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Black Women Matter:

A Qualitative Examination of the Professional and Personal Experiences of Black Women

Working as Mid-level Student Affairs Professionals in One Public Four-year University

A dissertation in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree in Doctor of Education

by

Michelle Andrea Maye

2023

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2023

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Black Women Matter:

A Qualitative Examination of the Professional and Personal Experiences of Black Women
Working as Mid-level Student Affairs Professionals in One Public Four-year University

by

Michelle Andrea Maye

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2023

Professor Mark Hansen, Co-Chair

Professor Ananda Marin, Co-Chair

Black women student affairs professionals are essential figures and play a vital role in the development and learning of students attending college (Jackson, 2003; Turrentine & Conley, 2001). While the presence of Black women students continues to rise on campus, Black women student affairs professionals continue to be disproportionately represented in comparison. Black women mid-level student professionals are underrepresented and face unique challenges while they are navigating the intersecting identities of race, class and gender while working in student affairs. This qualitative study examined the personal and professional experiences of ten Black women student affairs professionals at a public university. This research study utilized a conceptual framework developed from Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) and Black Feminist

Thought-BFT (Collins, 1986, 2000, 2009) to guide this analysis to reveal the thematic elements of shared experiences.

The findings highlighted six themes that illustrated the personal, professional experiences and challenges that these Black women mid-level student affairs professionals faced. The findings illuminated the tensions between their experiences and their social identities. The themes related to their experiences were: Black Woman-ness, Faculty Bullying and Incivility, Black Superwoman Syndrome, Quality of Life, Lack of Support and Community. These themes offered a nuanced view of their challenges and the mechanisms they utilized to survive and thrive while working at the university, showing the ways they navigated these tensions. Ultimately participants struggled with lack of support and sought community to enhance their quality of life.

Recommendations for practice, policy and future research consisted of the institution being pro-active and intentional about building internal structures within the university to provide opportunities for Black women to be mentored. Further, institutions should encourage community by promoting affinity groups that cater to the development of Black women. Institutions must be more deliberate and strategic in the hiring and retention of Black women working in the academy, as well as implementing better institutional supports to encourage the success of Black women student affairs professionals.

The dissertation of Michelle Andrea Maye is approved.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the ten remarkable women who volunteered their time and energy by sharing their experiences through their stories. I hope that this dissertation captured the essence of your personal and professional experiences while navigating race, class, and gender at your institution. I hope that this study will offer recommendations to enhance future experiences of Black women student affairs professionals working at colleges and universities. Thank you for your transparency and entrusting me to tell your stories. Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Areatha Delois Maye. You are my guiding light and shining star. I love you forever.

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“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” Philippians 4:13

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Student affairs is a vital element of the higher education experience. The origins of the student affairs profession trace back to the earliest years of American education. During the colonial era, the role of the student affairs professional encompassed the doctrine of *in loco parentis* (literally “in place of the parent”) (Long, 2012). During this time, college students were seen as ‘emotionally immature’ and in need of strict guidance; permitting colleges and universities to act “in place of the parent” inside and outside of the classroom (Thelin, 2004). At this point in time, college students were still not acknowledged as adults capable of making their own decisions and living on their own. Because colleges and universities were poorly staffed, faculty had to step in and fulfill many of the obligations of the student affairs role (Long, 2012). Not only were faculty responsible for the instruction inside the classroom, they also served as live in teachers and disciplinarians to students. By the mid-1800s, the relationship between students and faculty shifted as American faculty, greatly influenced by European scholarship, now viewed the primary role of faculty “to be the training of the intellect” (Long, 2012, p. 3). As a result of faculty’s new focus, students began to develop interests in extracurricular activities as well as reject the mundane nature of faculty’s lack of interest in other areas outside of academics.

By the early 1900s faculty participation in student discipline matters had drastically decreased and by the 1920s the first student affairs administrators were employed and their responsibilities focused on student personnel matters. (Long, 2012). At the same time, the student affairs profession began to develop and become respected in higher education. Specifically, national professional associations were founded, and student affairs professionals were now collaborating and sharing ideas about their work in the profession (Long, 2012). The

publication of the *Student Personnel Point of View* in 1937 legitimized the student affairs profession in higher education in that it focused on the needs and development of the “whole” student. The report was revised in 1949 and serves as the philosophical and organizational and foundations of the student affairs profession (Nuss, 2003).

Major events throughout the course of history contributed to the evolution of the student affairs profession. In 1961, the US Supreme Court’s decision in *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education* changed the relationship between students and colleges and universities. (Long, 2012). This decision defined a person over the age of 18 years as a legal adult and changed the relationship between students and the university to transactional versus personal. Now that students were recognized as adults by the US Supreme court, they no longer needed strict supervision and in turn, student affairs professionals focused more on educating students on making appropriate life decision as their role as disciplinarian lessened.

Today, the student affairs profession focuses on being change agents and educating students by serving as a primary resource to help students navigate their educational experiences (Long, 2012; Gaston-Gayles, Wolf-Wendel, Tuttle, Twombly & Ward, 2005). Although underrepresented, Black women working in student affairs have pioneered their own principles and values in their commitment to students and have their own unique experiences within the student affairs profession.

Statement of the Problem

Black women student affairs professionals are essential figures and play a vital role in the development and learning of students attending college (Jackson, 2003; Turrentine & Conley, 2001). Research demonstrates that Black women student affairs professionals are dedicated to understanding the development and well-being of students, as well as constructing meaningful

experiences for students throughout their time in school (Long, 2012). In addition, they add value to student life and contribute to the professional lives of both their black and non-black colleagues (Henry, 2010). One way they do this is by offering insight and different perspectives regarding racial and social issues (Clay, 2014; Slater, 2007). At the same time, Black women student affairs professionals must also manage the ethos of their institutions (Paitu & Hinton, 2003, p. 79). This often includes having to navigate their realities based on societal pressures inflicted on them because of their race, gender and class (Hurtado, 1996).

The existing literature tends to describe the experiences of student affairs professionals in gender neutral ways; thus, eliminating the unique experiences Black women in student affairs experience (Clay, 2014; Yakaboski & Donahoo 2011). Moreover, there is limited literature concerning the experiences and impact of those experiences that address specific challenges such as underrepresentation, isolation, and marginalization of Black women student affairs professionals in the academy (West, 2015). As Henry (2010) notes, minimal research has examined the interplay of race and gender specific to the experiences of Black women in student affairs. Moreover, little is known about the professional and personal experiences of Black women working as mid-level student affairs professionals and how they navigate the intersections of race and gender as they work in the institution. For these reasons, it is important to explore and document the distinctive experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and specifically mid-level student affairs professionals.

Unique Challenges

For over a century, Black women have been vital players in the education arena and have made substantial developments in owning their own space in academia (West, 2015). Black women student affair professionals also face unique challenges such as underrepresentation,

isolation and lack of support while working in colleges and universities (West, 2015). While Black women have been influential figures in the academy, they continue to be underrepresented among students, faculty, and staff (Gregory, 2001). While their presence is undeniable and integral, Black women are underrepresented in higher education, particularly in student and academic affairs. Among women working as student and academic affairs professionals in degree granting post-secondary institutions, only 9% identified as Black compared to 46% White (NCES, 2017). Despite the disparity in percentages among White and Black student and academic affairs professionals, Black women student affairs professionals play significant roles in the facilitation and development of not only Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) students, but all students (Jackson, 2003).

Racial and sexual stereotypes play an integral role in how Black women educators and students are seen in colleges and universities (Moses, 1989). Black women in higher education are faced with multiple marginalizations as members of at least two historically oppressed groups, being black and female (Henry, 2010). Not only do Black women face barriers of oppression because they are Black and female, but socioeconomic status also affects their experiences in higher education. Even though Black women student affairs professionals deal with racial and gender stereotypes within their institutions, Black women must navigate society's racism and sexism in unique ways.

Because of their experiences in higher education arenas and the stresses of societal pressures due to race and gender, Black women produce, comprehend, and internalize knowledge differently (Robinson, 2010). Utilizing a Black Feminist Thought lens, Black women are often able to offer critical viewpoints and recognize themes of practice that others may be unable to do. Further, Black women student affairs professionals are unique because their

cultural competence gives them access and advantages as insiders within the institution (West, 2020). Culturally responsive professionals must exist in order to provide students with the adequate resources and support they need to succeed (West, 2020).

Gaps in the Existing Research

Black women have been contributors to higher education for more than a century; they have been influential and have made significant progress in solidifying their place within higher education arenas (West, 2015). Although the evolution of Black female presence is apparent in literature, there is an obvious gap in the research that speaks directly to the experiences and contributions of students, faculty and administrators (Gregory, 2001; Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; West, 2015; Zamani, 2003). Data from the Women in Student Affairs Current Research Sub-Committee (2009), a sub-committee of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators that addresses gender equity and promotes personal growth for professional women in student affairs indicated that there were no articles published in 2009 related to Black women in student affairs. This is particularly important because literature regarding Black women in higher education continues to be scant. Much of the extant literature on student affairs administrators centers on entry-level professionals (Burkard et al., 2004; Mather et al., 2009; Renn & Hodges, 2007) and senior administrators (Beeny et al., 2005; Moneta & Jackson, 2011; Reisser, 2002). However, there remains a gap in the literature concerning mid-level professionals, with the last major national study published nearly 15 years ago (Rosser, 2004).

My study aims to add to the existing body of knowledge regarding Black women in student affairs by highlighting the professional and personal experiences and realities of these women who embody Black excellence in the academy. This research endeavors to recognize the

professional and personal experiences of mid-level Black women student affairs professionals and how they navigate the intersections of race and gender as they work within the institution.

Particularly, the presence of mid-level student affairs professionals are integral to the success of the student affairs mission and role at a university or college campus (Mills, 2009). Likewise, mid-level student affairs professionals are essential to the institution as they bridge the gap between university decision makers and frontline staff (Mather, Bryan & Faulkner, 2009). They serve their institution in a myriad of ways as they also have supervisory, budgetary and leadership responsibilities (Mather et al., 2009). So essentially, Black women mid-level student affairs professionals “lead and influence others beyond the formal scope of their position” while at the same time navigating their own personal and professional experiences within the institution. (Mather et al., 2009, p. 249).

There is limited empirical work that chronicles the history of Black women’s work experiences in higher education (Collier-Thomas, 1982). My dissertation draws upon the Black Feminist Theory framework to explore the professional and personal experiences of Black women working in mid-level student affairs professions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine and investigate the personal and professional experiences of Black women in mid-level student affairs positions and how they navigate the intersection of race and gender as they work in the institution. By utilizing a qualitative approach, I was able to gain an in depth understanding of the lived experiences of Black women who serve as student affairs professionals at a public four-year institution. More specifically, this study generated recommendations to enhance support for Black women student

affairs professionals based off their professional and personal experiences working within the academy.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the personal and professional experiences of Black women working as mid-level student affairs professionals in one public four-year institution?
2. How do Black women working as mid-level student affairs professionals navigate the intersections of race, class, and gender as they work within the institution?

Significance of Research

Historical and modern research has shown that Black women are severely underrepresented in the student affairs arena and there exist a small number of Black women that are students affairs professionals, however their presence and influence as student affairs professionals is vital (Gamble & Turner, 2015). Not only do Black women student affairs professionals contribute to the professional lives of their colleagues, but they also build inclusive communities for faculty, staff, and students by emphasizing the diversity of cultures within the institution (Blimling et al., 1999).

This study built upon existing literature related to Black women student affairs professionals, with an emphasis on the personal and professional experiences they encountered and the ways they navigated race, gender, and class. Black women student affairs professionals provide an invaluable resource to relationships between faculty and students to create a culturally sustaining environment for students, as well as contributing to the lives of their colleagues both, professionally and personally (Patitu & Hinton, 2003).

This study is essential as it illuminates the experiences and perceptions of Black women mid-level student affairs professionals so that others who aspire to work in the field can learn from these experiences, as well as highlight the challenges they face to provide the necessary support they need. The findings from this study inform practice pertaining to providing suggestions for support and mentorship, allocating resources to improve community, and campus climate data. These practices inform institutions of the ways to make changes that will allow for the support of Black women mid-level student affairs professionals.

Operational Definitions

For uniformity and consistency, I have defined specific terms used throughout this study.

- *Student affairs*: A division at a college or university dedicated to ensuring student success by providing services to support their academic and personal development.
- *Student affairs professionals*: Higher education practitioners dedicated to supporting the academic, personal, and professional development of students at a college or university.
- *Mid-level student affairs professional*: staff members working in a student affairs role in an academic unit or staff working within the division of student affairs who have worked at the institution for more than five years and who are not entry-level or senior-level professionals.

Conclusion

In student affairs, mid-level professionals are often forgotten and receive minimal to no training in their positions (Ackerman, 2007). Black women mid-level professionals must deal with inadequate trainings and support, delaying their career advancement while navigating race, gender, and class. This dissertation sought to highlight the personal and professional experiences of Black women mid-level student affairs professionals through their stories.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of the relevant literature on student affairs and the role Black women play in student affairs. The goal of the study is to understand the professional and personal experiences of Black women mid-level student affairs professionals at a public university and how they navigate the intersections of race and gender. The literature review begins by discussing the history of student affairs, the current role of student affairs, student affairs professionals' multicultural competencies, the presence of Black women in student affairs, the intersectionality of race, class, and gender and the unique challenges Black women in student affairs face such as: underrepresentation, isolation and lack of support. This study utilized a conceptual framework integrating Black Feminist Thought (BFT), (Collins, 1986, 2000, 2009), and Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). Collins (2000) intellectualized the notion that Black women encountered unique and challenging issues that only Black women themselves could relate to, while Intersectionality captured those intersecting experiences through specific social identities, such as race, class and gender. In this study, those identities and experiences are depicted through a lens that depicts personal and professional experiences Black women mid-level student affairs professionals face.

Review of the Literature

Student affairs was established as a profession in higher education to support the academic mission of the university by fostering the well-being and development of students emotionally, intellectually, and psychosocially (Lang, 2012). The student affair profession materialized from the need to deal with student discipline issues and the administrative functions of the university (Lang, 2012). Student affairs officially began in 1890 at Harvard College. As

faculty interests shifted to scholarship, Harvard President Charles Eliot engaged in institution building. From this observation, the first student dean was created. This position was created to retain the humane values of the old college at a time when the more worldly goals of the university were becoming dominant (Sandeem, 2014). Soon after, other colleges followed suit and while these early student affairs deans struggled to define their work, the education of the student was eventually adopted as the fundamental idea of student affairs, and it remains so today. In the following sections I review the current role of student affairs and the impact Black women have in students affairs. I then discuss the mission and the multicultural competencies of student affairs professionals, as well as how critical race theory engages as a tool to encourage multicultural competence. Finally, I review how intersecting identities coincide with the unique challenges Black women face in student affairs.

The Current Role of Student Affairs

A student affairs division today typically includes responsibility for such roles as enrollment management, financial aid, housing, counseling, student health, judicial programs, career services, recreational sports, and student activities. It also may include campus services such as transportation, security, childcare, and student academic support. Consequently, student affairs leaders have expanded their professional interests and reject any suggestion that they are just “service providers” (Long, 2012). They see themselves as an integral part of the academic programs of their campuses and as active contributors to students. The student affairs function in higher education has become more complex as the age, ethnic, academic, social, and economic backgrounds of students have become more diverse (Sandeem, 2014). Many colleges depend on student affairs professionals to host events and activities pertaining to diversity, and to engage in discourse concerning culturally sensitive issues (Liang & Sedlacek, 2003).

The essential mission of student affairs, however, is to serve; the profession exists to ensure that students are safe, cared for, well treated, and satisfied with their higher education. The value of service intrinsic to the profession extends not only to students but to faculty as well; to “provide teachers of subject matters with information about their students, when, where and how they find significant experiences inside and outside the classroom” (Young, 1993, p. 17). Student affairs represents such a wide and diverse range of functions that many student affairs professionals may be in direct contact with students infrequently. Many student affairs professionals—those concerned with assessment, for example—may serve primarily administrative functions, but their overall work is still centered around services for students.

The nature of work of student affairs refers to the shape, breadth, and scope of the charges, duties, and responsibilities of administrators who work with students. Three constructs are associated with this viewpoint: pace of work, how work gets done, and the work environment. Pace of work is measured by the degree to which change occurs, the level of stress involved, and the degree of balance between one’s personal and professional life. How work gets done refers to the processes and/or procedures for accomplishing work. Working on a team, using creativity, and taking risks are a few of the factors associated with how work gets done. Finally, the work environment refers to the setting in which work is conducted and whether it tends to be collaborative, friendly, hostile, or positive, for example (Hirt, 2006).

The Presence of Black Women in Student Affairs

Student affairs is an essential component of the overall higher education experience. In this specific context, student affairs professionals help students develop intellectual and social skills, as well as facilitate leadership skills and cultural understanding (Long, 2012). By carrying out their primary job responsibilities in fostering significant relationships, Black women student

affairs professionals nurture students (Hirt et al., 2008). The presence of Black women in college and university campuses is especially important as Black women foster a system of support and encouragement for Black female students (Glover, 2012; Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Among the scarce literature that exists regarding Black women in student affairs, some researchers have acknowledged the significant roles that these women play in facilitating the learning and development of students.

In their study, Hirt et al. (2008) provide empirical data about student affairs administrators' perceptions of relationships with students at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Participants of the study occupied various positions within their institution and considered themselves general student affairs practitioners. The participants were comprised of 70 HBCU administrators from 25 HBCUs, 89% of participants were Black and the majority 67% was female. The findings revealed that these student affairs professionals instilled a sense of cultural connectedness through nurturing relationships with students and by intentionally creating an inclusive environment, they promoted the success of Black students (Hirt et al., 2008). Because the majority of the participants interviewed were Black women student affairs professionals, it can be implied that Black women consciously form and create relationships with students in order to retain and advance students in their educational journeys. Although not faculty, Black women in higher education share similar experiences, the presence of Black women is crucial for white faculty in the institution, as white faculty must interact with Black faculty to better understand minority cultures (Patitu & Hinton, 2003).

Student Affairs Professionals' Multicultural Competencies and the Mission of Student Affairs

Over the past thirty years, colleges and universities have become increasingly more diverse as a result of both changing demographics and educational policies that are increasing the number of students from underrepresented groups (Husband, 2016). Diversity in student affairs administration is integral as student bodies in higher education are continually diversifying and the number of students of color are increasing (Jackson, 2003; Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Student affairs professionals who have been exposed to and employed in “multicultural educational opportunities” and who are able to engage in discussions about multiculturalism tend to be more positive and affirming in their opinion and attitudes about people of color (Mueller & Pope, 2003). As more student affairs professionals are being educated through student affairs programs, exposure to these types of dialogue may be more difficult. Specifically, the presence of Black women is extremely important in higher education. Patitu and Hinton (2003) convey that Black women:

Have rich backgrounds and bring diversity to their experiences, their perspectives, and their abilities. They also bring different worldviews, which help to promote a multicultural environment. Furthermore, their presence is crucial for the personal and academic success of minority students for whom they act as mentors, role models, and advisers and for white students, who need the opportunity to interact with African American faculty to overcome misconceptions about the intellectual capabilities of minorities, especially African Americans. (p. 89)

Studies have shown that student affairs professionals have lower rates of preparedness for working with minoritized groups and may be inadequately prepared to work with diverse

students (Liang & Sedlacek, 2003). Particularly, in their study, Liang and Sedlacek (2003) examined the attitudes of White student services practitioners toward Asian Americans to determine if White student affairs practitioners at the University of Maryland differed in their attitudes in situations where a student's race was specified as Asian American. The results from the study indicate that White student affairs practitioner's attitudes are influenced by the racial/ethnic makeup of Asian Americans. The difference in treatment of a group that is based on stereotypical beliefs, regardless of their perceived "positiveness", serve to limit opportunities and experiences and result in psychological distress. In recent years, the discussion on racial diversity in higher education has centered on four areas: (1) retention (Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Tinto, 1993), (2) campus climate (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000), (3) prejudicial attitudes of one group toward another (Ancis, Choney, & Sedlacek, 1996), and more recently (4) the multicultural competency of professionals in student services (King & Howard-Hamilton, 2000; McEwen & Roper, 1994).

Multicultural Competence is a heuristic tool that enables student affairs professionals to deal with students who are culturally different (Pope & Reynolds, 1997). This idea guides student affairs professionals' ethical, affirmative, and professional practices in establishing multicultural sensitive and affirming environments. Multicultural competence is described as global competence where individuals learn how to express themselves without offending others' cultures, ideas, beliefs, and feelings (Bresciani, 2008). Bresciani (2008) argued that there is very little difference between global competence and multicultural competence if the notion of intellectual diversity is emphasized. College students can go through significant interpersonal changes during their tenure in campus, including a critical examination of their race and ethnicity (Cabrera, 2012). This period of growth provides a valuable opportunity for student affairs

practitioners to affect change in students' lives. To guide students during this period of growth effectively, however, student affairs professionals need to be comfortable in their own identities as well as being aware of their own biases, prejudices, and assumptions about other cultures (Mueller & Pope, 2003).

In their study, Mueller and Pope (2003) provided empirical data on White racial consciousness (WRC). Specifically related to Student affairs professionals, experience with multicultural issues, self-identification with a socially marginalized group, discussions with supervisors on race and multicultural issues, and interest in working with culturally diverse students and staff were all significantly related to several dimensions of WRC. These findings suggest that respondents who report high levels of multicultural educational opportunities, implementing multicultural programs and policies, and discussing multicultural issues with supervisors tend to be more willing to explore racial issues. They also are more likely to possess more positive attitudes toward people of color, are less uncertain about their views on racial issues, and have an awareness and a desire to combat racism.

In a review of existing research, Pope and Reynolds (1997) presented 32 characteristics of a multiculturally competent student affairs professional as a starting place for student affairs professionals to assess their own levels of awareness, knowledge, and skills in the core competencies for student affairs professionals. The list of characteristics is not comprehensive, and it is linked to the ethical principles shared by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS). Pope and Reynolds (1997) claimed that to be an effective student affair professional, one must possess the awareness, knowledge, and skills necessary to communicate and support individuals within cultures similar to and different from one's own.

The Dynamic Model of Student Affairs Competence (Pope et al., 2004) represents the seven core competencies for good student affairs practice (administrative and management, theory and translation, helping and interpersonal, ethical and legal, teaching and training, assessment and evaluation, and multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills). Reynolds and Pope (2003) also offered a list of seven multicultural competencies specific to professionals in helping and advising roles. These are the seven multicultural competencies suggested by Reynolds and Pope (as cited in Pope et al., 2004, p. 8):

1. An awareness, appreciation, and understanding of cultural groups, specifically those groups that have been historically underrepresented.
2. Increasing content knowledge about culturally related terms such as racial identity, acculturation, or worldview.
3. Improving awareness of one's own biases and cultural assumptions.
4. Developing the ability to use that knowledge and self-awareness to make more culturally sensitive interventions.
5. Developing an awareness of the interpersonal dynamics that may occur.
6. Unpacking the cultural assumptions underlying the counseling process.
7. Applying advocacy skills to assist in the development of a more multiculturally affirming campus.

These multicultural competencies are especially important for a multitude of reasons. Although the model does not measure multicultural competence in student affairs professionals, it does provide an instrument for student affairs professionals to self-reflect and assess their own understanding of multicultural competence and how they can better serve the goals and mission of student affairs. Another reason these competencies are important is because Black women

already bring unique experiences and worldviews to the student affairs profession. Their distinctive roles in the institution can provide a deeper understanding of their experiences in institutions of higher education.

In recognizing competencies to support students of color, Garcia (1995) suggested multiple personal competencies identified as essential for working with persons in diverse settings including being nonjudgmental, flexible, and resourceful; attentively listening, tolerating ambiguity, displaying empathy, and maintaining a sense of humor. Student affairs professionals can interpret their knowledge so that students of color can translate and apply to their experiences in higher education. Harding (2008) argued it is critical for student affairs professionals to realize their own level of cultural competency in addressing the concerns and issues of their advisees. Harding (2008) stated that as individuals on the front line must examine their own levels of intercultural awareness. The above study offers a theory-to-practice point of view and highlights how student affairs professionals can support students of color.

Further, corroborating such theories, empirical data from Herndon and Hirt's (2004) study, examined the role of families in the lives of successful Black college students. This study confirms that campus administrators can take steps to promote success among Black students in the early stages of their college careers by acting as a resource to help them acclimate to their new realities and environment. Additional research explains that students of color require special attention from student affairs educators in order to excel in the higher education setting. Heaven (2015) reports that to guarantee a higher level of success in the African American male population, student involvement should be supported, mentoring programs established, counseling required, and career counseling afforded. These programs will encourage African American males to persevere because they see student affairs educators authentically concerned

about their well-being and future. Student affairs educators must be committed to their students and knowledgeable about the practices that work best with specific demographics. While the diversity of students attending college has changed significantly over the years, and because of the nature of the intricacies they bring with them to college, studies show that student affairs professionals need to be educated about underrepresented groups to have the ability to build culturally responsive relationships with these students (Cunningham, 2003; Gilbert, 2005; Harding, 2012).

All in all, student affairs professionals have to advance student development and learning, foster community, promote social justice and empower student so that they may prosper and thrive as they navigate their academic journey. In addition, there is a need for student affairs professionals that are culturally responsive in order to inspire and prepare the same students that are being served (West, 2020).

Critical Race Theory as a Tool to Encourage Multicultural Competence

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is defined as pedagogy of opposition that empowers students to experience academic success, develop and maintain cultural competence and develop a critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Since the early 1990s, educational reformers have advocated to close the academic gap between White economically advantaged students and students of color and students from lower socioeconomic families (Vavrus, 2008). Although numerous studies depict the effectiveness of CRT among students of color in urban settings, few illustrate the notion of how whiteness plays an integral role in the conveyance of culturally responsive teaching (Matias, 2013). Further, cultural differences between faculty, administrators and students contribute to the learning experiences of BIPOC students (Heitner & Jennings, 2016).

Research now cautions that student affairs professionals need to become more comfortable in engaging with their students in dialogue regarding race, ethnicity, and privilege. Critical Race Theory (CRT) plays an integral role in preparing student affairs professionals through engagement with students and support of students requiring an understanding of the history of education. Matias et al. (2014) have articulated that CRT provides a framework for individuals to work at transforming institutions that have historically served racial groups differently, and perpetuated injustice for minority groups. Student affairs professionals engage first-generation, low-income, and minority students who sometimes come to higher education less prepared due to inequities in the school system, and CRT argues that race is a factor in these outcomes (Matias et al., 2014). CRT provides a vehicle for student affairs professionals to identify and challenge the dynamics that race plays in institutions of higher education, it also allows student affairs professionals to address the racial inequities that exist to better serve and support students of color.

Intersecting Identities: Race, Gender & Class

Black women experience a myriad of multiple oppressions, signifying their intersecting identities (Crenshaw, 1989). “African American women live in a society that devalues both their sex and their race” (Myers, 2006, p. 6). Black women’s experiences are unique in that the gendered racism they face can only be felt and understood by those who are immersed in it (Hughes & Hamilton, 2003). Although Black women and Black men share many commonalities like cultural beliefs and oppression, they also provide incomparable contributions and distinctive insights that are shaped by their own experiences in their professional roles, as they are not monolithic (Henry, 2010). In their study, Belk (2006) investigated the impact of gender, institutional characteristics, years of professional experience in higher education and highest

degree earned on perceptions of career advancement factors held by mid-level Black women and mid-level Black men student affairs professionals. They found that Black women who were mid-level student affairs professionals were more likely than their male counterparts to perceive heightened professional standards, gender discrimination, underutilization of their skills and negative societal attitudes regarding Black women.

Black women in higher education live at the intersection of two forms of oppression: racism and sexism (Collins, 2004). As a result, these “intersecting power systems [create] socially constructed and complex set social inequalities [for Black women who work in higher education] who experience these intersecting identities via their material reality” (Walkington, 2022, p. 51). Often, because of this reality, Black women are placed at a disadvantage professionally because their societal status dominates their achievements and successes (Henry, 2010). In their study, Seo and Hinton (2009) found that Black women experience a double minority status in professional environments. Both race and gender combined presents pressures to Women of Color that Black and White men do not face; it is only the woman of color that experiences such oppression because she is Black and female (Robinson & Nelson, 2010).

Black Americans experience increased levels of racism, as compared to other people of color (Pieterse, Todd, Neville, & Carter, 2012). In United States culture, White superiority is incessantly perpetuated in both work and social spaces, many times creating a lesser perception of self for Black Americans (Husband, 2016). In a study that surveyed 289 Black women, researchers found a positive correlation between internalized racism and alcohol consumption (Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000). As internalized racism heightened among Black women, so did their consumption of alcohol.

Collins (1990) posits that American society assigns Women of Color to specific social groups because of their race and gender, when they try to function outside of those roles, conflict arises, and they are forced into a “series of negotiations” in order to effectively navigate their life choices. Many Black women see themselves at war with society because of their race and gender. Because of that, they form “weapons” by which they navigate their life choices such as: anger, silence/outspokenness, withdrawal, shifting consciousness, and multiple tongues (Hurtado, 1996). In academia, Black women experience a double bind of racial and gender discrimination (Walkington, 2022). As a result, Black women are viewed as less capable and undeserving of their roles and positions in the academy. In addition, in institutions of higher education, Black women are viewed as “Mammy”, one who experiences sabotage and expected to give regard to their white counterparts and students (Wilson, 2012).

Racism and sexism are oppressing forces that work simultaneously to create a barrier for Black women in higher education (Breedon, 2021). Further, Black women face additional barriers as they are faced with negative stereotypes related to their race and gender (Candia-Bailey, 2016; Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). In turn, these negative stereotypes form how Black women are seen in the academy and affect how others in the academy interact with Black women. Specifically, Lais (2018) highlighted that Black women in leadership positions in higher education are perceived as, “aggressive, strong willed, difficult to work with, or too pushy” (p. 1). Although minimal, the body of research that has examined the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals has also highlighted the simultaneous effects of race and gender (Howe-Barksdale, 2007).

West and Greer’s (2020) qualitative study that examined the perspectives of Black women student affairs professionals regarding their professional success and personal well-being

found that participants felt the need to “be twice as good,” “go above and beyond,” “or go the extra mile” to prove they belonged (p. 9). This is an example of what is called “Black tax”: “When a Black woman does something well, she is overlooked, but when she does something wrong, she faces excessive backlash” (Prince, 2017, p. 33).

Black women in higher education face a myriad of obstacles and issues. In their study, Breeden (2021) interviewed seven mid-level and senior-level Black women student affairs professionals to examine how they navigated their roles at the intersections of both racism and sexism. Based on their three research questions, their findings indicated that a) they experience “Superwoman Syndrome” and feel they must perform better than their White colleagues, b) they need multiple sources of support and c) they have difficulties navigating future career outcomes (Breeden, 2021).

Unique Challenges Black Women Face in Student Affairs

Black women face specific challenges in their personal lives and while working in the institution. On a daily basis, Black women must socialize and interact with those they work with. By doing so, they experience various challenges that highlight the triple burden of being a Black woman. Specifically, the unique challenges Black women face in student affairs are: underrepresentation, isolation/outsider within/ and lack of support.

Underrepresentation

West (2015) explains that underrepresentation of Black women in higher education “exists when there is noticeably a 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). Black women have been an essential presence and have made significant strides in higher education for more than a century, but continue to be severely underrepresented among students,

faculty, staff, and campus administrators (Gregory, 2001; Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Zamani, 2003). While Black women administrators in higher education outpace other marginalized populations, they still fall behind White men and women in student affairs leadership positions (West, 2020). In the Fall of 2016, Black women represented only 9% of the 179,164 student and academic affairs employees compared to White women who represented 45% and White men who represented 22% (West & Breen, 2020).

Ironically, although student affairs place a heavy emphasis and on diversity and inclusion, minorities are underrepresented altogether, and women are especially underrepresented in more senior student affairs positions (Turrentine & Conley, 2001). Even though there are more Black women entering the student affairs professional field, they continue to be underrepresented and will continue to be disproportionately represented in relation to the number of Black women students on campus (Turrentine & Conley, 2001).

As a result of their underrepresented status in higher education, Black women face many challenges in their roles as administrators. West (2015) conducted 10 semi-structured interviews with Black women who were student affairs professionals and who identified with the experience of being underrepresented and isolated. They found that Black women shared experiences of being “the only” Black woman or “the only one of a few” Black women in their department or institution.

Miller (2003) describes critical mass as existing when there are enough individuals of a particular group that feel comfortable and not pressured to participate in conversations without feeling like spokespersons for their race. It is especially integral to have a significant number of Black women on college campuses for retention and success of Black women students, faculty, and staff (Myers, 2002). Black women on campus must be surrounded by one another in order to

share ideas, concerns and experiences specific and common to Black women. Black women working at campuses where there is a critical mass of Black women are less stressed than those without a critical mass (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

Current statistics, specifically the educational and employment rates as compared with those of Black men and other marginalized populations do not take the larger societal context into play, consequently creating flawed conclusions that Black women have achieved a level of academic and professional success that is adequate (West, 2020). These statistics muddle the reality that while there has been some improvement with Black women being employed and enrolled in higher education, much remains to be done in order for Black women attain an acceptable level of equality with White women and men (West, 2020). Mabokela (2001) posits that although underrepresentation is an indicator of how negligent the numbers are of Black women in higher education, there exist other issues and factors that affect the quality of their experiences in higher education.

Isolation/Outsider Within

Isolation refers to “feelings of loneliness, to the persistent awareness of ‘not fitting in,’ to always being on guard, and/or to the fatigue that comes from always having to be one’s own support system” (Daniel, 1997, as cited in West, 2015, p. 109). Black women student affair professionals are underrepresented in the academy, which leads to isolation causing Black women in the academy to feel they do not belong (Clayborne, 2006). Issues related to isolation include lack of access to culturally similar mentors, colleagues, and supervisors, leading to feelings of loneliness and unsupportive work environments for Black women student affairs professionals (Croom & Patton, 2011; Henry & Glenn, 2009; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; West, 2015). Specifically, Black women in higher education experience a form of isolation known as

invisibility/hypervisibility (Patton & Catching, 2009). With this type of isolation, they experience, “the paradoxical feeling of being both socially invisible and constantly on display” (West, 2019, p. 162). Collins (1986) describes the isolation of Black women in professional and academic settings as the “outsider within.” This phenomenon identifies the marginalized roles Black women hold in higher education and explains how Black women are often invited to settings where the dominant group has assembled, however they have no voice and feel invisible, as there is no personal or cultural fit between Black women and the dominant group (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

While navigating race and gender in the institution, Black women student professionals frequently feel alone. In turn, they try to establish a sense of connection with the majority culture on predominantly white campuses by assimilating so that they do not feel isolated and can find support systems (Evans, Forny, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Black women in higher education share similar experiences and challenges. In their examination of Black women in college, Watt (2003) found that Black women college students were situated in unwelcoming, insensitive, and isolative environments. In a qualitative study with 10 Black women student affairs professionals, participants identified coping strategies such as commitments to their faith, family and community in order to deal with isolation and the stresses of working in higher education (Becks-Moody, 2004; West & Greer, 2020).

Lack of Support

Black women feel they have no safe space in the academy, so they often rely on one another for encouragement and support. Support is a vital component to the personal and professional experience of Black women (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Patitu and Hinton (2003) found that in their study, Black women needed professional and personal support while

performing their work-related tasks. In particular, for these women, being abused, feeling stressed and being isolated were some of the ways Black women experienced a lack of support (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). By feeling unsupported, Black women also were ineffective in their jobs (Patitu & Hinton, 2003).

Due to lack of support and mentorship, Black women are also underrepresented in leadership positions in the academy (Grove & Montgomery, 1999; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; West, 2017). In their study, Grove and Montgomery (1999) found that Black women receive little to no encouragement to seek leadership positions, while particularly white men are “tapped” to pursue administrative roles and are provided with the “professional grooming” to equip them with the tools to pursue leadership positions while Black women are overlooked. Ultimately, their findings disclosed that Black women need effective support systems and healthy mentoring relationships to advance in higher education (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Black women need a safe space built by and for Black women to support and develop their career opportunities in leadership positions in student affairs (West, 2017).

Conceptual Framework

The primary theoretical orientations that guide this study are Black Feminist Thought (BFT) and Intersectionality. Black Feminist Thought (BFT), (Collins, 1986, 2000, 2009) reveals the unique characteristics of Black women personally and professionally, while Intersectionality, brings to light how Black women have been excluded from antiracist and feminist policies, as they do not take into consideration the intersecting identities of race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989). I conclude by discussing how I bring these two perspectives together and how they guided my dissertation study.

Black Feminist Thought

Black feminist thought provides the tool to help understand the experiences of Black women in student affairs (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Patricia Collins (1986, 2000, 2009), a social theorist, described BFT as a culturally responsive theory grounded in the lived experiences of Black women in the United States. Collins (2002) further suggests that there are three essential themes in Black feminist thought; first, BFT is shaped by the experiences Black women have encountered in their lives, although others have documented their experiences. Second, the experiences of Black women are both unique and intersect, and finally, there are multiple contexts in which Black women's experiences can be understood. As these themes may not be recognized by Black women at first, Black female intellectuals have provided a framework about the Black woman experience that clarify a Black woman's standpoint for Black women (Collins, 2002). Black women in student affairs face unique challenges in their personal and professional lives, as they are underrepresented, feel isolated and lack support. Collins (2000) highlights the challenges that Black women in academia face as occupying an "outsider within" status. Black feminist place high value on concrete, lived experiences as a standard for credibility (Collins, 1989, 2000). West (2015) notes, "Black women feminist simultaneously validates the intersection of African American women's collective common experiences, as well as the distinctness of their individual unique experiences; conceptualization of African American women's unique worldview, or standpoint" (p. 110).

Intersectionality

Rooted in Black feminist scholarship, intersectionality strives to understand how multiple social identities intersect. An intersectionality approach focuses on race and gender and the ways these two identities coexist. Black women in higher education "live at the intersection of two

forms of oppression: racism and sexism” (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003, p. 100). Crenshaw (1989) posits that intersectionality signifies the ways in which race, gender and social class interrelate to influence the lived experiences of Black women. In the context of this study, intersectionality explains what outlines the experiences of Black women by examining how race and gender interact on various levels (Davis, 2008; McCall, 2005). In addition, it also provides practical indications for conceptualizing the underrepresentation and isolation that Black women student affairs professionals experience (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Rooted in the legacies of Black women feminist scholars, Crenshaw (1989) centralizes the experiences and discrimination of Black women while highlighting the gendered, racialized and class experiences that intersect in their daily lives.

Intersectionality is analytical framework that was created by Black women feminist scholars that acknowledged that most feminist scholars only concentrated on the experiences of White middle class educated women, thus not portraying a realistic and accurate account of the experiences of all women; so, in turn, Black feminist scholars introduced a point of view that recognizes the intersection of race and gender with other social identities (Dill, 1983; Hull & Smith, 1982). By utilizing intersectionality as a theoretical framework, the patterns, and experiences of Black women in higher education may be better understood (Walkington, 2022).

Integrating Black Feminist Thought and Intersectionality

Black Feminist Thought and Intersectionality work together to provide an analytical lens that examines the experiences and challenges that Black women face in relation to their social identities, specifically as it pertains to race, gender, and class. Black women face a myriad of experiences and challenges while working in student affairs, however race, gender and class are what guides those experiences and how others perceive and receive them. It is imperative to

further examine and shine light on these encounters to be able to provide better supports to enhance the quality of life for these professionals.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Black women mid-level student affairs professionals are integral in building relationships within public four-year institutions and bring a wealth of experience and knowledge to the role, however they continue to face many barriers because of their race and gender (Henry, 2010). The purpose of this study was to investigate the personal and professional experiences of mid-level Black women student affairs professionals (a very specific underrepresented group in student affairs) who work in higher education and how they navigate the intersections of race and gender as they work in the institution. This chapter outlines the research design of the study including, site selection and access, participant recruitment, data collection, data analysis, positionality, ethical issues, credibility, and limitations.

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the personal and professional experiences of Black women working as mid-level student affairs professionals in one public four-year institution?
2. How do Black women working as mid-level student affairs professionals navigate the intersections of race, class, and gender as they work within the institution?

Research Design and Rationale

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) posit that qualitative research is inductive in nature and that “researchers build toward theory from observations and intuitive understandings gleaned from being in the field” (p. 17). This study sought to understand the professional and personal experiences of Black women mid-level student affairs professionals and how they navigate race and gender in the institution. Additionally, this study sought to better understand the ways to increase representation and remedy the challenges that Black women mid-level student affairs

professionals experience. For these reasons, I employed a qualitative design. A qualitative approach afforded the opportunity to investigate the specific contributions of professionals in higher education (Guillory, 2001; Henry, 2010; Jackson, 2001).

Drawing on Irving Seidman (2006), I took a phenomenological approach to the interview process and to understanding the lived experiences of Black women mid-level student affairs professionals and their views of their profession and their workplace. By utilizing a phenomenological approach, semi-structured interviews allowed for conversational two-way communication. Through this approach, participants were able to share their everyday experiences that occurred within the world of student affairs, this approach allowed for flexibility in gathering data from participants, while pausing the researchers' preconceived notions about the phenomenon. Further, this approach allowed participants to share both positive and negative experiences as they described the impact these experiences had on their well-being and job performance.

For this study, Black Feminist Thought (BFT) and Intersectionality were employed as the conceptual frameworks for understanding the personal and professional experiences of Black women-mid level student affairs professionals as they navigated race, gender, and class at a public university. Utilizing a qualitative design enabled the researcher to understand how participants created meaning and the ways in which they made sense of their lives (Merriam, 2009). A quantitative study would not allow the opportunity to understand the lived experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and their experiences.

Site and Sample Selection

In this study, I utilized a purposeful criterion-based sample. In qualitative research, the researcher purposefully selects participants that are better suited to address the problem of the

study, as well as the guiding research question(s) (S.R. Jones et al., 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Purposeful sampling allowed for the researcher to learn and gain understanding from selected participants, as well as gather rich information to focus on and learn about a particular problem (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 1990). Merriam (1998) notes that purposeful sampling allows the researcher to set the criteria and standards for selecting research participants. By utilizing purposeful sampling technique, the researcher was able to identify essential participants that met the criterion for this study, as well as observing that the findings offered better insights and more precise research results (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Participants in this study were employed at one public university in Southern California. Sobers (2014) posited, “the academy needs to know what it is like for a woman of color working in today’s colleges and universities” (p.166). It is imperative to know and understand the experiences of Black women within the institution. Although the sample is not representative of all Black women student affairs professionals, in the context of this study, a large public institution is a reasonable place to start. Specifically, at this particular university, Black faculty, staff and students have historically remained underrepresented and their presence continues to be overwhelmingly low. The campus climate is comparable to climate issues that exist in the world today. As a result of this, many campus departments and campus organizations are intentionally and strategically providing support for student affairs professionals of color, Specifically, the institution has recently launched Equity, Diversity and Inclusion education for staff and faculty. Institutions that employ a diverse and multicultural workforce enhance the climate for all members of the organization and by observing through a Black Feminist Thought lens, Black women must be empowered to battle existing individual and systemic oppressions (Clay, 2014; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Collins, 2009).

Table 1 displays the undergraduate/graduate student profile and faculty workforce diversity at the institution where the study was conducted. Specifically, it presents the breakdown of race/ethnicity for students during the 2020-2021 academic year (the most recent data available) and faculty employed at the university as of April 2023 (the most recent data available).

Table 1
Undergraduate/Graduate Student Profile, 2020-21 and Faculty Workforce Diversity, 2023

Race/Ethnicity	UG	Graduate	Faculty
Asian/Asian-American or Pacific Islander	29%	19%	23.2%
Black or African American	3%	4%	3.6%
Latina(o)/Chicana(o)/Hispanic	22%	14%	7.9%
White	27%	32%	58.3%

Note: UG=Undergraduate Students; Graduate=Graduate Students

The table illustrates how Black faculty and students are underrepresented and present in smaller numbers than other faculty and staff from other race/ethnicity groups at this public university.

Through direct communication, via email, I reached out to and recruited 10 participants for this study (Appendix A). After IRB approval, I emailed colleagues within my network to invite them to participate in my research study. The process was speedy as I was able to conduct 10 interviews in a two-month span. Although all those I invited to participate fit the criteria and responded to the invitation, they also suggested other colleagues they knew that fit the description. While I knew that I could invite more participants to participate, prior research noted that the selected sample size was more about saturation than representation (Hodges, 2011). With saturation, the participants' common experiences and primary points surfaced repeatedly with no new information being present in the data (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). According to Hennink and Kaiser (2022), studies using empirical data reached saturation within a narrow range of nine

to 17 interviews, particularly in studies with relatively homogenous study populations and narrowly defined objectives. Based on the literature and my homogenous population of Black women mid-level student affairs professionals, 10 participants were enough to reach saturation as consistent themes were apparent throughout the study. If saturation had not been attained after 10 interviews, there were other subjects that fit the criteria that I had access to.

Participants

Participants in the study had to meet the following criteria:

- identify as a Black Woman;
- be employed at a specific four-year public institution;
- hold a mid-level student affairs professional position; and
- work in one or more of the following offices in a division of student affairs or academic unit: Office of the Dean of Students, Residential life, Cultural and Recreational Affairs, Student Services, Counseling/Mental Health Services, Career Services, Student Development, Student Wellness, Campus Life, Financial Aid.

Each participant was a mid-level student affairs professional, employed as at this public university, and self-identified as a Black woman. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities. Although they had different working titles that qualified as mid-level student affairs professionals, to ensure confidentiality, I only included their working titles with no mention of their specific departments. Participants in the final sample ranged in age from 25 to 55 years old, with a median of 16 years' experience as a student affairs professionals and a median of 15.3 years working as a student affairs professional at the university. The most common age range among participants was 41-45 years old, with 5 participants in this range, followed up by 5 who were 26-30 years old, 31-35 years old, 36-40 years old, 46-50 years old

51-55 years old, respectively. All participants held college degrees, 3 of them held PhD degrees, 3 of them held masters degrees, 2 of them held bachelors degrees while 2 were working on their EdD degree and masters degree during the time the study was conducted.

Data Collection Methods

In qualitative research, data collection can come in the form of multiple techniques. Such techniques can include: (a) documentation (b) archival records, (c) Interviews, (d) direct observation, (e) participant observation and (f) physical artifacts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Yin, 2014). For this study, I conducted semi-structured interviews to collect data in order to answer the research questions.

Semi-structured Interviews

Interviews serve as a powerful method for capturing the experiences and lived meanings of a subjects' everyday world. Interviewing allows subjects to share with others their reality from their own viewpoint and in their own words (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). According to Kvale (1996), a benefit of collecting data through interviews is the production of data that highlights the lived experiences from the interviewees' points of view and helps to understand the meaning behind their experiences.

Data collection for this study was conducted through semi-structured interviews as these types of interviews, "attempts to understand themes of the lived daily world from the subjects' own perspectives" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p. 2). COVID-19 restrictions have transitioned in-person qualitative research interviews to virtual platforms. Considering the current world climate and the age of Zoom, I conducted my interviews via Zoom. Although in person qualitative interviews have been associated with valuable advantages, Zoom has also been validated by participants as adding value (Olliffe, Kelly, Yu Ko, Montaner, 2021). Olliffe et al.,

(2021) posits that Zoom interviews are especially beneficial as participants can interview from the comfort of their own home, allowing for a relaxed environment and being surrounded by personal belongings that encourages naturalness and spontaneity. Zoom also reduces the formality of the interview, as well as, providing participants management over what is seen and said (Olliffe et al., 2021). For the sake of this study, Zoom increased recruitment reach and the inclusivity of diverse participants, eliminating any discomfort being face to face with the interviewer (Olliffe et al., 2021).

Before I conducted interviews, I pilot tested my interview protocol with Black women mid-level student affair professionals who were not employed at this institution. In this study, pilot testing was imperative because it, “identifies potential problem areas and deficiencies in the research instruments and protocol prior to implementation during the full study” (Hassan, Shattner & Mazza, 2006). After pilot testing, I reached out to potential participants to invite them to participate in this study. Once participants responded, I set up 90-minute interviews and emailed them an electronic copy of the informed consent form (Appendix B) to review before the interview date. I then sent the demographic questionnaire (Appendix C) to participants so that I could record identifying data in order to describe participants in this research study. Prior to engaging in the interview, I reviewed the consent form and answered any questions they had about the consent form or interview process. After, I used a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix D) to gather data and to capture the stories about participants’ personal and professional experience (Seidman, 2016). By using an interview protocol, I was able to capture the experiences of the participants, as well as, allowing for flexibility to elaborate, clarify and to provide additional information. The protocol provided structure throughout the interview process. The interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes. Interviews were recorded via Zoom

and a recorder, saved to a secure cloud storage system, transcribed, and uploaded to Dedoose software for analysis.

The conceptual frameworks and guiding research questions provided the basis for the interview protocol and focused on the personal and professional experiences of participants' and the ways in which they navigated race, class, and gender at the university where they were employed. The interview protocol was revised multiple times to ensure that the conceptual frameworks were apparent through the questions being asked and to make sure the questions were connected to the research questions and literature guiding the study. The revised version of the interview protocol included journey mapping. Participants were informed they would be journey mapping their experiences when they were invited to participate. All participants gave permission to be recorded via Zoom as well as audio recorded, although I did notify them, I would be taking notes throughout the interview process. Throughout the interview, I asked follow-up questions to go into more detailed conversation about certain experiences they shared. By doing so, participants were encouraged to make meaning of their experiences working at the university. Despite the nature of the topic, participants offered rich data from the interviews. After the interviews, participants received a \$20 Amazon gift card for their participation. All participants completed the interview in its entirety. At the end of the interviews, I provided each interviewee with the option to be contacted for a follow-up once all interviews were completed, to allow the interviewee the opportunity to reflect on what was discussed in the first interview in case new ideas emerged.

Journey Mapping

Brinkmann (2013) notes that the interview structure and process is specific to the actual study. In this study, I utilize object elicitation as means to engage with participants, as there are

some qualities that verbal communication cannot express (Weber, 2008). Visual communication relates to the subconscious in ways that language cannot, ultimately creating a different dynamic in communicating (Ashton, 2018). Particularly in this study, since I will be examining the experiences of Black women mid-level student affairs professionals and how they navigate race and gender in the institution, the study of relationships between people and objects can show the association between society and human nature (Schiffer, 1999). Object solicitation can ease and relax the process of discussing personal experiences, by including objects that correlate to a participant's life it may encourage a greater scope of responses (Willig, 2016).

Specifically, in this study used journey mapping as a method to capture the experiences of the participants. During the interview, I designated the first 20 minutes for participants to draw a map of their journey as a Black woman student affairs professional that highlighted their experiences from the beginning of their careers through today. Through this journey map, they were asked to represent how their identities as a Black women had impacted their professional journeys. This process was helpful in identifying the barriers and challenges they experienced, as well as leading to the examination of important memories (Prosser & Loxley, 2008). Participants shared their experiences via journey mapping in multiple ways. Some participants drew actual maps of their experiences, while others created visual timelines.

Data Analysis

Uwe Flick (2014) describes data analysis as the “classification and interpretation of linguistic (or visual) material to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material and what is represented in it” (p. 5). Data analysis includes collecting open-ended data based on asking questions and constructing an analysis from the information participants' share in order to answer the research question(s) (Maxwell, 2013).

In this study, interviews via Zoom were the primary source of data. After the first interview was conducted, I began the data analysis process and continued throughout the interview process. After each interview, the data was transcribed, and I created analytic memos that detailed my thoughts and any themes that related to the research questions. I conducted two cycles of analysis (Saldana, 2016). The first coding cycle began by reading and listening (if necessary) to the interviews several times then identifying codes. All of the transcripts were initially coded by hand, then I uploaded all of my transcripts into the data analysis software program, Dedoose. I recorded consistent themes by creating categories that integrated my conceptual frameworks, research questions and any themes that were consistent with prior literature.

During the second cycle of coding, I consolidated codes into larger themes. For example, consistent codes such as ‘hanging out outside of work’ or ‘collaborating during work events’ were categorized into the theme ‘Community.’ I revised the themes before solidifying the final themes which resulted in the findings. Through the coding process and collapsing of data, the development of patterns allowed for meaning to be attributed to the experiences of these participants (Saldana, 2016).

Positionality

As a Black woman working as a student affairs professional in higher education, I realize and understand the necessity and importance of representation within the world of student affairs. It is particularly important to document and provide empirical evidence of our lived professional and personal experiences within higher education to increase supports and to address the challenges that exist for Black women student affairs professionals. On a daily basis, we are faced with the responsibilities of fulfilling our work tasks in addition to caring for the

mental and emotional well-being of students. Prior research has also shown that Black faculty and staff are asked to serve as mentors and role models, creating unbalanced working conditions, affecting their overall well-being (Joseph & Hirschfield, 2011). It is imperative that these experiences are addressed so that we feel supported while upholding the values of student affairs.

For the past fifteen years, I have worked in the area of Student Affairs at this university. My higher education career began working in student affairs as a student affairs officer. Currently, I work as student affairs professional in an academic department at the university. As a Black woman student affairs professional, I have first-hand knowledge of the campus climate and inner workings of the university. As a Black woman student affairs professional, my identity allowed the privilege to cultivate and build relationships with other Black women in the field. I know that many of the experiences we face as Black women in the academy are the same. Because of my own personal and professional experiences in student affairs, there was a strong desire to understand the experiences of other Black women student affairs professionals. While my close connection to the research can be considered a strength, it can also present bias during the research process. I prepared myself to be intentional while processing my own thoughts and feelings and focused on the lived experiences of the participants. To address this bias, at the start of each interview I shared my own connection to the research topic and created a journey map of my own experiences along with participants. By doing so, participants gained trust and I was able to engage in self-reflection to accept and understand my own perceptions and bias (Milner, 2007).

Ethical Issues

Although I did not anticipate many ethical issues arising out of this study, there are a few instances where ethical issues could come into focus. The first ethical issue is the two-fold role I

play as an employee and doctoral researcher. To protect the well-being and rights of participants, I made sure that I did not interview employees that I manage. Although my role as a Black woman student affairs professional allows me to know faculty, staff, and students, I used pseudonyms to protect participants' identities and department affiliation (Kaiser, 2009). Next, it was my responsibility to protect the participants of study. The name of the university was not specifically named or identified, and the names of the participants will not be published. Due to the sensitive nature of the study, if participants felt any discomfort recalling events, memories and telling their stories, I let them know prior to the interview that they could stop at any time. I also stored all data in a secure password-protected computer. Finally, it was important to be respectful of participants' time and participation. I compensated their time with gratitude, as well as offered a gift card as a thank you.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

My bias, reactivity and participant reactivity were potential threats to the credibility and the data collection of this study. As a former student and current employee at this four-year public institution, I had my own opinions about my own experiences as a Black woman student affairs professional. It was imperative to not react either way to maintain my role and positionality throughout the study and to ensure credibility. As a result of my own personal experiences, it was important to address concerns of credibility. To address those concerns, I collected rich data in the form of direct quotes. By doing so, the rich data provided a more detailed understanding of their experiences within the institution and not mine (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participant reactivity could have been a threat to the credibility of this study, one way I reduced participant reactivity was to conduct pilot testing. I piloted the instrument with two Black women who worked in student affairs outside of the university. By piloting the

instrument (semi-structured interview protocol), I was better prepared to navigate the interview process with participants in the study as well as, establish fluidity and build rapport among myself and the interviewees. Further, this process guaranteed that all participants were asked the same questions, despite my relationship with participants or involvement with the department. By practicing my data collection methods, I was able to identify common links and threads as it related to the study while at the same time, sharpening my interview technique.

I also used member checking to enhance the quality and accuracy of the data, as well as to offer participants the opportunity to provide feedback (Carlson, 2010). Specifically, participants were given the opportunity to review the transcribed material to check for inconsistencies. Six of the ten participants responded to confirm the accuracy of their transcripts, stating there were no changes needed. After that, I invited the ten participants to review a draft of Chapter 4 to make sure their experiences were accurately portrayed. Of the ten that were invited, the same six participants responded with no changes needed. Member checking was employed to ensure that the findings were consistent with their personal and professional experiences.

Finally, I utilized peer debriefing to establish consistency and dependability throughout the data analysis process. A faculty member at the study site who had knowledge of the qualitative process was asked to review preliminary findings and interpretations of the data (Spall, 1998). I had worked with this faculty member since the beginning of the dissertation process so trust was already established. The peer debriefing process assisted in making sure themes were accurately portrayed, worthy and believable (Spall, 1998). Specifically, to begin the coding process, I shared a copy of one of the transcripts with the faculty member. They then reviewed the transcript and offered their reactions and feedback regarding the initial set of codes that developed from the transcript. Through rich discussions and analysis, the debriefer

encouraged dialogue to assist in condensing the scope of codes to create and derive themes that are presented in chapter 4.

Conclusion

This research study was designed to collect data on the personal and professional experiences of Black women mid-level student affair professionals and how they navigated race, class, and gender at a public university. This qualitative interview design revealed the challenges participants faced and the ways in which they needed support. The following chapter will include the findings from this research study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this dissertation was to examine the personal and professional experiences of 10 Black women in mid-level student affairs positions, including how they navigated the intersections of race, class and gender while working in one public four-year university. In the first three chapters of this dissertation, I provided a brief overview of the history of student affairs, reviewed relevant literature on the role that Black women play in student affairs and discussed the challenges that Black women mid-level Student Affairs Professionals face in these positions. I also discussed the methodological design that was utilized for this study. This chapter presents findings generated in response to the following research questions:

1. What are the personal and professional experiences of Black women working as mid-level student affairs professionals in one public four-year institution?
2. How do Black women working as mid-level student affairs professionals navigate the intersections of race, class, and gender as they work within the institution?

To answer these questions, I conducted a qualitative study and employed a phenomenological approach to interviewing (Seidman, 2006). This approach was paired with journey mapping. Through the analytical lens of Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 1986, 2000, 2009), journey mapping allowed participants to share knowledge based on their personal and professional experiences. Journey maps also served as the primary guiding tool for data collection. Ten Black women mid-level Student Affairs Professionals participated in interviews.

Participant Introductions and Characteristics

In this section I introduce the 10 Black women who participated in this study. Each introduction highlights each participant's age, how long they have worked in student affairs, how

they were introduced to working in student affairs, their current positions and degree attainment. At the end of the section, I include a table summarizing participant characteristics.

Tameka is a 25-30-year-old Black female that began her career in student affairs 0-5 years ago. Although Tameka aspired to work as a student affairs officer immediately after graduating from college, she began working as an officer manager in an academic unit to get her foot in the door. She currently serves as an undergraduate advisor. Presently, she is in school working towards her masters degree.

Justine is a 31-35-year-old Black female that has worked at the university in student affairs for 6-10 years. Although she wanted to pursue a career in event planning, Tameka was encouraged to pursue a masters degree in student affairs by her boss while working as an undergraduate student. She is currently an assistant director and is working towards her doctorate degree.

Dr. Lori is a 41–45-year-old Black female that has worked in student affairs for the past 6-10 years. Dr. Lori initially began her career as an assistant professor, but shortly thereafter transitioned into student affairs. She currently serves as a director; she holds a doctorate degree.

Dr. Evelyn is a 36–40-year-old Black female that has worked in student affairs for the past 11-15 years. She began working in student affairs while pursuing her undergraduate degree. She is currently an assistant dean in student affairs and has a doctorate degree.

Jeanine is a 41–45-year-old Black female that has worked in Student Affairs for the past 11-15 years. Jeanine was introduced to student affairs as an undergraduate student by her former boss when she was a Resident Assistant who encouraged her to pursue a graduate degree in Student Affairs. While pursuing her graduate studies, she held various positions in student

affairs, such as a program coordinator and an area coordinator, she currently she serves as a director. She holds a master's degree.

Natalia is a 41-45-year-old Black female who has worked at the university and in student affairs for the past 16-20 years. She currently serves as a senior undergraduate advisor within an academic department. She is also a graduate of the university and received her bachelors degree there, as well. She began working in student affairs immediately after graduating from the university. Natalia knows the inner workings of the university extremely well and knows many people who also work in student affairs.

Monica is a 41–45-year-old Black female who graduated from the university. She began her career in student affairs 16-20 years ago, immediately after graduating from the University. Shortly after, Monica received her doctorate degree from the university as well, she currently serves as a director.

Shawna is a 41–45-year-old Black female who has worked in student affairs at the university for the past 11-15 years. Shawna was introduced to student affairs by an old boss. Shawna has a masters degree and currently serves as a dean in student affairs.

Marla is a 51–55-year-old Black female who has worked in student affairs and at the university for the past 26-30 years. She attended the university as an undergraduate student and holds a bachelors degree. She is currently an assistant director.

Shay is a 46-50-year-old Black female who has worked in student affairs for 26-30 years. Shay initially worked in the entertainment industry and then transitioned to work in student affairs. She is a recent graduate who obtained her masters degree. Shay currently serves as a manager in student affairs.

Table 2 provides an overview of the demographic characteristics for each participant. The table is organized by each participants' years of experience, the years they spent at the site of study, their age, level of education and their positions within student affairs.

Table 2
Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

Pseudonym	Years of Experience in Student Affairs	Years at the University	Age	Level of Education	Position
Tameka	0-5	0-5	25-30	Masters (IP)	UG Advisor
Justine	6-10	6-10	31-45	Ed.D (IP)	Assoc. Director
Lori	6-10	6-10	41-45	Ph.D	Director
Evelyn	11-15	11-15	36-40	Ph.D	Asst. Dean
Jeanine	11-15	11-15	41-45	Masters	Director
Natalia	16-20	16-20	41-45	Bachelors	UG Senior Advisor
Monica	16-20	16-20	41-45	Ph.D	Director
Shawna	21-25	11-15	41-45	Masters	Dean
Marla	26-30	26-30	51-55	Bachelors	Asst. Director
Shay	26-30	26-30	46-50	Masters	Manager

Note: Assoc. Director= Associate Director; Asst. Dean=Assistant Dean; UG Advisor=Undergraduate Advisor; Senior UG Advisor= Senior Undergraduate Advisor; Asst. Director=Assistant Director

Participants ranged in age from 25 to 55 years old. Years of experience working in student affairs ranged from less than five years of student affairs experience to thirty years' experience.

Participants varied in positions they held in student affairs, as well as degree attainment, ranging from bachelors degrees to doctorate degrees.

Analysis and Findings

Each interview was transcribed, reviewed multiple times and coded as part of the data analysis process. My analysis was guided by my conceptual framework. I drew on Black

feminist thought (Collins, 1986, 2000, 2009) to help understand the subjective experiences of Black women in student affairs in the United States. Black feminist thought allows Black women to validate their life experiences as truth. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) provided a lens for understanding how the multiple social identities such as race, class and gender intersect for Black women working in student affairs. Although each of the Black women mid-level student affairs professionals who participated in this study had a unique story to tell, I found that they also shared similar personal and professional experiences. All of the women faced challenges that ultimately affected their overall experiences as mid-level Student Affairs professionals. In addition, they all navigated the intersections of race, class, and gender in the public university, regardless of their position or their roles, or even if they began their careers at other institutions.

Using specific coding strategies, such as creating a preliminary coding scheme by first reviewing transcripts, revisiting journey maps and listening to interview audio at least three times to remember the connection I had with the data. I then refined and finalized the coding schemes to develop a set of six themes about the personal and professional experiences of participants, including the unique challenges they faced and the survival strategies/techniques they used. These themes include: Black woman-ness, Faculty Bullying and Incivility, Black superwoman syndrome, Lack of support, Quality of live, and Community. All of the participants dealt with feeling like their Black Woman-ness was too much for their colleagues and supervisors. They described their communication styles as being perceived as hostile and aggressive. Participants also encountered Faculty Bullying/Incivility. They shared stories of faculty being hostile, passive aggressive, and verbally abusive when they communicated something that faculty did not like. In addition, participants reported suffering from Black Superwoman Syndrome. They were expected to tackle the issues of the workplace while simultaneously dealing with race, class and

gender. Relatedly, participants shared that they did not receive the support other colleagues received, especially from Black women; however male colleagues received support, even from them. As a result, participants expressed a decline in their quality of life while dealing with issues in the university, such as feeling overworked, underpaid and unappreciated. Their mental, physical and emotional health were affected. Finally, they discussed the value and importance of community and how community was a mechanism they utilized to survive working in the institution. Community gave them a sense of belonging and buffered feelings of isolation.

Themes in Relation to Research Questions

The six themes I derived from the analytic process address both of the research questions posed by this study. Each theme represents Black women's stories about the challenges they faced while working at a public university and/or the survival techniques they developed to protect their well-being. In addition, each one of the themes illustrates how personal and professional experiences played a role in the journey of Black women mid-level Student Affairs Professionals.

Participants in this study described how the social categories of race, class and gender shaped their personal and professional experiences as well as how they responded to workplace challenges. The social categories of race, class, and gender were present in three of the themes (e.g., faculty bullying and incivility, Black superwoman syndrome, lack of support). The social categories of race and gender were present in two of the themes – Black woman-ness and quality of life. The social categories of class and gender were both present in the theme of community. Utilizing Intersectionality as an analytic lens to examine their experiences, the findings show that Black women Student Affairs Professionals utilize different strategies and techniques to respond to the challenges they faced. The relationship between themes and social categories are displayed

in Table 3. This table also includes information about how participants navigated the intersections of race, gender, and class in relation to each of the themes.

Table 3
Thematic Elements, Social Categories and Navigational Approaches

Theme	Social Categories	How They Navigated Intersections
Black Woman-ness	Race and Gender	Played the Game/Adapted
Faculty Bullying and Incivility	Race, Class and Gender	Let Superiors Address
Black Superwoman Syndrome	Race, Class and Gender	Burnout/Learn to Say No
Lack of Support	Race, Class and Gender	Supported Others/Self Advocacy
Quality of Life	Race and Gender	Disassociation/Self-Care
Community	Race and Class	Sought Out Others

In the following sections, I discuss each of themes and provide details from participants’ stories in order to detail the lived experiences of Black women working as mid-level student affairs professionals at a public university.

Black Woman-ness

A dominant finding in this study centered around the university rejecting and watering down the uniqueness of what it means and what it is to be a Black woman. The larger societal discourse assigns Black women attributes that influence how others view them. For example, numerous media outlets routinely represent Black women negatively, normalizing and perpetuating harmful and destructive images and ideas about Black women (Collins 1986, 2000, 2009). Through these disparaging images, Black women are often viewed by their peers, colleagues and supervisors as being hard to work with and as the stereotypical “angry Black woman.” In this study, Black women described being perceived as a threat when they communicated with their colleagues and supervisors at the University. When discussing how they were perceived by their colleagues’ participants focused on two of their marginalized

identities – being Black and being a woman. The participants felt their communication styles were always heavily criticized and picked apart and that the criticism of their communication styles were linked to their race and gender. Lori shared that her previous supervisor, a White male, would find fault in all of the emails she sent. No matter what the conversation entailed, he would have something to say about the tone of her emails and what she said. She shared:

I don't candy coat anything, I don't have time for that, I'm very direct with how I communicate. I remember my previous boss, he was White. He always had issues with how I would communicate, you know, deliver a message. You know, I know my communication is loaded with my Blackness, loaded with me as a woman, as a Black woman. He would always read into it, no matter what. After that experience I started getting my emails checked by colleagues before I sent it, just to be like temperature check, how's the tone?

Lori points out how her direct communication style was always interpreted negatively and how she had to be strategic in how she communicated so that she was not perceived as a threat or uncooperative. In another situation, Lori talked about a specific encounter she had with a White woman from Human Resources who never acknowledged her role and would ignore her presence in email correspondences. When Lori did address her in the emails, the lady from HR became hostile. She described the following:

There was this time this lady from HR kept asking questions about my unit but would never address me in the emails. She would send general emails and copy me on them. I would respond, "Hey, I see you were asking about my team; this is the information you are seeking." After that, she started coming for me, just real nasty and I had to check her on it. I told her that as a HR person it is very problematic to hear you and see you speak

to me in this manner. She called me right away to explain herself, that conversation turned into her crying and turning herself into the victim. I later found myself playing the game just to get things done.

In both situations, Lori attends to the racialized nature of her experiences. Noting that her boss was a White man and identifying her own Blackness as an important factor in shaping her experiences. In effect, she raises the racialized and gendered dynamics of her work environment and how she both interprets this environment and responds in ways to protect herself.

Jeanine faced a similar situation while working at the university. She often felt that she had to be cognizant of her communication style and how others received and interpreted her messages. She described having to pay close attention to how she delivered her messages. She recalled a particular incident where a White colleague called her on her personal cell phone after work hours. She talked about how she had to be careful as a Black woman setting boundaries. She stated:

I remember it was after work hours one day and on this particular day, I got a call on my personal cell about something related to work, and I was being very much myself, which is, this is my personal cell. Apparently, they didn't like personal Jeanine and that call caused so much drama and for me if I was a different person, or looked differently, I imagined how I showed up because to me, I wasn't necessarily overly rude, but I was a Black woman setting up clear boundaries, that was when I realized this is going to be challenging to do, like you need to apologize to this person, but how?

Much like Lori, Jeanine identified race as a key factor in how her colleagues perceived her communication style and behavior (e.g., setting clear boundaries). She pointed out that if she looked differently, her communication would have been perceived more constructively. In

addition, she felt the need to shift her own behavior in order to communicate with her colleague and to protect herself.

Participants also described experiencing tension in their work environments because of their Black woman-ness. They were reprimanded and written-up and received negative feedback on evaluations because of how they communicated. Justine recollects an experience where she communicated with a White male colleague and felt she was disciplined because she was a Black woman. As a result of this communication, she faced disciplinary action. Justine shared:

I remember every year we would get these evaluations; at the end of the year, you get feedback. My feedback was so bad, it was so bad and the things she put in my feedback didn't make any sense. One of them I remember vividly. There was a guy who started the same time as me, he was terrible, his name was Sam, he doesn't work there anymore. The feedback came in August, but the incident happened in January, or sometime around that. We're in this meeting, I mean in this interview with staff and Sam is just rambling on and on and taking up the interview person's time. I gently nudge him to move on to the next question. Sam goes and tells whoever I did this and says I made him feel uncomfortable. So instead of telling me this and giving me time to talk to him and have a conversation, she puts it in my feedback. She says I make people feel uncomfortable and that I don't know how to talk to people, and I don't know how to communicate, and I don't have good relationships with people. And so then, in our meeting, I asked, "can you give me these examples?" So, she gives me these specific examples and I asked, "why would you wait six months to tell me? Why would you not try to help me correct that issue?" If I'm going to be dealing with people, and I'm going to be dealing with Sam regularly, why

don't you talk to me about what it is I need to fix? So, I started to kind of not talk as much or be careful with what I was saying.

In the above example, Justine discusses how her behaviors in the workplace were interpreted by her male colleague (Sam) and other female colleagues. Justine realized that she was held to a different standard than her White male colleague who had also in the past done the same things she had done in interviews. Her story illustrates how similar workplace behaviors are perceived differently based upon race.

Like Justine who began to monitor her communication by either communicating less or carefully watching what she said, Evelyn described an experience where a White male colleague called her angry on multiple occasions when she either did speak out in meetings or she did not speak out in meetings. By speaking out, she was viewed as an angry Black woman, reinforcing the "angry Black woman" stereotype. Even when she stopped speaking in meetings, she was still viewed as an angry Black woman. Evelyn explained:

As a Black woman you're damned if you do, damned if you don't. When I would speak out in meetings, you know. It's like why is she angry? You're sitting over there red in the face, but I'm angry? Okay.

Evelyn described how she was considered angry whether she spoke out or not in meetings. No matter what she did or said, her colleague would always have something negative to say about her behavior, even insinuating she was hostile and angry, even when silent. When Evelyn identified herself as a Black woman and noted that her colleague was a White man, she marked race as a relevant factor in the office and the workplace climate.

As these examples illustrate, participants noticed the intersections between race and gender in their own experiences with their colleagues. Each participant pointed out that their

voices as Black women were often shunned and in specific situations, some of their colleagues or supervisors depicted some sort of victim mentality weaponizing victimhood, highlighting their White privilege. For example, when Dr. Lori confronted the HR person and was met with tears instead of accountability. The participants noted that “playing the game” (as Lori put it) was easier than confronting these experiences head on because the work still needed to get done and they did not want to seem problematic. Many participants found themselves being extra polite and cordial to their colleagues so that they were not received negatively or labeled with the “angry Black woman” stigma. They had to be cognizant of how they represented themselves and how others received and interpreted their communication styles. Even when setting clear boundaries in matters of respect, they still had to be deliberate in how those boundaries were set and how others would receive that information.

Faculty Bullying and Incivility

The second finding centered on faculty bullying and incivility. Generally, in higher education there exists a governance that organizes different bodies and functions at the university (Kezar and Eckel, 2004). When looking at the organizational structure and functions of the university, faculty play a vital role in hierarchy. While the primary role of faculty is to teach students, staff typically do not teach, but their role is to support faculty and students alike. Although faculty and staff should collaborate and work together, many times there exist a barrier that prevents this occurrence. Specifically, participants in this study described being disrespected by male faculty based on their race, class and gender, revealing their intersecting identities. Participants viewed these interactions as a form of bullying. Marla, who has worked on campus for nearly 30 years shared an encounter she had with a White male faculty member who had a tendency of constantly berating and criticizing female staff in the department. Marla shared:

There was once a time that I had a horrible encounter with a faculty member. He always found a way to weaponize his incompetency. This one time he sent an email asking me for information I had sent out several times previously. When I responded, I advised him of the dates that the information had been sent out and gave him the information again. When he responded, he copied my boss, her boss and her boss's boss and wrote this elaborate email about how I had shamed him, he used so many trigger words that it was ridiculous, I was so upset I couldn't even think or see straight. Instead of responding, I let my boss handle it. But in that moment, I felt I needed to protect and defend myself. I went through every single email I sent him to make sure she knew that I hadn't shamed him or done anything to him in the past.

Marla's encounter with this particular individual illustrates the racialized, gendered and classist nature of her experiences working with faculty members. He used his rank as faculty to intimidate her. By copying her boss, he established a hierarchy and made it clear that Marla still had someone to answer to, further intimidating her. As a result, she felt the need to protect herself by providing evidence of her previous correspondences and had to let her boss deal with him because she did not feel comfortable addressing him on her own as she feared retaliation.

Shay, who has worked on campus for over 25 years experienced a similar situation with a faculty member. She stated:

That's another component of the challenge of being a Black woman is the faculty bullying. I mean, I don't care, you can bully me, I can handle it. When I was in the history department. This professor happened to be of Indian descent. He started cussing at me when I communicated something he didn't like, and I just looked at him. I grabbed my purse, I grabbed my keys, and I looked at him and said, "if you ever want to speak to me

as an adult I will return to this conversation.” I walked out. I really walked out. And then he went and told on me to my chair.

Shay’s experience with this faculty member accentuated the disrespect and multidimensional layer of trying to do her job while at the same time being belittled and verbally abused by someone whom she worked with and supported. It further highlighted the role that gender, and class played, as he even went and told on her to the chair of her department after he verbally assaulted her.

Tameka shared an experience where she sat on an admissions committee for her department. A White male faculty member assumed because she was a Black woman, she had more insight than others about fee waivers. She shared:

I’ve had very bad encounters with one White professor. He’s been around for a while, since before I began working there. There was this one time I felt like he was saying something to me because I was Black. When it comes down to PhD admissions, students can apply for fee waivers. I remember him making this comment, “Oh, can you help with that? Because I don’t really have much experience with that and I just assumed that you would be more relatable.” That’s one thing I never forgot, why would you think that I would be more relatable to students applying for fee waivers?

Tameka describes feeling disrespected and further marginalized as a Black woman staff member during this encounter. In this example, Tameka highlights the race of the professor and noted how he asked her to help students because she “would be more relatable.” From her question, “why would you think that I would be more relatable to students applying for fee waivers” we can infer that Tameka is pointing to the intersections of race and class and raising the possibility

that the professor drew on stereotypes to demonstrate how he viewed her socio-economic position as it relates to race and class.

Black women mid-level student affairs professionals in this study describe being disrespected and bullied by male faculty members. In their descriptions, they explicitly name membership in racial categories, gender, and class thus indexing these social positions relevant in their workplace experiences. Many of the participants felt upset and felt the need to protect themselves from such behaviors. They let their supervisors address the situation for them, they walked away, or they ignored the disrespect completely. This finding leans into the next as Black women have to tend to and deal with the demands of work as well as their multiple identities.

Black Superwoman Syndrome

Another prevalent theme was the notion of the Black Superwoman Syndrome. Although this syndrome looks different for every Black woman, there is a consistent element that Black women must be strong, show no emotion, be independent, thrive even without adequate resources and prioritize the responsibility of caring for others while at the same time surviving as a Black woman in the world (Woods-Giscombe, Robinson, Carthon, Devane-Johnson, Corbie-Smith, 2016). This theme highlighted the gendered and racialized elements of the interactions that Black women mid-level student affairs professionals dealt with on a daily basis while working at the university. This theme also focused on the belief that Black women were held to a different and higher standard than their colleagues.

Shay described how she felt as a Black woman on campus and how flexible Black women needed to be in order to be accommodating to everyone else, despite their own physical, mental and emotional needs. She said:

Being a Black woman, I know that I have to be 2 to 3, 4, 5, 6 steps ahead and do 2 to 3, 4, 5, 6 different jobs more than what other people are doing. One thing about being a Black woman is you have to be a chameleon. You have to be able to wear multiple hats, change colors sometimes. You know what I mean, code switching it all the time.

She also added:

You have to be in a position of doing everything and all things and knowing all positions. I know academic personnel, I know payroll, I know management, I know student affairs, I know scheduling, I know being an executive assistant, I damn near know facilities. I even know electrical work at this point. I've done everything.

Shay acquired many skillsets along the way. Importantly, she felt that she *had* to acquire these skillsets in order to stay relevant at her job. Shay implied that it was an unwritten rule and expectation that Black women had to be twice as better as their colleagues.

Relatedly, participants shared that they were expected to juggle multiple tasks and wear multiple hats no matter what other things they had going on in their lives. For example, Natalia remembered an experience with a White woman who was her boss and who constantly micro-managed her and ignored her pleas for additional help. She shared:

It would just be frustrating when I'm trying to plug along, respond to emails, office hour drop-ins, students always coming by all the time. This is when I had my door open, and they would just come in all day, and I'm trying to do work in between and I can't get anything done, you know, and so I would complain, instead of helping me, she'd be like, "Oh, well, why isn't this done or that?" And I'm like, "did you see the line out the door?" So, she really didn't understand, what my position was, and how we service undergrad

students, and that was totally frustrating. And then she'd be a micro manager, too, like “well, why did you do this?” “And why didn't you do that?”

Natalia described feeling overwhelmed by the demands of the job. She also noted that her competency and ability to balance her tasks well, often meant that her pleas for help were overlooked and ignored. She realized that the intersection of her race and gender affected how her supervisor responded to how she utilized her time at work.

Tameka also experienced being inundated with work because of her competency. She shared a story detailing her experience when she first began her work as a mid-level student affair professional. During her first year working in the department, her white colleague went on maternity leave and was out for six months. While new, Tameka had to learn her own job while also performing the duties of her colleague who was on maternity leave. She shared:

When she got back, I was like “great, I’ll go back to my job,” but it seemed like she was kind of under the assumption that now that I knew how to do it, that I would just continue to do it. It was so stressful and during that time I was frustrated because I felt my boss was pretty much expecting me to continue to help out with her job because I could do it.

As a young Black woman early in her career, Tameka struggled with saying no to the additional demands of the job and of the expectations of her boss. Although she did mention resuming only her work duties, she was still expected to do both jobs. Like Natalia, Tameka described herself as being a competent employee who executed the demands of the job because she did not want to come across as being uncooperative. Tameka felt that because she was a young Black woman and her boss and colleague were both White, she was targeted to perform these additional tasks without care or concern for her well-being.

In the same light, Justine felt bulldozed with additional work that she did not consent or agree to doing. She shared:

VC's and AVC's would be like "oh my goodness, you're so great, you're going to design our next program." I would find out about work from VC's and AVC's in committee meetings. So, you've put me on a committee and a VC was like, "yeah, we're going to have a committee to review that, Justine is chairing it," and people in the meeting would be like "what?" And I would say "you know about as much as I do." And did I get paid extra? No. Have you ever seen the student affairs memes? Where it's like we have all these work demands and they're like here's a pizza party. That's what it was like, you got all this work from me, but never felt appreciated or compensated.

Justine expanded on the link she made between being assigned duties beyond the job description and being positioned as superhuman. She shared:

We obviously know that Black women are magical, and I think my professional career set me up in a way where I am literally superhuman, I can do all the things. I don't know how I managed all of this, but I think there was some accepting of I'm not going to necessarily grow, the ceiling is opaque, this is the situation I'm in, at some point I'm going to have to change it, but today is not the day.

While Justine describes herself as magical and superhuman, she also acknowledges the tension that exists between being magical and superhuman while at the same time being inundated with copious amounts of work and being expected to perform these duties without adequate compensation. This is a clear depiction of how the intersecting identities of race and gender play into effect. Black women must adhere to the demands of the job, feel grateful they are

recognized for their abilities while neglecting their own personal well-being as Justine says that knows she will not necessarily grow.

Much like Justine who felt inundated with work, Shay described the challenge of being a Black woman in the institution. She points out that because she is a Black woman, she knows that work is “thrown” at her. She shares:

Another challenge I face is that everything is thrown at me because I’m Black. All of this stuff. So, as me being a manager and an advisor, oftentimes everybody wants to duck their work on me because it’s like “you’re Black, you can handle it, you’ll be able to take it.” And then as a staff member and a Black woman you have no voice. So, I get the centers giving me work, I get the Dean’s office sending me stuff, I get my own department, my own faculty sending me stuff. Stop. At what point can I just do the job that’s actually on the job description?

Both Shay and Justine mentioned having no voice as Black women when constantly being given additional work. Shay expressed disdain for work being asked of her that was not in her job description. She further noted that the extra work demanded of her weighed her down. She expressed:

It’s weird, they want to test you, they want to challenge who you are as a Black woman, like you are not well informed, like you don’t know. And to be perfectly honest, if anything, I know my job very well and everybody in here knows it too. They’re always coming to me, they’re like “talk to Shay, please talk to Shay because she knows.” We carry that burden because everybody knows that we know everything because we do, because we had to pad ourselves and be extra knowledgeable, only to not have a seat at the table.

Not only does Shay illustrate another example of Black women having to neglect their own personal needs and well-being for the demands of the job, she also characterizes this overload as a burden and mentions that even though Black women perform all these additional tasks, they have no seat at the table. Shay conveys that although her authority and knowledge is undermined, it is imperative to be even better to validate her existence as a Black woman, thus having to meet higher standards as a Black woman. The intersection of race, class and gender is apparent as Shay suggests that Black women are at the bottom of the hierarchical organizational structure by having no seat at the table.

A similar example relating to a challenging interaction with a White female colleague at the university was shared by Lori. She shared that she once taught a course in the department and was met with criticism surrounding her course outline/syllabus. Lori shared:

It's always something. I was teaching a course once; I mean the class was bomb, but even my department chair spoke to someone else, another colleague who I went to graduate school with, and she didn't even know they were coming back and telling me everything. She would always have something to say, like "why is this course outline so extensive, why she does have all this stuff?" I was like "why can't you tell me to my face so I can explain to you why it's like this and why I have to do that?" Cause if it was real basic, you would have a problem with it too. So, I have to work ten times harder than you to be perfect and it's still a problem for you. So, nothing that I did was right. "Why are you assigning me to chair committees without asking me first?" And I could never say no, but my older White male colleagues could say no. But I can't say no, I cannot say no, I don't have the privilege to say no. And you know, you read about stuff that Black female staff

members face in the academy, but I feel like you really don't know until you're in it. It made me question what I knew, maybe I was a real bad person in my past life.

Lori talked about feeling disrespected by the chair and feeling that no matter how hard she worked, it would never be adequate. Lori did not push back because as a Black woman in her position she could not say no. Ironically, even though she could not say no, her White male colleagues were able to say no with no consequences or fear of job retaliation.

Like Lori, Monica shared her experience with struggling to say no when additional work was thrown at her. She said:

I think this year I experienced a lot of burnout. How do I say, "no more?" So, I think that's one thing. We [Black women] can handle a lot. We can do a lot of different things. It almost becomes expected. And we can do multiple different things. There are a lot of unpaid jobs, unpaid responsibilities, or even things that I take on, because I'm connected to other Black students. I'm going to be on this committee and I'm going to mentor these students, there are all the things that I'm not paid for. And then here are the things that I'm paid for. Which then contributes to more burnout, which then increases the expectation that I can do more, that I will do more, that I will be a part of this. I need to learn to say no for my bandwidth.

While Monica discussed feeling a tremendous amount of burnout, she also pointed out that she felt a moral obligation to perform these tasks because students depended on her and she could not let them down, once again affirming the notion of putting others before herself. She describes her experience as a perpetual cycle of the more work she takes on, the more work she receives, thus experiencing burnout and feeling stressed

These experiences that participants shared emphasized the nature of what it is to be a Black woman mid-level student affairs professional working in a public university. Participants felt they had to manage the demands of the job which went beyond the scope of their job descriptions. Not only did they balance additional work thrown their way, but they also had to balance the day-to-day operations of their own lives. By doing this, they managed the intersecting identities of race, gender and class. They realized that they felt an overwhelming sense of burnout because of these many demands and in order for them to be able to better thrive at work and at home, they needed to learn to create boundaries by saying no when asked to perform task that were not in their job descriptions and/or that benefitted them.

Lack of Support

Another dominant theme in this research study was lack of support. The lack of Black women faculty and staff working in the university poses a substantial problem to how Black women are supported in the university. Support is essential to the experiences of Black women mid-level student affairs professionals as they navigate the intersections of race, class and gender on a day-to-day basis. In this study, lack of support was explicitly described as lack of mentorship when trying to navigate the job and promote to the next level, specifically from Black women and other Women of Color. Participants also described how their male colleagues received support despite their lack of receiving support. They also highlighted lack of support in terms of delayed progress when trying to promote. The lack of support affected participants' outlook on the profession and their quality of life.

Gendered Dynamics of Support and Mentorship

Participants in the study shared a view that there was a lack of support for Black women across the university. However, what unexpectedly stood out was the lack of support they

received from other Black women in leadership positions and the discrimination they faced from other Women of Color. Coincidentally, participants also noticed that the pathways that led to more senior positions are missing for Black women mid-level student affairs professionals, however they did observe that their male colleagues had clearer pathways and opportunities for growth and leadership positions. For example, Jeanine points out that White male colleagues' passions were continually nurtured which led to him being promoted while hers were ignored even though she was supportive of everyone else. The participants even acknowledged their roles in nurturing and assisting Black men in their development and career advancement because they wanted them to succeed.

Monica reflected back to her first experiences working in student affairs and how she was received by other Women of Color:

I had problems those beginning years, even with other Women of Color that worked for or with me. And as I'm talking to you about this, I'm trying to think back, why was that the case? If I think about it, maybe the first to five years where there were issues, it was with the majority of other Women of Color, both Black and Brown women. When I started the job, because I was so young with a pretty important role, I kind of expected for the Women of Color, you know, to reach out. But instead, no, I had to figure it out on my own. So, you figure it out, or, you know, they're just totally avoiding you. And it's not even just Black women. I'm thinking of a couple of different Black women, Brown women, Asian women. A lot of the issues were with other Women of Color, those that I was directly on the team that I was supervising or even folks that maybe had been a friend before. Even professional courtesies weren't extended to me or even the same respect others were given.

Monica talked about how she did not receive support or respect from other Women of Color, especially at the start of her career. For example, she mentioned being ignored by women she thought she could relate to. She also questioned if she should be doing more to reach out to other Black women with the hopes of establishing relationships. Monica's experience is an example of how the intersecting identities of how race and gender as well as age played an integral role in shaping her relationships with other Women of Color colleagues.

The lack of representation among Black women working in the university poses a substantial problem to how Black women feel supported. In Marla's department, there is a huge disparity between women in her position and those in leadership positions. Marla talked about the lack of leadership in her department:

The racial climate is terrible, even though we have some Black women in power, it is a terrible climate, because they're so high up that they're not looking at the people at the bottom levels. They're so far removed. I've had to build myself up to the extent that people know I do good work. I advocate for myself.

Based on participants' perspectives, the marginal number of Black women in leadership positions ultimately affects how Black women mid-level student affairs professionals promote and move ahead. Another reason participants do not get the support they need because there are no other Black women around.

Tameka shared how the lack representation of Black women in her position affected her trajectory. She shared:

Honestly, I've come to terms with there's not a lot of Black women that are in positions to help. I don't really know what the next step for me is really when it comes to student affairs, because there's only two undergrad advisors and there's no one in our department

above that, I mean that looks like me. I definitely feel when it comes to basic representation where am I supposed to go? How am I supposed to know what the next steps are for me. Every time I go to a training, there's never any Black women doing the trainings or anything like that. So yeah, I guess it's just a constant thing of trying and knowing that you're going to have to figure it out yourself and knowing you're going to have to create a path because everything else is not there. It's just not there.

Both Marla and Tameka pointed out that Black women were not represented across the different categories and levels of student affairs positions. They felt that there was a distance between themselves and Black women in leadership positions. They attributed this to the lack of support and mentorship opportunities.

Although many participants emphasized the need for better support, they also discussed how they provided support to others. For example, Shawna shared her experience as a woman of influence and how the Black women she worked with felt that they did not receive mentorship from her. She talks about how she realized that she could be more supportive to Black women and how she took ownership of her actions:

On my staff there were three of us [Black women], and the interesting part of this is one of the RDs [Resident Director's] was from Jamaica, the other one was from Kenya, and then there was me from New York. We're different. When they first came, because I had been there a little bit before, we didn't really talk a whole lot. Even though we were a part of the same team, you know I was cordial, I was polite. It actually took one of our colleagues, a Black guy in the department to bring it to my attention that they did not see me. I mean I thought I was welcoming, and they couldn't understand why I wasn't helpful. I was nice but I wasn't as welcoming as I thought I was. They talked to him, and

he came to me, and then eventually when we began talking, they were pretty transparent with saying, “you know you come to the meetings on Tuesdays, you know you're contributing, you're participating in the meetings, but then you leave right after. You show up right before the meeting, and you leave directly after. There are things about the department that we don't know. I'm not from this country.” And the other would say, “I'm not from here, there are things you could help us with as a Black woman, and you're not doing it.” And so, I had to do some deep reflecting on that and had a conversation with them. I had to tell them, “Your Black is your Black and it is not my Black. The way that you believe in being a Black woman is very different than me, and how I was raised, and what makes me feel good.” I remember having a conversation with my colleague from Jamaica about respect and feeling that I was being disrespectful. It was really hard for me to hear that, it was very, very hard for me to hear from both of those colleagues that they expected more from me as a Black woman in that space, and I was not offering it, and I was not welcoming, and they felt isolated. I was about the business of doing business right and wasn't interested in in doing anything other than that and didn't realize how that was coming off. After our colleague brought that to my attention, we talked very openly and honestly. After that, we had a fantastic relationship like one I've never had before. Shawna did not realize that her lack of support had a huge impact on her newer colleagues and as a result they felt isolated and lacked community.

Participants mentioned feeling a lack of support from other Black women and Women of Color in leadership positions as they navigated their way through the university and sought higher level positions. At the same time, they also supported other Women of Color and their male colleagues, directly and indirectly, so that they would succeed in their positions. Jeanine

talked about the lack of leadership in the institution and how she felt obligated to support Black women:

For me, I think that the things that are really important is showing up for Black women. I found that Black women in my career, senior level or in a position to mentor and support, hadn't, so it was important for me to at least show up for those that I could. Whether it's identifying resources, taking the heat for things, you know, whatever it was, I just felt like I needed to be a better buffer for them, because if I'm not doing it, and these other people aren't doing it for me, it's likely not going to happen, which is challenging.

Jeanine also shared that she felt it was imperative to support her Black male colleagues as well because she wanted them to succeed. She remembers going above and beyond for a previous boss who was a Black male because she did not want to see him fail. She shared:

I had a supervisor for a short period of time. A Black male who was actually very supportive. I would say, one of the things I remember from our relationship were our one on ones. You're talking to them about the work you're doing. They're giving you direction and projects. We connected together so well. In our one on ones, we would just talk about higher education, the future of higher ed. Where are we going? We would have conversations about work. I really appreciated that. And I think that he supervised me very well in that regard, because I was able to think and be creative like that's my superpower. I worked very hard for him. I usually did most of the work because other people couldn't do the work. And honestly, I just didn't want him to fail because people weren't doing the work, maybe I shouldn't have done so much extra work. But I didn't want this Black man to fail, because mostly white people weren't doing their work and if

I didn't help him, that wouldn't have been aligned with my core values of community of support and of team.

Jeanine's story is an example of the gendered dynamics of support at the university. Although Jeanine did not receive the support she needed, she felt obligated to support her Black male colleague. Jeanine talked about her core values and how it was important that those value align with her community. Here it is evident that Black women share similar experiences with Black women. In addition, Black women's valuing of their racial identity led them to support Black men.

Participants also discussed how male colleagues received the support they needed from mentors, supervisors, and those in leadership positions at the university. The participants were explicit in conveying that their male colleagues had pipelines specifically created for them to ensure their success while they lacked the same support.

Jeanine discussed how she witnessed her male colleague receive the support he needed to promote to the next level. She stated:

I had to make some tough decisions; you know. In the time my father passed, I had to navigate being at work in that space, and I was so unhappy, and I was never going to grow, and nobody was ever going to position me for the type of success I wanted, the way they did it for other people. There was a person in our small community group, this White guy I worked with, he now is like special projects person for the Chancellor, and he started off in the academic support area of the university. I'm not saying he's not qualified or anything like that, but someone, nurtured his passions and interest in a way that helped him move forward. But I'm supporting all of their passions with interest, but nobody's nurturing mine, and I realized it just is not going to happen here.

Jeanine illustrates the dynamic of how gender played a significant part in how her male colleague was nurtured and mentored, revealing how both gender and race plays a role in the workplace. Black women tended to nurture and mentor male colleagues while their own passions were often ignored and neglected.

Natalia recalled a time where she witnessed a male colleague get the support he needed while she was drowning with her extra work duties and did not receive the help she asked for:

Thinking back on all this, it just feels frustrating. Sometimes I'll notice that jobs will get created for specific people and it's so easy for them, all they have to say is say "I need help" and then, boom! Here's this magical position. Just like in Chemistry this guy got the director of whatever counseling job over a well-qualified Black woman. As soon as he got the position, he said "I'm drowning, I need help." And they corrected this immediately. They created this lead counseling position. Then again, they hire this other guy who had no right really to be doing his job, and then they hired somebody to help him out! And I'm just like, where does this come from? When in our cases we could be doing everything and be superwoman, and just be drowning. But then "oh, look! Here's this brand-new job we created for these men who need help." It's like they look at it like, "Oh, you guys can handle it. You'll be okay." But I am literally asking you for help, and you're not supporting me.

Not only did the participants notice that their male colleagues were getting the support they needed, but they also noticed that men were offered promotions, raises and incentives as a result of the labor of Black women. Jeanine and Shawna both shared their experiences about times when White men had capitalized on Jeanine's and Shawna's hard work. Jeanine recalled,

At one point I was doing all this extra work, way more than what my actual job entailed. So, I asked my boss about a reclass or a raise. Well, it took forever, and they changed my role from that union to the MPP. Which is, you know, the management level. And that was the rationale for giving me a raise but then they leveled up the other person [White man] that I work with who doesn't do nearly what I do. The whole point in this was recognizing me for doing work, but this person gets a raise on my coattail. How does that work? And now I don't even have a union.

So, while Jeanine eventually got a raise, by default her male colleague also got a raise. Jeanine felt slighted because of the hard work she put in to receive this raise while her colleague received the raise only because of her hard work. Not only did Jeanine feel slighted because of her colleague getting a raise because of her work, she also lost her union support in the process of getting promoted. Similarly, Shawna shared about a time her male colleagues received special incentives while she was on maternity leave:

There was one situation where after I came back from having my son I had a conversation with my boss about incentives that were given to my two male colleagues while I was gone having a baby, and you know for me the two months I was gone I don't think that amounted to the ten months I was here working very hard, because I worked my entire pregnancy. To return and feel like going to have a child was creating a deficit in my professional life was a problem for me. I wasn't as in tune with my rights, and what I should have done at that time to actually do something about it. I still hold on to some of that, I was just taken aback. My thought is, "I've been helping, you know, for the last, however, many years, and that was a slap in my face." And then another realization I had was we were handling important cases as investigators and the bulk of the cases actually

went to the female-identified Deans, the very hard cases, and I don't mind at all, that's what I'm here for, but it is a lot on a staff member to have cases and to look at the trends in the numbers and see that our male-identified Deans didn't have the same cases really made me question a lot right? And so, I'm glad I could help all the students and folks who were involved in those cases, but I truly believe that that those were assigned to the three of us because of how we identify, and I found that to be somewhat problematic when I thought about it.

This is one example of how Black women's labor uplifts those around them even when they are receiving minimal support for themselves. Participants shared multiple stories of how they supported their colleagues, male and female, even as they felt unsupported, devalued, and overlooked for promotion and advancement opportunities while their male colleagues received the support they needed, either directly or at the expense of their own work.

Delayed Progress When Trying to Promote

Ten out of ten participants in the study shared that they performed many duties outside of their original job descriptions. When they tried to get promoted or reclassified, they were met with delays that took significant amounts of time to get approved. Tameka recalled how long it took her to get approved for a reclass:

Finally, the third attempt was approved to switch from one SAO position to a step above. It took three different times to approve it with campus human resources. And it's not like I added any work duty. It was literally just acknowledging the work that I was doing already.

Just like Tameka, Shay experienced difficulties trying to get reclassified, although she was already doing the work the job entailed. She also noticed that other colleagues were ranked higher than her even though they were doing the same job:

Another challenge is we have to find resourceful ways to balance our money, come up with resourceful ways to get a raise, to fight for that, to get the appropriate title. I was denied how many times? Five times the appropriate title, Five times. I was the lowest ranked manager from within all the ethnic studies units. They kept going, “Oh, well, she doesn't have this.” Well, no, I do have this. “Oh, she doesn't have this.” Yeah, I do have this. They were constantly pulling different things out of the butt, different excuses. Tell me why it took my colleague, a white woman, to fight, and write on my behalf with my chair for that to happen. All the Black chairs previously who would try were denied. But when my colleague who was in the same role as me, but had a higher title, had to write in, then it was approved.

Even with the same credentials as a colleague who was promoted, Shay was denied the promotion she was due five times and her status as a Black woman played an important part in this process.

Black women mid-level student affairs professionals faced a lack of support while working at the university. They lacked support from Black women and other Women of Color, while watching their male colleagues get supported and receive opportunities not afforded to them. Although they did not receive the mentorship from other Black women they needed to advance and promote, they continued to support others with the hopes that they could provide to others what was not provided to them. They also advocated for themselves by doing exceptional

work and constantly advocating for the additional work they were doing to be reflected in their job titles and job descriptions.

Quality of Life

Another prominent theme that stood out in this study was quality of life. In this study, quality of life was characterized by indicators that affected the participants' personal well-being. The participants shared that the challenges they faced while working at the university led them to experience a poor quality of life. Factors that contributed to their unsatisfactory quality of life were lack of support, feeling overworked, being underpaid, feeling overwhelmed, feeling unseen and neglected, and feeling like important accomplishments, events and milestones in their lives were dismissed.

Jeanine shared a situation where mourning her father's death was interrupted by work colleagues who reached out to ask for information:

When my father died, I felt so low, exhausted, and not supported. I just couldn't concentrate. He lived in Texas, and I lived in California, so I had to go back to Texas to bury him. I remember feeling so anxious and I kept thinking about all the things I had to do at work and how much work I would have to come back to. I couldn't even properly mourn my father. I got a call during the time I was in Texas, managing arrangements, multiple calls. This one call I particularly remember, my boss called asking me if I marked all my incident reports for clery because they were getting ready to do some reporting.

Jeanine described going through a traumatic experience in her life with the passing of her father. While already dealing with grief and trying to navigate the logistics of burying her father she continued to worry about work. She described herself as a competent employee who went above

and beyond in executing the demands of the job. However, despite her efforts, she did not receive the consideration and concern she expected from her supervisor. Jeanine's experience demonstrates the lack of regard Black women face while working at the university, no matter how hard they work. By feeling like her emotional needs were unseen by her supervisor, she physically felt low and exhausted affecting her quality of life.

While Jeanine discussed how the emotional impact of how her experience affected her, Lori described the physical toll work had on her quality-of-life experience and how she handled it:

My experience there was just so toxic. The associate dean, she was probably in her late 50's early 60's [White female] would barely even talk to me. I had to work closely with her, she didn't even want to look at me. I was the only Black staff. She would always wait for me to speak. I was depressed. I found therapy through that job through a good friend. She even left the university because it was trash. She was the one who was said, "I think you're depressed," and she has a background in social work. "Here's my therapist number, you should go talk to her." That was the best therapist in my life, and I've never had therapy before. Even this white woman who was my therapist said, "they're racist, this is not a good space for you, this is not it. You need to find something else." I mean, I felt sick. I was getting sick. I felt like my fibroids were exacerbated. I was like "these people are not going to kill my reproductive health." You know, for me quality of life was most important.

In Lori's case, her physical health began to decline, and she could feel her fibroids worsen as a result of the stress she felt working at the university. Lori openly discussed her reproductive health, placing major emphasis on her fibroids as fibroids are more common and more severe

among Black women (Eltoukhi, Modi, Weston, Armstrong, & Stewart, 2013). The intersection of race and gender displayed negative experiences at work for Lori, which decreased her quality of life.

Much like Lori, Tameka also experienced a decline in her quality of life because of work struggles and negativity. However, while Lori decided to find a new position, Tameka began to internalize the problems from work. Tameka recalled a time when she felt stressed because her boss expected for her to perform the job duties of two roles with no additional help and made no efforts to assist her in getting her job description changed. She shared:

The time between 2019 and like March 2021, it was the most stressful time. During that time, I was frustrated because I felt like the grad advisor was pretty much expecting me to continue to help out with her job, I had multiple conversations with my manager trying to redefine my duties so it made sense doing the additional work. Honestly, I started to take my problems home, I was so annoyed and frustrated, and I felt like that was when it started definitely affecting my mental health at that time, because I was anxious, and I just didn't want to talk to others.

Tameka noticed her mental health was beginning to deteriorate because of the additional work and being overwhelmed, in turn, Tameka began to disassociate from her work role and the university. She shared:

When I first started, I definitely cared, I just wanted to get everything done right. But over time, I realized I started to disassociate from this job and this department. Once I realized that the university actually doesn't necessarily care. You know, if you are here, they'll just find someone else to do the job. I just started treating my job the way that the

other grad advisor treated her job, she does not volunteer for anything, she didn't do any extra stuff. And I just started to do that because I was just like, what's the point?

The intersection of race and gender were prevalent when participants discussed how their quality of life was affected. Their multiple identities were significant factors in how they were treated by their colleagues and superiors which in turn had substantial impacts on their mental, physical and emotional health. Eventually they began to make strides to improve their quality of life by going to therapy or they simply disassociated from their jobs altogether.

Community

Black women mid-level Student Affairs professionals felt they had to initiate relationships with other Black individuals on campus. Based on the findings, underrepresentation is a key factor in why the participants sought community. The participants described not seeing many people like them and feeling isolated because of the lack of representation. In terms of intersecting identities, race was more important than gender and class because these women sought solidarity with men and women, as long as they were Black. The participants described the racial climate as lacking diversity and since the Black population is small, they pursued relationships with people who looked like them. Black women had to seek out community because they felt isolated, and the community gave them a sense of togetherness centered around people who could relate.

Monica described how the lack of representation of Black people in the institution affected community:

Do you ever consider, perhaps our staff should reflect the students that we serve? There's not enough Black representation, and that's huge for our community, representation matters. That is something that I bring up continuously. Sometimes it still feels like we

have to have this back-channel network, where Black folks talk to other Black folks. I mean, seriously, sometimes it's continuously behind these doors that we have the conversations that we need to have. And why? Why can't they be had out in the open? I don't know. It almost feels wrong for us to be able to talk about that fact like it's still this underground network that we have. It's like the new underground railroad. It's nothing racially overt or offensive, but just the simple fact that these conversations have to happen behind the scenes between us. There's something wrong with that.

Through her experience, Monica illustrates how the lack of representation impacts the Black population where they feel they must have underground communities and meetings to share their experiences on campus. Black people share commonalities and shared understandings, so it is natural that they come together to share their experiences.

Shay discussed her active involvement in spearheading community groups to bring Black people together and how doing so kept her engaged at work. She described her experience:

I found organizations around Black life that I wanted to get involved with. So, for me, I took over, Black faculty and staff, I brought that back because it was dead.

I also got involved with the Black Alliance Group, which is really cool, which tied me into a lot more Black folk, which is pretty awesome. You learn about a lot of different issues between each campus and you realize we Black folk are experiencing the same thing, especially as Black women at each university, each campus. So that's a good thing. But it's also great because you find tools that will help you fight certain challenges that you come up against while being a Black woman here. And the other thing is it kind of is good therapy and you get to meet folks from all over, which is nice, different Black

people that are doing what you do. So, you can kind of meet your doppelganger at different schools, it's kind of cool.

Jeanine and Monica shared similar encounters where their communities offered non-verbal support. For them, they experienced situations in meetings where they felt like their Black colleagues were able to understand what was going on without having to verbalize what was happening. Monica shared:

It's important to have safe spaces at the institution and away from the institution. I think before, I was very compartmentalized. I think I've developed more of those safe spaces where, in a meeting when something crazy is going on we can be in the same meeting or in a different meeting and there are enough folks that I can text and know that they understand already off the back without having to explain or provide context or extra information. You know, "I know I'm not crazy, did you hear that?" That's helpful. And then also starting to spend time together outside of the institution, where we also can learn and know each other outside of just the roles that we possess, and then connect each other with other people, I think I now have a much stronger community at the institution. We don't broadcast it, we're not like posting pictures together and doing stuff, but because even that provides some kind of safety and looking out for that means we may be on a committee that's hiring one another, and other people don't even know we're able to look out and speak up in spaces because Black tax is a very real thing, it's so tangible. Where we're pulled in all different directions and pointed to for all these things, but at the very least, it's because of that community, if we need each other, you say, "Hey, I need you to do this," then, I got you. I think that has been something that has helped me survive in spaces and having stuff outside of it, like the community outside of work.

Jeanine also added:

The young Black professionals, we all would get together and have lunch. We'd be tearing up the dining hall. We would get together at each other's houses, we built a strong community. I would say that was probably the biggest coping piece, because I had a lot of work, and there were things that I needed help to do, and so the group would help at times, like, you know I might need people there to help check students in. Okay, I'll come early and help you check students in, or we're going to be at the tailgate, you don't have to work you but we need staff to walk around so these kids aren't just super crazy. Okay, I'll come early, you know. So that was the piece that helped me. Even those text messages in those meetings where I would get a bunch of work and because you feel like am I crazy? Did you just hear what I heard? And that was helpful because we could relate on the same level, that community was how I like survived.

Monica and Jeanine emphasize how finding community at the university has created a safe space for them. Despite the threatening nature that university provides to them in some extent, they are able to connect with others that share the same experiences to build a strong network and community. Marla shared a specific encounter she had where she felt supported by her community:

In the res halls we had a student commit suicide and I'm on call or the only one in. I'm doing everything, managing everything, navigating communications and things like that. This is the first time in my professional career that something like this happened. But you don't think about these things. You must get the body out of the space. Well, no one can access the elevators now, because we've turned everything off. So, the administrators and I have to escort the coroners up and back down. And so, at one point I recognize, that was

a person who was alive, but not anymore and all of us just in this elevator together just going about this like it's normal. I have a colleague there who works in the council office, a Black man, and we have a good community even with some of the younger Black professionals, and maybe a couple of weeks later, he was like "Are you okay?" Then he just looks at me and says, "that's not an everyday thing for people." And then I thought about it and the answer is I don't know, because at that moment it wasn't until I realized, that was actually extremely traumatic and for some reason it did not click that these things were happening as they were happening.

Marla's community, her Black male colleague deliberately checked in with her about her experience dealing with a deceased student. By checking in with her, it humanized the experience for her which made her stop, reflect and acknowledge her emotions and feelings.

Lori shared how she relates to other Black people in her department and how it is a safe space for all of them:

I mean, I feel like where I am, you know, is one of the safer spaces. I mean, we have our issues, but it's one of the safer spaces on campus. I know I have people in that space I call work sisters. They're two other Black women and another Black counselor in there, and we call each other "hey, brother!" "Hey, sister!"

Tameka discussed how she felt when the only person she could relate to who was a Black professor left the department:

The Black faculty [representation] in our department is not good at all. Currently we have one Black faculty member, and he was about to leave when I started. There was one Black woman and one Black male. Now we only have one Black male. The Black female professor left, and I loved her, too, because when she was there, I would just go to her

office, you know, and talk about everything. But she left and when she left, I had nobody. But yeah, our faculty have, like, no Black representation.

Through these experiences, participants demonstrated how community gave them a sense of belonging and helped them survive working in the institution. From fellowshipping off campus, understanding non-verbal cues, to supporting one another in meetings, work events and work situations; community provided them an avenue to connect with others who looked like them and battled the isolation they felt. They sought community by joining campus groups, initiating friendships in their departments and acknowledging one another while passing each other by on campus. By doing so, they had to find and create significant and safe spaces to talk about their experiences on campus.

Conclusion

This chapter presented findings from my analysis of the interviews I conducted with ten Black women mid-level Student Affairs Professionals who were employed at one public four-year university. The first theme, Black Woman-ness addresses how these women had to adapt to their surroundings and water down the essence of who they were while communicating with their non-people of color colleagues and superiors. Participants shared encounters that they had where they had to apologize to others for the way their communication styles were perceived, while fighting the angry Black woman stigma. They also shared their experiences where they had to have others check their emails before sending out for a temperature check. The second theme, Faculty bullying and incivility, discusses the interactions these women had with male faculty and how these interactions impacted their experiences. The third theme, the Black Superwoman Syndrome, derives from the idea that although it is different for every Black woman, there is still a collective feeling that Black women must tackle the issues of the world while simultaneously

balancing their blackness, womanhood and the many other roles they have. Participants in the study shared experiences where they faced hardships because the amount of work that was expected from them without receiving support or help, the idea was that “they can handle it” while they watched others receive the support they were asking for. The fourth theme, quality of life, foregrounds the many ways that participants experienced a diminished quality of life because of their experiences, dealing with discrimination, and feeling overwhelmed which led them to disassociate from their jobs. The fifth theme I identified was lack of support. Participants felt that they did not receive the mentorship they needed to promote to the next level from their Black women colleagues in leadership roles, they also acknowledged the delays in trying to promote, such as their reclassifications being delayed and even ignored. At the same time, they noticed that their male colleagues were nurtured and groomed for more leadership type roles. Finally, the last theme that surfaced was community. Community provided participants’ a sense of belonging and it was one of the main mechanisms they utilized to survive working in the institution. These themes work together in detailing the experiences these women share. Black women take on the responsibilities of others, even nurturing other women (despite their lack of support) and male colleagues while their own passions are neglected, ultimately affecting their quality of life. They seek community in order to survive and thrive.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the personal and professional experiences of Black women in mid-level student affairs positions and how they navigated the intersections of race, class, and gender while working in one public four-year university. My analysis and interpretation of the data generated from this study was guided by two theoretical orientations, Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) and Black Feminist Thought-BFT (Collins, 1986, 2000, 2009). These two theories are distinct, yet related. Intersectionality provides a lens for understanding the double discrimination of racism and sexism faced by Black women (Crenshaw, 1989). Black Feminist Thought centers the perspectives and experiences of Black women navigating race, sex and class in society, as distinctive from the experiences of Black men and White Americans (Collins, 1990). Drawing on these theoretical orientations I reviewed and coded interview transcripts, looking for the ways that Black women described their experiences. I also attended to how participants discussed the intersection of race, class, and gender. Through this process, I identified six themes: Black Woman-ness, Faculty Bullying and Incivility, Black Superwoman Syndrome, Lack of Support, Quality of Life and Community. In this chapter, I discuss the study's findings in relation to my conceptual framework and existing bodies of literature. I provide a summary of my findings and interpretations in relation to the following research questions:

1. What are the personal and professional experiences of Black women working as mid-level student affairs professionals in one public four-year institution?
2. How do Black women working as mid-level student affairs professionals navigate the intersections of race, class, and gender as they work within the institution?

I also discuss the limitations and implications of the findings. Finally, I offer recommendations for policy, practice, and future research.

Research Question 1: What are the personal and professional experiences of Black women working as mid-level student affairs professionals in one public four-year university?

The participants in this study discussed the unique challenges they faced as Black women mid-level student affairs professionals and the techniques they utilized to survive and thrive while working at a public university. Although the stories participants shared about their experiences were nuanced and distinctive, they all described experiencing discrimination and disrespectful behavior in the workplace (Collins, 1986, 2000, 2009). In addition, all of the participants marked race, class, and gender as social categories that were relevant to their experiences. The themes I identified offer insight into the collective nature of participant's as Black women mid-level student affairs professionals at a public university.

Black Woman-ness

The obstacles Black women face within higher education are often related to of how they are portrayed and the negative stereotypes about Black women that circulate in society (Candia-Bailey, 2016; Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Specifically, Black women are seen as “aggressive, strong willed, difficult to work with, or too pushy” (Lais, 2008). In the context of this study, participants described feeling criticized on a routine basis and picked apart when they communicated with their supervisors and colleagues. They also expressed feeling that their Black-Woman-ness was perceived as “too much” for their White supervisors and colleagues. They noted that their communication styles were perceived as negative, and they were consistently labeled as the “angry Black woman.” For example, Lori shared how she was constantly berated by her supervisor for how she communicated in emails, no matter what she

said, he always found some type of issue with her tone. Similarly, Justine was reprimanded on evaluations for how she communicated with colleagues in meetings. Black women in this study identified negative racial stereotypes as a contributing factor to the challenges they experienced in the workplace. In response to negative perceptions, they adjusted and adapted their behaviors in ways that felt minimizing to their own voices as Black women. They also felt defeated as they could not communicate their true authentic selves at the expense of offending a White colleague or supervisor because their colleagues or supervisors could not handle the essence of their Black woman-ness.

Faculty Bullying and Incivility

Prior research sheds light on how Black women face discrimination from colleagues in the academy and how they are situated in unwelcoming, insensitive and isolative environments (Watt, 2003). In this study, participants shared their experiences with male faculty members and the hostility they faced when they interacted with them. The encounters with these male faculty members were depicted and described as “bullying” type behaviors. Shay shared an experience where a male faculty member blatantly cursed her out because she communicated something he did not like. She attributed this to the faculty member’s perception of his role as being higher in rank than her staff position. Participants also experienced racial microaggressions from faculty members. Specifically, Tameka talked about a time when she sat on an admission’s committee and a White faculty assumed that because she was a Black woman, she could relate to the students who qualified need-based fee waivers. The relationship between male faculty members and Black women mid-level student affairs professionals proved to be tumultuous and negative, ultimately affecting their experiences while working. Even while being treated unfairly and

feeling bullied, these women were still expected to perform their job duties while balancing other areas of their lives, which led to the Black Superwoman Syndrome.

Black Superwoman Syndrome

Black women mid-level student affairs professionals narrated the many ways in which they met the duties of their job and took on additional responsibilities. Moreover, they discussed how race, class, and gender intersected in shaping their professional experiences. This finding is consistent with studies conducted where both race and gender were driving forces in how others viewed Black women working in the academy (Breedon, 2021). It was also consistent with prior literature as Breedon (2021) pointed out in their study that Black women felt they had to perform better than their White colleagues. Although Black women student affairs professionals deal with the demands of their primary jobs and responsibilities, they still offer support and encouragement while working in the academy (Glover, 2012; Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Participants in this study highlighted the ways in which Black women were held to a higher standard than their White and male colleagues and how they felt they had to perform their job duties better than their colleagues while dealing with the intersecting identities of race, class, and gender. Prior literature coined the term “Black Tax”, in relation to this interaction. Prince (2017) describes “Black Tax” as: “When a Black woman does something well, she is overlooked, but when she does something wrong, she faces excessive backlash” (p. 33). Lori recalled a situation where she taught a course for her department and when the chair reviewed her syllabus, there was negative feedback. Lori shared,

She would always have something to say, like why is this course outline so extensive, why does she have all this stuff? ...Cause if it was real basic, you [she] would have a

problem with it too. So, I have to work ten times harder than you to be perfect and it's still a problem for you.

Shay expressed similar thoughts as she mentioned that as a Black woman on campus, she felt she needed to know how to perform all roles, even outside of her job description to stay relevant at her job, even though those same expectations were not the same for non-Black women colleagues. Shay expressed,

I know I have to be two, to three, four, five, six steps ahead and do two, to three, four, five, six different jobs more than what other people are doing. One thing about being a Black woman is you have to be a chameleon. You have to wear multiple hats, change colors sometimes.

Participants also described not having the privilege to say no to work tasks and responsibilities that had nothing to do with their job descriptions resulting in burnout. Monica described experiencing major burnout because she took on “unpaid jobs” and unpaid responsibilities” in addition to her actual job. She pointed out that the more work she took on, the more work she received, causing extreme burnout. Although participants expressed fatigue and burnout due to the overwhelming amounts of extra labor, they also pointed out that they knew they could take on the extra responsibilities. Justine expressed that she was “magical” and “superhuman” even though she was inundated with work. This example illustrates the tension that exists between their super abilities and their workload, showcasing just how drastic the workload is in comparison to their superhuman skills.

Lack of Support

Black women student affairs professionals who participated in this study experienced a lack of support. Jeanine shared a story where a White male colleague, a member of her small

community group promoted to a special position working with the Chancellor. He was able to promote because someone “nurtured his passions and interest.” On the other hand, Jeanine did not feel supported or despite her efforts to support and encourage everyone else. Jeanine’s experience confirmed how Black women are regularly overlooked for leadership positions, as they are unsupported. Similarly, Shawna described a time when she felt unsupported while working her in her department. She shared that after working throughout her entire pregnancy and after returning to work after only two months of maternity leave, she realized that carrying a child had created a deficit in her professional life. Upon arriving back from maternity leave, Shawna learned that two male colleagues received incentives while she was gone. Shawna felt like she had been “slapped in her face” because of her significant work contributions and sacrifices she had made to the department. Shawna also pointed out the gendered dynamics of the department as she shared that she and other female-identified deans carried the bulk of the work in comparison to the male-identified deans in the department. These findings align with prior literature that highlights the gendered dynamics of support at the university. For example, Grove and Montgomery (1999) found that Black women felt unsupported and received little to no encouragement as they sought leadership positions, while white men were “tapped” to pursue administrative roles and were provided with “professional grooming” to equip them with the tools to pursue leadership positions, while Black women were overlooked.

Participants also demonstrated how difficult it was for them to get promoted or reclassified. Specifically, Tameka highlighted a situation where it took three times to get reclassified for a job she was already doing. In this situation, Tameka was already performing additional job duties and wanted to be fairly compensated with an updated job description, title change and more money to reflect the work she was already doing outside of her job description. Much like

Tameka, Shay also described how difficult it was for her to get reclassified despite other colleagues being ranked higher with the same work experience. In looking at her experience trying to get reclassified, Shay said,

It took my colleague, a white woman, to fight, and write on my behalf with my chair for that to happen. All the Black chairs previously who would try were denied. But when my colleague who was in the same role as me, but had a higher title, had to write in, then it was approved.

Shay's story exemplifies how race played an integral role in her reclassification process. The Black department chairs who were ranked higher in position than Shay's parallel colleague could not persuade HR to reclass Shay, however when a White woman spoke on her behalf, after the fifth attempt, Shay was reclassified, demonstrating how race was more important than status.

Interestingly, in addition to the existent literature, my findings specifically point out how Black women do not feel supported by other Black women and Women of Color in the academy. The women in this study shared experiences of Black women undermining their leadership and not extending professional courtesies. Shawna expressed how her lack of support for other Black women affected their experiences while working in the university. Although she maintained a cordial working relationship with them and remained polite, they did not feel supported by her and her lack of support caused them to feel isolated and disrespected, affecting their work.

Quality of Life

According to Patitu and Hinton (2003), when Black women felt unsupported in their roles, they were ineffective in their jobs, leading to a diminished quality of life. Prior literature illustrates the correlation between racism and the impact it has on mental health. Researchers found a positive correlation between internalized racism and alcoholism suggesting the negative impact

of how racism affects Black women in societal institutions (Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000). The Black women in this study encountered many challenges that affected their quality of life. Specifically, the racism Black women endured when working at the university had a negative impact on their quality of life. Lori described how she faced racism as the only Black staff member in her department by the associate dean, she shared,

The associate dean would barely even talk to me...she didn't even want to look at me. I was the only Black staff. I was depressed. I found therapy through a good friend. She was the one that said they're racist, this is not a good space for you.

Lori's physical health began to decline, she felt like her fibroids were "exasperated" and staying there would "kill" her reproductive health; for Lori preserving her quality of life was more important than the job, so she decided to seek therapy and eventually leave the job. Unlike Lori who decided to leave the job, Tameka began to internalize the discrimination she encountered, causing her to feel over worked and overwhelmed. By internalizing those negative aspects of the job, she started taking her problems home and her mental health begin to decline. Tameka experienced anxiety and stress which affected her work performance. Instead of going above and beyond at work as she did in the past, she began to disassociate herself from the job altogether. By disassociating, Tameka stopped volunteering for special projects and committees since she felt the university treated her only as a commodity and not a human being with feelings.

Community

This study found that Black women sought community at the university because they were underrepresented and felt isolated. Prior studies found that Black women are severely underrepresented among student, faculty, staff and campus administrators (Gregory, 2001;

Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Zumani, 2003). This finding is consistent with studies that illuminate how Black women are underrepresented in the academy and that Black women must be surrounded by one another to share experiences that are specific and common to Black women. For example, both Jeanine and Monica described the power and importance of non-verbal communication among Black people in specific settings such as meetings. They shared that because they experienced the same race-based experiences as Black people, they often picked up on racial and gendered microaggressions in meetings and would acknowledge these microaggressions through non-verbal cues such as making eye contact. They mentioned they would often communicate with their Black colleagues after meetings and would automatically understand and pick up on microaggressions without having to directly verbalize what happened, by doing so they realized that they were not “crazy” or imagining such things. Monica shared how the lack of representation affected the Black community at the university. She pointed out that the staff should reflect the students they served and that representation matters. When Black women feel isolated, they feel as if they do not belong (Clayborne, 2006). Shay took the initiative to spearhead and revive Black groups on campus to create community and a sense of belonging.

While the literature emphasized the importance of Black women creating community among each other because of their shared commonalities and experiences, this finding shows that Black women sought community in other Black women, as well as Black men alike, emphasizing that creating a safe space with people that looked like them was just as important as creating connections and community with other Black women.

Research Question 2: How do Black women working as mid-level student affairs professionals navigate the intersections of race, class, and gender as they work within the university?

Collins (2004) posits that Black women live at the intersection of two forms of oppression: racism and sexism. Because Black women working in the university often feel alone, they try to establish connections with the dominant cultures on campuses so they can find support systems (Evan, Forny, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Participants in this study applied strategies and survival techniques to navigate the intersections of race, class and gender while working in the university. Navigating these intersecting social identities were expressed in ways that participants dealt with the challenges they faced while working in the institution. As they encountered these challenges, many times they required support from others and responded with resistance by speaking up for themselves as Black women (Collins, 1986, 2000, 2009).

Participants described encounters where they dealt with gendered and racial microaggressions as well as, discrimination and disrespect that was race-based, class-based and gender-based. For example, in response to “Black Woman-ness” participants conveyed they were perceived as the “angry Black woman” depicting the negative perceptions of race and gender that Black woman constantly have to deal with. In response to this experience, participants pointed out they “played the game” to survive working in the university, therefore trying to establish their connection with White colleagues and supervisors. By playing the game, they described double and triple checking their emails, so they did not appear to be hostile or difficult to work with. Participants also found themselves being extra polite and cordial to their colleagues to reject the “angry Black woman” persona. Participants became very intentional

about how they carried themselves, so that they did not come across as aggressive while still managing their multiple identities.

Participants were explicit in their stories while describing faculty interactions. Specifically, they shared experiences they had with male faculty. While sharing their experiences, they highlighted the gendered microaggressions and blatant disrespect they encountered. Marla described how a male faculty member often “weaponized his incompetency.” He would often bark out orders and demand work that he was capable of doing himself that sometimes did not fall into her job description. Similarly, Shay recalled a time where a male faculty member “cursed her out.” Instead of apologizing to her, he instead went and told on her to her supervisor. The disrespect stemmed from him identifying her role as lesser because she was staff and because she was a Black woman. Tameka experienced disrespect and felt further marginalized as a Black woman when a male faculty member assumed she had experience understanding the process dealing with fee waivers in admissions because she was a Black woman. In these situations, participants dealt with these faculty members in different ways. In some instances, these women decided to let their supervisors deal with them, not wanting to deal with the repercussions associated with confronting them on their own, like retaliation. Shay packed up her belongings and walked away, along with telling him “If you ever want to speak to me as an adult I will return to this conversation.” By doing so, Shay let him know that his reaction to her was unacceptable and she would not stand for the disrespect. Other times, the participants ignored the disrespect as to not cause further uncomfortable moments.

All participants in this study expressed experiencing the “Black Superwoman Syndrome.” As a result of constantly prioritizing work responsibilities and while managing intersecting identities, participants experienced burnout. By creating boundaries and learning

how to say no to additional tasks not within the scope of their jobs or that benefitted them, participants realized that much of the stress and burnout would be alleviated.

While experiencing tremendous amounts of burnout, participants also expressed the lack of support they felt while working at the university. Participants described the gendered dynamics of support and mentorship, sharing stories of the lack of support they received from Black women and other Women of Color, while observing male colleagues' passions groomed and nurtured for leadership roles and positions. They also recalled experiences where they were denied and/or delayed promotions because of their race, class and gender. Because they realized they were not getting the support they needed to succeed and thrive working in the university, they in turn, supported other Black women by "identifying resources" and "taking the heat" by being buffers for them since no one was doing it for them. They also advocated for themselves by speaking up and staying persistent when asking for reclasses and promotions. The ways in which participants navigate race, class and gender in the institution is consistent with studies that identified coping strategies to deal with stresses working in higher education (West & Greer, 2020). Further, Hurtado (1996) posits that because Black women see themselves at war with society because of their race and gender, they form "weapons" as a means to navigate their life choices.

Enhancing their quality of life was imperative in the survival of participants in this study at the university. Participants described the experiences they faced that impacted their quality of life. For example, Lori talked about how the racism she faced working with a White female supervisor caused her to feel depressed and exasperated her fibroids, affecting her reproductive health. Much like Lori, Tameka recalled a period of time her mental health was affected as she battled the "Black Woman Syndrome" working two full time jobs with no assistance.

Participants took active strides to combat the negative effects these challenges had on their quality of life by disassociating from the job altogether and going to therapy. They also sought out community.

Finally, participants identified underrepresentation and isolation as unique challenges they encountered while working at the university, causing them to seek community. This finding reinforces the evidence from the literature that Black women frequently feel alone so they try and establish a sense of connection and find support systems (Evans, Forny, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Participants sought out others that looked like them, not just other Black women. In the context of this study, race was more important in seeking and building relationships with other because participants felt solidarity with those that looked like them because of the race-based issues they faced at the university.

Limitations

All participants in this study identified as Black women mid-level student affairs professionals who were employed at a public university. All participants held Student Affairs Officer (SAO) positions, although they had different working titles in different departments across campus. Because Black women represent a small percentage of the make-up of student affairs professionals in higher education, the sample size was only ten participants (Gamble & Turner, 2015). To assist in alleviating any potential bias since I identify as a Black woman who works in student affairs at the university, I employed different trustworthiness techniques, such as peer debriefing and member checking to assist in analyzing the experiences of this sample. Although the six themes that developed from this study may not be representative of all Black women mid-level student affairs professionals, saturation of the data offered insight and firsthand experiences of the unique challenges, survival techniques and navigating the

intersection of oppressive identities exclusive to Black women at a public university. While the data collection experience was advantageous because participants were able to share their stories in their own way through journey mapping and via Zoom, as they were afforded the opportunity to be comfortable within their own personal settings; I was not afforded the opportunity to experience the nonverbal cues, reactions and body language firsthand. By not experiencing their nonverbal indications, I may have missed some of the unspoken issues and feelings they may have experienced.

Implications and Recommendations

Black women are integral in the development and learning of students attending college (Jackson, 2003; Turrentine & Conley, 2001). Black women shape the ethos of the institution, and they also contribute to the professional lives of their Black and non-Black students by offering their own distinctive perspectives regarding racial and social issues (Clay, 2014; Slater, 2007). However, a gap exists in the student affairs literature as it pertains to mid-level professionals working in student affairs (Rosser, 2004). This study focused on this specific population. This is especially important because there exists a gap . The study's findings contribute to the field of higher education and student affairs by illuminating the experiences of Black women mid-level Student Affairs professionals, future Black women mid-level professionals. Specifically, they speak to the many ways that Black women the importance of their intersecting identities and how their race, class and gender play a vital role as they navigate working in the university while embracing their cultural competency. Findings from this study can inform Black women mid-level professionals understanding of the roles, responsibilities, and unique challenges that are present while working at public institutions.

It is of the utmost importance for universities to increase staff diversity by hiring more Black women. Doing so may positively affect the retention and success of Black women students and staff. As this study demonstrates, Black women share experiences that are uniquely shaped by their race, gender, and class. Importantly, Black women's wellbeing increases when they are surrounded by one another as they share experiences only, they can relate to. Concentrating on the experiences of Black women mid-level student affairs professionals and the intersection of race, class and gender and understanding the strategies they employ to survive and thrive in the university, universities could be urged to evaluate the campus climate to guarantee that Black women are successfully recruited, retained and supported (Watt, 2003).

Finally, universities should be more intentional in their supports of Black women by offering and creating more opportunities for mentorship so that mid-level professionals can advance to leadership positions. Although these findings are not a universal phenomenon, they might be transferable in relation to other universities.

Recommendations for Schools, Departments and/or Units within the Institution

The findings and implications from this study inform the recommendations for schools, departments and/or units within institutions of higher education and directions for future research which are provided in the following sections. Black women mid-level student affairs professionals deserve to be respected and treated fairly and those in leadership positions should be equipped with the proper and necessary tools to aid and support to ensure these basic provisions are met. Universities should make sure that they are hiring, supporting, and retaining Black women as they create constructive and meaningful experiences for students throughout their time at the university (Long, 2012). The recommendations discussed in this section focus on supports that are specific to Black women student affairs professionals and the university.

Mentorship. Black women student affairs professionals struggle with the reality that they are oftentimes “the only” Black woman or “the only one of a few” (West (2015). When Black women are isolated, they face issues related to access to culturally similar mentors, colleagues and supervisors (Croom & Patton, 2011; Hendry & Glenn, 2009; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; West, 2015). It is imperative that institutions be intentional about building internal structures within the university to provide opportunities for Black women to be mentored in ways that support their well-being and their advancement to leadership positions. Creating opportunities for Black women to work together can potentially combat isolation, increase their productivity, and increase the quality of their experiences while working in the university. Mentors that share similar experiences and intersecting identities with Black women student affairs professionals are ideal as they are able to share ideas, concerns and specific experiences. Institutions should create and maintain an institutional culture to better support Black women by allocating funds to departments to train and develop potential mentors and/or invite mentors to work with Black women student affairs professionals. Institutions should also actively stress the importance of mentorship by encouraging faculty and staff to participate in mentorship opportunities through active programming by facilitating mentorship programs. For example, the institution can create and fund specific programs that identify mentors to match with Black women who seek mentorship.

Community. In this study Black women mid-level student affairs professionals identified seeking community as a strategy used to survive and thrive working in the university. Previous studies revealed that Black women seek community to deal with the isolation and stresses while working in the university (Becks-Moody, 2004; West & Greer, 2020). Institutions of higher

education can encourage community by supporting informal and formal gatherings and promoting affinity groups that cater to the development of Black women. Affinity groups are essential, in that they foster opportunities for community and can generate a sense of belonging for Black women working in the institution. Human resource departments, in particular, should assist in cultivating connections within and outside of the department to enhance the experiences of Black women working in the university. Specifically, they can provide resources for professional development opportunities and community events. These resources should include funding for space to host events, food, materials and other essentials needed to build and maintain community. The institution should also be proactive in facilitating interaction among Black women so they can find each other on campus. For example, the institution should regularly provide resources for affinity groups to advertise and publicize their community events. By doing so, Black women will feel less isolated, and this will help to combat the challenges they face working in the institution.

Hiring Practices. The institution must be cognizant of the experiences shared by Black women on campus. It must understand that Black women have not achieved the same level of success as White women and men in the university and that they should play an active role in creating an equity-based environment for Black women (West, 2020).

As universities have become increasingly more diverse, the number of students from underrepresented groups have increased, as well (Husband, 2016). Black women bring different worldviews that create a multicultural environment (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). The institution should be proactive in recruiting and hiring more Black women student affairs professionals. Much like faculty hiring processes, where an emphasis is placed on identifying a diverse pool of candidates, intentional and deliberate actions can be taken to identify and recruit Black women

student affairs professionals. Not only should the institution be intentional when recruiting and hiring, it is also essential to put its best effort forward by retaining Black women student affairs professionals.

Institutional Support. Black women in higher education live at the intersection of multiple forms of oppression and these intersecting powers create a complex set of social inequalities (Collins, 2004). The Black women student affairs professionals who participated in this study, regularly faced discrimination while working in the university. They encountered discrimination and disrespect, and experienced micro aggressive behaviors from their colleagues and supervisors. The institution must acknowledge these challenges and oppressions to enhance the quality of life for Black women working in the institution. It should be compassionate when recognizing the multiple intersecting identities that Black women juggle while at the same time prioritizing their work. Black women should be better supported when trying to promote and reclassify. Departments should implement equitable standards across the board pertaining to promoting and reclassing that benefit Black women. This policy should eliminate the extra barriers that Black women encounter when seeking promotion. The institution should also offer equitable pay and work schedule flexibility. By doing so, institutions can help to improve the work-life balance for Black women, supporting their professional development opportunities and their involvement in community events they need to thrive.

Suggestions for Future Research

The findings from this study were generated by interviewing 10 Black women mid-level student affairs professionals and has implications for the ways Black women can and should be supported. At the same time, significant questions were raised pertaining to why black women do not feel supported by other Black women or Women of Color. Are resources scarce for Black

women, so they feel a need to compete for them? Due to their own lack of support, do Black women feel unqualified to adequately mentor and support other Black women? Expanding the research site and participant pool would deepen understandings about culturally relevant mentoring.

In addition, participants from this study were from the United States. However, some of the women discussed their experiences with Black women who were first generation American citizens and whose parents were from Jamaica and Africa. For example, Shawna described an encounter she had with two colleagues who were Jamaican and Kenyan who did not feel supported by her. Shawna said, “Your Black is your Black and it is not my Black. The way you believe in being a Black woman is very different than me.” Additional research in this area could provide insight into the experiences of first-generation Black women and capture the ways they navigate race, class and gender in the university and also, the ways in which they perceive and understand what they consider to be respect and disrespect. Although similarities exist across the kinds of challenges Black women face, it is important to remember that the Black community is diverse. It is imperative to understand how Black women in different regions across the world need to be supported. A qualitative study focusing on the experiences of these groups would be beneficial,

Also, future research that includes Black women student professionals who are employed at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) could inform the field’s understanding about the influence of institution on experience. This kind of comparative study might observe differences and similarities in the experiences, supports, and unique challenges they encounter. Such studies could better inform universities about how to support Black women working in student affairs.

As this study demonstrates, Black women desire to promote and advance in their careers. A longitudinal study to assess the trajectories of Black women in mid-level positions could offer insight into the kinds of resources that are necessary for supporting promotion and advancement. Also, this type of study can highlight any differences between the types of institution observed.

Finally, a mixed methods study focused on the intersecting identities of Black women working in institutions of higher learning and the distinctive occurrences of discrimination they face could speak to questions of generalizability and transferability of findings. For example, interview data about the experiences of these intersecting identities could inform the design of a survey to measure these interactions.

Conclusion

Black women represent a small percentage of the make-up of Student Affairs professionals in higher education (Gamble & Turner, 2015). Black women mid-level Student Affairs Professionals play an integral role in the world of student affairs and maintain different roles, functions, and capacities. Through various roles and functions, they share similar realities when it comes to their shared personal and professional experiences and how they navigate the intersections of race, class, and gender as they work within the university. It is important to acknowledge and understand these collective experiences so that Black women mid-level Student Affairs Professionals feel supported and continue to work within the university because their role and presence is profound (Myers, 2002).

The purpose of this qualitative dissertation was to examine the personal and professional experiences of Black women mid-level student affairs professionals at a public university while navigating race, class, and gender. The findings from this study showcased the experiences of ten Black women mid-level student affairs professionals at one public university. This study was

guided by two research questions and identified the personal and professional experiences, as well unique challenges as these women navigated the intersections of race, class, and gender, while looking at strategies they utilized to survive and thrive working in the university. Through a theoretical lens, Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 1986, 2000, 2009) and Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) provided a critical lens that examined the individual experiences of Black women and the ways in which they navigated race, class and gender.

Black women are dynamic, and they bring a myriad of experiences to higher education institutions. As Shay, a participant in this study articulately stated in response to how Black women should be treated, “Give them respect. Don't make them have to be the clean-up woman. You know everybody ain't Betty Wright!” Institutions must do a better job respecting, valuing, and protecting Black women so they do not feel isolated, unsupported, and burnt-out. As Black women continue to enroll in colleges and obtain degrees it is essential that Black women student affairs professionals are recruited, hired, retained, and supported in order to ensure a more positive experience for Black women and to prepare the world for future leaders. As a Black woman working in higher education, it is my hope and dream that this study will contribute to the existing literature and motivate universities to take a proactive stance in supporting, uplifting and protecting Black women.

APPENDIX A REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION

Greetings:

My name is Michelle Maye and I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Program (ELP) at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Along with my studies, I also serve as a Student Affairs Officer in the School of Education and Information Studies (SE&IS) at UCLA.

I am the principal researcher in a qualitative study examining the professional and personal experiences of Black women mid-level student affairs professionals and how they navigate the intersectionality of race and gender working at a public four-year institution of higher learning. I would like to invite you to participate in this study as you meet the sampling criteria of my research, particularly as a Black woman mid-level student affairs professional.

I am seeking eligible participants to participate in this study.

To be eligible to participate, participants must:

- Identify as a Black Woman
- Be employed at this specific four-year public institution
- Be a mid-level student affairs professional
 - In the context of this study, mid-level staff members are defined as staff members working in a student affairs role in an academic unit or staff working within the division of student affairs who have worked at the institution for more than five years and who are not entry-level or senior-level professionals.
- Work in one or more of the following offices in a division of student affairs or academic unit:
 - Office of the Dean of Students
 - Residential life
 - Cultural and Recreational Affairs
 - Student Services
 - Counseling/Mental Health Services
 - Career Services
 - Student Development
 - Student Wellness
 - Campus Life
 - Financial Aid

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will participate in one (1) in-depth one-on-one interview (lasting approximately 90 minutes in length). The interview will be conducted via Zoom.

Please be assured that all information collected will be kept confidential. It is my goal to interview research participants between the dates of [insert dates]. Please reply to this email to

communicate your participation decision by [insert dates]. Should you volunteer to participate, I will reach out to contact you to schedule an appointment for a 90-minute interview. You will also receive a letter of consent to participate in the study.

It is my hope that you will participate and contribute to the research by sharing your professional and personal experiences as student affairs professionals. Thank you for your time and consideration.

If you have any questions or would like to participate in the research, I can be reached at maye@gseis.ucla.edu.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Michelle A. Maye
Principal Investigator
University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)

APPENDIX B PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

The Professional and Personal Experiences of Black Women Working as Mid-Level Student Affairs Professionals in One Public Four-Year Institution

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Michelle A. Maye, a doctoral student in the School of Education & Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. This study will examine the professional and personal experiences of Black women mid-level student affairs professionals and how they navigate race and gender in the institution.

You were selected as a potential participant because you identify as a Black woman and are currently work as a mid-level student affairs professional and meet eligibility requirements.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

The participants for this research study will include 10 Black women who are mid-level student affairs professionals at one public four-year institution of higher education.

WHY IS THIS RESEARCH BEING DONE?

This study will examine the professional and personal experiences of Black women mid-level student affairs professionals and how they navigate race and gender in the institution. Particularly, this study may highlight challenges Black women face to provide recommendations for support they may need.

RESEARCH DETAILS

Research participation will take a total of approximately 90 minutes. If you volunteer to participate in this research study, the following will occur:

- Participate in one (1) in depth one-on-one interview, approximately 90 minutes. The interview will be held via Zoom, at a mutually agreed upon date and time.
- All interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim with your permission. I will also take handwritten notes during the interview. If at any time you do not want to answer a question or want to stop altogether, I will immediately stop recording and taking notes.
- All participants will be provided with the option to be contacted for a follow-up once all initial interviews are completed *to allow the participant the opportunity to reflect on what was discussed in the first interview in case new ideas emerge*
- *All participants are asked to come to the interview with a "journey map." The journey map will highlight experiences from the beginning of your career through today with a particular emphasis being placed on how your identity as a Black woman has impacted your professional journey*

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS?

As in any study, no study is risk-free. Particularly, this study poses no risk to you. The interview process may trigger different memories and emotions and may lead to some discomfort as you

recall specific events and memories that have taken place throughout your experience as a student affairs professional.

To address this, interviews will be held via Zoom, this allows you (the participant) to choose a place you deem fit and one that is conducive to your comfort.

Another potential risk is most research involves some risk to confidentiality, even though the intention is to keep participants anonymous. To address this, I will create pseudonyms and keep all confidential information on a restricted drive. All interviews will be transcribed verbatim and you (the participant) will have the opportunity to review all transcripts and address any errors or instances that may put you at risk.

ARE THERE ANY POTENTIAL BENEFITS?

By participating in this study, you will be able to give a first-hand account of your experiences in student affairs. By sharing those experiences, this process can provide you with the space to share your realities, thoughts and ideas, as well as find community with others who share the same experiences as you.

CONFIDENTIALITY

As the principal investigator, I will do my best to make sure all private information is kept confidential. Data will be stored securely, and you will select your own pseudonym which will be used throughout the process. I alone will have access to both digital and hard copy data. I will share some of the transcript data (with pseudonym) and records with my dissertation co-chairs to monitor the study. Research records provided to authorized, non-UCLA personnel will not contain identifiable information about you. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not identify you by name. All consent forms, raw data, and all related materials will be retained for a period of one (1) year following completion of the research. After one (1) year, I will destroy all data. *Your data, including de-identified data may be kept for use in future research.*

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions at any time about the study and/or procedures, you may contact the researcher or the dissertation co-Chairs.

- Principle Investigator
Michelle A. Maye
310-756-2881 (cell)
Michelle.gseis@gmail.com

- Dissertation Chair
Dr. Ananda Marin
Amarin1@ucla.edu

- Dissertation Co-Chair
Dr. Mark Hansen
markhansen@ucla.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers, you may contact the UCLA OHRPP by phone: (310) 206-2040; by email: participants@research.ucla.edu or by mail: Box 951406, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1406.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty and withdraw your consent at any time during the study. You may refuse to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable at any time throughout the study and remain in the study. You will be able to review, edit, and erase the tapes/recordings of your research participation.

PAYMENT

For taking part in this research study, you will be reimbursed for your time and inconvenience. You will be compensated with a \$20 Amazon gift card upon completion of the interview, the gift card will be emailed to you.

You will be given a copy of this information for your records.

APPENDIX C
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Background Information

1. Please provide your name.
2. What is your age?
3. To which gender group do you belong?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Other
4. How long have you lived in the United States?
5. How long have you worked for the University?
6. What is your position/title(s) you currently hold?
7. Number of years in Student Affairs?
8. Highest level of education?
 - a. PhD
 - b. EdD
 - c. Masters
 - d. Bachelors

APPENDIX D INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Research Questions

1. What are the personal and professional experiences of Black women working as mid-level student affairs professionals in one public four-year institution?
2. How do Black women working as mid-level student affairs professionals they navigate the intersections of race, class, and gender as they work within the institution?

Greetings!

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today, I appreciate you taking time out of your schedule to participate in this research study.

I am completing dissertation research for my doctorate in education in the Educational Leadership Program (ELP) at UCLA. I am interested in the personal and professional experiences of Black women mid-level student affairs professionals at a degree granting institution and how they navigate race and gender in the institution. I will be asking you a series of open-ended questions about your experiences as student affairs professionals, which will take approximately an hour.

So that I am fully present, engaged, and attentive to your responses, I will be recording the interview and taking handwritten notes. Please feel free to request to skip a question or stop the interview at any time. Please be assured that everything we discuss during the interview is confidential, so please feel free to speak freely and openly about your experiences and give specific examples.

The data collected in this interview will be transcribed, analyzed, and potentially included in a dissertation. Individual and institutional identifying information will remain confidential.

Do you have any questions before we begin? (Pause for questions).

Are you comfortable with me recording this session? (Wait for affirmation).

Wonderful, let's get started!

This is a study examining the role of race, class, and gender on your professional and personal experiences, please feel free to comment to the role of these identities as it relates you, as you answer the questions.

Research Questions:

1. What are the personal and professional experiences of Black women working as mid-level student affairs professionals in one public four-year institution?
2. How do Black women working as mid-level student affairs professionals navigate the intersections of race, class, and gender as they work within the institution?

Journey Map Prompt

I would like to spend time learning about your career journey as a Black woman and the obstacles, challenges, supports and encouragement you experienced along the way.

Draw a map of your journey as a Black woman student affairs professional that highlights experiences from the beginning of your career through today. Please represent how your identity as a Black woman has impacted your professional journey. Include important people, places, memories, and milestones. Make note of accomplishments, opportunities, obstacles, and/or challenges. You might also include moments when you felt uplifted and/or celebrated or when you might have experienced hostility and/or resistance. Please feel free to be creative with your drawing.

Journey Map Questions

(I want to spend some time talking about their background and why they chose a career in student affairs)

1. Please share with me a little bit about your yourself and what led you to choose a career in Student Affairs?
2. Please walk me through the journey map that you created. [ask follow-up questions as needed]
 - a. How did that experience shape your outlook on your profession?
 - b. How did this experience make you feel?
 - c. What did you learn from this experience?
 - d. How did you respond to this experience?
 - e. Do you feel as if your experience as a Black woman was acknowledged and validated?

Additional Questions

1. How would you describe the racial climate of the institution as a whole and of your department?
2. How does the racial climate of the institution and your department affect you as a Black woman, mid-level student affairs professional?

3. What strategies have you used to survive and thrive working in the institution?
4. What can institutions do to better recruit, retain, and support Black woman?
5. Do you have any questions for me?

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