriers/issues to obtaining senior leadership positions in student affairs are identified by Black women?

3. What do Black women senior student affairs leaders attribute to their success?

4. What recommendations and/or strategies do Black women senior leaders suggest to improve the leadership pipeline in student affairs as it relates to other Black women obtaining such roles?

Significance of Study

The glass ceiling is a term referring to a transparent barrier that keeps women from rising above a certain level professionally *solely* because they are women (Morrison, White, & Van Velsor, 1987). The intersection of gender and race brings its own set of unique challenges for Black women throughout the student affairs workforce. Black women face more disadvantages and discrimination based on what Crenshaw (1989) defined as *intersectionality*—the ways in which race and gender intersect or overlap with other personal characteristics (e.g., social class, sexual orientation) simultaneously to oppress Black women in society. Crenshaw argued that race and gender are not mutually exclusive categories of experience. Using a "single-axis" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140) framework to shape conceptions and conditions surrounding Black women theoretically erases the multidimensionality of Black women's experiences and contributes to their marginalization, isolation, and vulnerability (Crenshaw, 1989). This results in Black women having "to fend for themselves" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 145), taking on additional burdens and responsibilities that women from other backgrounds do not have to shoulder (Crenshaw, 1989). Further research has supported Crenshaw's theory, in finding that individuals who belong to two underprivileged classes face greater inequities than those in single marginalized classes (McChesney, 2018).

Black women who aspire to positions of leadership face other unique challenges related to intersectionality (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). For example, stereotyping is one of those challenges, and it is a significant barrier to advancement. Because of stereotyping, one may experience *stereotype threat*, defined as an individual being at risk of confirming, as a self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one's social group (Steele & Aronson, 1995). This confirmation is a side effect resulting from of bias and prejudice. Steele (2010) introduced the concept of "identity contingencies" (p. 3), as those things that an individual has to manage due to their social identity (e.g., age, race, ethnicity, gender, social class). Stereotype threat can affect Black women in leadership roles because of the way that this phenomenon interacts with identity. Identity influences societal outcomes (Steele, 2010). Stereotypes of White women "are less focused on individual identity and more around skill, whereas women of [C]olor face stereotypes first about identity" (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010, p. 174). Hence if negative stereotypes are associated with Black women's group identity, their societal outcomes, including their positionality as leaders, could be affected (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Steele, 2010). The shaping of positive experiences and pathways to success for Black women through avenues such as formal workplace mentoring helps to mitigate these challenges (Tran, 2014). Black women, however, are less exposed to informal networks of influence than their White colleagues, further explaining why few women of Color advance to higher levels (Mehra, Kilduff, & Brass, 1998).

Data show that the growth among Black women who earned bachelor's degrees has increased by 75% between the academic years 2000-01 and 2015-16 (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). At the master's level, the number of degrees conferred on Black students increased by 58% between the academic years 2004-05 and 2014-15, and by 56% for doctoral

degrees earned by Black students (McFarland et al., 2017). Despite this growth in the number of

Black students obtaining terminal degrees, evidence shows that women of Color, particularly

African American women, are grossly underrepresented in senior administrative positions in

student affairs and in higher education in general. In comparison with the student population

from the same group, they occupy only 6.5% of senior-level administrators (Bartman, 2015;

Crawford & Smith, 2005; H. Johnson, 2017; National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

This disparity presents a void in the ability of Black women to assist with the academic and

professional development of African American women students (Bartman, 2015). Additionally,

as the student bodies of institutions of higher education increase in diversity (Bischel &

McChesney, 2017), so should the professional staff. Research in industry suggests that gender

and ethnically diverse companies are 35% more likely to outperform their peers (Bischel &

McChesney, 2017). The same is true for institutions of higher education (Bischel & McChesney,

2017). Understanding the complexities of Black women in leadership and the intersection that

race and gender have on achieving professional heights in the workplace serves as a starting

point for the theoretical foundation that will guide this study.

Theoretical Framework

Ravitch and Carl (2016) defined a theoretical framework as "the ways that a researcher

integrates and situates the formal theories that contextualize and guide a study" (p. 86). Here, the

guiding theories are briefly introduced; the theoretical framework is expounded in Chapter Two.

This study is guided by Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1984) and representational

bureaucracy (Kingsley, 1944; Mosher, 1968).

Black feminist thought specializes in articulating the distinct and self-defined standpoint

of African American women by African American women (Collins, 2000). Black feminist

thought emerged in the 1970s when Black women found themselves racially oppressed in the wake of the women's movement, which centered White women, and sexually oppressed by the Black liberation movement, which centered Black men (Hull, Bell, Scott, & Smith, 1982). The resulting feelings of invisibility and oppression led Black women to produce theories which could adequately address the way race, gender, and class were interconnected in their lives, and to take conscious action to stop racist, sexist, and classist discrimination (Hull, Bell Scott, & Smith, 1982). Three key themes emerged in Black feminist thought: self-definition and self-valuation, the interlocking nature of oppression, and the importance of redefining culture (Collins, 1986).

The second framework guiding this study, *representative bureaucracy*, had its origins in public administration. Mosher (1968) described representative bureaucracy as an institution being representative to the extent that the social background of the representatives mirrors the social backgrounds of the represented. Meier and Stewart (1992) conducted one of the first studies linking demographic representation to policy outcomes. They found that the increased presence of African American bureaucrats (i.e., teachers) had a significantly favorable effect on policy outcomes related to African American students (Meier & Stewart, 1992). Essentially, the concept of a representative bureaucracy is that public agencies (e.g., colleges and universities) are better situated to serve their constituents (e.g., students) when the bureaucrats (e.g., administrators) reflect the social background of the population they serve.

This study combines Black feminist thought, which encompasses theoretical interpretations of Black women's reality by those who live it (Black women; Collins, 2000) and the concept of representative bureaucracy, which argues that diverse constituent groups

(students) warrant a greater diversity of leaders and policy decision makers (Flowers, 2003), with the specific focus here being African American women leaders in student affairs.

Summary of Methodology

This qualitative study uses a case study research design. Yin (2014) stated that case studies are preferred when "you want to understand a real-world case and assume that such an understanding is likely to involve important contextual conditions pertinent to your case" (p. 16). I was interested in examining the lived experiences of Black, public college and university women senior-level student affairs administrators at four-year degree granting PWIs and HBCUs. Case studies seek to investigate a phenomenon (the case) in depth and within a real-world context (Yin, 2014). My data were collected via a series of one-on-one interviews, archival documents, and through artifact elicitation.

Definitions

African American women: American women of African ancestry; descendants of enslaved people from the continent of Africa.

Black women: Inclusive of the influx of individuals from other parts of the Diaspora, such as the Caribbean, and used interchangeably with African American women for the purpose of this study.

Historically Black College and University (HBCU): Any historically Black college that was established before 1964, whose primary goal was to educate African Americans (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Predominantly White Institution (PWI): Colleges or universities in which the majority of enrolled students are non-Hispanic White (Mills, 2019). Bourke (2016) expanded the term to

signify "the extent to which whiteness is embedded throughout interconnected organizational practices" (p. 20).

Senior-level student affairs administrator/officer (SSAO): Synonymous with chief student affairs officers (CSAO). Top executive officers, within a university, usually a vice-president or vice chancellor reporting directly to the president, provost or academic dean (American Council of Education, 2019).

Student affairs: Education outside of the classroom designed to develop students' cognitive and interpersonal skills, and to foster leadership, ethics, and cultural understanding with a stress on the importance of wellness, identity, career exploration, and service to society (Long, 2012).

Student affairs professionals: Persons who deliberately create and provide services, programs, experiences, and resources that will advance students' learning and growth outside the classroom (Long, 2012; NASPA, 2010).

Vice president of student affairs (VPSA): A person who manages and leads student affairs divisions (NASPA, 2014).

Limitations

The limitation of this study is the circumstances in which data were collected.

Circumstances. Data collection was set to begin in April 2020. In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared coronavirus, COVID-19, as a global pandemic. As a result, I was restricted in the manner and time of data collection. In compliance with health mandates, all interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom or telephone. Additionally, since data collection began in April, less than one month after the coronavirus was introduced in the United

States, time was also an issue, as the participants in this study were managing numerous responsibilities and deadlines during this uncertain time.

Overview of Study

The next two chapters will consist of the literature review and methodological approach. The literature review presents a synthesis of empirical literature related to my topic, the lived experiences of senior-level Black women administrators in higher education, and will also address the theoretical framework of my study. Chapter Three provides the methodological approach used to conduct the study, including the design, procedures, setting, population, sample, data collection and analysis methods used.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to contribute to, and advance, the research concerning the lived experiences of African American women in senior administrative leadership positions in student affairs at public four-year postsecondary institutions. To provide a context for discussion, this review begins with a foundation of student affairs, followed by a historical overview of African American women in higher education and their ascension to leadership. Next, it continues with a focus on the current state of African American women leaders by institution type (i.e., public, private, historically Black colleges and universities, etc.), including quantitative data in relation to representation; then it explores the literature on the reported challenges African American women have faced while pursuing leadership roles and the noted recommendations for improving the pipeline and succession for more African American women to ascend to senior leadership positions in student affairs. Lastly, it includes a review and discussion of Black feminist thought and representative bureaucracy, which serve as the frameworks guiding this study.

Foundation of Student Affairs in Higher Education

Student affairs was constructed as an environment for learning outside of the classroom to promote student learning and development (Long, 2012). College is a transformative experience for students, and conceptually, student affairs attests that while traditional learning occurs inside of a classroom, the college or university itself is itself a classroom. The professionals employed by the field of student affairs "help students enter, enjoy, endure and exit from college" (Delworth & Hanson, 1989, p. xiii). From the beginning of college education in the United States, administrators in colleges and universities began to recognize that students' academic success is based on their ability to meet their basic hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1954),

including food and shelter and physical and psychological safety. Over the years, student affairs has been known by a variety of names, including student personnel, student services, and student development, yet student affairs is the term most commonly used today (Long, 2012).

Formal student affairs practice dates back to the colonial era in the mid-1800s (Schwartz & Stewart, 2017). During that time, formal higher education was reserved to educate White men as ministers in the colonies, and the doctrine of *in loco parentis*, Latin for "in place of parents," was incorporated to uphold guidelines such as curfews, expectations, and restrictions, and to enforce disciplinary measures in the residential spaces of colonial colleges (Nuss, 2003). In keeping with this doctrine, universities began to appoint deans of women and deans of men to enforce rules and monitor students' conduct (Long, 2012).

After the Civil War, the student enrollment in college increased, and campuses began to welcome a wider student demographic, including African Americans and women (Schwartz & Stewart, 2017). The evolution of student affairs professions was discussed in detail by Dallas Long (2012). Most colleges were still run by faculty members until the 1920s, when the first student affairs administrators were hired to allow faculty to focus on academics, while the student affairs professionals' primary concern would be student personnel matters. Deans of women and deans of men were replaced by professional staff to serve in what is considered to be traditional functions of student affairs today. These student affairs staff members were hired to provide students with guidance in their academic records and schedules, and to provide vocational and job placement advice. In addition, they were responsible for imposing discipline as required. This role shifted after the Civil War and evolved into focusing on the students' well-being and providing guidance and educating them to make appropriate choices and decisions outside of the classroom (Long, 2012).

The core values of student affairs became widespread and accepted in higher education with the publication of the first *Student Personnel Point of View* in 1937 by the American Council on Education (Long, 2012). The report highlighted the holistic development of students—intellect, spirit, and personality—paying attention to their individual needs (Long, 2012). The report was revised in 1949 and contains a litany of student services representing 33 functional areas which provide the philosophical and organizational foundations for the profession as it is currently known (American Council on Education, 1949). Today, the field of student affairs includes national professional organizations, produces literature and publications, and has created graduate degree programs for prospective practitioners on college campuses worldwide (Schwartz & Stewart, 2017). Student affairs divisions are normally led by vice presidents of student affairs.

The Role of Vice President of Student Affairs on College Campuses

The role of the vice president of student affairs (VPSA) is integral to a college campus. Most VPSAs are considered senior student affairs officer (SSAO), which is the highest rank within student affairs, and also includes professionals holding title the title of dean or of vice president and dean combined (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). Senior student affairs officers are members of their institution's president's cabinet, reporting directly to the president, chancellor, or, in some instances, the provost (Kuk & Banning, 2009); this proximity allows for greater decision-making power and influence.

The VPSA often supervises and provides overall insight and strategy to some of the most influential departments on campus for the development of students. The VPSA can supervise staff representing upwards of 17 or more student support service areas designed to contribute to students' sense of belonging, which increases retention through meaningful programming and

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educational opportunities (Kuk & Banning, 2009). The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher education (2012) lists those departments as academic advising, academic support services, admissions, campus activities, career services, counseling and mental health services, disability services, LGBT services, multicultural affairs, orientation and new student programs, recreation and intramural spots, religious programs, and veterans affairs. These student affairs departments budded from a need to provide students with social integration outside of the classroom. The next section provides an overview of African American women's role in higher education.

From Whence We Came: A Historical Overview of African American Women in Higher Education

The shortage of African American women administrators and educators in higher education can be traced back to a historical longstanding problem--the disproportionate access to higher education for all African Americans (Rusher, 1996). Prior to the Civil War, and before the abolition of slavery in the South, statutes were in place forbidding educational instruction to enslaved African Americans (Clewell & Anderson, 1995). The earliest account of a Black person attending a college or university was in 1799. During this time, college training for African Americans was limited and seen as experimental (Clewell & Anderson, 1995). John Chavis of North Carolina attended Princeton University (now Washington and Lee University in Lexington, VA) to "determine whether or not a Negro was capable of acquiring a college education" (Clewell & Anderson, 1995, pp. 56-57). Despite his having proven to have the capability of acquiring a college education, there is no record of him receiving a college degree (Clewell & Anderson, 1995).

In the North and Midwest, small numbers of African Americans were being educated at the collegiate level (Clewell & Anderson, 1995). Oberlin College in Ohio and Berea College in Kentucky were two of the first few colleges in these regions to admit African American students in 1835 and 1855, respectively (Clewell & Anderson, 1995). Women gained entry to higher education in 1837 , when Oberlin College admitted the first woman to the school, and African American women would enter shortly thereafter with the first Black woman, Lucy Ann Stanton, graduating from Oberlin in 1850 with a certificate in literature (Rusher, 1996). She was followed by Mary Jane Patterson in 1862, the first Black woman to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree in the United States, and by Mary Church Terrell and Anna Julia Cooper in 1884 (Solomon, 1985).

In order to obtain a formal higher education prior to the Civil War, African Americans had to pursue training abroad or attend one of three Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) that had formed at the time (Clewell & Anderson, 1995). Cheyney University in Pennsylvania, founded in 1837 as The Institute for Colored Youth; Lincoln University founded in 1854 also in Pennsylvania; and Wilberforce University in Ohio, founded in 1856, were the first three universities founded solely for educating Black male students (Clewell & Anderson, 1995; Stefon, 2019). HBCUs were established prior to the Civil War at a time when higher education was inaccessible to women and African Americans. The United States passed a series of landmark legislation at the turn of the 19th century, which made a significant impact on the educational opportunities afforded to Black women.

Landmark Legislation

Historian Horace Mann Bond believed that the key to understanding current issues facing African Americans in education, and paving the way to a brighter future, was the study of history

(Tillman, 2009). Both African Americans and women experienced extreme difficulties navigating within the White male dominated world of academe (Tillman, 2009). However, Black men typically had access to institutions and programs that excluded women, and White women had more frequent access to opportunities and institutions that excluded all African Americans (Tillman, 2009). African American women then were the "exception to the exception" (Solomon, 1985, p. 76), not being wanted by institutions of higher education and being denied access to all of them.

Emancipation and the end of the Civil War ushered in a new beginning for public higher education (Tillman, 2009). In 1862, the Morrill Land Grant Act was signed, offering each state 30,000 acres of public land to endow colleges for instruction in agriculture and the mechanical arts (Solomon, 1985). The Morrill Act was not extended to former Confederate States until *after* the Civil War (Solomon, 1985), again restricting access to African Americans. In 1890, Congress passed the Second Morrill Act aimed at former Confederate States, which called for "a just and equitable" (Tillman, 2009, p. 46) use of federal funds (instead of land), and requiring all states to prove that race was not a criterion of admission to colleges and universities. If found to be so, states had to designate a separate land-grant institution that would admit Black students. The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) determined that state laws requiring separate institutions—including academic ones—for Blacks and Whites were constitutional as under the federal constitution long as they were equal (Tillman, 2009). As a result of such legislation, over 17 HBCUs were created to educate African Americans, and many states began to provide Black students with stipends to satisfy the ruling, both at the undergraduate level and postbaccalaureate (Clewell & Anderson, 1995; Tillman, 2009). The *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision had other consequences which affected formally integrated schools, including Berea College

which was mentioned in an earlier section. For example, in 1904 my home state, Kentucky, enacted the Day Law prohibiting interracial education, a direct response to the once integrated Berea College (KET Education, n.d.). The College, in turn, forced to close its doors to Black students, opened the Lincoln Institute for Black Students in 1912 (KET Education, n.d.).

Over the next three decades, a series of civil rights cases were filed to protest the injustice of excluding African Americans from higher education (Clewell & Anderson, 1995). However, no case had a more substantial impact on the access of African American students to desegregated higher education than *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). In the 1930s the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) began to fight the legality of the *equal* aspect of the separate but equal principle of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (Clewell & Anderson, 1995). In 1954, the Supreme Court reversed the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, ruling that racial segregation in public schools deprived African American students of equal protection of the law under the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution (Clewell & Anderson, 1995). The Civil Rights Act, passed in 1964, which forbade discrimination on the basis of sex and race (Tillman, 2009), and the Higher Act of 1965, which provided federally funded "educational opportunity grants" (Clewell & Anderson, 1995, p. 66) such as TRIO programs, the work-study program, and affirmative action legislation, were all designed to support underrepresented minority students. These acts opened the door for more African Americans to enter higher education at predominately White institutions (PWIs).

The research done by Dr. Mamie Phipps Clark—the first African American woman to earn a Ph.D in psychology from Columbia University—on the racial identity formation of Black children was central evidence cited in the Brown decision (Hine, 1997). Further, Ada Lois Sipuel helped to establish the desegregation of graduate and professional schools with the Supreme

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Court's ruling in her favor in the 1948 case *Ada Lois Sipuel v. Board of Regents.* This ruling

ordered the University of Oklahoma School of Law to admit Sipuel on the basis that African

Americans could not be state mandated to postpone their education until separate Black graduate

or professional schools were established (Hine, 1997). In the years following, African American

women would continue to obtain advanced degrees and to set precedents in higher education and

in higher education administration.

African American Women Making Early Strides in Higher Education Administration

Despite the ruling granting Black women access to higher education and being the

"exception to the exception" (Solomon, 1985, p. 76), White schools did not want to accept Black

women teachers or administrators, and the options for formal training at Black schools were

limited. Still, Black women played a critical role in Black racial uplift by serving in

administrative roles at institutions of higher education (Solomon, 1985). Fanny Jackson (Coppin)

was named principle of the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia in 1869, becoming the

first Black woman to lead an institution of higher education in the United States (Littlefield,

1997). Mary McLeod Bethune founded the Daytona Educational and Industrial Training School

in 1904, now Bethune-Cookman University, making her the first Black woman college president

(Littlefield, 1997). Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander was the first African American woman in

the nation to complete a Ph.D. in economics, earning her degree from the University of

Pennsylvania in 1921 (University of Pennsylvania, 2002). Anna Julia Copper and Willa Player

would soon follow, serving as president of Frelinghuysen University in Washington, D.C. (1929)

and Bennett College in North Carolina (1955), respectively (Littlefield, 1997). In addition to

serving in administrative roles, African American women began to form professional

associations to serve the interests of Black women's education. The Association of Deans of

Women and Advisers to Girls in Negro Schools was created as a result of a convening of deans and advisers to girls in Negro schools by Lucy Diggs Slowe in 1929 (Littlefield, 1997). These women represent only a few of the African American women leaders in higher education during the early years. There is a statistical gap in the literature surrounding African Americans in higher education from the 1930s through the late 1960s; the early 1970s introduced the formal collection of data on African Americans in higher education (Rusher, 1996).

Then and Now: Status of African American Women in Higher Education

While the historic achievements of Black women in education have been documented, there is an undeniable underrepresentation of Black women in student affairs administrative roles in postsecondary education institutions (West, 2019). Gill and Showell (1991) reminded all that "There is a clear absence of Black female leadership at predominantly White and Black institutions" (p. 2). Black women are significantly underrepresented as student affairs administrators in U.S. degree-granting institutions when compared to White men and White women (West, 2019). Gill and Showell (1991) likened the plight of Black women striving to ascend to administrative leadership as the "cinderella concept" (p. 2). This concept describes how a Black woman in higher education can ascend only so far before her dreams dissipate and return her back to "her place" (Gill & Showell, 1991, p. 2). This could be explained by the prevalence of Black women being recruited by colleges and universities to entry level positions, to staff Black studies and minority programs, and to midlevel administrative posts (Carroll, 1982). As early as 1982, Carroll (1982) noted that in higher education, only 1.1 percent of Black women held the title of college president, or professor, with the majority of Black women college graduates seemingly moving into areas that have traditionally been "open" (p. 117) to them such as teaching at the secondary level.

Decades ago, African American men held the majority of administrative positions in higher education when compared to African American women (Rusher, 1996). While this dynamic has since changed, and Black women represent a larger population of minority student affairs administrators, West (2019) noted that African American women still "remain significantly underrepresented when compared to White men and White women student affairs administrators" (p. 544).

The National Center for Education Statistics conducts an annual study of higher education employees in degree-granting institutions. Its 2017 and 2018 report showed the number of Black women administrators serving in managerial roles at degree-granting institutions compared to Black men, White men, and White women in the same roles (NCES, 2017, 2018). Tables 2.1 and 2.2 provide this data.

Table 2.1

Administrators in Degree Granting Institutions by Race/Ethnicity: Fall 2018

Primary Occupation	Total	White	Black	White Male	Black Male	White Female	Black Female
Management	262,919	194,842	27,340	86,797	9,816	108,045	17,524
Percentage	100%	74.1%	10.4%	33%	3.7%	41.1%	6.7%

Table 2.2

Administrators in Degree Granting Institutions by Race/Ethnicity: Fall 2017

Primary Occupation	Total	White	Black	White Male	Black Male	White Female	Black Female
Management	259,665	194,984	26,501	87,751	9,629	107,233	16,872
Percentage	100%	75.1%	10.2%	33.8%	3.7%	41.3%	6.5%

The data above show that White men have remained steady in managerial leadership roles, comprising 33% of all leadership positions, trailing only White women who comprise the majority of the leadership roles in higher education, who saw a decrease in number by .2 percentage points from 41.3% in 2017 to 41.1% in 2018 (NCES, 2017, 2018). The greatest degree of gender and racial disparity among top-level senior administrators is seen with Black women and Black men. The table above illustrates that while Black women are represented more in management roles in comparison to Black men, increasing .2 percentage points from 6.5% in 2017 to 6.7% in 2018, and Black men saw no percentage point increase during that time period remaining at 3.7% (NCES 2017, 2018), the majority (74%) of administrators in managerial or senior-level positions in higher education are White. More specifically, excluding the chief diversity officer role, an often underfunded, more symbolic, powerless role (Gasman, Abiola, & Travers, 2015), Black women are underrepresented in 24 of 42 top-level administrative positions with numbers ranging from 0% (chief executive officer, system) to 5.1% (chief public relations/communications officer; Pritchard et al., 2019).

These numbers are not progressive. Prior to 2019, The College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) lumped all minorities into one category in regards to race/ethnicity. CUPA-HR data from the previous two academic years showed that non-White minorities made up 15% of higher education administrators (a one percentage point increase from 2017) with women having a higher representation in lower-level administrative positions (60%; Bichsel et al., 2018; Renn & Hughes, 2004). Out of the four main areas of higher education administration (i.e., student affairs, academic affairs, business services, external affairs), the greatest imbalance between racial and ethnic diversity among administrators is between student affairs and academic affairs (Espinosa, Turk, Taylor, & Chessman, 2019).

Data from 2017 show that Black/African American professionals are most represented in the chief student affairs officer role (16%), with women making up half of the profession (Bichsel, McChesney, & Calcagno, 2017).

Carroll (1982) described these inequities as frustrating and appearing hopeless in the eyes of Black women. Noting that when these disparities are questioned by Black women, one common response is "we can't find them" (Carroll, 1982, p. 121). A doctorate degree has long been the "credential for entry into faculty and administrative positions" (Mosley, 1980, p. 287). Gasman, Abiola, and Travers (2015) noted that an advanced degree is a critical necessity for people of Color to obtain senior-level administrative positions. In his 2012 study of the characteristics of African American senior student affairs officers, Hammonds found that 100% of participants held a terminal degree. Participants in his study further advised any aspiring African American senior student affairs professional to obtain a terminal degree as a mandatory prerequisite (Hammonds, 2012). All but one of the participants included in my study have obtained their doctorate degree, with the latter currently enrolled in a doctorate program.

Black women with terminal degrees are not hiding, they are in plain sight. African Americans obtaining doctorate degrees have steadily increased. Black students increased their overall share of earned doctoral degree completion from 3.5 % in 1996 to 7.6 percent in 2016 (Espinosa et al., 2019). Overall, between academic years 2004-05 and 2014-15 the number of doctoral degrees conferred increased by 56% for Black students (McFarland et al., 2017). In contrast, during that same time period, the percentage of doctoral degrees conferred on White students decreased from 76% to 69% (McFarland et al., 2017). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has published data on degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions dating back to 1976. In 1976, Black women earned 6.5% of all doctoral degrees

awarded, ranking third in number of degrees earned by race and gender (trailing White women and Asian/Pacific Islander women) with a total of 1,237 degrees; by 2017 that number increased to 10.5%, a total of 9,276 degrees awarded (NCES, 2018).

With this steady increase in the number of doctorate degrees awarded, one would think that Black women would be even more competitive with respect to senior leadership positions than ever before. The word *qualified* is often repeated, used as a euphemism allowing individuals and institutions to circumvent hiring more candidates of diverse backgrounds (Gasman, Abiola, & Travers, 2015). However, qualified in many instances does not refer to qualifications, rather "'fit', with upper-level administrators assessing candidates on the likelihood that they will be pleasant in social situations and hold similar intellectual and cultural views" (Gasman et al., 2015, p. 2). So, while Black administrators and staff are qualified and capable, private and public PWIs are reluctant to recruit them to senior-level positions; instead many African American administrators are appointed as "coordinators and directors of special programs and projects with unusual and prestigious-sounding titles, but which mean very little in terms of job authority and decision-making power…found at the helm of predominately White public two-year and four year institutions" (Wright, Taylor, Burrell, & Stewart, 2006, p. 60). While HBCUs have led the way in hiring Black women to serve as faculty and administrators for many years (AAUW, 2016), Black women have been overlooked in regard to hiring and advancement in higher education at both HBCUs and PWIs.

Following the Civil War, some HBCUs were founded and led by White religious groups or individuals (i.e., Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians) throughout the South to train African Americans to be teachers, to learn a trade, or to prepare to be preachers and ministers (JBHE Foundation, 1997). As the years progressed, the educational mission of these institutions

changed, and many of the schools began teaching a college-level curriculum as a way to bring

Blacks "up to the standards of Western civilization" (JBHE Foundation, 1997, p. 93). However,

"the White founders and supporters of the Black colleges were reluctant to entrust control of the

institutions to Black people" (JBHE Foundation, 1997, p. 93). Some HBCUs, including

Wilberforce University (Ohio), Tuskegee Institute (Alabama), Bethune-Cookman College

(Florida), and Kentucky State University (Kentucky) were the exception and had Black

Presidents from inception (JBHE Foundation, 1997).

Other HBCUs including Howard University (Washington D.C.), Dillard University

(Louisiana), and Spelman College (Georgia) were slow to elect African Americans, especially

African American women, to serve as president of their institutions. Dillard University, founded

in 1930, appointed its first Black President, William Stuart Nelson, in 1936 (JBHE Foundation,

1997); however, it would take 69 more years, before Marvalene Hughes would be appointed the

first woman and first African American woman president of the institution in 2005 (Pope, 2005).

Spelman College was the first HBCU founded solely to educate Black women (Lefever, 2005).

Founded in 1881, by two White women from New England, the College appointed its first Black

president, Albert E. Manley, in 1953 (Lefever, 2005). It took the college 107 years to appoint Dr.

Johnnetta B. Cole as the first African American woman president of the school (Lefever, 2005).

An examination of the barriers faced by Black women in the workplace and factors influencing

career ascension is crucial to providing a viewpoint for Black women in higher education.

Barriers and Other Factors Influencing Career Ascension

Black women in higher education are faced with a rather inauspicious destiny in the

workplace (Rusher, 1996). Numerous research findings and reports have discussed various

factors that have influenced the career progression and ascension of middle-to senior-level Black

women (e.g., see Alexander-Lee, 2014; American Association of University Women, 2016; Catalyst, 2004; Guillory, 2001; Henry & Glenn, 2009; Hylton, 2012; Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009; Kanter, 1977; Main & Gregory-Smith, 2018; Moses, 1989; Mosley, 1980; O'Callaghan & Jackson, 2016; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Rusher, 1996; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Shavers & Moore III, 2019; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). Institutional and organizational barriers, including racism, sexism, homophobia, issues with salary, implicit/unwritten codes, isolation, exclusion, negative stereotypes, fit, lack of mentors, emotional tax, unclear succession plans and non-existent pipelines toward advancement, and other metaphorical labels (i.e. glass ceiling, sticky floor, concrete wall) have all been noted as obstacles which hinder women from reaching the senior-most levels of organizations (Betters-Reed & Moore, 1995; Catalyst, 2004; Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, & Vanneman, 2001; Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009; Leon, 2014; Main & Gregory-Smith, 2018; O'Callaghan & Jackson, 2016; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Smith, Caputi, & Crittenden, 2012). Moses (1989) raised the subject, stating:

> Black women faculty members and administrators face numerous barriers to their growth and success in academe. To effectively recruit and retain more Black women faculty members and administration, colleges and universities need to understand these barriers and institute policies and programs to overcome them. (p. 13)

The following subsections will address these barriers and explore the literature related to factors that have been documented as influencing or hindering the ascension of African American women administrators in student affairs.

Racism and Sexism

Moses (1989) described the duality of Black women facing the effects of racism and sexism as double discrimination, adding that racism and sexism are often so fused together that it

is difficult distinguish the two in any given situation. In describing this parallel, hooks (1984) noted:

> In studies on the experiences of African Americans at multiple levels in society, African American women's struggles were masked with those of African American men. This approach does not give appropriate attention to the African American women's experience. One ignored the gender related issues, while the other did not consider elements of racism. (p. 37)

Racism, the "belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance" (Lorde, 1984, p. 450), has lasting social, physical, and psychological effects, and these effects are often overtly and covertly embedded into campus systems (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). For example, covert racism occurs when colleagues and superiors subtly infer that an African American woman leader of a unit is incompetent or inexperienced despite being high-achieving (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Overt racism can also be found when students, or other administrators or faculty, question, challenge or dismiss the intellectual ability of an African American woman leading a unit on campus (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

Henry and Glenn (2009) ascertained that "the effects of systemic racism that Black women face in the academy can be directly observed in and attributed to the underrepresentation, or lack of a critical mass of Blacks in higher education in general" (p. 3). The phrase critical mass can be used to conceptualize the underrepresentation of African American women senior leaders in higher education (West, 2015). West (2015) summarized this phenomenon, stating, "the underrepresentation of African American women in postsecondary education exists where

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there is a noticeably smaller number of these women present in institutions of higher education as compared to the number of members of other cultural groups present" (p. 109).

Hinton's (2001) study focused on Black mid-level and senior-level women higher education administrators, and found that, among the five women interviewed, race was the most relevant factor as they worked to retain their positions and ascend to the next level in their field. One participant declared, "I would be surprised if you don't find that African American women, because of their race, wrestle with issues as administrators that White women do not confront, because we are not seen like they are" (Hinton, 2001, p. 126). Statements such as this affirm the fact that racism and sexism are two social constructs with roots in discrimination (Jackson, 2003).

Sexism and racism manifest in different forms and have differing effects on their targets (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Beale (1969) introduced the term *double jeopardy* to emphasize the dual discrimination faced by minority women on the basis of both their gender and race. Double jeopardy predicts that "people with multiple subordinate identities will be subjected to more prejudice and discrimination than those with a single subordinate identity" (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008, p. 378). These -isms can take the shape of racist or sexist comments, sly remarks, harassment and/or discrimination (Howard-Hamilton & Patitu, 2012).

> Patitu and Hinton (2003) highlighted one African American woman administrator's experience with sexism by recalling the fact that at her institution "there were no female vice presidents, deans, associate deans, or assistant deans; they are all White males" (p. 81). The lack of a critical mass of individuals from a particular group, in this case, African American senior leaders, is a recruitment and retention deficit which, coupled with racism and sexism, leads to feelings of marginalization and isolation, which

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contribute to the barriers faced by Black women administrators (Hughes & Howard-

Hamilton, 2003).

Isolation and Marginalization

There has been a long-standing practice of Black women being overlooked for positions

and opportunities at PWIs simply because of their race and gender (Alexander-Lee, 2014).

Mosely (1989) affirmed the presence of Black women administrators as having held positions of

leadership in historically and predominately Black institutions of higher education as founders,

presidents, deans, and department chairs, but stated that:

> In White academia, however, Black women administrators are, for the most part,
>
> invisible beings. Their status in higher education is a reflection of their status on the
>
> national scene-at the bottom. They are isolated, and their academic opportunities are
>
> limited by barriers that have nothing to do with their preparation, qualifications, or
>
> competency. (p. 306)

West (2015) described isolation as "the persistent sense of being physically present in a

specific group, but being forced to function in the group as an individual entity, with little to no

support or genuine camaraderie" (p. 115). Carrol (1982) noted that Black women in higher

education are isolated due to the "sheer paucity of Black women among the faculty and

administration in colleges and universities" (p. 120), which, as a consequence, creates a small,

isolated community. Carrol (1982) a former faculty member and administrator, described her

personal experience with isolation as extremely difficult:

> With the exception of Black studies and minority programs I never come in contact with
>
> another Black woman professor or administrator in my day-to-day activities. This seems
>
> to be typical for most of the Black women in similar positions. There is no one with

whom to share experiences and gain support, no one with whom to identify, no one on

whom a Black woman can model herself. It takes a great deal of psychological strength

just to get through a day. (p. 120)

As with racism and sexism, African American women experience and describe isolation

and marginalization differently (West, 2015). The participants in West's (2015) study elaborated

further that one of the consequences to isolation is the tendency by some African American

women to "self-isolate in professional settings" (p. 116), for fear of being labeled as appearing in

a clique, causing them to avoid connecting with other Black women in a totally appropriate

environment.

Isolation is a by-product of marginalization (Clayborne, 2006). Patitu and Hinton (2003)

defined marginalization as "any issue, situation or circumstance that has placed women outside

of the flow of power and influence at their institutions" (p. 82). In their study of the experiences

of African American administrators in higher education, Patitu and Hinton (2003) recounted an

instance in which a Black woman was placed at the periphery of the decision-making process at

her institution:

Being consistently excluded from weekly meetings with the vice president of student

affairs that other directors participated in, because her title was shifted to coordinator

(rather than director) of multicultural services when she accepted the position…she and

the people she served, denied a voice and power. (p. 83)

West (2015) interviewed ten African American women representing a wide variety of

positions, including vice president, assistant vice president, and coordinator, with the purpose of

gaining insight into African American student affairs professionals' self-conceptualizations of

underrepresentation, isolation, and marginalization while employed at HBCUs and PWIs. One of

the primary concepts that emerged was related to participants' struggle to gain full access to the culture of their respective work environments. Many of the women pointed out the limited ways in which they were able to fully participate in the "life of the departments, offices and/or institutions at which they were employed" (West, 2015, p. 114). One participant described her experience with the following analogy:

> When we were taught how to write in elementary and secondary school, they told you to stay within the margins. And there was always this red border running down the side of the paper. That's marginalization. You're told and you're being dictated to by teachers for years and years and years "Stay within the margins, stay within this boundary. If you go outside of the margin your grade will be lowered, you will be penalized for that." So, no one wants to be on the margin…but that's where we are. That's were people who are disenfranchised are. (West, 2015, p. 114)

These subtle, yet intentional behaviors that result in the isolation and marginalization of African American women present many challenges. African American women being put on the periphery of their respective work settings denies access to a network of mentors who can help to navigate institutional climate as mentoring has been considered a salient factor to academic and career success (Clayborne, 2006). African American women who experience isolation and marginalization on campus experience higher rates of burnout, which can result in a permanent exodus from the field and feelings of resentment and ill will (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

The inability to connect with one another in meaningful and sustainable ways (West, 2015) can cause negative and erroneous stereotypes about Black women to form as well (Moses, 1989). African American women are oftentimes viewed as a threat, (Smith & Crawford, 2007),

one women being described as a "horn" (p. 255) when holding a conversation with colleagues, and others being perceived as "aggressive" and "pushy" (Moses, 1989, p. 11), when trying to have their voices heard. The alienation associated with isolation and marginalization creates a heightened visibility for the individual, either negative or positive, a status known as *tokenism* (Alexander-Lee, 2014).

Tokenism

In higher education, tokenism mirrors that of society (Moses, 1989); a small population of people who differ in ethnic or racial groups from the dominant group are seen as "tokens" (p. 15), treated as representatives of their entire group, or seen as symbolic rather than as individuals. Kanter (1977) examined the phenomenon between women and their token status. She (1977) argued that the term token "reflects one's status as a symbol of one's kind" (p. 968). Kanter's focus more specifically addressed "what happens to women who occupy token status" (p. 967), a situation "commonly faced by women in management" (p. 967). In her study, Kanter arrived at the conclusion that (1) the women had "automatic notice" (p. 973), meaning they could not be anonymous in the public, in meetings, or in trainings; (2) the women were not acting or speaking for themselves, rather how they represented other women and lived up to "womanhood" (p. 973); (3) the women in this study worked harder than those in the majority to have their accomplishments noticed; and (4) tokens in this study were afraid of displaying an outstanding performance in fear of outshining the dominant group, in fear of showing up well, but being too aggressive, hence being criticized by management.

Tokenism often comes with an additional burden of work. Black women are frequently tasked with additional unassigned obligations such as committee assignments and asked to problem solve and deal with situations specifically around race in addition to their day-to-day job

responsibilities with no reward for the additional work (Henry & Glenn, 2009; Moses, 1989; Niemann, 1999; Shavers & Moore III, 2019). The concept of dualism in tokenism suggests that Black women on one hand feel highly visible because they are the only one or they stand out, while simultaneously feeling invisible by not being valued for who they are as an individual (Shavers & Moore III, 2019). Niemann (1999) described her experience as one of a double-edged sword:

> I was inordinately visible as a minority female in a predominately White, male
> department. I was also visible when it was in the department's best interest to have an,
> "ethnic scholar" such that my name, teaching, and research, were brought up during site
> visits of the national program accrediting association and during visits of international
> scholars and elected officials of color. (pp. 119-120)

This lack of critical mass also is attributed to lead Black women to be disproportionally called upon to work with Black students more than their White colleagues (Arjun, 2019; Henry & Glenn, 2009).

Tokenism has affected hiring practices as well. The U.S. Department of Labor conducted a study on university hiring practices and found that in many cases, once an underrepresented minority hiring goal was met, departments stopped actively seeking minority candidates, in some instances taking direct and intentional action to cease minority recruitment altogether (i.e., by pulling ads from minority focused publications; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). This practice, considered by some to be affirmative action hires, has been cited by Henry and Glenn (2009) as being viewed as a "twofer" (p. 5), someone who counts as both a woman and minority hire. Arjun (2019) conducted a study of seven mid-level African American administrators at PWIs to understand how intersectionality, self-definition, and multiple identities impacted their lived

experiences. The participants in this study indicated feelings of tokenism particularly related to their institutions' desire to regularly request their presence on hiring committees as the only outward show of diversity, or lack thereof, to candidates.

Individuals perceiving themselves as tokens can experience psychological discomfort, and can feel unvalued, invisible, and isolated (Niemann, 1999). Mosely (1980) noticed a major discrepancy between Black women administrators and their White counterparts stating:

> Black female administrators in White academe are an endangered species. They are still tokens in higher education. Black women, where they are represented, are most often in positions peripheral to the policy-and-decision making core of higher education. They feel overworked, underpaid, alienated, isolated, and powerless. (p. 296)

These feelings of being the only, feeling alienated, and unsupported are institutional and organizational issues that need to be intentionally addressed by individuals in positions of authority and influence (West, 2015).

Institutional and Organizational Barriers

Institutional barriers are present across functional areas in higher education. Jackson and Harris (2007) described the institutional contributors leading to the exclusion of African American women from fully participating in the upper levels of administration as organizational barriers. Some of the institutional barriers prohibiting African American women from ascending to senior-level leadership positions include hiring and promotion practices (Jackson & Harris, 2007); unclear or nonexistent pipeline and succession plans (McClinton & Dawkins, 2012); institutional stressors (Ford, 2014); and impediments such as the glass ceiling (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009).

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Hiring and promotion practices. Rusher (1996) focused her study on African American women administrators in higher education, attempting to help increase their leadership in number and decrease the negative experiences they encountered. Since then, the employment status of African Americans has remained primarily consistent, with White males being overrepresented in senior-level administrative positions and African Americans being overrepresented in lower-level administrative positions (Jackson, 2002). Patitu and Hinton (2003) pointed out that the recruitment practices of some institutions disadvantage Black women. Hughes and Howard-Hamilton (2002) presented an example of a common disadvantage that Black women face during the hiring process is, de facto segregation, or "the selection of persons for key administrative or faculty roles who mirror the majority group on campus" (p. 99).

Moses (1989) confirmed that African American women were slow to receive promotions when compared to both African American men and White women. More recently, Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) affirmed this fact, stating that African American women experience lower promotion rates and are subjected to different predictors for advancement and more negative career expectancies than other professionals whom they studied, including Asian Americans, Latino men and women, African American men and White men and women. Henry and Glenn (2009) put forth the notion that "when Black women do obtain professional positions with within higher education, they can expect, in general, to be paid less than White men and White women" (p. 4).

Reason (2003) examined salary inequities related to gender for African American Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs). Reason's study revealed a statistically significant relational difference between gender and salary for African American SSAOs. Reason concluded that in comparison to African American men, African American women's salaries are significantly less,

lending credence to the notion of sex discrimination. Further, Walker, Reason, and Robinson (2002) elaborated further and revealed that in those areas where there were high numbers of women professionals of Color (i.e., assistant deans), there was a moderate, negative predictive relationship between degree and salary, meaning a higher level of education (i.e., a Ph.D. or Ed.D.) did not necessarily translate to a higher salary for these student affairs professionals. This suggests that student affairs as a whole does not value higher levels of education corresponding to higher more equitable salaries for African American women (Walker, Reason, & Robinson, 2003). These figures remain standard in student affairs and higher education, despite African American women being frequently expected to perform "double duty" (Reason, 2003, p. 67) on college campuses, serving as role models, and mentors to the students they serve across both racial and gender lines.

In addition to feeling the pressure to perform more service, acquire more course or advising loads, and being tapped for a multitude of committee assignments by their department head, Black women must also deal with the isolation of often being the only minority presence represented (Henry and Glenn, 2009; Moses, 1989; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). Institutions should make it a priority to expand their recruitment, retention and promotion efforts (Rusher, 1996), and it is the responsibility of top administrators to do so (Moses, 1989). A myriad of obstacles are faced by Black women as they not only seek to be seen as viable candidates but to reach the top levels of institutions (Smith, Caputi, & Crittenden, 2012).

Glass ceiling. The term glass ceiling became popular in 1986 when it was used by two journalists who cited the phrase in a *The Wall Street Journal* article (Smith, Caputi, & Crittenden, 2012) to describe the experiences of women in corporate America (Jackson &

O'Callaghan, 2009). It is one of the most popular terms to describe the obstacles faced by women when attempting to advance their careers in a male-dominated field (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009). The glass ceiling is used in reference to the invisible barriers and/or impediments to career advancement for women and women of Color, particularly as they strive to move up in organizational hierarchies (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Smith, Caputi, & Crittenden, 2012). While not insurmountable to break through, glass ceilings exist for all women, but they exist at a higher degree for women of Color (Betters-Reed & Moore, 1995).

Glass cliff. Beyond the glass ceiling is the glass cliff. The glass cliff phenomenon refers to women being increasingly more likely to be appointed to leadership positions within organizational units faced with, or in the midst of, crisis or underperformance, positions that are associated with increased risk of failure and criticism (Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Main & Gregory-Smith, 2018). Women are able to break through the glass ceiling only to be placed at the edge of a cliff, in a risky situation, potentially falling off, then being blamed for the organization's decline (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). As a result, the career prospects of these appointees are high risk and are more likely to result in premature failure, thus leading to the underrepresentation of women in director roles and above (Main & Gregory-Smith, 2018). Risk is defined as "a role…in a company with consistently declining performance (and hence an increased risk of failure), as opposed to a role in a company with continuing success (a position more safe)" (Haslam & Ryan, 2008, p. 533).

The notion of the glass cliff is supported by the research of Haslam and Ryan (2008), whose experimental studies with management and business leaders found that when men and women are equally qualified and contending for the same position, there is an increased

likelihood that a woman would be chosen ahead of a man when an organization's performance is declining. While men are undoubtedly also placed in challenging situations, women, and especially women of Color, are most likely to lack the support of a mentor or network, are typically more isolated, and less able to garner the help needed to navigate these challenges (Haslam & Ryan, 2008).

Concrete wall, glass door and labyrinth. Another term used to describe the obstacles associated with women navigating their way to the top is the *concrete wall* which Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) liken to a thicker barrier that Black women and women of Color face, posed by racism and compounded by sexism. The glass door is used to describe the initial barrier that exists for women ahead of entering an organization (Smith, Caputi & Crittenden, 2012). The concept of the labyrinth, used to describe the "uneven path of upward progression for women in organizations" (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010, p. 172) encompasses all of the metaphors previously described (i.e., glass ceiling, glass cliff, concrete wall) and "emphasizes the diverse challenges posed by childcare needs, sexism, and discrimination on the basis of identity" (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010, p. 177).

The underpinnings of all of these metaphorical barriers for Black women include stereotypes, decreased visibility in the workplace, scrutiny by peers and students, questioning of authority and credibility, lack of a sense of belonging or fit in the workplace or in the field of higher education as a whole, and exclusion from formal and informal networks (Catalyst, 2004). Even still, for women who overcome these obstacles, the succession pipeline is often unclear.

Pipeline Succession

A 2016 American Association of University Women (AAUW) report affirmed that "qualified and ambitious women are not in short supply" (p.16). Between 2015-16, Black

women earned 66 % of all doctoral degrees awarded to Black students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a), yet they hold only 5.8% of all senior-level, decision-making positions in higher education including president, vice-president, chancellor, provost, and dean (Hinton, 2012). Unlike with the faculty tenure process, there is not a linear track or sequential steps to take for advancing as a student affairs or higher education professional (Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). An array of pipeline barriers exist for Black women, including nonexistent or limited training, lack of mentoring opportunities, and unwritten rules (Glover, 2012; Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009; Patitu & Hinton, 2003).

Contributors to the barriers that affect the promotion of senior-level African American women administrators include racism, sexism, homophobia, hostile climate, isolation, salary inequities, coping strategies, and institutional ethos (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Consequently, student affairs administrators tend to work at an unyielding pace, forgoing additional compensation for long hours worked, and experiencing disparity in pay in regard to their job scale and questionable job security due to the lack of a formal promotion process (Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). The experiences and ideas of African American women and the concept of representational bureaucracy are explained in depth in the next section, which details the theoretical framework used for this study.

<div align="center">Theoretical Framework</div>

Black Feminist Thought

Black Feminist Thought (BFT) is a critical social theory developed by sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (2000). Critical social theory echoes power relationships, and for Black women, critical social theory grapples with institutional practices and inquiries that have collectively served to oppress Black women as a group (Collins, 2000). Black feminist thought seeks to

clarify longstanding beliefs of stereotypes and misconceptions about Black women (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Akin to the second principle of the Nguzo Saba as observed by Kwanzaa, BFT is a form of self-determination, allowing Black women to define themselves, name themselves, create for themselves, and speak for themselves "instead of being defined, named, created for, and spoken for by others" (V. D. Johnson, 2001, p. 416).

Black feminist thought seeks to honor Black women's lived experiences as a marginalized group within traditional scholarship and in academic settings (Collins, 2000; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Collins described such marginalization as intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, religion, age, and sexual orientation (Collins, 2000). These intersections lead to a rather peculiar positionality that she describes as "outsiders within" (Collins, 1986, p. 11), referring to a status in which Black women have been invited into a space or setting occupied by the dominant group, but remain on the outside, having no voice and being deemed invisible (Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

Collins' inaugural work, the 1986 article, "Learning from the Outsider Within," provided the foundation of the "outsider within" (p. 14) status as related to self, family and society for Black women. The outsider within refers to Black women's social location within society—having a certain knowledge and relationship with the dominant group, but never gaining the power afforded to that group (Collins, 1986, 2000). Collins (1986) posited that there was a necessity for a female-centered theory that would allow Black women the opportunity of self-definition and self-valuation, an opportunity that was nonexistent with the Black liberation movement (Black social thought), which focused on Black men and the women's (feminists') movement whose focus was White women.

There are six distinguishing themes of BFT (Collins, 2000):

1. The overarching theme of BFT is to "resist oppression" (p. 22) in both practice and ideology, which Black women experience.

2. African American women are not a monolithic group. While they all may "face common challenges" (p. 25), Black women have different individual experiences and vary in the degree of the significance of those challenges and in the ways in which they respond them.

3. Due to oppression, African American women as a collective group have generated alternative practices to express themselves, such as "*rearticulation"* (p. 32), taking in a different view of themselves and the world, in relation to their lived experiences.

4. The contributions of African American women intellectuals both "inside and outside of the academy" (p. 35) are essential empowerment, part of which consists of asking the right questions as related to Black women's standpoint. Collins (1986) asks the integral question, "Why Are African American women and our ideas not known and believed in?" (as cited in Brewer, 1992, p. 133).

5. Change is significant and in order for BFT to remain socially relevant, change must not be static. "As social conditions change, so must the knowledge and practices designed to resist them" (p. 39).

6. BFT is in relationship with a more broad project for social justice initiatives and a commitment to human solidarity. "Black women's struggles are a part of a wider struggle for human dignity, empowerment, and social justice" (p. 41).

These main themes, along with representational bureaucracy, are both vital theories used to frame this study towards understanding the experiences of Black women in senior leadership positions at institutions of higher education.

Representational Bureaucracy

The concept of representative bureaucracy dates back to a work published by Kingsley (1944). Kingsley established a connection between elected officials (bureaucrats) and the constituents that they serve, concluding that traditionally disadvantaged groups have an interest in being represented in government by officials whose backgrounds mirror their own. Since then, evidence of such connections, which link the presence of minority bureaucrats to benefits for minority constituents (Grissom, Kern, & Rodriguez, 2015; Selden, 1997b) has been applied not only to politics (Bradbury & Kellough, 2007; Brudney, Hebert, & Wright, 2000; Kingsley, 1944; Kropf, Vercellotti, & Kimball, 2013; Naff & Crum, 2000; Riccuci & Saidel, 1997; Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1991; Selden, 1997a), but also to policing (Lewis, 1989; Riccucci, Van Ryzin & Lavena, 2014; Wilkins & Williams, 2008), education (Flowers, 2003; Flowers & Moore III, 2008; Grissom, Kern & Rodriguez, 2015; Grissom, Nicholson-Crotty & Nicholson-Crotty, 2009; Meier & Bohte, 2001; Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1991), and to women in the workplace (Bowling, Kelleher, Jones, & Wright, 2006; Dolan, 2000; Dolan, 2002; Ogmundson, 2005; Rehfuss, 1986; Sneed, 2007).

The theory of representative bureaucracy suggests that organizations be broadly representative of the public they serve (Meier, Wrinkle, & Polinard, 1999). The research initially focused on descriptive representation (the demographics) and the degree to which the race/ethnicity or gender of the workforce was similar to the public served (Meier, 1993). Mosher (1982) provided a detailed analysis of the theory distinguishing between the two types of representative bureaucracy, *passive* and *active representation*. Passive representation refers to situations "where the bureaucracy has the same demographic origins as the population it serves"

(Riccuci & Saidel, 1997, p. 423), and active refers to situations "where bureaucrats act on behalf of their counterparts in the general population" (Riccuci & Saidel, 1997, p. 423).

The theory suggests that passive representation, a workforce comprised of people from diverse backgrounds, will lead to active representation, policies and decisions that reflect the interests and desires of the population being served (Bradbury & Kellough, 2008). According to the theory this occurs "because the demographic and social backgrounds of individual bureaucrats influence their socialization experiences and the development of attitudes, values, and opinions that ultimately affect their decisions of policy issues" (Bradbury & Kellough, 2008, p. 698). While the theory has been largely used in politics and public administration, it applies "to many situations in which there is a considerable diversity among a group and a lack of diversity among the individuals who are making decisions on behalf of the group" (Flowers, 2003, p. 38). A study conducted by Meier, Wrinkle and Polinard (1999) found that students of all racial backgrounds perform better in the presence of representative bureaucracy. Flowers (2003) noted the importance specifically of the need for more African American student affairs administrators "to ensure that the concerns of African American students are being fully considered, understood, and acted upon by university leaders and administrators" (p. 39).

Chapter Summary

The literature highlights some of the early milestones Black women accomplished, including earning advanced degrees and being appointed to the ranks of faculty and administrative positions. Further, the literature presents data by preceding studies which point to the lack of Black women senior administrators employed on college campuses, mainly PWIs, despite the number of Black women pursuing and earning advanced degrees. Absent from the literature is an exploration of Black women's experiences as administrators at HBCUs as most

studies have focused solely on PWIs. Research exploring the lived experiences of senior-level Black women administrators at PWIs is also scarce. My research seeks to contribute to the literature by focusing on Black women senior-level student affairs officers at both HBCUs and PWIs.

Conclusion

This chapter provides an historical overview of women in higher education, including how higher education has evolved from Black women being denied access, to having limited access solely at HBCUs and the gradual integration of Black women at PWIs via a series of passed legislation dating back to 1862. Data were presented to show the dismal numbers of Black women representing a lack of critical mass (Henry & Glenn, 2009) in senior leadership positions at colleges and universities nationwide (American Council of Education, 2013; NCES, 2012; Pritchard & McChesney, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2016b). Findings of earlier studies revealed that Black women endure stereotyping, discrimination, sexism, racism, lack of mentors, all which were cited as barriers faced in the workplace (Alexander-Lee, 2014; Catalyst, 2004; Henry & Glenn, 2009; Moses, 1989; O'Callaghan & Jackson, 2016; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Shavers & Moore III, 2019; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). Finally, the two frameworks anchoring this study, Black feminist thought and representational bureaucracy were introduced and explained. The following chapter will present the research methodology used to address the purpose and the research questions for this study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine and understand how Black women in senior leadership in student affairs have navigated their roles in higher education, using Black feminist thought (BFT) as a theoretical framework to identify the barriers and challenges they have experienced, highlighting their success along the way, and using the theory of representative bureaucracy to gather their suggestions for institutional specific strategies that could increase the future leadership pipeline for Black women seeking these roles.

This study is guided by the following questions:

1. What are the work experiences of Black women in senior leadership positions in student affairs?

2. What barriers/issues to obtaining senior leadership postitions in student affairsare identified by Black women?

3. What do Black women senior student affairs leaders attribute to their success?

4. What recommendations and/or strategies do Black women senior leaders suggest to improve the leadership pipeline in student affairs as it relates to other Black women obtaining such roles?

This chapter details the research design used to explore the lived experiences of senior-level Black women administrators in student affairs at four-year degree granting institutions in the following order: overview of qualitative research, study setting, research sample and criteria, participant details, research design, data collection techniques, data analysis design, ethical considerations, trustworthiness, and my positionality as a researcher. This research concentrates on the lived experiences of Black women leaders in student affairs, which Miles et al. (2014) suggest is "well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, process, and

structures of their lives and for connecting these meanings to the social world" (p.11). Therefore, a qualitative research methodology is most appropriate for this study.

Methodological Approach

Qualitative research aims to understand, describe, and analyze the attitudes and behaviors of individuals, groups, and phenomena by engaging with people to observe and record their lived experiences within their natural setting (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Broadly stated, qualitative research examines "how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 15). Unlike quantitative research, which involves numerical data analysis through statistical or other mathematical means, qualitative research is concerned with the subjective interpretations of people's experiences and perspectives and the context in which this shapes their lives (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In my study, I am interested in the lived experiences of Black women in student affairs leadership, guided by the meanings that the participants ascribe to them, which fits the criteria of qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A multiple-case study will be employed as the research design.

Multiple-Case Study Research Design

Stake (1995) described case study methodology as a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in-depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Creswell (2013) offered a more detailed definition, stating that "case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case-based themes" (p. 97).

The specific type of case study applied to this dissertation is a multiple-case (or collective case) study Creswell (2018). A multiple-case study is centered around one issue or concern, with the researcher selecting multiple cases to illustrate that issue or concern (Creswell, 2018).

Yin (2014) suggested that when a researcher has the choice, multiple-case designs are more substantial than single-case designs, which are more vulnerable because "you will have to put all your eggs in one basket" (p. 64). In order for a case study to be incorporated, the phenomenon being studied must be "intrinsically bounded" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 39). I chose multiple-case study because each SSAO within this study is bounded by her experience as an underrepresented student affairs administrator on her respective college or university campuses and how she navigates within those spaces. My study centers on Black women, who, although not a monolithic group, are able to contribute to the phenomenon I am studying, the lived experiences of Black women senior leaders in student affairs. Each case, or each study participant, will experience different challenges, have varying concerns, be situated within different contexts, and represent a multitude of cultural heritage (West, 2017) but each is bounded by a singular system, student affairs.

For this study the issue being explored is the lived experiences of student affairs leaders, specifically the *cases* of individuals who identify as Black women placed at four-year PWIs and HBCUs. Case studies are most appropriate when (1) a "how"/"why" question is being asked (Yin, 2014, p. 14), (2) a contemporary set of events which the researcher has little or no control over is being studied (Yin, 2014), (3) more than one individual is being studied (Creswell, 2018), and (4) the researcher seeks to develop "an in-depth description and analysis of a case or multiple cases" (Creswell, p. 104). This study's research questions focus on how participants ascended into their roles, how they define success, and their recommendations for improving the

leadership pipeline, providing their thoughts about ways in which colleges and universities can improve their efforts to recruit, retain, and promote Black women in student affairs. It is for these reasons that a multiple case study was chosen as the qualitative research approach for the study.

Sample and Criteria

The participants for this study were selected using purposeful sampling, also commonly referred as purposeful selection (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Yin (2014) suggested that the use of the term sample may cause confusion in a multiple-case study design and recommended using the term purposeful selection as an alternative. Purposeful selection is a strategy that deliberately derives individuals from particular settings, participating in specific and intentional activities, in order to gather information (Maxwell, 2013). The administrators selected for this study were chosen specifically because they have the expertise in, and knowledge of, the phenomena I am studying. Each participant met the criteria set forth by the purpose of this study, an African American woman willing to detail her experience as senior leader in student affairs, currently employed at a four-year HBCU or PWI. In qualitative research sample size is dependent on the research questions, the data being collected, the data analysis, the resources available to support a study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and the research design being utilized (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For case study research, Creswell (2018) suggested four to five participants. A purposeful selection of five administrators was studied.

Study Participants

Criteria for selecting cases. Purposeful sampling is best used for qualitative studies with small numbers of participants where generalizability is not the ultimate goal (Yin, 2014) as compared to random sampling often used in quantitative research "due to the high likelihood of

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substantial chance variation in such samples" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 97). Maxwell (2013) offered

five goals when using a purposeful sample: (1) deliberately selecting settings, individuals, and a

sample size representative of the case(s) being studied, (2) capturing the "heterogeneity in the

population" (p. 98), which is to ensure that the findings adequately address the entire range of

possibilities within cases, (3) selecting cases most critical for testing the theory at the foundation

of the study, (4) establishing comparisons that may illustrate any differences within the study, (5)

and establishing productive relationships with study participants in order to yield the best data

for the study.

I approached my selection of cases using these goals as a guide. The first goal was met

by the diversity of the individuals representing the sample, specifically their educational

backgrounds, career progression, and acquired experience in student affairs. Goal two was met

through the variety of participants' institution size and type. Goals three and four were met by

the sample itself, Black women who have risen to the rank of senior student affairs officer, a

number that is highly truncated in higher education (Flowers & Moore III, 2008; West, 2020).

The fifth goal was established beginning with the initial email communication with participants,

seeking those individuals who were comfortable with being interviewed, eager, and inclined to

share their stories.

Participant recruitment. My effort to obtain potential participants was twofold. First, I

scoured the databases of student affairs and higher education websites in search of VPSA

appointees or seasoned VPSAs in the news. These included *Diverse Issues in Higher Ed*,

African American and women's sections, *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*'s appointment

and HBCU sections, *INSIGHT into Diversity*'s latest news section, and *U.S. News* 2020 HBCU

list; additionally, I checked the student affairs pages of the various PWI and HBCU websites.

Second, I posted my dissertation study graphic, which detailed my study and request for participants, to various social media sites and groups on Facebook (groups included Black student affairs professionals, Black women in higher education, women of color directors' network, Black women PhDs, Instagram, and LinkedIn; Appendix D). From this search, I compiled a spreadsheet comprised of 21 potential participants. I sent an invitation email with a consent form attached to all 21, requesting their participation in my study (Appendix A & B). Within the body of the invitation email, a link to a Google Doc form was included, which served as an electronic participant questionnaire (Appendix C). This questionnaire was used as a preliminary tool to ensure that participants met the criteria for the study, to collect participant demographics, and to gather institutional information. Of the 21 potential participants, six responded; one was eliminated from consideration because she did not meet the requirement of being a senior student affairs officer. The remaining five were interviewed for this study. Each participant and the institution she represented was assigned a pseudonym to protect her identity throughout the data collection process. The following two sections share detail and background on the participants and the institutions they represent.

Participant Demographics

The data for this study were gathered from Black women senior-level student affairs leaders employed at four-year, public and private, PWIs and HBCUs in the Midwest, Southeast, and Northeast regions of the United States. Participants range in age from 40-59 years old. Two participants serve at HBCUs and three are at PWIs. Each participant is an administrator at a four-year institution. Four administrators hold doctorate degrees as their highest degree obtained, and one holds a master's degree. Table 3.1 below provides more demographic detail about each study participant.

Table 3.1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym*	Institutional Pseudonym **	Age Range***	Salary Range	Institution Type	Institution Size	Years in S.A.	Highest Degree Obtained
Whitney	Herron Velma University	N/R	$120,000 -230,000	HBCU	5,001- 10,000	>21	Ed.D.
Toni	Harden University	50-59	$114,001 -170,000	HBCU	2,000- 5,000	>21	Ph.D.
Anita	Bush University	40-49	$120,000 -230,000	PWI	>20,000	16-20	M.A.
Jill	Lawson College	50-59	$120,000 -230,000	PWI	<2,000	11-15	Ph.D.
Janet	King University	50-59	$114,000 -170,000	PWI	<2000	>21	Ph.D.

*Note. * Each participant was given a pseudonym to protect their identity*
*** Each institution was given a pseudonym to protect its identity*
**** Participant did not respond*

Research Sites

Purposeful sampling requires only a limited number of sites (Maxwell, 2013). Maxwell

(2013) reminded researchers that "you are not only sampling people, but also settings, events,

and processes" (p. 96). Maxwell (2013) recommended that the researcher make certain that

these parameters are in line with the research questions, ensuring that the site selected

appropriately contributes to answering them. Five Black women VPSAs were interviewed, each

representing a different college or university. There were two HBCUs represented and three

PWIs. The student populations ranged from small (less than 2000 students) to large (over 20,000

students). Below is a brief description of each college or university represented in the study.

Each school has been assigned a pseudonym in order to protect the identity of the participant and to maintain confidentiality for both the participant and the school.

Herron Velma University. Founded in the late 1800s, Herron College (HVC) is a land-grant, public HBCU established under the Morrill Act of 1890. The college offers 42 bachelor's degrees, 21 master's degrees, and five doctoral degrees. Approximately 5,000 students are enrolled at HVC, and 63% of the student body are residential (live on campus). Black or African American students represent the largest racial or ethnic group, comprising 70% of the undergraduate student body, followed by White students (9%) and Hispanic/Latinx students (6%; College Factual, n.d.).

Harden University. Founded in the late 1800s, Harden University (HU) is a private, land grant HBCU offering 40 bachelor's degrees, 17 master's degrees, four doctoral degrees, and one professional degree program. Approximately 3,000 students are enrolled at HU, and 65% of students are residential. Black or African American students represent the largest racial or ethnic group, comprising 73% of the student body (College Factual, n.d.).

Bush University. Founded in the early 1900s, Bush University (BU) is a public research university offering 120 bachelor's degrees and more than 140 master's doctoral and specialist degrees. Approximately 22,500 students are enrolled at BU, and 75% reside on campus. Underrepresented minority students represent 18.1% of the total study body (College Factual, n.d.).

Lawson College. Founded in the mid-1800s, Lawson College (LC) is a private liberal arts institution offering 34 bachelor's degrees. Approximately 1600 students are enrolled at LC, and 87% reside on campus. White students comprise 59% of the student body, followed by Black or African American students (15%), and Hispanic students (9%; (College Factual, n.d.).

King College. Founded in the early 1800s, King College (KC) is a private, liberal arts institution offering 35 bachelor's degrees. Approximately 1100 students are enrolled at KC, and 85% reside on campus. Underrepresented minorities represent 12% of the student body (College Factual, n.d.).

Data Collection

Data collection, the process of gathering and measuring information to better understand your participants, should be "intentional, rigorous, and systematic" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 145). Case study research "remains one of the most challenging of all social science endeavors" (Yin, 2014, p. 3). However difficult, a case study is the best methodology for this study because case studies rely on multiple sources of evidence. Yin (2014) referred to six forms of data collection: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation, and physical artifacts, all of which contribute to "high-quality" (p. 105) case studies.

Before collecting data, the procedures and guidelines of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) governing research at Bellarmine University were followed, and a request for review to proceed with the study involving human subjects was submitted. Upon IRB approval, participant recruitment and data collection began. Data for this multiple case study was collected in three phases, which began in May 2020 and continued through July 2020. During the first phase of the study, I gained background information on each participant by collecting relevant documents and reviewing them. Data for the second phase included a participant demographic questionnaire in line with Creswell's (2014) purposeful sampling strategy, followed by conducting one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with each participant as outlined in Creswell & Creswell's (2018) interview protocol. The third and final stage incorporated artifact elicitation (Miles et al., 2014)

to generate conversation and develop an understanding of each participant's perspective of a physical representation of success.

  Document review. Prior to her interview, I asked each participant to email a copy of her resume or CV, and researched the institution's website, national journals, and news outlets for archival records related to the participants (i.e., press releases, articles). I reviewed every document to learn more about each participant's professional (and in some instances personal) background; these documents served as contextual content relevant to each case and research site. My first review of the documents preceded the participant interviews. Following each interview, I went back and reviewed the documents, cross-referencing my interview notes with the documents where relevant (Yin, 2014).

  Participant demographic questionnaire. All participants were sent a link to a demographic questionnaire in the invitational email. Since one of the primary criteria for participation was to self-identify as Black or African-American, the questionnaire asked participants to both indicate and list their highest degree earned, their previous work experience at both an HBCU and a PWI (if applicable), their length of time in their current role and in student affairs as a whole, the size of their institution, the titles of their direct reports, the title of their immediate supervisor, the size of their institution, and details regarding their salary range.

Interview Process

  As participants completed the demographic questionnaire and granted consent to participate, I began scheduling interviews. The interviewing process took place from June 2020 through July 2020. In total, five participants who completed the questionnaire and fit the criteria for the study were interviewed. I reviewed the consent form, which was sent to each participant with the initial invitation email, with each participant at the beginning of each interview,

ensuring that she was clear on the purpose of the study, her rights as a participant, and the nature of the questions that I would be asking. I also wanted to be transparent about participants' voluntary participation in the study, reminding them that they could choose to not answer any question for any reason, and that they could abandon the study at will.

Yin (2014) suggested that the interview is arguably the "most important sources of case study evidence" (p. 110). Therefore, I wanted to approach the interview protocol with precision. Before the interviews were conducted, the questions were reviewed by five higher education professionals; three were faculty members, one was a student affairs professional, and one, a researcher. After this review, I piloted my semistructured interview questions with a Black woman student affairs professional with over 20 years of experience to ensure that the question sequence made sense and the questions themselves posed no uncertainty or misperceptions. Based on the suggestions from this pilot, I adjusted two questions and added one question to the instrument, resulting in 22 questions total.

Case study interview questions tend to be less rigid and rather fluid, not following a prescribed structure (Yin, 2014). Kvale and Brinkmann (2008) described interviewing in qualitative research as "an active process where interviewer and interviewee through their relationship produce knowledge" (p. 17). Keeping in line with Maxwell's (2013) fifth goal of researching, establishing productive relationships with participants, and in order to gain trust and build rapport (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), I began each interview by sharing a bit of my background in student affairs as well as my interest in this topic with participants. I also used the beginning of each interview to ask any preliminary questions about the study that may not have been addressed previously through the invitation email or consent form. My first interview question

was centered around the participant's identity, background, and culture, and progressed from there.

Due to the current world pandemic (COVID-19), interviews could not be conducted in person. I conducted four interviews via *Zoom* videoconferencing and one via phone, at the participant's request. To maintain maximum confidentiality, interviews were not video-recorded; instead, all interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy with each participant's permission (Yin, 2014). The duration of the interviews was between 60-120 minutes long. Multiple sources of evidence are key to case study research (Yin, 2014). During the interviews, I took handwritten field notes, recording my thoughts and interpretations, noting facial expressions, body language, and other observations made during the interviews. Each field note was labeled and organized by the participants' pseudonym, time and date of interview; thus notes were easily retrievable for later access (Yin, 2014).

Immediately following the interviews, I wrote entries in my reflexive journal, noting my own thoughts and reflections in response to the conversations. As a result of this journaling, one follow-up question was developed in order to formulate a more comprehensive narrative of the participants' experience. Once each interview was completed, an audio recording of the case was sent to a third-party transcription service, *Rev,* to be transcribed. The transcriptions and audio recordings were safeguarded via password protection on my personal laptop, which remained locked when not in use.

To help foster and establish validity I employed two strategies (1) triangulation and (2) member checking (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Within 24 hours of receiving the transcript, I listened to each participant's audio recording individually while following along with the transcript, to cross-check the consistency of the data transcribed with the data recorded. I listened intently to

verify that the transcribed documents mirrored the audio, making any corrections to spelling or inaudible audio material along the way. Once the interviews were transcribed and in final form, I began member checks, which Maxwell (2013) argued is "the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of what participants say and do" (p.126), as well as being an important way of identifying my own biases and misunderstandings as a researcher to what I observed. Each participant was sent an emailed copy of their transcript for review. At this time, they were asked to confirm that the transcript accurately reflected their responses and were given the opportunity to request any portion be omitted or to add any additional information that they would like to share. The additional question that resulted from my reflexive memos was asked in this same email; all but one participant responded to that question.

Artifacts

The final source of data collected for this study was artifacts. Miles et al. (2014) suggested incorporating artifact elicitation into a study in an effort to elicit responses and make meaning of the topic being studied. In this study, I used artifact elicitation as a part of the interview process to evoke information, feelings, and memories as to what each partcipant considered to be a physical representation of her success. While the specific introductory question related to the artifact was focused on the study topic, the majority of follow-up questions were open-ended and based on the artifact. Participants were asked to be prepared to show their artifact during the interview. Artifacts presented included awards, pictures, degrees, and documents. In total, three of the six forms of data collection referenced by Yin (2014) were used for this study. A complete timeline of each form of data collected and phase is delineated in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2

Data Collection Timeline

Type of Data Collected	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Month/Year
Excel Spreadsheet of Potential Participants	Participant Recruitment			January-April 2020
Press Releases, Institutional Website Profiles, Social Media Profiles	Document Collection			May-June 2020
Ongoing Document Review	Document Review	Document Review	Document Review	May-August 2020
Electronic Questionnaire		Participant Demographic Questionnaire		April-May 2020
Videoconference, Phone Interviews		Semi-Structured Participant Interviews		June 2020
Physical Artifacts			Artifact Elicitation	May-June 2020

Data Analysis and Synthesis

Data analysis, or taking apart the data (Stake, 1995) should be performed simultaneously with data collection (Maxwell, 2013). Maxwell cited one of the most common calamities in qualitative research as allowing your collected data (e.g., transcripts, field notes, etc.) to pile up unanalyzed while researching. I began data analysis immediately and continued analyzing each various form of data consecutively until the conclusion of the research by writing reflexive memos, taking notes at the conclusion of each interview, and rereading interview transcripts, searching for responses that aligned with my research questions.

I used a combination of Maxwell's (2013) and Creswell and Creswell's (2018) data analysis

process. Creswell and Creswell outlined five steps to conducting data analysis:

(1) Organize and prepare the data for analysis. This involves transcribing interviews, typing

up field notes, cataloguing visual material, and sorting or arranging data into distinct

types depending on the information source.

(2) Read through all the data. Take note of what general ideas participants are saying, use

this step to reflect on the overall meaning of the data.

(3) Start coding all of the data. Organize the data in segments using words and terms to

represent categories.

(4) Generate descriptions and themes. Use the coding process to generate a detailed

description of the setting or people, as well as categories or themes for analysis.

(5) Represent the description and themes. Advance how the description of the themes will be

represented in the qualitative narrative. (p. 194)

During the initial data analysis, I incorporated Maxwell's (2013) strategies for qualitative

data analysis. First, prior to transcribing the interviews I listened to the audio while taking notes

and writing memos on what I saw and heard. Then I sent the interviews to be transcribed,

afterwards reading the interview transcripts, taking further observational notes on the

transcriptions and on any documents or artifacts that were collected prior to, during, and after

interviews. Miles et al. (2020) referred to this process as data reduction, the focus and

organization of data so that conclusions may be drawn and verified. Finally, each transcription

was separated into its own individual electronic file folder and stored by pseudnym on my

password-protected computer.

Coding

Saldaña (2016) suggested a four-stage coding process, which begins with precoding. For this first step, I read through the interview transcripts deductively (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), line by line, seeking to understand the data and looking at the broad picture of the data to a more inductive approach (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), identifying "codable moments" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 21), and highlighting text that I considered "rich or significant" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 21). The first cycle of coding is used to organize the data into individually coded chunks or segments (Saldaña, 2016). In the first cycle, I provided an initial summary of the data using in vivo codes (Saldaña 2016). In vivo coding or "verbatim coding" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 106), uses the participant's own language from the data collected as codes, to honor their voices and to "ground the analysis in their perspective" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 71). Verbatim coding was completed by reading each through each individual transcript thoroughly and making notes in the margins that I believed correlated to what participants wanted to share as related to their experiences as Black women student affairs professionals. Then during second cycle of coding, I reorganized and reconfigured the larger mass of codes generated in the first cycle using focused coding (Saldaña, 2016). At this phase, I searched for the most frequent or significant codes to develop major categories from the data by connecting and condensing the codes into categories (Saldaña, 2016).

Finally, I assigned themes to the data. Themes are outcomes of codes (Saldaña, 2016). Theming the data involves assigning an "extended phrase or sentence" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 298) to explain what a particular unit of data is about and/or to explain what it means. Themes can consist of "descriptions of behavior within a culture; explanations for why something happens; iconic statements; and morals from participant stories" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 298). I repeated the cycles three times to further manage the data, considering that coding likely will not be perfect

the first time attempted (Saldaña, 2016), and then sent the codes to a PhD faculty member for review. The qualitative data collection and analyzation process must be rigorous. Rigor can be assessed by the researcher's approach to validity and trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness

Ravitch and Carl (2016) suggested many different methods to mitigate threats to validity and to achieve rigor. I incorporated the criteria they set forth—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—as I conducted my research. Credibility is "the researcher's ability to take into account all of the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 188). Credibility is important as it establishes congruency between the study's findings and reality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To increase the credibility of this study, I incoporated triangulation, member checks, and remained present and engaged during the data collection and analysis proccess (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To ensure that my study remained "applicable or transferable" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 189) to broader contexts and to help readers understand my research in depth, I used thick, rich, context-relevant descriptions (see Chapter Four) for each of the five cases. These included case profiles for each participant, the artifact(s) they selected, and their responses to their experiences as Black women in senior student affairs leadership positions, the barriers and issues they faced to obtain these roles, the factors surrounding their success, and their recommendations for improving the leadership pipeline as it relates to other Black women obtaining student affairs leadership roles.

Dependability "refers to the stability of the data" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 189). In qualitative research, data stability implies that the researcher has a compelling reason for the particular methodology and data collection technique chosen, and that the data supports, and is

consistent, with answering the research question(s) and purpose (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I referred back to my research questions to ensure that data collection was consistent with the purpose and aligned with the questions guiding this study. Confirmability "takes into account the idea that qualitative researchers do not claim to be objective" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 189). As the primary research instrument, in order to establish confirmability, I had to acknowledge my own biases, limitations, and views throughout the various phases of the research process. Miles et al. (2014) recommended calling on critical friends to serve as peer reviewers throughout the research process. I solicited feedback from two critical friends as I progressed through the research, particularly during coding, to ensure validity throughout that process.

I also incorporated reflexivity to control for bias, which Ravitch & Carl (2016) explained as "the systematic assessment of your identity, positionality, and subjectives" (p. 15). As a qualitative researcher, the practice of maintaining a record of how my interpretation of comments, observations, and other findings was shaped by my personal background, culture, and identity proved essential to clarifying bias (Cresswell, 2014). Since the interviews for this research were collected over a two-month span, that allowed for a higher level of reflexivity as I was able to assess at multiple points along the way through reflective and reflexive journaling. All researchers have a responsibility to be *"rigorously ethical"* (Saldana, 2016, p. 39) with their participants and with the way they collect and analyze data.

Ethical Consideration

Ethics:

A set of personal principles for intrapersonal action and interpersonal conduct, rooted in obligatory codes and the individual's value, attitude, and belief systems…can be shaped

by cultural upbringing and socialization, adherence and acquiescence to laws and

regulations, and personal motives and goals for living. (Saldaña, 2015, p. 80)

Attention to ethical issues is essential in qualitative research (Maxwell, 2013). One of the most

basic components of qualitative research is to design an ethically sound study (Cone & Foster,

2006). As researcher, I took several steps to prevent any ethical violations that would jeopardize

the legitimacy of this study or that would harm the participants. This included informed consent,

protection of privacy, and data management.

Consent is vital to qualitative studies, particularly *informed* consent (Ravitch & Carl,

2016). Informed consent should be "thought of as a particular kind of attention to meaningful

dialogue with participants about the research and their involvement in it" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016,

p. 360). Consent forms were electronically distributed for each participant to read prior to the

study and again verbally together before each interview to discuss in detail all aspects of the

research process and any risks associated with it. The potential risks to participants, physical,

emotional, or other, were low for this study, but are not to be underestimated.

Protection of privacy was maintained by guaranteeing confidentiality through the use of

pseudonyms when referring to participants and masking any other information which might be

identifiable to an outside audience (i.e., institutional distinctions; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Anonymity was ensured through the use of pseudonyms for both the participants and the

institutions they represent, and any other potentially identifying information. All interview

recordings, transcripts, journals, and notes were safeguarded by a password-protected computer

and saved on password accessible only cloud storage. All interviews and recordings were

destroyed at the conclusion of my successful dissertation defense. My positionality as a

researcher should not be masked. My identity—my race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and so

forth—undoubtedly affect the ways in which I navigate throughout the world and the lens by which I see things, and therefore had to be addressed throughout this entire process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The Researcher's Positionality

In qualitative research, the researcher is considered the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, meaning that the "subjectivity, identity, positionality, and meaning making of the researcher shape the research" (Ravtich & Carl, 2016, p. 368). Therefore, my identity and positionality as the researcher is an integral and vital part of the study. I enter this research as a Black woman mid-level administrator in student affairs aspiring to be a senior leader. All of my professional student affairs experience has been as an employee at PWIs. From the onset, I will share at least two commonalities with the study sample. And while I will not have a personal relationship with any of the participants, as I moved into the data collection and analysis phase of the research process, I found that we did indeed share some commonalities in terms of both professional and personal experiences. My experiences and positionality led to a certain connectedness with the participants, which I had to acknowledge, account for, and approach the potential bias associated with such in order to conduct an ethical and valid qualitative research study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

As a researcher I was intentional about being thoughtful and deliberate (Ravitch and Carl, 2016) with my choice of words and actions in interactions with the participants and in my analysis of their stories. My interest in this study not only aligns with my personal and professional goals, but with my intent to share the stories of the participants who, simply because of their race and gender, are more prone to double-discrimination or "double-jeopardy" (Beale, 1969; Crenshaw, 1989, p. 149). One of the main tenants of BFT is that sharing and

understanding the lived experiences of African American women not only serves as a tool of empowerment for the participants and readers, but it also is a call to action (Collins, 2000), for the decision makers and the majority at institutions to revisit their practices, dismantle unequitable systems, and find ways to improve the status of Black women administrators.

Chapter Summary

This study is concerned with exploring the lived experiences of Black women senior-level, student affairs administrators employed at PWIs and HBCUs. The research uses a multiple-case study methodological approach, and it is framed by two sound and coherent theories, Black feminist thought and representational bureaucracy. This chapter outlined the study setting, research sample and criteria, participant details, research design, data collection techniques, data analysis design, my positionality as a researcher and the steps taken to ensure an ethically sound and trustworthy study. The chapter that follows, Chapter Four, will focus on the individual cases, case themes, and subthemes.

Chapter Four: Case Overviews and Findings

The focus of this chapter is two-fold: (1) to introduce in detail the profiles, including the background and current leadership experiences, of the five Black women senior-level student affairs officers (SSAO) who were the participants in this study and (2) to illustrate the findings of the data gathered from each SSAO using a multiple-case study research design. This study sought to understand the lived experiences of Black women SSAOs and is framed in Black feminist thought (BFT) and the theory of representative bureaucracy to explore the barriers and challenges experienced by the SSAOs, as well as depictions of success and suggestions for improving the pipeline of future Black women SSAOs. Qualitative research should produce thick, rich, and detailed data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Maxwell, 2013), that "allows the reader to experience vicariously the essential features of the experiences that are described and does not gloss what is being described" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p.201). Participants' thoughts and feelings are conveyed through rich data, including verbatim transcripts of the interviews, and by using thick description (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) to present themes using participant quotes to conceptualize the data for readers. Maxwell (2013) asserts that rich data is collected through intensive interviews that provide "a full and revealing picture of what is going on" (p. 126). Table 4.1 details the duration of each participant interview including date, time, and interview format.

Table 4.1

Participant Interview Table

Name	Interview Date	Interview Duration	Interview Format
Jill	June 3, 2020	01:38:47	Zoom
Whitney	June 11, 2020	01:04:50	Zoom
Janet	June 15, 2020	01:22:25	Zoom
Toni	June 15, 2020	01:45:23	Phone
Anita	June 26, 2020	01:58:37	Zoom

Participant Profiles

The criteria for participation in this study included identifying as a Black woman and currently working as a senior-level student affairs officer at a public or private Historically Black College or University (HBCU) or Predominantly White Institution (PWI). It is important to note, however, that while all participants shared these qualifiers, Black women are not a monolith. While each of the women who was interviewed for this study did share some similarities with other participants, their individual upbringings, backgrounds, length of years in the field, career progression, leadership styles, and their experiences as minority leaders at their respective institutions varied. A snapshot of each case profile is presented in table 4.2. The participant profiles follow and are presented in the order in which they were interviewed. Their narratives are shared using a pseudonym for each person as indicated in chapter three.

Table 4.2

Snapshot of Cases

Case	Ascension to SSAO (Current to Past)	Artifact	Success as Defined by Artifact
Jill	• VP of Student Affairs • Associate Dean of Student Life • Associate Director of Campus Life • Academic Adviser • Manager • Deputy Director • Communications Specialist • Annual Fund Officer • Public Information Officer • Executive Assistant • Admissions Counselor	Diploma, Ph.D.	Education was something that her mother always wanted her kids to achieve. The Ph.D. degree represents the highest level of education attained in the family.
Whitney	• VP for Student Affairs • Associate VP of Student Affairs • Director, Student Activities • Associate Director, Cultural Center	Small plaque with scripture reading "To whom much is given much is	Serves as a reminder, a foundation, that as she's progressing, she still must do more.

Case	Ascension to SSAO (Current to Past)	Artifact	Success as Defined by Artifact
		required" Luke 12:48	
Janet	• VP for Student Life and Dean of Students • Associate Vice Chancellor • Dean of Student Success • Associate Dean, Career Center • Director, Career Services • Assistant Director, Career Services • Career Counselor • Job Development Officer • Career Planning Services Representative • Admissions Representative	Various photos of international travel	Traveling is a way to give back to her mother and family, and those that supported her along the way.
Toni	• VP for Student Affairs • Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management • Associate Vice President of Student Affairs • Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students • Dean of Students • Associate Dean of Students & Director of Student Rights and Responsibilities • Director of Student Affairs	A wooden carved board that has the words Student Centered engraved on the front, gifted by student leaders at a previous institution; various awards received over the years, in particular her RA of the Year award she received as an undergraduate student.	A reminder of a job well done, and a nod to creating a student-centered environment at each institution.
Anita	• VP of Student Affairs • Associate VP for Student Affairs and Enrollment • Director, Cultural Center • Assistant Director Housing and Residence Life • Coordinator of Residence Life • Residence Hall Director	Master's and Bachelor's degree	The experiences and commitment it took to receive that education cannot be replaced or taken away.

Case One: Vice President Jill

Vice President Jill's higher education trajectory has spanned over sixteen years, beginning in 2005 during her tenure as an academic adviser at a predominantly White (PWI) public, four-year university, and extending to her most recent appointment as vice president (VP) for student life of Lawson College in 2019. Lawson is a residential, four-year private, liberal arts, PWI in the Midwest. Like many student affairs professionals, VP Jill's academic trajectory did not begin with student affairs or higher education as the goal. Instead, VP Jill earned a bachelor's degree in arts and sciences and a doctorate in higher education leadership. Vice President Jill has held various roles outside of higher education, working in the nonprofit and government sectors, ultimately returning to the university setting in 2005 as an academic adviser.

Throughout her career, VP Jill has had oversight of a variety of offices, including campus life, fraternity and sorority life, student involvement and engagement, and student conduct; and in her current role she supervises the director of public safety, counseling services, residential life, and student engagement. Vice President Jill describes her experience as a student affairs leader as one of building community and unifying departments that were previously stratified. As a Black woman working at a PWI, she acknowledged that while there is diversity on campus, the leadership is not, and has not historically been, representative of that diversity:

> We've only had nine presidents, so I've known a third of them. I love my president, but he's a white male and all of the presidents have been white males. So, you've never had any persons of Color or female at the helm.

Vice President Jill acknowledged that despite this, "we have to work together regardless."

Vice President Jill attributes her success as a student affairs professional to the foundation that was laid by her mother, noting that her mother was the catalyst who urged her to

enter the field of education. She submitted a photo of her doctorate degree as a physical representation of success, tearfully adding:

> It shows several things. It shows where my mom had said that would happen for me, and I fought her. I never thought I would get a Ph.D. She didn't get to make it to my graduation. My mom always wanted her kids to have the education and I was the highest achieving, and then that helped me get this job that she said was going to be my destination. So that is success, because I truly believe had she had the opportunity that this might be where she would have gone, but instead she worked really hard to make sure that her kids, and in this case me, got that opportunity.

Case Two: Vice President Whitney

Vice President (VP) Whitney's higher education trajectory has spanned over twenty-one years, beginning in 1999 during her tenure as the associate director for the African American center at a public, four-year PWI. Her current appointment is vice president for student affairs at Herron Velma University as of 2014. Herron Velma is a research two, four-year, residential, public HBCU, located in the mid-Atlantic region. Vice President Whitney earned a bachelor's degree in psychology, a master's in criminal justice, and her doctorate in urban educational leadership.

Throughout her career, VP Whitney has provided oversight to the following functional areas: campus events and programming, club sports, diversity education, fraternity and sorority life, leadership development, student government, registered student organizations, residence life, campus safety, health services, career/volunteer services, psychotherapeutic services, disability services, first-year student advising, new student orientation, religious life, student involvement, and judicial affairs. Vice President Whitney expressed that she feels that she has a

voice and is heard as a Black woman working at an HBCU as opposed to a PWI. However, she

stated that being a Black woman in higher education is not easy regardless of the institution type:

> In most settings I'm the young professional at the table and sometimes they really don't
>
> know my experience. That is a thing at an HBCU. You have to be old, seasoned, to do
>
> certain things, but I've been very fortunate in my role to demonstrate who I am, that I
>
> have an area of expertise….Not saying that I don't get pushback, but I'm prepared for the
>
> pushback.

Vice President Whitney attributes her success as a student affairs professional to her spirituality,

specifically to this mantra that her great-grandmother repeated as early as high school

graduation:

> I'll never forget, my great-grandmother, she was like, just remember to whom much is
>
> given, much is required. As I was in college, I had this little plaque that was Luke 12:48,
>
> to whom much is given, much is required. So, I sit that on my desk, and I've had it for
>
> like 20 years because it really gives me a foundation that as I'm progressing, I have to do
>
> more. The things that were given to me, opportunities, I have to make sure I'm doing the
>
> same thing.

Case Three: Vice President Janet

Vice President Janet's career in higher education has spanned more than twenty-seven

years, beginning in 1992 during her tenure as an admissions representative for a system of

private, for-profit colleges scattered throughout the United States. Following that role, VP Janet

held various student affairs positions at a private, four-year HBCU in the south, initially as a

career counselor, and ending her tenure as the dean of students, serving there a total of twelve

years. Currently, VP Janet serves as the vice president for student life and dean of students at

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King College a small, private, four-year PWI in the Midwest. Vice President Janet earned her bachelor's degree in arts and sciences, a master's in counseling, and a doctorate in organization and management.

Throughout her career, VP Janet has provided oversight to the following functional areas: career services, student conduct, residence life, student health, multicultural affairs, campus safety, Greek life, and counseling services. Having experienced working at both an HBCU and a PWI, VP Janet is dedicated to serving her students, president, and board of trustees, but admits that being a Black woman at a PWI has been starkly different from her experience at an HBCU:

> It's hard. I'll admit that. It's a struggle. What I found just when I was interacting and going to conferences and talking to other students of Color, particularly African American students that were at PWIs, there was no one really there….that level of support that happens at an HBCU is very different.

She further describes her relationship with some of the African American staff that she has supervised:

> So, I've had, since I've been here, three African American employees. Those were the people that I've had the hardest time with. They questioned my authority, they questioned why I was here. None of my other employees or anybody else on campus, and of course it's a predominantly White campus, not predominantly White, it's an all-White campus. No issues with any of them. It has always been my people…it hurt me. So that's been a struggle for me being an African American administrator or senior cabinet member at a predominantly White institution and having my own people against me. I don't want them to love me because I'm Black, but don't hate me because I'm Black either.

As VP Janet noted, "everybody's level of success is different." When describing her success, she also linked her accomplishments to the matriarch of her family, her mother. She sent me pictures, snapshots from various international travel excursions, recalling:

> I feel like I owe a lot to my mother. For the most part, when I do my international travel, I will take my mother….That means a lot to me to be able to share this with my mother, because I feel like I am who I am because of her. That's my get away. It is also my opportunity to see other things and to bring that back to my students.

Case Four: Vice President Toni

Vice President Toni's higher education trajectory has spanned more than twenty years, beginning in 2001 during her tenure as director of student affairs at a regional campus of a large, public, four-year PWI, and extending to her current appointment as vice president for student affairs at Harden University, a small, private, four-year HBCU in the south. Vice President Toni holds a bachelor's degree in the social sciences, a master's in educational administration, and a doctorate in higher education.

Throughout her career VP Toni has provided oversight to the following departments: student life and development, cocurricular programming, health and wellness services, housing and residence life, student conduct and judicial affairs, career development, diversity recruitment and enrollment, and Greek life. Having worked at both HBCUs and PWIs, Vice President Toni takes a student-focused, results-orientated approach to ensure that the collegiate experience is unique for all students, stating "my current role as the vice president for student affairs here at Harden is really focused on the actual student affairs kind of heart, mind, and spirit side of things." These sides are often outwardly expressed in different ways depending on institutions

type. When describing how she has witnessed and experienced engaging with students at a

HBCU versus a PWI, VP Toni recalls:

> When you see events that happen that relate to race and ethnicity, we have very different
>
> conversations at PWIs. They're trying to talk about how do we create this diversity, this
>
> engaging dialogue, how do we keep our students of Color safe in these predominantly
>
> White spaces? Whereas if you're at an HBCU, you're in a predominantly Black
>
> community. There's this sense of safety and security…. There's a support for culture and
>
> experience while also giving you that educational background that you need.

Vice President Toni's commitment to providing students with the resources and tools necessary

to gain quality educational experiences is evident in her depiction of success. She showed me

two artifacts, one being a handcrafted wooden board gifted to her by former students and another

being a particularly special award she received as a student working in student affairs:

> There's this board that students gave to me. It's a board that you can kind of hang out
>
> like a shield….and it says student-centered. That, to me, is a reminder that I did my job
>
> well enough, that somebody saw enough to say that, yes, you created this space here that
>
> was very much student-centered. The other artifact piece I have is, I've got a bunch of
>
> awards that people have given to me, but the one award that makes the difference to me is
>
> the one given to me as an RA. It was my first experience. I was named RA of the Year.
>
> So, I look at that. Knowing that is something great enough to be considered for, out of
>
> 72, 75 people, to be RA of the Year.

Case Five: Vice President Anita

Vice President Anita began her career in higher education in 2000 with her role as a

residence hall director at Bush University, a large, public, four-year, PWI.   After spending two

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years in housing and residence life at another institution, VP Anita returned to Bush University,

serving in multiple capacities, beginning as assistant director for residence life, then as director

of the multicultural center, associate vice president for student affairs and enrollment

services/interim vice president for student affairs and enrollment services, and finally, twenty

years later in March 2020, Anita was appointed to her current role as vice president for student

affairs at the institution. Vice President Anita earned a bachelor's degree in journalism and a

master's degree in higher education student personnel.

Throughout her career, VP Anita has provided oversight to the following functional

areas: career center, counseling and health services, disability services, Greek life, health,

alcohol and drug education, housing and residence life, multicultural center, student center

retention and graduation, student legal services, student life, student rights and community

standards, public safety, and Title IX. Vice President Anita began her career path aspiring to be

a journalist, stating, "I wanted to be able to tell people's stories, have their voice be heard, and

impact the world." She carries this ideology with her as a student affairs professional, looking

for the human interest side of the profession and ways to connect with students and colleagues.

When describing what it means to be a Black woman at a PWI, Vice President Anita reflected on

how her experience and education has been a catalyst for intentional interaction:

> It's exhilarating to some extent, and I use the word exhilarating because I'm truly excited
>
> to go out and do what I do because I see myself as an educator. So, it's exhilarating
>
> because at a PWI, most people don't expect me to be in this position, especially without a
>
> doctoral degree. So that always leads to questions about who I am and what I do and the
>
> opportunity to talk, whether it's with the students, whether it's colleagues, whether it's

parents. So, it's exhilarating because I get to do this and show up in spaces and do what I

do and, in some ways, dispel people's stereotypes of what they think this is going to be.

When speaking about success defined, Vice President Anita from spoke of her familial

relationships and her ancestry:

> My grandmother, my family, my mom, she always used to say your education is one
>
> thing nobody can take from you….and it probably was something she got sold and some
>
> people might say, well, yeah she bought into the system that education can make a
>
> difference, but she was a teacher. My grandfather was a principal, education ran deep in
>
> our family. And she felt that it could take you from one class, in our country it's more
>
> about class than it is about Color, but she really felt that was how we were going to be
>
> successful is if you get a good education. And I fundamentally bought into that. So, for
>
> me, my artifact would be in some ways the paper degrees…but it's beyond the degree,
>
> it's the experiences and the commitment it took to get that education.

Summary

The five cases examined in this multicase study of VPSAs began with the number of

years in the field along with each participant's career trajectory and educational background.

This information demonstrates the range and variance of experience each participant brings to

their positions. The type of institution was included to give readers insight into the participants'

familiarities with either a PWI, HBCU, or both. Each case was presented with thick descriptions

to emphasize the participants' varied approach to leadership at different institution types, as well

to convey the diversity in experiences of being a Black woman in leadership across institution

type. Lastly, each vice president of student affairs' artifact was included as a depiction of

success in her career. The next section will present the across-case findings of each of the five participants.

Overview of Findings and Themes

The themes presented in this section addressed and answered the following research questions:

1. What are the work experiences of Black women in senior leadership positions in student affairs?

2. What barriers/issues to obtaining senior leadership positions in student affairs are identified by Black women?

3. What do Black women senior student affairs leaders attribute to their success?

4. What recommendations and/or strategies do Black women senior leaders suggest to improve the leadership pipeline in student affairs as it relates to other Black women obtaining such roles?

Through the research five overarching themes developed and are illustrated in Figure 4.3. While the themes became the foundation of my findings, each overarching theme has accompanying subthemes that were represented in the data that add to the detail of the study. Each theme is presented using narrative from participant interviews, the initial participant questionnaire, and a collection of documents, to support the findings.

Case Themes

Figure 4.1 Case Themes

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5
I Have a Right to be Here	Overt and Subtle Obstacles, -Isms, et al.	Creating Social Capital	No Straight Line to the Top	I'm Thinking about the Black Girls Coming Behind Me
• Belonging • Fit • My Blackness • Imposter Syndrome • Code-Switching • HBCU Nourishing	• Tokenism • Racism • Microagressions • Oppression and Marginalization	• Mentor Support • Presidential Support • Networking • Visibility	• I Fell into this Field • Intentionality • Active Representation • Leadership	• Aspirations and Advancement • Pipeline Practices

I Have a Right to be Here

A major component of this study was to identify barriers and successes that each participant identified as influential in their career progression. Theme one, I Have a Right to Be Here, developed as I began to hear the women in this study overwhelmingly speak about feelings of isolation and exclusion. Through this theme's subthemes, the participants discussed how they navigate their work environments as Black women, vying to be seen, heard, and valued both by colleagues, students, and other members of the university community. These subthemes include:

- Belonging

- Fit

- My Blackness

- Imposter syndrome

- Code-switching

- HBCU nourishing

Belonging. When asked about the barriers that they faced, feelings of isolation instigated by being one of few Black women on campus, particularly in a senior-level role, resulted in

participants feeling disengaged from other administrators and happenings on campus. Vice President Janet gave credence to this stating, "It has been a struggle for me, being an African American administrator or senior cabinet member at a predominately White institution." Adding, "It is a struggle as an African American woman to work at a majority institution, it is on both sides, from the faculty and staff as well as the students." Participants cited having a sense of belonging as a significant contributor to their persistence when they often are the minority in the workplace based on race, gender, or both. The participants talked about belonging both in a relational sense (i.e., developing social relationships at work; McClure & Brown, 2008), and also feeling valued and appreciated for their contribution to the institution and the expertise that accompanies them (Filstad, Traavik, & Gorli, 2019).

> Vice President Janet expanded on this concept of belonging in a relational aspect, stating:
> It's just a handful of us, and I mean, literally just a handful. And not that I wanted us to cling together because we are the same skin color, but I mean that's a part of it, that we need to support each other.

She further described an instance where she felt isolated and a sense of nonbelonging from a colleague based on her seniority and established position within the department socially:

> I will admit when I came here…there was someone in the office who had been here for a long, long time, and she was a roadblock for me in terms of my leadership in the office. And, what I found was that she had been here for so long and there was a vice president before me, but he kind of let her run things. And, she was still in the mode of running things. And, even the staff felt an allegiance to her and not me. So, that was a challenge for me, and of course this was a White female.

Vice President Jill spoke about how she felt a contrast in sense of belonging with how relationships among colleagues played out in terms of disputes or misunderstandings with other minority professionals versus majority:

> In our community we always say, there are the ones that's going to run to HR, where nine times out of 10, we're going to squash it within us. Might be mad, might mumble some stuff but…we come back the next day, we get work done. Over here, this one is going to run to HR, and now we either in a situation, I'm written up or whatever, and I ain't got time for that.

Further, she tied her sense of belonging to her purpose in relation to her current institution:

> I'm here for a purpose and I can see now, I see one piece of the purpose, and what that purpose is that I have a right to be here, and so do other persons of Color, have a right to be here.

Vice President Anita was deliberate when speaking about institutions' roles in creating a sense of belonging, stating:

> For a number of African Americans, Black people coming into a space, they need community and a space that works. So, institutions have to assess, what is the community that I am bringing people into? What are the needs and how do I work through that?

Vice-President Janet:

> I felt like I wanted to be, number one, a part of this community. If I'm going to work here and live here, I need to be in the community and there where I could be a part of the change.

It was evident that the women felt that a sense of belonging was both relational and situational. Reciprocity was essential to feelings of belonging to their institution and being more granular to their department. Participants described having a sense of belonging as being a fundamental need in their role, a motivator to achievement and essential to their level of satisfaction as a SSAO.

Fit. For many of the vice presidents, the often-obscure meaning and use of the term fit was noted as a barrier that they have faced throughout their careers. Vice President Toni spoke about experiences with fit as related to the hiring processes, both that she's been a part of and as a candidate herself. She referred to the selection as "We hire who we like, as opposed to hiring the people that are best suited, needing to do or perform a given role." Vice President Anita spoke about fit during an encounter she had with colleagues while a member of a search committee:

> When we got to the interview stage, there was a lot of words of being polished and stuff that were being thrown around. And so, for me, what I did was I spoke to the chair of the committee privately about my concern over the use of those terms and how we were using it as a criteria. I certainly understand what the intent is, but let's look at the impact because what I see is that most of the people being described as not polished as we finish our interviews, happen to be the one or two candidates of Color in some aspect and that is problematic because we have decided that's a criteria and we've equated it with that that means…It was one of those where well, the language changed, but the outcome in the person's mind as you're evaluating, it's still what it is. I want you to talk about the skills. I want to talk about the experience, and I wanted to be able to explain your talk, because that is code word for, they don't fit. And we also will not talk about fit. There's no

fit…Let's call a spade a spade and a club a club, what is it you want and you're looking

for. How are you assessing it and how are you assessing it in the fairest way possible?

Vice President Toni recalled a conversation with the head of the department (who she reported

to) during her own tenure, where fit had an overt effect on her employment as vice president and

dean of students at a former institution:

> I got a text message that we needed to meet, and we met, and she had the conversation
>
> and said that, I just really don't think that this is going to work. I looked at her and I'm
>
> like, Whoa, wait a minute. I don't have any evaluations from anybody, my supervisor or
>
> any of my vice presidents, that say I have done anything wrong. She said it was about fit
>
> for her. I said, well what in the hell does that mean? In the end, she just wasn't
>
> interested in hearing and talking about anything.

The participants also noted that fit is reciprocal. When asked about leadership and the

attributes that have made them successful and their recommendations, the participants agreed

that individuals should decide if the institution is a fit for your needs and wants. VPSA Janet

gave this advice to aspiring Black women senior student affairs officers: "Understanding who

you are and what your role is or what you want to be and what's the best fit." VPSA Toni

echoed, "We're mayors of little cities or big cities…. Understanding where you fit in the

organization is important."

Institutional fit has various implications. The cultural norms and values shared by a

particular institution may not necessarily match those of the administrators selected to work

there, and this reality should be acceptable, as each individual in a senior role brings a different

set of values, experience, credentials, and leadership qualities to the position.

My Blackness. To understand the factors that may influence the lived experiences of Black women administrators in this study it's important to note that each participant indicated that her race was central to her identity. Each participant spoke about feeling reminded of her race in ways that White colleagues rarely were. When asked to describe her identity, above her degrees, job title, religion, class, etc., each participant led with a variation of identifying as a Black woman, seeing her dual identity as a Black or African American woman as significant to how she sees herself and how she leads. Vice-President Janet led her interview with this statement:

> People assume that I will automatically say I'm a Ph.D.. I don't. My number one identity, particularly in this field and me working in a majority institution, is that I'm an African American female. That's always what I start with… Now you may say, of course they'll know that by looking at you, but if I don't talk about it or I don't say it, it's almost invisible. People overlook the fact that I'm not just female, but African American female… Being African American and female adds to the layer of me as an administrator and how I function and how my role unfolds in my position. So that's the number one. African American female from the South.

Vice President Whitney simply stated, "I do really value my Blackness, my history, my foundation, and everything that comes with that as well as being a woman." She credits one of her mentors, whom she described as self-assured, for giving her the confidence to be comfortable with her identity, aspiring to emulate her professionalism. When asked to elaborate she stated, "She was the first fantastic, professional Black woman who did not hide her Blackness at any time. When she stood up and was ready to talk, it was like, yes, this is who I want to be."

The VPs also spoke at length about the concept of authenticity and what it means to bring your authentic self to work. Vice President Janet spoke about the struggles of being an African American woman at a PWI. She talked about her desire to support both students and staff, some who were supportive and receptive to her leadership and others who would "overlook my role…and go to the White administrators." From her stance, this made her both reflect and also become even more determined:

It makes me go hard, it does. But I will admit it does make me reflect…So first of all, I am the first African American in this role. They have never had an African American at the senior cabinet-level. This school's been around for over one hundred years. So, I think for a lot of people that was a shocker as well. So, I think about that in terms of, okay, so, how do I keep moving and how do I be a bit stronger and a little bit more aggressive? But not aggressive in a bad way, but aggressive in terms of, "I'm here, I have a job to do, and most of all, I'm here for you and I want you to succeed." So, it just pushes me to do more.

Vice President Anita also reflected on her experience as a Black woman at a PWI, while simultaneously being at the senior most level at the institution. She highlighted the balance between being a Black woman and university administrator when engaging with faculty, staff, and students:

I recognize that I am the highest ranking Black administrative professional on this campus. There is a balance I have to strike because ultimately yes, I am a Black female, but I am a university administrator. And there is a fine balance you have to share because you can't act too much out of your administrator role because no matter what people say,

you are still the vice president. So, I have to understand what responsibilities come with

that when I'm operating in that space.

The participants also spoke about create a welcoming and comfortable environment.

Specifically, the importance of allowing a space for Black women to be seen, heard, and

comfortable in their workspace was paramount to the concept of authenticity. They cited that at

the most basic level, institutions and those working in them should focus on creating nonhostile

work environments.

Vice President Anita referenced a specific awkward, uncomfortable, encounter that is all

too common for Black women working in predominantly White spaces, their hair:

> One of the things we can do is when somebody changes their hair, it's like, oh, I didn't
>
> even recognize you. Please don't do that. Just pretend their hair didn't even change.
>
> Why do we have to draw attention to that fact? A number of Black females change their
>
> hair all the time. Let's not make conversation about their hair. How do we not make it a
>
> big deal for a Black female to be part of this experience?

She noted that the significance here is not just about a hair style, rather Black women or Black

people in general having to suppress their Blackness in order to be perceived as professional and

not on display, or simply to thrive and feel a sense of belonging in the workplace.

There was a connectedness among all the participants to their heritage and to their Black

identity. While their identity is multifaceted, being a Black woman was at the forefront for the

women in terms of how they positioned themselves in relation to the institutions and their work.

Imposter syndrome. Imposter syndrome, an internal feeling of incompetence, feeling

fraudulent and undeserving of achievements, can be attributed to an individual's self-doubt,

anxiety, and isolation (Bothello & Roulet, 2019; Chrousos & Mentis, 2020). When people

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internalize these feelings, they tend to ascribe their achievements and accomplishments to luck or

coincidence instead of to their personal and distinct skill and merit (Bothello & Roulet, 2019).

Participants expressed similar sentiments when recollecting feelings of imposter syndrome,

echoing what Clance and Imes (1978) described as "an internal experience of intellectual

phoniness which appears to be particularly prevalent and intense among a select sample of high

achieving women" (p. 241). While imposter syndrome is common in many professions, the

caveat of this phenomenon being associated with women, high achievers, and women of Color is

more prevalent (Chrousos & Mentis, 2020).

> Vice President Jill reflected on receiving signals of imposter syndrome as a child:
>
> From when I was younger, the message you should be seen and not heard. Like oh
>
> you're beautiful, so be seen. You're not intelligent enough, so don't be heard, you just
>
> need to be quiet cause you really don't know everything, so you just need to sit there and
>
> observe and listen. And so, I'm still trying to, to navigate that.

Afterwards, she reflected on how this mindset manifested itself in her adult years, adding that

despite being a high-achiever, "when I was coming in as an associate dean, I thought there would

be no way that I would get the job," speaking of the interview process at a former institution.

Vice President Jill was adamant about her existence however:

> I think that growing up where I grew up made me to feel that way all of the time…I've
>
> started to see where some of that thinking came from. Oh, I'm very competent. I'm like
>
> now you can't tell me nothing. And you can't tell me that I don't deserve to be here.
>
> Cause I can tell you how I got here and why I should be here.
>
> Self-doubt and feelings of not belonging were also cited as factors prompting feelings of

imposter syndrome. The idea that Black women lack professionalism is culturally biased, and

these thoughts hold people from marginalized backgrounds to much higher expectations than others. Vice President Toni recalled being in the presence of other highly skilled and educated Black women at professional conferences during which discussions of rising to the ranks of vice president were met with trepidation:

> The one statement that they made consistently is that we don't apply. As women, we want the VP roles, but we never apply or we want a critical role, we want to be in a space, but we never raise our hand, we never say I would like to do that.

On the contrary, she noted the differences in confidence between Black women and women of Color as compared to their White male counterparts:

> Whereas our male counterparts, they're going to tell you, "I want this, I need this salary. I'm supposed to be here by this time." We don't do that and that's the one thing I am criticized for is that I am extremely humble.

The participants noted that these feelings and behaviors were in part a result of the bias that is prevalent in work culture and what is valued by the majority. The experiences that Black women encounter such as unequally high-performance standards, being compared to the majority standard of professionalism, and systemic bias and racism are contributors to feelings of being an imposter in a White majority field.

Code-switching. Making behavioral adjustments in the workplace, or code-switching (Boulton, 2016; Hall, Everett, & Hamilton-Mason, 2012) was a phenomenon experienced by all of the participants. Modifying their speech, appearance, expressions, and mannerisms in order to acquiesce in various environments, and in the presence of interracial audiences, was noted frequently. Participants noted code-switching for a myriad of reasons. Vice President Janet code-switched — both consciously and unconsciously — to talk more like those around her:

So, I've had to code-switch in two different roles. As a Southerner, because I will get

real southern and say y'all, and talk real slow. So, I have to remember I'm in the

Midwest. I have to be mindful of that.

She further explained how recent instances of racial injustice affected the manner in which she

spoke:

Sometimes, if things get real emotional for me, I will then code-switch and try to bring it

down, use different language, not Ph.D. speak, but using regular speak. You know this

stuff that's going on now with the death of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, that has really

impacted me… As a campus we addressed it, I put something out, but I need you to

understand what this feels like for me as a Black woman.

Vice President Jill talked about inadvertently slipping into "hip or young language" with the

president of her institution, and then immediately thinking, "that's the president, should I have

said that? So yeah, I guess to a certain extent, yeah, I code-switch."

Code-switching can also be activated as a means to protect oneself against stereotype

threat, or the perceptions of negative stereotypes of one's entire race. Vice-President Anita

described having to oscillate back and forth, depending on the audience or setting, as an unfair

burden:

It's absolutely not right. It's not right and it's not fair. Every Black female is supposed

to come here and be judged on who they are, that's the way it should be. But in reality,

do I know that's how it's going to be? No, more than likely not. So, there is that

responsibility and burden.

In this respect, both Vice President Whitney and Anita mulled over times when they had to code-

switch in order to increase perceptions of professionalism and lessen the stigma of perceived

stereotypes towards Black women. Dr. Whitney reflected on her early years in higher education versus her latter years in regard to stereotype threat:

> I think as I grow professionally, my thoughts are never to make sure people feel comfortable. I'm going to say what it is because I've arrived at that point, but early on it was difficult…I don't want to be in there, but I had to learn it right? Sit there, have the conversations, and not be that angry Black woman who's real ethnic, but I started breaking out of that shell early on as I established myself as a professional and it became somewhat easier.

Vice President Anita similarly said:

> I always have to remind myself, do not be the stereotype, because if you are, nobody else who looks like you is going to get an opportunity. For me, that's a huge responsibility. I don't want people's one experience with me to say, oh, we would never have another Black female in this role again. I can't, I don't want to do that because somebody else is going to need to have this experience as well.

A unique parallel between cases was that whether currently working at an HBCU or a PWI, participants explicitly cited personal instances of code-switching only while working at PWIs. Vice President Anita explicitly declared, "You cannot be in a role like this at a PWI if you don't understand how to code-switch." When asked about code-switching, Vice President Toni remembered:

> Yeah, I think I did that earlier in my career by working at predominantly White institutions. I really had to go into those spaces and learn to speak their language…You had to quote unquote switch the code, the language that you're speaking, and speak whatever it is that made sense to them.

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She added that the behavior was not reciprocated, stating, "But they're not doing the same thing for you in those spaces. They're not trying to learn the environment in which you live." Vice President Whitney spoke of the contrast between working at a PWI in two different settings:

> I definitely struggled with [code-switching] at the beginning of my career when I started working in student activities. It was much easier to be who I was working at the cultural center because of who I worked for, who I worked with, what student population.

She recalled a specific instance when she was put on the spot from her colleague, an in-group member confrontation:

> I had a network at the university, but my day-to-day interactions could still be uncomfortable. I was just telling someone, I remember [my department head] said why did you make that White woman cry? Those things, it was still the angry Black woman syndrome. I'm not angry, I'm just letting you know what it is.

> The women also expressed the toll that code-switching has had on them. Vice President Anita noted, "You just want to explode, externally you have to be poised. There is no place for that to happen. It makes me exhausted." Still in the end, code-switching did not completely strip the participants of their perceptions of themselves and how they navigated mostly White spaces. President Toni reflected on her years as a student affairs professional from then to now:

> Yes, I've been in those spaces, but that was earlier in my career. Now, I'm at the phase where, I'm going to be 52 and I just really don't care. I'm too old to play the game. So, you like me or you don't. I'm going to give you my very best.

> Code-switching was used by participants as a mechanism to succeed. Participants noted that while they did employ code-switching to balance double-discrimination of racism and

sexism (Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 1984; Moses, 1989), it did not rid them of their authenticity to themselves, but was often unconsciously or consciously strategic to help them reach their goals or operate effectively in their respective SSAO role.

      HBCU nourishing. This study explored the lived experiences of Black women student affairs administrators at both HBCUs and PWIs. As a result, there were some distinctions that participants described between the two types of institutions. It was clear that the HBCU experience was both valued and appreciated. Vice President Whitney remarked, "I would not trade my HBCU experience for anything…it really changed my whole perspective on an HBCU because I was fortunate enough to have a great president, a great institution." However, HBCUs lacked in assets and capital. Vice President Toni described, "HBCUs tend to be underresourced, severely underresourced, whereas, your PWIs might have some budget challenges, but not always knocking on the door and wondering if they're going to be open." She noted that HBCUs balance that with "a support for culture and experience while also giving you the educational background that you need."

Vice President Janet echoed that point, stating:

> Of course there's less money at the HBCUs so, it makes it a little bit harder to do the work that we want to do because we just don't have the funds but at an HBCU you feel a little bit more at home. I felt a little bit more relaxed. I felt, I'll be honest, a little bit more supported. I felt that my goals and my dreams, aspirations were supported. Whatever I wanted to do personally, as well as professionally and for the institution, that was supported.

In fact, of the three participants who have current or former work experience at an HBCU, they described the setting as encouraging and nourishing for both administrators and students, terms

that they did not use in reference to PWIs. Vice President Whitney presented an account of her experience having worked at two HBCUs:

> This is my second HBCU…when I compare my experiences working at an HBCU as opposed to a PWI, I do think my voice is heard. I have made decisions that are truthful and impactful to our young people. I do think there is a sense of nourishment, voices being heard and not just being that person in the room.

Vice President Toni continued to describe the HBCU difference as supportive:

> When you're in a predominantly Black community, there's this sense of safety and security. You're not seeing the White flag or the Confederate flags or having those conversations that are challenging and people questioning how you got accepted or why you're even there in that community. All of that already exists. There's such a support for culture and experience while also giving you that educational background that you need.

The participants specifically talked about the impact that an HBCU and their presence in that institution had on students. When describing her interactions with students, Vice President Whitney spoke about working in tandem with students:

> When you fall, we're going to fall with you, and this is how you get up. Those teachable moments become numerous. You don't pay your bill, we're still going to let you roll through to figure out how we get it done, and at a PWI, they're just going to cut you off. Again, it's those things that we try to help balance. It's a family environment, we want you to succeed, but I'm going to give you tough love at the same time.

Currently an administrator at a PWI but a former administrator at an HBCU, Vice President Janet also placed importance on the sense of a supportive and reassuring environment versus one with the most lucrative finances:

> I find myself always preaching about diversity and inclusion. They always want to talk about, oh, we're diverse, we're diverse. You may be diverse, but are you inclusive? When you bring students in, do they feel like they are a part of this community? So that's the challenge too, at a PWI, that inclusivity, and what does that look like in terms of a student at an HBCU? They're home, they are included. Everything is focused on them.

She discussed her role at an HBCU as being matriarchal in nature:

> I started out at an HBCU and what I found just when I was interacting and going to conferences and talking to other students of Color, particularly African American students that were at PWIs, there was no one really there. And not to say that they were on their own, but that level of support that happens at an HBCU is very different. We push, we become mama, we become auntie, everything at the HBCUs, because we want to get our students out. We want to see them win; we want to see them succeed.

Vice Presidents Janet, Whitney, and Toni all had currently or formally worked as HBCU administrators. Their testaments to the support and resources that HBCUs provide not only to students but to staff, endorse the verity that is their experience. The participants who worked at HBCUs noted that they offer the necessary level of support and resources that will allow SSAOs to be most influential as supervisors, mentors, and leaders. For Black women administrators, this is important. Many of the study participants cited that the institution's philosophy and vibe matched with their own personal way of life, citing how their familial ties and background

helped them relate to the students, often treating and considering them as they would their own younger family members.

Overt and Subtle Obstacles, -Isms, et al.

Theme Two, Overt and Subtle Obstacles, -Isms, et al. derives from barriers that participants explained led to occasional hostile and unwelcoming work environments. They described these obstacles as both overt and covert acts displayed both at the institutional and individual level. The women's views of the racial climate of their institution and the experiences associated with it will be detailed in the following subthemes:

- Tokenism

- Racism

- Microaggressions

- Oppression and Marginalization

Tokenism. Throughout the interviews, participants proceeded to detail how being the only minority person in their department, some being the only senior leader woman of Color at their entire institution, was credited with experiences and feelings of tokenism. Vice President Janet reflected on the difficulty of being one of few, or the only, Black administrator on campus: "There's only eight or nine of us on the campus that is hard for me as a Black woman. And being the only one at senior cabinet, they're not understanding what I'm experiencing." She went on to voice that this was not an isolated phenomenon: "I've worked at two majority institutions, and it's been very interesting because I've been the only person of Color and female at both of those institutions."

Vice President Toni acknowledged that she was forewarned by other Black women administrators early on in her career about the isolation she would encounter:

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When I was starting in my first vice president role, I used to make those phone calls and just interview them and talk about what I should and shouldn't do, so then I had a sense of how to be successful in those spaces. And oftentimes they would talk about, you know, it's lonely being at the top, that you didn't have other women who look like you or people who are willing to talk about their experiences and share their experiences.

Vice President Anita had the same opinion, expressing feelings of isolation being one of a few, or being the only:

I think the challenge that I face in my current role is the whole situation of being the only. So, I am the only Black administrator at my level, the only one. We have another cabinet member of Color, and our cabinet is pretty female. But that's one of the things that's really unusual, actually it's predominantly female, but it's a challenge, because I don't feel welcome, not because I don't feel included, but it's a challenge because there is a certain sense of responsibility that you feel being the only Black voice and perspective.

She also shared that one of the challenges of tokenism was being expected to represent the viewpoint or speak for your entire race:

We all know that our experience is not monolithic. Mine just represents one…Sometimes the challenge is to represent all of those when you're the only at the table. To represent all of those in the best way possible without perpetuating stereotypes, myths, or making the experience so simplistic for people to buy into, that you feed into everything else. So, for me, that's a huge challenge. Every time I have conversations, I always start with, this is one version. This is one experience.

Vice President Whitney highlighted another problematic residual of tokenism and pondered about her time at a former institution, wondering, "Why am I in the room? Am I only in the

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room because I'm meeting a quota when I worked there?" She also added, "At a PWI, sometimes I felt I was just supposed to be in the room because, oh now she has a PhD, so let's get everything we need to meet a quota in one space."

Furthering those sentiments, Vice President Jill also spoke about quotas in relation to hiring as she remembered a time where quotas and "checking the boxes" were a covert standard practice at a former institution, so much so, that when she went to apply to her current role, she did not consider herself to be a viable contender because there was too much diversity at the institution:

> I was watching hires here and I had seen where they had just hired an African American female as the vice president for [alumni relations]…I didn't think I would get the vice president position because [the president] had so many, his board was so diverse, his cabinet was so diverse. He already had two African American females and a Black woman from the Caribbean, an Asian lady, and I forget where else, but she wasn't born in the United States, and a White lady. Then he had four white males, so I knew I wouldn't get the position. But I got it.

The participants talked about the difficulty of being one of only or one of a few. They cited higher visibility, feelings of isolation, and being tasked with representing their entire demographic background as barriers and burdens.

Racism. When speaking about racism, participants reflected on a combination of the racism and racist remarks that they had personally experienced both past and present, as well as racism that Black students at their institutions faced and their reactions to such treatment. Vice President Janet gave an example of what she perceived as the catalyst to a racist incident experienced before even stepping foot on campus:

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Before I came, which I didn't know this, the college put out a post, an article in the local newspaper that I was coming, with my picture, where I was coming from. So, when I went to the supermarket, when I had first got here, people were looking at me weird and I could see people pointing and whispering. And I was like, "oh my God, what's going on?" Then I realized, oh okay, they knew I was coming before I got here. So, they knew me and what I looked like. A Black woman running a college for White people. That's weird to them.

After arriving, the experiences continued in more blatant ways. She shared:

I stopped to get some breakfast and I'm in the shop and this guy comes over to me and he said wow, I was at the graduation and I saw you. I didn't know [names school] had Black people in important roles.

The environmental racism that Vice President Janet experienced has shaped her decision-making process as she contemplates her next role:

The College is in the middle of nowhere. We have Klan rallies every year; a handful of Black folks live here. I've had my tires slashed, there was a Facebook post that had my picture and the picture of a monkey…and it said, this is why [names college] is becoming a jungle because of niggers like this. So, I have had my issues here. So, I said for my next role as a presidency, it's got to be in a big city. I cannot do small rural again, unless this is just the best place, or I'm called to it.

Vice President Toni faced similar tribulations at another rural institution at the launch of her career. She described how the lack of diversity and the chilly climate set her on a mission to use her role as an advocate for the students to help with retention:

We didn't have a Black student union at the time, and people were antidevelopment of it because it was again in the middle of nowhere, the cornfields, and, you know, they had signs that said, "niggers go home." I saw all that stuff, and to me it was just a challenge to create a different type of experience for students living on campus…And so, I think my career was launched on trying to make a better experience for them because I was going to be okay regardless, because I had lived in White, Black and other spaces.

She also pointed how racism led to an aha moment once she began living in predominantly White spaces during her collegiate years:

I didn't know I was really, really Black, Black until I went to the middle of nowhere, because my whole community is Black. And so, we didn't talk about being Black, we talked about being human, we talked about our needs every day. And then you get to a community like that and all of a sudden, you got other people saying well you're different from us, and in some ways equating that different with being less than.

While racism is clearly not just a rural issue, three of the five participants who currently live or work in rural areas gave flagrant examples of racism. They cited student safety and comfort as a primary concern. Vice President Jill addressed how racism interfered with the safety of a student on campus:

So, like I said, it's rural. There is a major state road that comes down the middle of campus. So, we have rush hour traffic. You get a lot of community folks and we had a young African American girl who called this guy confederate flag man, because he would always come through town on his motor scooter or his big truck with the confederate flag flying. This person actually assaulted her. He threw a soda bottle at her, and it hit her in the head.

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Vice President Jill went on to detail how she faced strife with a White colleague regarding the incident:

>And so, as the young lady is telling us what happened, she had to go to court, our public safety director says, "Oh I don't believe her, she's lying." I had a problem with that for many reasons, the first point is you work at this campus. That's our student. You weren't even in her corner, you just always said that she lied. So, it's those things. So yeah, it's hard. I still won't leave here, cause like I said, it's not all bad. I'm here for a reason, and I think that reason is to help these White folks get back on accord as to what our mission is.

The participants described both overt and covert instances of racism that they actively or passively experienced. These occurrences happened in the form of speech and behaviors practiced by both institutions and groups. Participants cited physical location and ideology as spaces harboring racist views towards them and discussed how all of these different views had an influence on them as professionals.

Microaggressions. Not all of the experiences that participants combatted were overt forms of racism. Some were subtleties, guised as microaggressions, which are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults towards people of Color (Young, Anderson, & Stewart, 2015). When asked about her experience with microaggressions, Vice President Jill struggled to name or clearly identify some of her experiences as such, saying, "I try not to use race, so I say was that because I'm Black, a woman or is that a territorial thing? That's how I try to justify it in my mind." Microaggressions are equally as harmful as racist acts and play a role in the discrimination and unwelcoming climate

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that the participants felt frequently. Vice President Whitney spoke about a time that she overheard a White colleague justifying her race and gender as the rationale for a former job appointment as opposed to her talent and qualifications:

> When I got the job for student activities, a person who was going for the job said, well she only got it because she's a Black woman and she knows (the dean). So, that definitely negated my whole ability, my skillset, my intelligence.

Participants described experiencing microaggressions while performing their daily, routine work duties. Vice President Jill reflected on an incident in which her own colleagues called authorities on her during the middle of a program that she organized:

> I had the fire marshal called on me. I was planning a program, we were having, what do you call them, "bouncies?" And we were doing a celebration and even had a band. And we had the fire department called on me, said I had too many people in the cafeteria and I was violating a noise ordinance. And at the same time, these are people who today still send me Facebook requests thinking I'm going to be your friend.

The participants also experienced microaggressions by way of the students. Vice President Janet was reminded of interactions that she had with students on her campus:

> With my students, it's very interesting because I came here to be a support to them and there is a pocket of students that I have some issues with. That's too strong of a word, it's not issues but they will overlook my role. But again, it's that, okay, this is a Black woman, we're really not going to listen to her. We're going to go to the White administrators, the White vice presidents, we will go talk to them. And they will do that. They'll go talk to someone else about stuff in student life, but I'm the student life person. So, I'm not quite sure if that's just something in their head like, okay, she can't really

know what she's talking about because she's Black and she's a woman, so let me go to this White man.

Vice Presidents Jill, Whitney, and Janet described microaggressions as reflective of varying levels of privilege and power with their White colleagues and as a matter of respect in relation to the students.

Oppression and marginalization. The power dynamic that stems from a place of privilege or by being a part of the dominant or majority culture often leads to the marginalization of minoritized groups, creating oppressive systems, structures, and environments. While each of the participants maintained a certain degree of privilege based on her title and role within the organizational hierarchy of the institution, the fact remains that they were still a part of the minority and underrepresented at their institutions, and as such were experienced marginalization and oppression.

Vice President Whitney spoke about the one of the burdens of being marginalized is being asked to do unrelated or unnecessary work:

> I always had to work harder. I think I was stressed for my first year in [my student activities role].... I remember the dean would say, well Whitney, I need you to go here because you would make people feel comfortable. You, as a Black man, shouldn't tell me that. Those situations are uncomfortable. First of all, I'm not only here because you feel like I make White people feel comfortable.

The emotional toll required to sustain a semblance of equanimity in oppressive situations was something that VP Janet was vocal about:

> I do feel that level of oppression, isolation, loneliness. And again, it's not just because I'm an African American female in a vice presidency role, but because there's nobody

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else here. I have one, two African American women on campus, and they work for me. That's it…and then we have five or six males. So not only is it difficult for me, I only have two other females, and they report to me. So, I can't go complaining and crying to them because they are my direct reports…. I have to put on a brave face and every day; I have to look like I'm good. I'm superwoman and everything is okay.

Vice President Toni recalled how a former supervisor used her power to reinforce an oppressive environment through communication and personal interactions:

She would silence me…. She would literally silence me. She'd keep me off of committees that were clearly designed to focus on student housing, student life, LGBTQ experiences, and tell me that so-and-so could represent me on that committee. And we just had these experiences where, we were just never, ever going to see the same. And I tried to work hard to like her, to get to know her, and it felt like she was trying to do the same thing, but…we just never could get to that place.

The situation did not end amicably and eventually cost VP Toni her job:

In the end, she wasn't interested in hearing and talking about anything. She was going to give me until June, but my brain said, "I don't trust this woman so I'm just going to get all the references that I can and just prepare to keep going." So, because I went out to look for references, and indicated that she was ending my contract in June, she terminated me via text. So, that was my moment of feeling oppressed. From the day she arrived on campus, every experience I had, she was working to make sure that I was nonexistent in critical decisions.

Vice President Toni also expressed feeling doubt and guilt when contending with feelings of marginalization:

So, I think my entire life has been riddled with having great ideas and having a vision, and I think that some of the challenges that I've had a PWIs is having people take the vision and implement the idea. Sitting in a meeting and not being heard, even though I've said the same thing; somebody else just said it right after me and all of a sudden, it's focused on that person and what they said…. I have struggled with that and struggled by not knowing when I should say, hey, I was a part of that process too. Because I've watched them take credit for some stuff and I don't understand or know if I should even make a comment, but at the same time I would feel rather challenged if I sat silently and let somebody else take the credit for the work that's being done.

Vice President Anita expressed frustration with the comments, reactions, and unwarranted attention associated with how Black women style and groom their hair. She recounted how this creates feelings of marginalization and contributes to an oppressive work environment:

I often talk with people about the fact that, yes, a number of Black females change their hair all the time. One of the things we can do is, when somebody changes their hair, it's like, oh, I didn't even recognize you. Please don't do that. Just pretend like their hair didn't even change. Why do we have to draw attention to that…? Let's not take these things and create environments where our staff of Color, they're constantly, especially our females, constantly on the defense, because did you ask this other colleague of mine who just walked by [if she] cut her hair? Did you mention anything about her hair being cut? Probably you didn't because it's normal. Let's normalize this.

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Lastly, VP Anita voiced concern with marginalization that she experienced and the oppressive

nature of a search committee on which she was asked to serve under the guise of building a

diverse committee to aid with the search for a diverse candidate pool:

> I guess there are multiple ways people probably wanted me to feel marginalized. I think
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> for me, the way that happened is there is a particular experience that I had as the director
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> of the multicultural center. It was clearly about being the token. So, having the director
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> of the multicultural center on this committee was important and that was about the only
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> thing—they wanted to be able to check off that this person is on this search
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> committee….That was one space where I felt it wasn't necessarily me being oppressed in
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> some way, but the process the committee was using to decide who was going to have the
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> positions was very problematic and in my opinion, oppressive.

These oppressive behaviors took on many forms. Whether overt or covert, the

encounters had negative effects on participants, leading to feelings of mistrust, invalidation, and

underappreciation.

Creating Social Capital

In addition to identifying the barriers that participants experienced, this study also sought

to identify the factors that participants attributed to their success. The participants strongly

promoted the importance of creating and maintaining strong relationships with other

professionals and administrators in the field and gleaning resources along the way. The women

ultimately leveraged this network of social capital to aid them in decision-making, to help them

understand institutional norms, to serve as advisers and individuals who could assist with

brainstorming and problem-solving, as well as mentors who could advocate and support them as

they advanced and navigated throughout their career. Four subthemes were derived from this theme:

- Mentor Support

- Presidential Support

- Networking

- Visibility

Mentor support. When asked what they contributed to their success, all participants responded that mentor support was one of the most influential contributors. Higher education is a competitive field, and as many of the participants said, a close-knit one, one in which who you know is just as important as who knows you. Mentors were listed as an invaluable support to participants at various stages of their career trajectory, and "having a good support base" was of upmost importance to VP Janet in regard to her success as an administrator. When asked about her academic path, VP Anita attested to the importance of a multifaceted network consisting of mentors, allies, and champions:

> I need mentors and allies, and I need champions, and I need advocates, my network needs all of those. It can't just be mentoring. It has to be all of those aspects; I think that has helped me to get where I am…. Not only do you have to have the education, but you need to have champions out there who are creating space because there's only so much knocking down the doors you can do on your own. Sometimes you have to understand the value of champions who are in this space and have the ability to open the door, as opposed to me, straining myself and knocking down the door.

When reflecting specifically on those whom she considered mentors and champions, she reflected on in-group and out-of-group influencers, adding:

For me, that made me reflect on my journey, professionally, and who were the

champions? So, people of Color for me were the mentors, and certainly the champions.

But I think about the champions as people who did not share the same racial or ethnic

experience that I did, but believed in it so much and believed in who I was, that they went

out there and championed and opened doors for me.

Mentoring was listed by VP Toni as one of the top three attributes to being a successful senior

student affairs officer: "Mentoring, supporting, and ensuring that we create spaces for Black

women to be successful." She went on to talk about the role of cross-cultural and across gender

mentors throughout her tenure as an administrator:

Yeah, I've got a series of mentors. I've got male mentors, I've got female mentors, I've

got White mentors. I have more than one, and I have them for very different reasons.

They all bring a different expertise to the area. I've got someone who specializes in law

in higher educations. I've got a mentor who was the first Black vice president at [names

institution], so she can talk about what that experience means. I've got White women

who support me and can help me think through situations that look very political, and that

I need to figure out how to navigate differently. I've got folks who are LGBTQ

mentors…So I've pretty much got a mentor for everything because everybody has their

own personal experience that they bring to the table.

In addition to champions and seasoned mentors, Vice President Whitney talked about the

importance of peer mentors in her quest to be an effective administrator:

I do think I have peer mentors…That's my board of directors as I call them. We push

each other to be greater. I think that has been very critical as well, not just having the

seasoned mentor, but who are your peer mentors who can give you things along the way,

push you into different uncomfortable situations because they see your potential. That

has been very beneficial as well.

Vice President Jill has kept lasting relationships with mentors dating back to her first role in

higher education and maintains that these relationships have proved to be just as valuable as

newly formed mentor relationships. In fact, on the day of our interview, she had met with a

long-standing mentor for lunch:

> We just came from lunch today. I call him, I text him. I remember within the first couple
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> of months in my role I called him to help me make a decision because I was having push
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> back from my assistant vice president. He guided me through that, he was telling me
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> today at lunch about things to do, he was guiding me through all this…He goes, you
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> might be on the island by yourself, but you have got to make sure that the students stay in
>
> the center. So yeah, our relationship is just as strong as ever. And I really appreciate
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> him.

Vice President Anita echoed this outlook when speaking about a long-time mentor:

> My mentor that I had in undergrad still continues to serve as a mentor for me, primarily
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> because she knows me so well. She knows that person in me that will want to go off in a
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> heartbeat. But she also knows the person that I am now. So, for me, she can serve as a
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> true gut check on who I am and make me think about things and say, well, what is your
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> motivation for really doing this? Is this you going above and beyond, or do you need to
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> let this go? So, my mentor continues to do that for me in many, many ways. So, it's
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> important for me to do that and have that; we have a great relationship and continue to
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> have a strong relationship with that.

All of the participants reflected on former or current mentor relationships that they have had over the years, some dating back to when they were undergraduate students. The mentor support proved to be an invaluable asset to the participants in their ascension to leadership. Participants described having a mentor as essential because doing so provides access to networks they otherwise may not have been privy to, increases their job prospects, enhances their promotion possibilities, and serves as a source of advice and insider information. The participants also stressed the importance of mentoring being reciprocal, adding that they too serve as mentors to other professionals, mainly younger, African American women.

Presidential support. All of the participants reported directly to the president of their institution. Participants spoke about their relationship with the president in terms of their decision-making power and their ability to maintain a good relationship with the president, his cabinet, and stakeholders. These dynamics proved to be important factors in terms of retention and level of institutional support felt by participants. Vice President Whitney reiterated the importance of having a supportive president, who trusts your leadership and decision-making skill:

> I think that is so important, the type of relationship you do have with a president because I've been in situations or I've had people around me who experienced something totally different. When we're at the table making decisions, it's real transparent. We know each other at the table and you can say, "Well Whitney, this is going to impact students, what do you think we need to do?" And I'm very firm when things are happening, he's calling to say, "Is this right? What's the word on the street? What do you feel?" It is a good feeling.

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Vice President Toni also agreed that she felt supported by her president and added, "He, in essence, makes sure that everybody is heard at the table." As someone who has had the opportunity to work autonomously throughout her career, she shared insight and caution about decision-making freedoms:

> I've always had that autonomy to make those important decisions. But, I'm also smart enough to know that there are some decisions you don't want to make by yourself. You don't want to be the one that's out there hanging when it either goes badly or even when you're celebrating, you want to celebrate as an institution. So, for me, my decisions are never really about me. I am going to promote a vision and an idea, but I'm also going to have people at the table that help me to look at the holes in the vision and the idea and to fill the gap and to really help me rethink it.

The pattern of being at the table was an advantage that VP Jill believed was most valuable as well:

> My former boss was an African American male; he let me be at the table. He let me have my ideas, and if my ideas were crazy and not in line with maybe some other things, we would talk about it and he would never make me apologize or even take them off the table, he would just talk like, let's have a conversation, you know, why do you feel that way? And I think that helps me in my job now as vice president. So, in my job now as vice president to be comfortable to say things at the president's table because my former VP had allowed me that in the relationship.

She further attributed the supportive relationship she had with the president to opportunities for advancement, exposure, and professional development:

My current president has been so supportive of me. He nominated me for a presidential

training program that I finished in February. That meant a lot to me because it said that

he saw something in me, he saw me as a president.

In speaking with VP Janet about her relationship with the president at her institution and

decision-making power, she reflected both on the level of support she received and the lack

thereof from some of her colleagues at other institutions:

I would say yet, it is very satisfactory. My president allows me to make decisions. I

don't have to run anything by him to make a decision, I just say, "Hey this is what I'm

planning," and he's like, "Okay is it going to work? Did you think about it?" He asks

those questions, not in a way that he's contradicting me, or he doesn't think it's going to

work, he just wants to understand my rationale for my decision-making. That's very

important for me because if I'm going to be in this role, I need to be able to do the job. I

have some colleagues that are vice presidents and their hands are tied. They have to get

permission from the president to do anything. That is not the case here. That helps me

because it frees me to think outside the box, to think about some things and to do things

that my president probably isn't thinking about…I like the fact that he allows me to make

decisions and to lead my team and to just do what we feel is necessary.

As administrators who reported directly to the president of their institution, all five

participants cited that they felt respected and that their relationship with the president was

trusting and open. They all also said that their decision-making power was satisfactory, which is

important as the VPSA is an influential position that should be entrusted with making decisions

on behalf of the students and changing and helping to shape progression of the university.

Networking. Higher education is a constantly growing and evolving field. The participants emphasized that in order to stay competitive and current with the everchanging dynamics of the industry, constant networking is critical to senior student affairs professionals. The women in this study reinforced that notion, sharing insights into specific ways that they have broadened their networks. Building relationships with other professionals in the field was emphasized. Vice President Whitney offered a nice summary of networking: "It's not what you know, it's who you know. But you've got to know something." She stressed the importance of developing a network while in pursuit of professional development:

> Being strategic, always still being a part of professional organizations. You have to, unfortunately to stay relevant, stay on top of things, because again, the barriers…Networking is so, so critical. I can't tell people that enough. Go to the things you just don't want to go to. Networking is so critical because now, I know the VPs at different HBCUs and I still am intentional about reaching out to other vice presidents at PWIs….I think a degree says a lot, but you have to get all that you can, and then once you get it, you have to join professional organizations and be active. Don't just put it saying I'm a part of NASPA. You have to do something in these professional organizations because, again, I think that's how it builds networks.

Involvement with professional organizations and affiliations associated with them were strategies for success for several participants. Vice President Toni was clear that in order to grow in student affairs and ascend to the senior level you need to "get involved beyond your institution, professional associations are key." She was encouraged to by a mentor to join the board of directors for the regional governing association for higher education in her state and also served as a reviewer for the accreditation board that her institution reported to, adding that these

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experiences led to her "being in the room with some great presidents, vice presidents for academic affairs, business and financial leaders, and pretty much every area imaginable on a college campus."

Participants viewed networking as not just the ability to work the room, but to build authentic and trusting relationships both inside and outside of their institutions. Vice President Jill had a rather robust and political method to networking:

I'm sure in your work that you read the book by, I think it's Birnbaum, *How Colleges Work.* Building relationships, that's what it is, that I build those relationships…you can call it a strategy, call it political, call it whatever you want. I became friends with the first lady, where no one else, they never took her out to lunch and [didn't want] anything from her. So, now we are really good friends…. The VP of [alumni relations] is good friends with the president, and so, I made friends with him when I very first got here, and he loved me. So, I have that to my advantage, to get some things that I want. So, my strategy is, I have to be political. That's one of those models from Birnbaum's book. It's me being intentional, I am not faculty. I've made friends with faculty members….

So, definitely it's building relationships, that's what it is, that I built those relationships.

Vice President Anita emphasized that networking did not always consist of desirable experiences, and acknowledged that she felt incongruity with networking as a necessity and her own interests in her role as VP:

I think about networking experiences where I really don't want to be. A great example is as vice president at least at the cabinet level at all institutions, you have to engage with donors in some capacity. That's part of your responsibility, to help raise funds for the institution, be able to talk about the story, the mission, the connection, that's going to

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have donors support the important causes….Let me tell you what that does to me, makes

me exhausted. When I'm done with one of these, I am literally so tired that I just need to

rest. It's exhausting. It really is. I don't know that people know or understand that….but

there's no other thing to be.

Intragroup networking among other Black professionals was also cited by participants as

a way to build alliances, engage in shared dialogue, and be in community. Vice President Jill

discussed internal intragroup networking that was a staple with colleagues at her institution:

We get together, we used to do monthly get togethers at people's places. Now, we have a

think called wind down Wednesdays over here at our restaurant. We go over there and

sit in the lobby. I mean we take over the lobby to where the tourists that were coming in

there at the hotel would be like, what is this, a Black convention?   So, we are a very tight

support group.

She expanded to talk about how these groups mature outside of the workplace:

We go to these conferences that we find each other, and we talk and stay in touch with

each other. So, I think just reaching out and finding those connections. Because those

professional development [opportunities], NASPA, ASH, ACPA, they all have those

networks or the affinity groups.

Vice President Whitney attested to the benefits of her involvement with an affinity group within

a professional organization:

So yeah, at NASPA they have a senior leadership women of Color [group]. Either you're

an AVP or VP, and it's just women. We get together at NASPA just to have a debriefing,

a breathing session. We hear the stories, get strategies, and network.

The social capital gained by networking was cited by participants as being crucial to advancement. Participants described networking as being both strategic and intentional. Networking occurred in many forms, including informal networks with other VPSAs, formal networks via professional conferences, intragroup or affinity group networking with other Black VPSAs, and through other professional or social events.

Visibility. As reported earlier, participants shared feelings of isolation and invisibility within their various roles at their institutions. In contrast, however, their racial/ethnic status leads to heightened visibility on their campuses, and participants reported feeling pressure to be seen and positively recognized and noticed on campus by different constituents, including parents and students. Vice President Whitney shared her approach to establishing herself as evident on campus:

> I'm popping up in the residence halls, I'm eating in the café, I'm going to the late-night programs. So, they know me, and definitely their parents know me. I mean I can't tell you the amount of graduation invites I get to come to a party or dinner or something or a thank you. That, to me, is important because they're trusting their children with us for four or five years. So, I say that coming in the door at new student orientation. Look at my face, see who I am. Email me, call me, but listen, we're going to work this together.

She further added that being visible in more unconventional ways is equally as important:

> I think being visible and being in the places that are just not common or normal for a student affairs professional, I think that is critically important, and I learned that from [names former supervisor], when he made me go to certain things. I'm like, what's this about, but then I was able to talk about things at different settings. When I get asked

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questions, I know it. Again, it's really not just staying in your bubble with your area of expertise. It's really being an expert in a lot of different things.

Vice President Toni spoke about the dichotomy of being both visible and invisible commenting, "Sometimes, I can be invisible, and I don't do it purposely." She added that visibility is considered one of her top three recommendations for improving the leadership pipeline for Black women:

I'm visibly out there with my campus and in professional associations, with people who are senior student affairs officers, and I think that makes a difference because I'm not your typical student affairs person and I get it…I can be invisible and I don't do it purposely, because I don't need to be that person out like that. I can do the VP role, I can be the public face, but I like to put my people out there because they need the exposure, people need to know what they bring to the table.

Vice President Janet reflected on being visible and conspicuous as an African American administrator:

My presence is not hidden, meaning everybody knows the Black woman is here and everybody knows the Black woman that runs the college lives here at the college. So even if I wanted to just live under the radar, I can't.

The women in this study reported a high level of visibility as compared to other faculty and staff on campus. They highlighted that while being visible is important, it could lead to more scrutiny and a pressure to be seen.

No Straight Line to the Top

Each participant took a different path to the vice-presidency. Their ascension to leadership was nonlinear and did not follow a logical and predictable route. In their ascension to

leadership, they have faced different demands and had to adjust their leadership style and professional interactions accordingly. Several themes emerged as a result of how participants' various educational and professional experiences led them to where they are today. Those themes included:

- I Fell into this Field

- Active Representation

- Leadership

I fell into this field. The women all held different roles before ultimately landing a senior leadership in student affairs position. Their career trajectories span decades and include work across multiple industries, from corporate boardrooms to law and government, philanthropic organizations, and education. All of the participants shared that a career in higher education was not necessarily their goal, and many had other aspirations and started out in fields quite distant from education completely; however, in some shape or form, their desire to change the face of higher education by having a voice and seat at the table was the catalyst to their careers.

Vice President Jill shared that low salary expectations [in the educational field] led to her wanting to be an entertainment lawyer, but ultimately, after a conversation with her mother, that vision changed: "I remember us arguing, because education doesn't pay well and it doesn't treat its folks well…So, I really wasn't going out to try to be a Black person in education, especially higher ed." She was recruited by a large PWI to work as an academic adviser and eventually ascended to an associate director position before finding her way back to her alma mater. It was a mentor who helped her make meaning of the move: "He goes, we are our student voices, you

might be on this island by yourself, but you have got to make sure that the students stay in the center of all of this."

Vice President Whitney shared her journey into student affairs after also aspiring to be a lawyer:

I had never thought I would be in this position. My ultimate goal was to be a lawyer, but you know, I had a lot of fun as an undergrad… and I started being very active as a student, I worked in the cultural center, I did all these things and then saw, oh this is really a job you can do.

She too got her professional start at her alma mater and had a mentor that influenced her to consider a career in higher education:

My mentor, I ran into him at the grocery store and he's like what are you doing? Someone's leaving, do you want to come at work at [names alma mater], because you worked in this office as a student. So, as I'm working in the field of higher ed, people started recognizing my potential.

When recalling her entry into student affairs, VP Janet said, "I fell into it," initially having ambitions of being an actress:

I was not going into higher education at all. So, get this, I was going to be an actress, and I'm not kidding, I had an agent, my undergraduate degree is in drama and communications. I did local plays, I did commercials, I did all kinds of things. I got into higher ed because I needed a job. I needed to work. I got a role in career services and I started working with students and then I was like, I like this, I like connecting with students. I like helping them identify who they are, what they want to be, and the impact they want to make on the world. And that's how I got into this.

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Vice President Toni, reflected on her interactions with the dean of students at her undergraduate institution as her introduction to the field:

> I think that's where my career got launched was when I saw this little woman walking across the campus and she was the friendliest thing on the face of the earth. I found out she was the Dean of Students and I said, I need her job. So, I just started building my career based on that.

She also attributed her experience as an undergraduate student on a predominantly white campus as having spiked her interest in student affairs, particularly advocating for students of Color:

> I went to this little place called [names alma mater] in the middle of nowhere, and it's this little utopia that was just the most beautiful place I'd ever seen. I came to campus on the first day and everybody was so friendly. I noticed that they recruited a lot of Black students that semester, there were 60 of us that came in and at the end of the semester, there were only 30 of us remaining. So, that too launched my career because I began advocating with the administration and talking about our experiences and helping them to understand how we could retain more students on campus.

Vice President Anita's initial career goal was to be a writer, having earned a bachelor's degree in journalism. She got her start in student affairs from a mentoring program that she was a part of through the Black student union at her undergraduate institution, first working as a receptionist in the counseling center and then working in the vice president for student affairs office as a student receptionist. As an undergraduate student, she was the president of the Black student union, involved with alternative spring break, and was a senator for student government. This involvement is what she said "kept me going at the university." She also spoke about a mentor relationship being the vehicle that sparked her interest in student affairs:

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In my senior year, the vice [president], we had a really great relationship, and he asked

me what I wanted to do…And we spoke about student affairs, the college student

personnel program, and I applied to that and got into that graduate program.

Her passion for student affairs is rooted in the ability to do diversity and inclusion work:

Diversity-related inclusion, equity, whatever you want to call it, has always been a part of

my experience. Even in all of those positions, I would find the opportunity to coordinate

training or to chair the multicultural committee, or to advise the multicultural committee.

That's a passion area I've always had.

While each one of the VPs took a different path to land in student affairs, their

educational track was similar. All but one of the presidents hold a terminal degree, and they all

agreed that their master's program helped to prepare them for a career in student affairs.

Active representation. In chapter two, I provided data concerning the

underrepresentation of Black women in collegiate leadership. The participants acknowledged

that too, speaking collectively about how the lack of representation manifested in their lived

experiences as administrators at both PWIs and HBCUs. When asked how they represent their

constituents, their students, all participants replied that they were active in the ways that they

showed up for students and their interests. Vice President Whitney described her involvement as

"an active advocate" for students.

The lack of Black administrators on campus illustrated the problem of representation on

campus for VP Janet and influenced her quest to fill the gap:

There's still challenges, particularly in terms of diversity and inclusion, not only for our

students but for our faculty, staff, and for myself. I look at our board of trustees. There's

one person of color and I think there's about 52 people on the board. So, think about

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that, okay. You're recruiting students of Color, not just African American students, but your leadership doesn't represent what you're trying to make your institution look like.

She went on to give specific examples of how active representation manifests in her role:

So, I would hope I'm staying active and I hope [students] see it as active. I have to be very clear…particularly with my students of Color, because some of us feel I'm not doing enough and I think that's their own struggle of being at a predominantly White institution….So I think active because I'm doing some things that will push them ahead. I'm getting support for them. I'm increasing funding. I'm increasing support in terms of programming, bringing people in. Something as simple as bringing in Black Greek letter organizations. Those are the things that I'm doing to enhance their experience here…. I'm running my mouth; I'm talking a lot in cabinet meetings just to make sure that students are supported and they have what they need.

Vice President Janet gave also gave a powerful description of passive representation:

I remember one of my students who is now a Ph.D., and she's teaching, and we ran into each other. She needed to interview me, I believe for something, and I was just so proud of her and at the end she said, "Well, Dr. Janet, you know I'm a Dr. because of you." So the impact on people, you never know….She said "I never said anything to you, but I watched you, I saw you on campus and I just watched how you carried yourself, and that's what made me go and get a Ph.D."

Vice President Toni commented that her "focus is serving all students," but in particular underrepresented students:

Looking at the experiences of underrepresented or underserved community members and how they are transitioning into the institution and their experiences once at the institution,

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and of course helping them to graduate and become successful alumni who come back

and support the institution.

Her approach with students is communal: "I'm always pulling their family members in. I'm

always pulling their family in to talk about what do we need to be aware of, how can we think

this thing through differently?"

Vice President Whitney gave credence to an ongoing problem with representation in

student affairs regarding active representation:

We had a board of trustees committee meeting today and they were talking, and someone

said, "Well those are Whitney's students." No, we're here together. It's a good thing and

a bad thing because I think everyone should have a vested interest in our students like I

do and advocate for them, not just in situations but daily…If they hear the word student,

they're always sending me an email or calling me. Sometimes I'm flattered, but I'm

pushing back because I want everyone to advocate on behalf of the students not in their

lens or their little bubble or silo.

Vice President Anita established a connection to being an active representative for students and

to being vocal about her expectations with the president:

My approach is active because I don't know any other way to go…When I took this

permanent position, well actually when I first was asked to serve as an interim vice

president, I had the conversation with the president, am I having this opportunity to be

passive, am I just maintaining or do I have an opportunity to take action and make a

difference? Because I understand that's what happens, that sometimes you are given an

opportunity just to maintain. And other times, you are given an opportunity where you

have the ability to do, take action. And thankfully he said no, even in an interim role, it's

yours.

She further expressed why these conversations were so important:

In terms of the whole theory of representation and presence, for some VPSAs who don't

report directly to the president that's all you get to do as opposed to really being able to

be active. Or the only place you get to be active is in the space of diversity and not in

other spaces. And that, I can't imagine that. I can't imagine as the VPSA…No, I'm the

vice president for student affairs, I get to do all of that.

Vice President Jill said that she views herself as an active representative but acknowledged the

role that being a passive presence has for students as well:

So yes, there's my face as the vice president for student affairs, an African American

woman. But I'm also very engaged with students. I insert myself…So we're going to

have a training coming up here soon, as soon as we can bring our students back. I have

always inserted myself in those trainings so that I can get to know all the students that

work for us in student life. But especially our African American students.

Vice President Jill takes a very student-centered approach to active representation, not only with

student staff but with all students:

As vice president, I instituted lunch with the VP and it was once a month.   I have lunch

with them, and we can talk. And that's how I get to know the students in that regard. So,

it's me being intentional. We have a Black male leadership initiative, that's for our first-

year students. I've gone in there to teach. My dissertation was on gay and lesbian

college students, college athletes. I go in there and talk to them about the coming out

process, and I get to know students that way. So, I insert myself into their lives so that

they get to know me. And then I am an ally, and advocate and important to them.

Each participant commented on the importance of active representation. They were

deliberate in their actions to engage with students and advocate on their behalf. They realized

that their presence played a critical role in the development of students of Color *and* White

students on campus. The participants strived to be relatable and assessable to all constituents,

including students and their families.

Leadership. This study presented an account of lived experiences of five student affairs

professionals who identify as Black women. They discussed the barriers as well as the successes

that they have encountered as senior student leaders in higher education. Throughout our

conversations, the various ways in which their identity influenced their approach to leadership

was evident. When asked to share which leadership attributes or characteristics have proved to

be successful in her career, VP Whitney asserted that being a servant leader was primary:

> I've always been the type that if I ask you to do it, it's because I've done it, or I will do it.
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> I think some VPs on campus would get mad at me, if I'm going to a meeting, I'm going
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> to post a flyer on the way. You have people that do that, yes, but why can't I? I think
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> servant leadership is very important to me because I think people have to know that
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> you're going to do the work alongside them, and then again, if they see you doing the
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> work, it's easy for them to follow you.

She acknowledged the role that advocacy and purpose have had as she leads both students and

staff:

> I also think advocacy is one of my things, and I just think it comes naturally in the work
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> that I do in student affairs because if I'm not at the table advocating for the students or

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my team, who will? Also, it's knowing and defining your purpose...you really have to

love and know your purpose on why you're doing things because as they say, you're

really not doing work if you're doing something that you love. So, there's not a time that

I haven't gone to campus that I didn't want to go. At that point, I think it's time to do

something else.

Vice President Janet described her leadership style as being inclusive and called attention to all

of the constituents that she serves:

I always say that I work primarily work for three people. I work for my students. I work

for my president and I work for my board of trustees. And each of those three

components expect and need something different from me, and I have to always be ready

to respond and understand what the differences are with responding to the questions and

their needs, or just giving them updates.

When making decisions, she added the mantra that she lives by when leading: "There go the

people, I must follow them for I'm their leader. I am following them, I'm taking their lead, I'm

listening to what they're saying." She echoed what VP Whitney said about identifying your

purpose as a leader: "The other piece is understanding who you are and what your role is or what

you want to be and what's the best fit….Understanding what's best for you, but also getting

outside your comfort zone."

Vice President Toni takes a more holistic approach to leadership:

Being a person of integrity and good character, having worked in pretty much every role

in student affairs…My decisions are never really about me. I'm going to promote a

vision and an idea, but I'm also going to have people at the table that help me to look at

the holes in the vision and idea… I've always fought to have some degree of autonomy,

but now I've reorganized, because I'm a little more seasoned. It's good to have autonomy, but it's better to have collegiality at partnerships and a team of people who are working to make the best possible experience for the students, faculty, staff, alumni, and guests.

She also has a mantra and accompanying outlook on her role as adjacent to others:

I work very intentionally to ensure that I am working with people who are different from my identity…I definitely try to reach out to those students who are from communities that are a little bit more in need or impoverished because there, for the grace of God go I. I was six blocks away from the projects and my entire family lived on one block…So, I always recognize that and try to make sure that…I operate from the perspective that just because I have some privileges that I don't have to sit in my little space and not reach out to others that are different from me.

Advocacy was also a major influence on how she approached leadership:

As I'm sitting in these executive cabinet meetings, my advocacy is always we need to talk to the students and the parents…I don't know that I'm a fan of bureaucracy, I try to eliminate it as much as possible, but I am a fan of putting the right people in the room to have the right conversations to move things forward.

Vice President Anita views herself as a more radical leader, helping to guide and educate the students and staff under her purview:

I always think about the radical aspect of me that wants to break the door down and have it temporarily. And what I've known in my experiences that sometimes when you're working with systems and bureaucracy, people will allow you to break the door down and give you a nugget, but that's the only nugget you're going to get. If you truly want to

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do something, you have to open the door and get there. You have to observe, understand

power structures, and you have to find a way to navigate that space and build sufficient

trust and to make lasting change.

She attributed relatability and authenticity as two of her top characteristics of leadership, having

a vision and the ability to think big picture were two of her top leadership characteristics:

 I'm in a leadership position to be the voice that says hey let's think about this…I love

what I do, but I think that my work ethic is one of the things that will speak for itself.

I'm an action, implementation, outcomes-based person. I hate doing things just to do

things…So that's helped, I think, my willingness to take on challenges and things outside

my scope of responsibility, I'm always willing to push myself professionally into spaces

that I don't necessarily have to be a part of to learn more about system and to learn more

about how decision are made.

Each participant employed a different leadership strategy. As senior leaders, their

positions were considered prestigious and influential. Their presence in these roles had

implications not only for the staff and students that they currently served, but for future African

American women in the workforce as the next theme describes.

I'm Thinking about the Black Girls Coming Behind Me

The final theme, I'm Thinking about the Black Girls Coming Behind Me, is focused on

the suggestions and recommendations that participants in this study have for Black women

aspiring to be senior student affairs administrators. The participants reflected on the personal

practices that drew them into the field, their future aims, as well as efforts that institutions and

individual departments should focus on when trying to recruit Black women to senior leadership

positions. Two subthemes emerged from this theme:

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- Aspirations and Advancement

- Pipeline Practices

Aspirations and advancement. Despite the barriers to the advancement of Black women leaders in higher education, the women in this study are a testament to perseverance and fortitude. Each participant shared the individual goals and aspirations that she is considering for her next steps. Many would consider college presidency as being a natural progression for VPSAs; however, the participants were evenly split on the matter. Vice Presidents Jill and Janet were clear about wanting to secure a presidency role following their tenure as VP. Vice President Jill has plans to stay at her current institution until the sitting president leaves, and then she said she would like to "go and work at an HBCU, whether it's in the presidency position or the vice president," before ultimately coming back to be the president of her undergraduate alma mater, where she currently works. When asked about her next steps VP Janet simply said, "I'm going to be a president one day soon…Yeah that is my goal. I'm hoping for that within the next year and a half, two years, max."

While she acknowledged that a natural next step would be president, VP Whitney was uncertain with that being her next move, and for her that is "okay for the moment to not know." Instead, she is debating and has considered doing something with a professional higher education organization such as her regional accrediting body or NASPA. What she knows for sure is: "In the next year, it will be something different. I just don't know what that is yet."

Vice President Toni was also not convinced that moving into a president role was next for her, rather considering a career in fundraising as a potential next step. She stated, "I don't aspire to be a president. I feel like I'm where I'm supposed to be, and until the good Lord tells me I am supposed to be somewhere else, I will be right here."

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Vice President Anita shared those sentiments: "I fundamentally believe that I am where I'm supposed to be." She shared that she has no desire to be a president of a university, instead she had her sights on being faculty stating, "When I retire, when I earn my doctoral degree, I want to teach in a student affairs program." She noted the importance of having teaching experience:

Understanding faculty culture, understanding curriculum, pedagogy and all of those things are so important if you're going to talk critically with your colleagues and your students in academic affairs about things that impact students, because I need to be able to help them understand how what they do in the classroom impacts retention, impacts the student experience, and how pedagogy could be noninclusive and alienate and marginalize student experiences.

She further explained:

If I don't understand that, and if I don't have the language, then I can't. Yes, I'm not faculty, but I do have the experience building a course and building curriculum and thinking about those things. So, I would say that for me as a chief student affairs officer, I would say everybody may not have the experience to teach, but if you do, take the opportunity to have that experience in the classroom because it gives you credibility and legitimacy when you go to the table.

The importance of teaching as a gateway to advancement resonated with VP Janet as well. She concluded from her observations, "My experience, as long as I've been in higher ed, is that faculty has always been at the forefront." So, while she acknowledged that a college or university campus would not thrive without campus life, she also recognizes that "It's important to teach." She offered the following advice:

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If you're able to do an adjunct role or something that's important also because we're also

challenged on the student affairs side, particularly by the academic side. So, we can have

our feet in both sides. That's very helpful…And that way, when faculty is talking, I can

talk to them as well and understand what their needs or concerns are. They don't always

understand my side of the house, but you know I can have that conversation because what

I try to tell them is our jobs are interconnected and you've got to understand that. And

you only know that they're interconnected if you have your feet in both sides.

While all of the VPs indicated that they felt respected in the workplace and did not raise

concerns about their salary in terms of advancement or in regard to pay, Vice President Jill did

share an experience she had that was reflective of pay the pay disparity that Black women face:

I couldn't understand, like I was like, my salary didn't move. Did I get a raise? Then he

blamed it on somebody else. He was like, "Well, people were getting 5% raises." Well, I

got a 0.0005% raise, and I said, "Is there a mistake here? What happened?" So, he's

like, "Well, I don't give them out…you have to make the recommendation for them to

give." And so, I had to have the conversation, it wasn't a hard conversation, I just said to

him, if that's what you think of me, I know the work that I do. So, I promise you this, I

will be here 8 to 5 unless I have a night program, and if I have a night program, I'm

coming in late the next day or I'm going to take off early…I said I'll give you a hundred

percent 8 to 5 but that's it, don't ask anything else. And he just looked at me like I had

three heads.

Vice President Jill's recount of her interaction with her supervisor regarding pay and

promotion is an important barrier to note. Black women and other women of color earn less than

their White counterparts. Conversations about adequate and equal salary and opportunities for

advancement are equally as important as mentoring, networking, and other forms of support.

Pipeline practices. The women contended that more attention needs to be focused on

how institutional practices either help or hinder professionals of Color, specifically Black

women, in reaching the ranks of senior-level or chief student affairs officers. African American

women face markedly different barriers to advancement. While more women are "breaking the

glass ceiling" (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010, p. 172), as Vice President Janet notes, higher

education as a whole "is still a predominantly male and White led field."

The participants each offered their suggestions for other Black women aspiring to be

senior leaders in student affairs, as well as recommendations to improve the leadership pipeline

in student affairs. Vice President Anita suggests being intentional about taking opportunities that

are given. She noted:

> If I'm going to be given a space at the table, I'm taking the opportunity. I may not know
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> what it would bring, but it's the opportunity. Because you may think what does that have
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> to do with me? Why would I do that? But what I have found is that when you get into
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> that space, people get to see your work and your skill and your talent…Then when it gets
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> to that opportunity, they'll say, "Who is the person that we think would have the ability to
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> do it?" And that's what it comes down to.

Vice President Whitney agreed, with VP Anita's comments on intentionality, stating, "You have

to just always stay sharp on your skillset because you can get so involved and bogged down with

your day-to-day and your professional things that you want to aspire to just go to the side." She

said that when focusing on advancement, being granted opportunities is important:

When I say opportunities, it's not that you need a new title, but it's about being in different spaces to be able to speak a language. So, I'm very intentional about that. I always tell my team when we have our strategy meetings, your positions are important, but my goal is to make sure you're getting opportunities to just be in the room, and what does that look like?

Vice President Janet recommended these efforts also be intentional and referenced a program that she participated in specifically designed for elevating African American women in higher education:

There is a barrier, there is a wall, there is a block. So, this program, [names program], was designed specifically to open doors and it's not just for letting Black people in because you're Black, you still need to be qualified and have what it takes, but it's giving you an extra push to get yourself seen. That's the main thing I think once we're seen, we can sell ourselves. It's just getting someone to look at us.

She went on to say that she felt she has a personal responsibility to mentor and be a role model to support and help other African American women as they move forward in their careers, doing what she can to be an example, adding, "I'm thinking about the young Black girls that's coming behind me."

As a current VP at an HBCU, Toni offered her unique perspective on succession, which speaks to the concept of fit and also reinforces the idea that HBCUs are less than:

If you're working at an HBCU, you need another reference besides a Black person, if you're trying to apply at a PWI because nobody cares…I've got a friend I'm trying to help right now, she's brilliant…But nobody cares, when she's interviewing at these PWIs, about that experience, because she doesn't have not one White reference in the

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bunch, that can speak to her ability to relate and quote unquote be the right fit for the institution.

As referenced earlier, the glass ceiling is an adage used to describe the barriers to career advancement that women face. Through their interviews, the women in this study describe barriers that could be defined as a concrete wall, a barrier more dense and less easily shattered (Griffith, 2014; Norman, Rankin-Wright, & Allison, 2018) and is an expression that has been used to illustrate the significant difficulties that Black women and other women of Color face as they try to advance in their careers. These barriers include stereotypes, oppressive behaviors, lack of visibility, questioning of authority and credibility, perceived fit in the workplace, double-discrimination status, and exclusion from informal networks. The participants offered their thoughts on how institutions can remedy and address these barriers and how Black women aspiring to be senior administrators can overcome them.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of five senior student affairs professionals who identify as Black or African American and work at either a four-year PWI or HBCU. While there is no monolithic Black women's experience of leadership, this study provides a sample of the Black women in senior leadership roles at institutions of higher education. The experiences of these women provide thick, rich data within the theoretical frameworks of Black feminist thought and representational bureaucracy. The first section of this chapter introduced each participant via a participant profile which included details of their former and current job roles, the artifact that they identified as a representation of success, and a summary of their career trajectory to date. The second section presented an account of the findings for this research addressed by the four research questions and depicted by the

participants through themes that emerged from the data using Saldaña's (2016) four-stage coding process. In the chapter that follows, Chapter Five, I discuss the findings and include implications for practice and recommendations for ongoing research.

Chapter Five: Discussion of Findings, Implications for Practice, Recommendations for

Ongoing Research

The objective of this qualitative multiple-case study was to examine the lived experiences of Black women in senior leadership in student affairs, specifically how they have navigated their roles in higher education, the barriers and challenges they have experienced, and their demonstrated successes along the way. Furthermore, I explored issues they encountered as they ascended to their roles as well as strategies and recommendations for the pipeline of the field. The study was guided by four research questions:

1. What are the work experiences of Black women in senior leadership positions in student affairs?

2. What barriers/issues to obtaining senior leadership positions in student affairs are identified by Black women?

3. What do Black women senior student affairs leaders attribute to their success?

4. What recommendations and/or strategies do Black women senior leaders suggest to improve the leadership pipeline in student affairs as it relates to other Black women obtaining such roles?

This research study was an exploration of the lived experiences of five African American women senior student affairs leaders employed at either four-year predominantly white institutions (PWIs) or Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). I chose to include both institution types in this study due to the ever-changing demographics of higher education, with many college campuses seeing an increase in women enrolling in college, specifically women of Color (Hussar & Bailey, 2018). Gathering the perspective of student affairs professionals on both types of campuses was important, as those charged with working with

students will need to adapt to a more diverse student body. African American administrators continue to remain disproportionately underrepresented in all areas of higher education, making up less than 8% of higher education administrators (Pritchard, Nadel-Hawthorne, Schmidt, Fuesting, & Bichsel, 2020). Women hold less than 40% of executive leadership roles, and the numbers are even lower for Black women holding executive positions in student affairs with recent data highlighting that Black and Hispanic women in leadership positions make up 14% of the workforce (Bichsel, Pritchard, Nadel-Hawthorne, Fuesting & Schmidt, 2020).

My research was grounded in Collin's (2000) Black feminist thought (BFT) and Kingsley (1944) and Mosher's (1968) theory of representational bureaucracy. Black feminist thought rejects the negative imagery associated with Black womanhood, and instead, uses the intersecting oppressions of race, class, and gender that Black women face to produce social thought in the form of music, essays, poetry, stories and the like (Collins, 2000). Collins asserts that Black women's experiences are not widely known, or respected, but have been excluded, distorted, and suppressed against White interpretations of the world; hence BFT is designed to reflect "the distinctive themes of African-American women's experiences" (p. 251).

Representational bureaucracy argues that diverse constituent groups (i.e., students for this study) warrant a greater diversity of leaders and policy decision makers (Flowers, 2003). There are two types of representational bureaucracy: passive and active. In the context of this study passive representation is simply Black women having a presence in leadership roles on campus. Active representation includes the decision-making power that the women yield, their ability to enact change, having a seat in the president's cabinet, and their relationship with students. According to the Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) Research and Policy Institute's *Vice President for Student Affairs Census*, Black women are underrepresented

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in chief student affairs officer positions (7%) as compared to White women and White men (38% and 39% respectively; NASPA, 2014). Getting this number up to par with the landscape of both undergraduate and graduate students needs to be addressed. In higher education, the goal should be to provide meaningful engagement with diversity rather than superficial representation. In order to do so, the higher education workforce that is supposed to meet the needs of a diverse student population must adequately reflect the demographic that its members serve.

The intent of this study was to understand how Black women in senior leadership positions described their experiences in student affairs. The following five themes emerged as a result of document review, artifact elicitation, and participant interviews: (1) I Have a Right to Be Here, (2) Overt and Subtle Obstacles, -Isms et al., (3) Creating Social Capital, (4) No Straight Line to the Top, and (5) I'm Thinking About the Black Girls Coming Behind Me. The next section will present a summary of the findings describing the themes and subthemes that emerged from the data. Following, I provide implications for practice and recommendations for future research. I close the chapter with an overall summary of the research and a conclusion of the work.

Discussion of Findings

The themes that follow are a reflection of the experiences of the women of this study. I chose not to group the themes by research question, as there was much overlap between theme and question as I analyzed the data. The participants provided a range of narratives from their identity being at the forefront of their experience to their leadership style and their legacy. Each narrative provides an insider look at the experiences of Black women in senior student affairs leadership roles, including the perils and rewards associated with the position. The following sections connect the participant narratives to the literature.

I Have a Right to Be Here

This theme produced six subthemes: (1) Belonging, (2) Fit, (3) My Blackness, (4) Imposter Syndrome, (5) Code-Switching, and (6) HBCU Nourishing. Participants each shared different ways their identity as Black women resulted in their acquiescing in various situations and at times feeling uncomfortable in certain settings. This is synonymous with Razzante's (2018) stance on how administrators of color work in either predominately White or predominately male settings while navigating dual positions of privilege (VPSA) and marginalization (Black women). In addition, their intersectional identities leveraged experiences of both sexism and racism among peers at their institutions. Participants were unapologetic when proclaiming their identity as Black women. The women did not shed their identity in order to fit in; rather they acknowledged the differences and remained true to the value that they brought to the field and to an institution.

The overarching consensus among the participants centered on one question: Is this an environment that feels comfortable to me, or do I feel like I have a place here, do I belong? Participants used space and proximity as a measuring tool. Erroneous terms such as *fit* were thrown out during committee job searches; these terms were challenged by participants but not without pushback. Race and ethnicity are often reported by staff and faculty as a major barrier to a sense of belonging (Zambrana et al., 2017). Participants talked about favoritism, exclusion, and feeling less than (imposter syndrome) all as barriers to their success in the field. While many of the participants did not list lack of respect as being high on the list of barriers, they did agree with Jones and Dawkins (2012) that they faced more obstacles than their White counterparts, citing that the campus community was sometimes unwelcoming, and many participants found

themselves having to code-switch in the presence of both White and Black colleagues sometimes inadvertently and unconsciously to fit in.

One of the repeating sentiments of the women in the study referred to the experiences they had working at an HBCU versus a PWI. Of the participants, three of five either worked at or had previously worked at an HBCU. The overwhelming consensus about HBCUs was that while they were limited in resources, they provided a nourishing environment to both the students who attended them, and the faculty and staff employed at them. This is consistent with Scott's (2003) findings that assert that the type of institution does not affect career path or development, but the philosophies of HBCUs differ from those of PWIs in that "the success of the student is taken more personally at an HBCU" (p. 184).

The participants in this study were all high-achieving women, who were responsible for key functional areas on campus, and who have received national accolades for their work and accomplishments. The women acknowledged their contributions to the field and expressed confidence in their ability. Interestingly, participants did not attribute imposter syndrome, belonging, or fit as a personal fault or weakness, but as results of various forms of environmental factors beyond their control, which I address in the next section.

Overt and Subtle Obstacles, -Isms, et al.

This overarching theme had four subthemes: (1) Tokenism, (2) Racism, (3) Microaggressions, and (4) Oppression and Marginalization. The literature suggests (e.g., Constantine & Sue, 2007; Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003) that Black women in the workplace experience both overt and subtle forms of racism in the same manner that the five participants in my study identified. These subthemes combined lead to what Steele (2018) described as a "chilly climate" (p. 110). Participants recalled many instances of unwelcoming

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and hostile work environments, including seeing racist imagery on campus or in the surrounding town, having racist remarks directed towards them, and getting pushback on projects or programs designed to address diversity and inclusion. Through the participants' stories, it is clear that overt forms of racism still exist (i.e., being called the n-word), and less obvious racist behaviors from well-meaning White individuals (Constantine & Sue, 2007, p. 142) are rampantly present on college campuses where mission and vision statements proclaim that they are welcoming and diverse institutions.

Being one of few in their institutions in general, and certainly one of few in leadership positions, the participants were by default labeled tokens. Lewis (2016) attributes being a "numerical few" (p. 110) a direct result of the skewed compositions of PWIs (race) and HBCUs (gender). The Black women in my study felt the effects of being one of these few, affirming the fact that because they are one of only a few, they have a higher degree of visibility and have been called on to speak universally on behalf of Black women. Vice President Whitney gave credence to this, recalling a time at a former institution where she believed she was included only to meet a quota.

Constantine and Sue (2007) identified and reported three different ways that racial microaggressions manifest: these include (1) overt actions, (2) verbal statements, and (3) environmental offenses. An example of an overt action is being stopped by police without cause due to race or being followed (or ignored) by a salesperson in a department store due to race. Verbal microaggressions include a person professing to be colorblind, which is essentially denying, distorting, and minimalizing race and racism, or saying I don't see color, "people are people" (Constantine & Sue, 2007, p. 143). Environmental microaggressions include the lack of Black leadership or executives in a workplace or seeing symbols of racism (i.e., confederate

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flags or discriminatory literature or pamphlets in public spaces). The participants in this study all gave examples of experiencing, or being the target, of one or more of these types of microaggressions while at work.

Participants discussed the nuances of being marginalized due to the intersection of their race and gender. Vice President Anita gave an example of how the majority population frequently pointed out changes in Black women's hair as an ostracizing experience that creates a hostile work environment. West's (2015) study of the experiences of 10 African American women student affairs professions yielded similar sentiments. One of the participants said that the conscious or unconscious systemic actions that alienated or excluded them in the workplace were akin to staying in line or remaining in the margins. The women in my study relied on their varied forms of social capital to counter the marginalization.

Creating Social Capital

The theme Creating Social Capital resulted in four subthemes: (1) Mentor Support, (2) Presidential Support, (3) Networking, and (4) Visibility. The presence of a strong social network was highly promoted by the participants in this study. Coleman (1988) defines social capital as follows:

> Not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures and they facilitate certain actions of actors-whether persons or corporate actors within the structure. Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends in that its absence would not be possible. (p. S108)

The women cited having a solid network of supportive mentors, having the respect and confidence of their president, and collaborating with other Black professionals as contributors to

their success as senior student affairs officers (SSAOs). Mentoring was by far noted as the most vital for learning, thriving, and progressing in the field. Each of the participants attributed her relationship with either former or current mentors to her overall success. Three of the five participants made note that while mentoring is important, expanding one's network to include relationships with faculty was of equal, if not more importance, for those aspiring to be in senior roles and beyond. They stressed the importance of teaching as a gateway into larger circles that administrators are often not invited to, or included in. Their varied career paths and future goals are discussed in the next section.

No Straight Line to the Top

There were three subthemes as a result of this theme :(1) I Fell into this Field, (2) Active Representation, and (3) Leadership. Each participant's path to student affairs was different; however they shared one commonality—none of the participants set out with the goal of a career in student affairs. Once in the field however, participants, showed up as active representatives to the student population that they served in the form of action, advocacy, and interaction. Recognizing that there was not proportional representation of Black administrators, particularly of Black women administrators, in respect to the student population at their institutions, which were often either majority women or Black women, the participants worked to ensure that both the social and academic environments on their campuses were hospitable, welcoming, safe spaces for the students. Active representation is derived from the theory of representational bureaucracy. This theory has its origins in politics, and has mainly been used in research related to different levels of government (Kingsley, 1944; Mosher, 1968). The participants in this study were able to demonstrate its relevance to higher education, specifically the ways in which Black women administrators take an active role in representing their constituents (i.e., students).

The VPs also discussed their leadership styles and how the ways in which they lead influenced their peers and the people that they supervised. A myriad of leadership techniques were utilized by participants. Vice President Toni described her leadership approach as holistic, and VP Janet said that she leads with inclusivity, while VP Whitney is a self-proclaimed servant leader. Vice President Anita described her leadership style as dynamic, and VP Jill used leadership as a way to encourage others. While the participants felt respected and valued by their president, they also shared instances of their leadership or authority being questioned either by other colleagues, supervisees, or students. As leaders themselves, the final theme focused on the participants' future professional goals and aspirations, as well as ways in which the participants could contribute to the success of aspiring Black women student affairs professionals.

I'm Thinking about the Black Girls Coming Behind Me

The final theme contained two subthemes: (1) Aspirations and Advancement and (2) Pipeline Practices. A natural progression for VPSAs is usually ascension into the presidency. For the women in this study, that was not the most obvious goal for each of them. Two of the participants were very clear in their intent to seek a presidency position as their next role, one participant was uncertain, and two had no desire to be the president of a college or university. While the presidency may not be the ultimate goal, advancement and pay parity were of importance to the participants. None of the participants complained about their salaries, but in comparison to White SSAOs, there is a discrepancy in pay equity for Black women and for all minorities in higher education (McChesney, 2018). Women of Color and men of Color (i.e., Black/African American or Hispanic/Latino) are paid less than White men and remain underrepresented among higher education administrators with median earning of .67 cents to every dollar that White men earn (McChesney, 2018).

Moses (1980) posed the question, "Are Black women administrators in higher education an endangered species?" (p. 295). Her question was posed as a result of Black women being tokens in higher education, and of reports of Black women feeling overworked, underpaid, isolated, and unsupported, which the literature, as demonstrated in previous chapters, still reports as being the case. The participants had suggestions on both a granular level and a macrolevel that institutions and student affairs leaders should heed in order to improve the pipeline from entry or midlevel administrator to SSAO. These included being intentional with hiring practices, search committees, and language used in reference to candidates, specifically as Vice President Anita said in reference to "fit," a subjective concept that often allows room for racial biases that negatively affect minority candidates and harm diversity efforts. They also recommended that other Black women professionals maintain and work on building their network of mentors and champions, as this form of social capital would prove to be significant, in the future.

Implications for Practice

The honest, open, and detailed interview accounts given by the five participants in this study suggest several implications. The implications of these personal accounts of Black women senior student affairs leaders as highlighted in this study can help influence our understanding of the experiences of Black SSAOs, and of the ways in which institutions can help to reduce unnecessary barriers for Black women in leadership. They can also help us to understand the significant roles and influence that Black SSAOs contribute to the diversity of campus and to support potential programs, services, or strategies that will increase their chances of development. African American women face challenges and barriers as they navigate the field of student affairs that are often unacknowledged and that their White colleagues are immune from withstanding. These barriers come in the form of feeling unwelcomed or of not belonging,

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and of experiencing tokenism, racism, microaggressions, oppressive environments, and marginalizing behaviors.

Black women are one of the few groups negatively affected by multiple forms of oppression or "double-discrimination" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 149). This concept refers to the ways Black women experience discrimination on the basis of race and gender combined (Crenshaw, 1989). The participants described this concept showing up in the form of the imposter syndrome, their Blackness (identity) being highly visible due to the underrepresentation of other Black women in leadership on campus, and their experiences with feeling the necessity to code-switch in certain settings or in the presence of certain people.

To combat these barriers, many of the participants sought out professional spaces that would put them in community with other Black women leaders in an effort to motivate one another, share resources, and offer advice. These spaces serve as an outlet for the women and help to alleviate the emotional tax—"the heightened experience of being different from peers at work because of your gender and/or race ethnicity and the associated detrimental effects on health, well-being, and the ability to thrive at work" (Travis, Thorpe-Moscon, & McCluney, 2016, p. 2)—that Black women experience while trying to successfully navigate through their careers.

Black women who are outnumbered by White colleagues need support spaces. Institutions of higher education should focus on how they can support affinity spaces such as employee resource groups specifically for Black women; developmental and coaching opportunities such as the African American Development Officers Network (n.d.) at the Georgia Institute of Technology; and participation in professional organizations for Black women such as the Association of Black Women in Higher Education (2021) or the Faculty Women of Color in

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the Academy National Conference hosted by Virginia Tech, which is an organization for current

faculty and professionals who desire to gain teaching experience or transition to a faculty role

(Continuing and Professional Education, Virginia Tech, 2019). This support should come in the

form of encouragement and fiscal resources.

All of the women interviewed for this study said that they enjoyed their work in student

affairs and enjoyed their role as vice president for student affairs. They attributed their

enjoyment and success in the field due to mentorship, maintaining a solid network, having a

strong and unwavering sense of identity, and having aspirations and goals to look forward to.

Lewis (2016) executed a study on gender, race, and career advancement and found that dominant

groups acquire social capital, or being coached, sponsored, or mentored, through informal, and

sometimes invisible, interactions among themselves in higher education organizations. In

contrast, African American women's ability to acquire social capital is dependent on their ability

to gain access to majority groups in their organizations (Lewis, 2016). Student affairs

departments can work to do more to provide access to mentorship, sponsorship, coaching, and

other forms of social capital for Black women administrators on their campuses, which in turn

could help with promoting Black women into positions of leadership.

Recommendations for Ongoing Research

Higher education has a demand for more Black faculty and administrators on both PWIs

and HBCUs, an observation that Moses made in 1989 that continues to be relevant today. This

research explored the barriers and successes that Black women described via their lived

experiences as senior student affairs administrators at either a PWI or an HBCU. I recommend

future studies focus on the recruitment and retention of Black women senior leaders to address

their underrepresentation in the field of student affairs and higher education.

Second, I suggest that future studies explore more broadly the underrepresentation of other chief officers within the field of higher education. Minority representation is low across the board in a range of executive positions in higher education (Bichsel & Jasper, 2017). Student affairs has the largest representation of minority representation at 22%; however, other fields such as public relations, libraries, facilities, business, athletics and finance have less than 10% of non-White staffers in executive positions (Bichsel & Jasper, 2017).   Chief development officers have the worst minority representation at a meager 6% (Bichsel & Jasper, 2017). In order to address the equity of the profession, the diversity and representation in the above-mentioned positions and roles should be examined.

Finally, I recommend that more research be done on pipeline practices. For many SSAOs and VPSAs, a terminal degree is the gateway to obtaining these positions. Data from the National Science Foundation's *Survey of Earned Doctorates* reveals that in 2019, there were 2,512 African Americans who earned doctorate degrees; this number makes up 7.1% of all doctorates awarded to U.S. citizens. In the field of education, which encompasses education administration, educational administration and supervision, educational and human resource studies and development, educational leadership, and urban education and leadership, African Americans received 13% of the total degrees awarded in these areas (NCSES, 2020). West's (2020) study of Black women senior student affairs officers (N=401) found that while 13% of the participants held doctorate degrees, only 3% were employed in student affairs in senior leadership roles, including vice president of student affairs or assistant vice president.   A closer examination of the current positions that African American women doctoral degree holders in student affairs occupy is warranted, but further, I recommend more research on graduate preparation programs that are intended to train aspiring professionals to the field of student

affairs and higher education. In addition, I recommend taking closer looks at institutions that are

doing well in regard to diversity, inclusion, recruitment, and retention practices as guides for

other institutions.

Conclusion

This qualitative study is an exploration of the lived experiences of senior-level Black

women administrators in student affairs at four-year degree granting institutions. Specifically,

this study documents Black women in nonfaculty administrative leadership roles in student

affairs at PWIs and HBCUs. The research questions address the barriers and issues the women

faced in their career and as they ascended to their senior leadership roles; the strategies,

phenomena, or people that they would attribute to their success; and lastly, the recommendations

for the future of leadership in student affairs.

I opened this dissertation with a quote by educator Anna Julia Cooper, an excerpt from

her 1892/1988 book, *A Voice from the South*. The quote is indubitably an articulation of BFT,

asserting that the progress of African Americans is impossible without Black women. Likewise,

given the stories that my participants shared through their interviews, the progress of higher

education is not possible without Black women. As the landscape of the student demographic

changes on college campuses across the nation, Black women's experiences are valuable and

needed.

Mosely (1980) argued that discriminatory institutional practices and systems of

stratification within institutions place Black women "in danger of becoming extinct" (p. 308). In

fact, they are not extinct, but are lacking the necessary structural, supportive, and deliberate

institutional attention often afforded to their White counterparts. The message is loud and

clear—in order to make meaningful change, listen to Black women, respect Black women, and

invest in Black women.

Note

1. African American and Black are used interchangeably for the purposes of this study.

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Appendix A

Interview Email Request

Dear _____,

My name is Tamekka Cornelius and I am a student at Bellarmine University in Louisville, Kentucky. I am currently a PhD candidate in the Leadership in Higher Education program. I am reaching out to you because I am interested in exploring and documenting the lived experiences of women who identify as Black or African American, in non-faculty, senior-level administrative leadership roles in student affairs at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) and at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs).

Participation includes one (1) initial 60-90 minute interview. Participants will also be asked to provide documents related to your leadership/administrator role in order for me to gain an understanding of your background for context (e.g., copy of resume or CV, permission to "connect" on LinkedIn [if applicable], a copy of biography, press releases). Lastly, during the interview, participants will be asked to identify, show or describe, one item (artifact) that to them, symbolizes success.

Requirements for participating in this study consists of identifying as a Black woman in a senior student affairs officer position (SSAO, administrative leader of the division of student affairs) often synonymous with Vice President of Student Affairs (VPSA) and Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs.

If you think you are able to help me with this research, please review the attached consent form and complete the questionnaire by following this link (**https://tinyurl.com/ViewsFromTheMargins**). Your demographic criteria will be reviewed in order to get a diverse sample of 4-6 participants, so not everyone will be interviewed. If selected, I will contact you to set up an initial interview time/date, and to discuss other important information related to the study.

If you know anyone else who meets the requirements and may be interested in participating in this study, please forward this email or have them complete the questionnaire linked above.

Thank you very much and I look forward to hearing back from you. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,
Tamekka Cornelius
PhD Candidate, Leadership in Higher Education
Bellarmine University
Email: ██████████████████
Cell phone: ████████████ (text and calls accepted)

Subject Informed Consent

Dear Prospective Participant:

I am a Ph.D. candidate at Bellarmine University in Louisville, KY. I am writing to invite you to participate in my dissertation research study exploring experiences of senior-level Black women administrators in student affairs at four-year degree granting institutions. Allow me to tell you more about the study, so that you can determine if you would like to participate. My research will focus on women who identify as Black or African American, in non-faculty adminstrative leadership roles in student affairs at predominantely white institutions (PWIs) and at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). I am specifically interested in understanding and documenting what participants describe as barriers, success and issues they have experienced as they assended to a senior student affairs officer (SSAO) role as well as strategies and recommendations for the future leadership pipleline of the field.

This topic is of interest to me as a mid-level professional, Black woman, with aspirations of being a SSAO in higher education and as a professional who considers herself to be an advocate and mentor for the many students that I have previously and currently work alongside. Your participation may or may not benefit you directly. The study is sponsored by the Department of Higher Education Leadership at Bellarmine University.

If you agree to participate your involvement will include:

- **Pre-Interview correspondence**: Each participant will be asked to complete an electronic inventory which will assist in gathering demographic information, a brief overview of your current role, institutional information, salary range (for national data comparison) and a synopsis of prior work history. Your demographic criteria will be reviewed in order to get a diverse sample of 4-6 participants, so not everyone will be interviewed.

- **Interviews:** We will meet for one 60-90 minute interview. The interview will be conducted via video conferencing or in person (pending COVID-19 protocols). While the interview may take place via video conference, the interview will be audiotaped only, no video will be recorded or saved. A third-party transcription service, Rev, which maintains confidentiality, will be used to transcribe each interview once completed.

- **Document review:** You will be asked to provide documents related to your leadership/administrator role in order for me to gain an understanding of your background for context (e.g. copy of resume or CV, permission to "connect" on LinkedIn [if applicable], a copy of biography, press releases).

- **Artifact:** During the interview, participants will be asked to identify, show or describe, one item that to them, symbolizes success. Please be prepared to show and describe the item during our interview. You may email it to me in advance of our interview if preferred.

- **Member checking:** Each participant will be given the opportunity to read and provide comments or clarification on their interview transcriptions and/or my analysis of the interview. If a follow up interview is needed based on the member check, one will be arranged at a time/date convenient for both the researcher and participant.

- **Communication with the researcher:** I will remain available throughout the course of the study for participants to contact me via email, video-conferencing or phone. Participation in this research is voluntary. You may decide to participate now and change your mind later, and we will stop, no questions asked.

The interview transcriptions will be matched for accuracy with the audio files and the audio files will be immediately destroyed. Your completed interview responses will be stored on the password personal computer. Your demographic data and other identifying information will be kept separate from the data and your name will not be on any of the data. Individuals from the Department of Higher Education Leadership and the Annsley Frazier Thornton School of Education and the Bellarmine University Institutional Review Board may inspect these records. Although absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, confidentiality will be protected to the extent permitted by law. Should the data be published, your identity will not be disclosed.

Please remember that your participation in this study is voluntary. By completing the interview, you are voluntarily agreeing to participate. You may refuse to participate or withdraw your consent at any time without penalty or losing benefit to which you are otherwise entitled. You are free to decline to answer any particular question that may make you feel uncomfortable or which may render you prosecutable under law. There is no foreseeable risk to participating in the study.

You acknowledge that all your present questions have been answered in a language you can understand. If you have any questions about the study you may contact me at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or on my cell phone at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮, you may also contact the principal investigator for this study, Dr. Donald "DJ" Mitchell, at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the Institutional Review Board (IRB) office at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject, in confidence, with a member of the committee. This is an independent committee composed of members of the University community and lay members of the community not connected with this institution. The IRB has reviewed this study.

Sincerely,
Tamekka Cornelius
PhD Candidate, Leadership in Higher Education
Bellarmine University

Participant Questionnaire & Interview Questions

Thank you for your willingness to complete this form. Your responses will be used for a research study designed to explore the lived experiences of Black women senior-level administrators at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and at predominately White institutions (PWIs). Your responses will be matched with a pseudonym and remain confidential.

1. Full Name
2. Preferred method of contact
   a. Email
   b. Cell phone
   c. Text
   d. Office phone
   e. Enter preferred contact_____
3. Indicate your highest degree earned
   a. Doctoral
   b. Masters
   c. Bachelors
   d. Other _____
4. List highest degree earned (Ph.D., Ed.D., M.Ed, etc.)
5. Do you currently work as a student affairs administrator at a HBCU?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. If yes have you previously worked as a student affairs administrator at a PWI?
6. Do you currently work as a student affairs administrator at a PWI?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. If yes have you previously worked as a student affairs administrator at an HBCU?
7. Current job title _____
8. Length of time in current role_____
9. In total, how long have you worked in student affairs?
   a. 0-5 years
   b. 6-10 years
   c. 11-15 years
   d. 16-20 years
   e. 21+ years
10. What is the size of your institution?
    a. Less than 2,000
    b. 2,000-5,000
    c. 5,001-10,000
    d. 10,001-20,000

e. Over 20,001
11. What is your immediate supervisor's title?
12. Who are your direct reports? (titles/roles only, names are not needed)
13. Please list the previous three positions you have held prior to securing your current role
   a. Job title＿＿＿＿＿＿Institution Type (HBCU or PWI) Number of years in position＿＿＿＿＿
   b. Job title＿＿＿＿＿＿Institution Type (HBCU or PWI) Number of years in position＿＿＿＿＿
   c. Job title＿＿＿＿＿＿Institution Type (HBCU or PWI) Number of years in position＿＿＿＿＿

14. Which describes your current salary range.
   a. $50,000-$80,000
   b. $80,001-$110,000
   c. $110,001-$114,000
   d. $114,001-$170,000
   e. $170,001-$120,000
   f. $120,001-$230,000
   g. $230,001-$260,000
   h. $260,001-$290,000
   i. $290,001-$332,000
   j. $332,001-$350,000
   k. $350,000-$380,000
   l. $380,000-$410,000
   m. $410,001-above

Electronic confirmation message: Thank you for completing this questionnaire. If selected, I will contact you to set up an initial interview time/date, and to discuss other important information related to the study.

Research Questions	Interview Questions
What are the work experiences of Black women in senior leadership positions in student affairs?	1. How would you describe your identity? 2. Describe your current role? 3. What does it mean to be a Black woman at a HBCU/PWI? 4. Describe the academic and professional path that led to your current administrator role. 5. Describe the hiring process for your current role? 6. How would you describe your decision-making power in your current role? Is it satisfactory? 7. For those that have worked at both HBCUs and PWIs as SSAO, how would you compare the two? 8. Describe your perception on how you as a Black woman in leadership represent your constituents (the students on your campus)? (Lead with brief description of representational bureaucracy theory)
What barriers/issues to obtaining senior leadership positions in student affairs are identified by Black women?	9. What barriers or challenges do you face in your current role? 10. Can you identify some challenges/barriers which you know other Black women SSAOs have faced during their ascension in leadership? 11. Have you ever felt the need to "code switch" to change who you are, your behaviors, suppress your identity to acquiesce to a certain professional or social setting? Please describe that experience and how it made/makes you feel? 12. Describe your interactions with colleagues and students who differ from your identity group(s)? 13. Describe your interactions with colleagues and students who share your identity as a Black woman?

	14. Have you ever felt oppressed or marginalized as a Black women SSAO at a HBCU or PWI?
	    a. Is so please describe a memorable situation?
	    b. How did this make you feel?
	    c. How did you react?

What do Black women senior student affairs leaders in attribute to their success?	15. What strategies have/do you execute during your tenure that you believe contributed to your career progression into a SSAO role? (Including skills/competencies/knowledge gained) 16. What positive experiences have you had that you believe contributed to your current SSAO role? 17. Who or what influenced you to pursue a career in student affairs? 18. Did/do you had/currently have a mentor? Describe that relationship? 19. As related to the artifact mentioned on the informed consent form, what would you consider to be a physical representation of your success?
What recommendations do Black women senior leaders have to improve the leadership pipeline in student affairs?	20. What are the top three leadership attributes/characteristics that have made you successful as a SSOA? 21. What professional experiences are vital for future African American women who aspire to be SSAOs? 22. What should colleges/universities be focused on to recruit and retain (or promote) Black women in student affairs? 23. Do you have any examples of successful recruitment/retention or promotion practices? Describe them? 24. What are your future professional or career aspirations? Do you desire to move beyond your current role?

Appendix D

Social Media Post

I am completing the data collection for my dissertation on Black women senior-level student affairs professionals at HBCUs and/or PWIs. I am seeking participants who identify as (1) Black Women (2) Currently work at either an HBCU or at a PWI. My research will seek to document and understand what participants describe as barriers, success and issues they have experienced as they assended to a senior student affairs officer (SSAO) role as well as strategies and recommendations for the future leadership pipleline of the field. If this is you (or someone you know), and you are willing to share your story, please complete the initial Google form, **https://tinyurl.com/ViewsFromTheMargins** and I will contact you to provide more information regarding your participation in the study.

I am completing the data collection for my dissertation on Black women senior-level student affairs professionals at HBCUs and/or PWIs. I am seeking participants who:identify as Black Women and currently work at either an HBCU or at a PWI.

Purpose: My research will seek to document and understand what participants describe as barriers, success and issues they have experienced as they assended to a senior student affairs officer (SSAO) role as well as strategies and recommendations for the future leadership pipleline of the field.   If this is you (or someone you know), and you are willing to share your story, please complete the initial Google form, accessed via this link https://tinyurl.com/ViewsFromTheMargins or the QR code below and I will contact you to provide more information regarding your participation in the study. Questions can be directed towards me: Tamekka Cornelius, tcornelius@Bellarmine.edu