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I Am A Black Woman, A Boss, And I Represent The University: Exploring The Lived Experiences Of African American Women Senior Student Affairs Officers

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I Am A Black Woman, A Boss, And I Represent The University: Exploring The Lived

Experiences Of African American Women Senior Student Affairs Officers

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By

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ABSTRACT

The lived experiences of African American Senior Student Affairs Officers has been riddled with systemic racism, sexism, and unrealistic expectations. Research has shown that there is value in intentional recognition of the intersection of their identities, identifying support mechanisms, and providing adequate resources for the women to be successful. This study aims to determine the unique experiences of each woman not only within their careers, but also from childhood. Poignantly asking about the span of their lived experiences, but also strategies used in climbing to and surviving in senior student affairs leadership positions? Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) are defined as the senior most leader at the institution that oversees all or the majority of student life outside the classroom.

Utilizing Black Feminist Thought and the N.O.B.L.E Model, coined by Dr. Kandace Hinton provided the foundation to understand African American women and how they view the world and the experiences that lead them to their current role. The seven female participants represented large, small, public, private, research focused, community college, and historically Black colleges and universities. The results of this study indicated that African American women in these roles experience racism, sexism, suffer from unhealthy coping habits, and have to work twice as hard to be acknowledge for the work they do on campus, if there is acknowledgement at all. It is recommended that African American women currently in the roles or moving into the roles establish safeguards to protect their mental and physical health, seek out and establish a supportive base, and ensure that the institution can support them financially as well as in their professional realm.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I was raised by Cheryl Lynn Brawner, a single mother of two in Dayton, Ohio. My mother is a high school graduate, was a licensed cosmetologist, and has at least two years of college education. She is the hardest working woman I know, taking care of kids, bartending, doing hair, and making sure we never went without. From her and her parents I received that same drive: Well, I am a Brawner woman as my Nana would say. When I became a King, it only got worse. The King work ethic is just as strong as the Brawners, so when my husband would overhear me talk about aspirations of a doctoral degree, he told me to not just talk about it but do it. During the Cohort 19 orientation, a Cohort 18 member stated "You will go through many life changes along this journey, and they can distract you but keep the course". It was the truest statement given. I have lost aunts and uncles as well as both my grandfathers during this journey. I have miscarried two children and given birth to a happy baby boy, I have cried, not slept, eaten horribly, lost weight, gained it back, spent too much money, and barely survived a new APA edition, and I'm still here but not because of my efforts alone. I thank GOD, who has kept me and placed many people in my corner, encouraging and cheering me on. I recognize I could not get this degree if it was not for my husband Oliver Wendell King Jr., my mother Cheryl Lynn, and my children, Nala, Oliver, and Gregory. They sacrificed alongside me during this journey and truly deserve to be celebrated.

I would like to acknowledge my crew. Annette, Danita, Carol, Sara, and Kasi (deceased). We have been friends for over 10 years, and their support, challenge, and straight up craziness has been a blessing to me and my family. To have a group of higher education professionals to connect and gain perspective from daily is beyond immeasurable.

I would like to thank my school crew and all of Cohort 19 as we have bounded together

since Day 1, and we have utilized each other as resources, support, motivation, learning centers, and a shoulder to cry on; together we succeed.

I would definitely like to thank the QUEENS! Being a Howard-Hamilton Hinton Scholar definitely affirmed me in times when Imposter Syndrome was looming. To be able to speak in classes and have the professors identify with what you are saying is absolutely an experience that should be felt by EVERY African American woman. To my chair, Dr. Kandace Hinton, thank you for paving the way, your N.O.B.L.E theory provided the foundation for me to tell the stories of each women that I met. I thank you for always answering the call and keeping me in line, your belief and constant support has not wavered and for that I truly thank you.

I would like to thank and dedicate this dissertation to the women that this study represents, many of whom were not interviewed but I know their stories. Whether they have passed on, moved to other institutions, or have just started their journey, this dissertation represents their struggles of health and well-being. It represents their stories of alcoholism, health concerns, deaths, mental illness, and loneliness. It represents the unrealistic expectations and demands placed on them because it is assumed they can handle and do it all.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Possessing the ability to bring life into this world has not made her a superhero. Having the strength and capacity to teach her children has not earned her any respect. Yielding the power of her inner strength to lift others, and in some cases above herself, does not gain her special recognition. African American women have brought life into this world, nourished their children and others, educated the community, and pushed others to excel without personal recognition or accolades. They are Women. They are Black Women. Often defined by bias, misunderstanding, or jealousy, Malcolm X (1962) stated in a speech, "The most disrespected women in America is the Black Woman, the most un-protected person in America is the Black woman" (para. 2). The story of Black women has become one of perseverance, distinction, and strength. The strength of Black women has manifested in many arenas and environments, including the home, place of worship, classroom, boardroom, and university. Today that strength is needed to combat the complexities of higher education and the profession of student affairs. In this chapter we provided a foundation of African American women in higher education, reviewed the statement of the problem, provided the purpose and significance of the study, as well as addressed the research questions and my personal statement regarding the research topic.

Statement of the Problem

African Americans' access to education was a battle fought consistently, as education

was seen as a means of empowerment, organization, and mobility (Allen & Jewell, 2002; J. D. Anderson, 1988; Freire, 2015). Women entered colleges and university many times without the support of family, their community, or the institution for which they would attend. "Women understood their primary duty was to bear children; children could help in the labors of the farm and shop as well as in the operation of the household" (Solomon, 1985, p. 2). Opportunities increased for women to attend college, and with those opportunities women's ambition flourished. As the number of women with degrees increased so did the need for oversight of this particular population,

> Consider the following demographic information, in 1870 women accounted for 21% of the total undergraduate population in the United States: by 1890 the number of women had climbed to 35%; and by 1920, women represented 47% of all undergraduate students enrolled in American colleges and universities. (Graham, 1978, p. 762)

The increasing number of female students on campuses raised the need for advisors, counselors, and those that could address the specific needs of female students. "Many college presidents began to appoint female faculty members to advise, assist, and counsel the new "minority" population on campus, female students" (Schwartz, 1997, p. 504). This new role emerged from what was often a dual appointment with faculty obligations to a sole profession for women (Rosenlof, 1941; Solomon, 1985; Schwartz, 1997). The positions created to support female students were considered the top administrative roles held by women. Female administrative roles did not come without obstacles or challenges within the academy (Solomon, 1985). Through perseverance, advocacy, and courage, positions like Dean of Women were established. Dean of Women positions were complementary to that of Dean of Men, and overseeing the daily actions and success of female students on campus, the Dean of Women was a conduit to

advocate and advise the students and other administrators. Dean of Women and like positions laid a foundation of relevant practices in higher education, including graduate study, the development of professional associations, research on student development, understanding college environments, and student guidance counseling (Schwartz, 1997).

The recruitment and intentional hiring of African American administrators began with the increase of legislation, specifically Title XI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Glover, 2012, p. 9). This legislation (affirmative action) was key in diversifying campuses in the student, faculty, and staff areas (Glover, 2012; McPherson, 1970). The first African American Dean of women, Lucy Diggs Slowe, understood the challenges she faced as an administrator as well as the challenges her female students faced (K. Anderson & Slower, 1994). That was not always the case as campuses became more diverse and African American students experiences differed from others regardless of gender. African American female students were physically segregated in the classrooms, isolated from living on campus, and kept from student resources (Glover, 2012; Klink, 2014). African American administrators acted as a confidants, allies, mentors, motivators, and advocates. Many college students developing as individuals, particularly developing within their cultural identity, would connect with administrators through what diversity theorists Cross and Phagen-Smith would call bonding (Patton et al., 2016). This theoretical connection of Black identity and bonding allowed for "daily enactments that Black people use to remain connected and grounded within Black social and cultural life" (Patton et al., 2016, p. 101). African American senior student affairs leaders still find themselves as confidants, allies, mentors, motivators, and advocates, connecting to students and many times with a special connection to minoritized students.

Senior student affairs officers (SSAO) are no longer just the Dean of Women or Dean of

Students but often referred to as the Vice President or Vice Provost for Student Affairs. This position has an institutional leadership component and is often a member of the president's cabinet and oversees multiple student affairs areas on a college campus (Kuk & Banning, 2016). On many campuses the SSAOs and senior leadership at an institution are White and male (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2016). The voice and experiences of African American women provide a counter-narrative to the majoritive leadership in colleges and universities. The lack of critical mass of this population places African American female SSAOs in an invisible scenario at their institution and within the profession of student affairs.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the personal challenges African American women who are senior student affairs administrators experience in their roles. Out of the over 106,000 women in student and academic affairs administration, African American women accounted for just over 14,000 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). This study was conducted to represent the countless number of women that believe there are barriers to their advancement into a senior leadership position.

Significance of the Study

The narrative and experiences of African American administrators have been overshadowed or unacknowledged by the student affairs community in comparison to White administrators (Herdlien et al., 2008). As cited in Herdlien et al. (2008), "Little attention has been paid by historians to the unique roles and significant contributions of African American women serving as deans" (p. 295). African American women provide a positive impact for women and in particular helping African American women be successful (Glover, 2012; Solomon, 1985; Sterling, 1984). Lucy Diggs Slowe, who was sought out by Howard University

president, became the Dean of Women for Howard University in 1922 (K. Anderson & Slower, 1994). This practice was not uncommon as many presidents sought after faculty, business women, and leaders in education to oversee the women on their campus (Schwartz, 1997). As the profession of student affairs grew, the advancement of African American women within the profession did not. Colleges, universities, and individual departments did not have a standard procedure or plan to recruit African American administrators (Jackson, 2003). The lack of a plan can be associated with the lack of understanding racial disparities on campus or within the student affairs area, and this is why this study is significant.

Campuses began to diversify their student population which in many cases did not reflect the senior student affairs leadership on college campuses (Holmes, 2003). Intentional efforts by senior leaders began to change the representation of leaders on campuses, through promotion and sponsorship. Women in senior leadership positions created the infrastructure to propel women inside and outside the university (Klink, 2014; Solomon, 1985). This "pipeline" manifested in many ways for African Americans as well. African American women in a leadership position, whether a faculty member, an administrator, or a mentor, provided peers with coaching, strategy, advising, encouragement, and experience to aid in their upward mobility. Understanding the avenues available, experiences, and road blocks gives aspiring senior leaders the tools to make informed decisions about their own career advancement.

In 2014, the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators Policy Task Force administered a survey which yielded over 860 responses. The survey of SSAOs focused on how the leaders propelled to their current position, how they manage their position, and how they navigate the ever-changing environment in higher education. The survey also provided benchmark data that helped individuals and institutions compare internal data to the survey

results (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators Policy Task Force, 2014). The responses included the following information: 114 individuals identified as African American men and women, over 45% of African Americans have been in their positions more than 15 years, and 10% of Vice Presidents in the NASPA IV-E region are African American (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators Policy Task Force, 2014). The profession of student affairs is heavily represented by women, and African Americans are slowly obtaining senior student affairs roles (Kuk & Banning, 2016; National Association of Student Personnel Administrators Policy Task Force, 2014).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1: What are the lived experiences of African American women in senior student affairs leadership positions?

2: What are the strategies African American women use in climbing to and surviving in senior student affairs leadership positions?

Personal Statement

The initial exploration into this topic was derived from my future career ambition of becoming a Vice President for Student Affairs. I have seen the lack of recruitment and retention of African American women to senior leadership at various institutions. I also have observed the experiences of student affairs leaders as they relate to the constant barrage of questioning, problem solving, code switching, and personal and professional sacrifices as well as fixing divisional or department problems that were in place long before their start at an institution. My goal of this continuous exploration into this topic is to help future administrators and prompt current administrators to understand the concerns that are faced by senior level administrators

and how to navigate them.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to understand the personal challenges African American women who are senior student affairs administrators experience in their roles. This chapter reviewed the literature as it relates to African American women in senior student affairs leadership positions at institutions of higher education. Included in this chapter is previous research related to women in senior higher education leadership, first addressing the history of Black women in higher education, followed by the introduction of the Black administration within colleges and universities. The chapter reviewed women in leadership roles, recruitment and retention of Black administrators, career demands, intersectionality, credibility, resilience, peer mentors, work–life balance, and professional presence. The literature reviewed in this section provided the connection to understanding the challenges and opportunities of African American SSAOs.

History of Black Women in Higher Education

According to Solomon (1985), "Between the years of 1870 and 1900 the number of females enrolled in institutions of higher learning multiplied almost eightfold, from eleven to eighty-five thousand" (p. 58). As we consider the environment for African American women, during pre-civil war it was forbidden for African Americans to be educated (Goodell, 1853;

Roebuck & Murty, 1993; Woodson, 1919). Education meant freedom, of mind, of spirit, and the possibility of personal freedom. By slave owners maintaining control over slaves through rape, murder, whipping, mutilation, and institutionalized laws, education was a dangerous venture. African Americans were not considered people, but things; they were indeed a piece of property, and property does not have personal legal rights under the law (Goodell, 1853). Woodson (1919) described three types of people that took on the risk to educate slaves,

> First, masters t who desired to increase the economic efficiency of their labor supply; second, sympathetic persons who wished to help the oppressed; and third, zealous missionaries who, believing that the message of divine love came equally to all, taught slaves the English language that they might learn the principles of the Christian religion. (p. 2)

The introduction of education was heavily brought forth by religious missionaries. It would be the founding of a small liberal arts college in Ohio that would lay precedent to graduating an African American woman. Solomon (1985) provided the context which set Oberlin College apart from its predecessors: "To its militant Christian founders, Oberlin College in Ohio was 'God's College.' Here men and women, White and Black, were to be educated together to carry out God's cause on earth" (p. 21). We see examples of the education of African American women through the following accounts. Mary Patterson, born in North Carolina and one of four siblings, is known as the first African American to graduate with a bachelor's degree from a four-year institution (Merrill, 1979). Mary Patterson's graduation from Oberlin College was just the start of education for Black women, specifically at Oberlin. There were "56 women enrolled in the ladies/literary course and the four year bachelors of arts programs sometimes called "the gentleman's course" (Merrill, 1979, p. 8). Of those 56 Black female students, 12

graduated from the literary program and three from the bachelor's program (Merrill, 1979). Mary Patterson's graduation was 21 years after the 'Oberlin four,' four White women who received a bachelor's degree from Oberlin, and almost 30 years since Oberlin opened their doors as a College (Merrill, 1979; Oberlin Heritage Center, 2018). Mary Patterson, two of her siblings, and other Black female graduates went on to work in Washington D.C. teaching Black students at a prep school (Merrill, 1979). Women who were deemed fragile and unable to withstand the strenuous nature of higher education were now becoming a part of the mainstream of higher education (Horton, 1985; Merrill, 1979). Mary was soon followed by a few others that received bachelor's degrees, including Fanny Jackson in 1865 and Mary Church and Anne Julia Cooper in 1884.

In the realm of higher education, "the earlier black-power drive did not aim toward a restructuring of the methods, content or purposes of education; Negros desired not to change the system but to achieve greater participation in it as teachers, deans, presidents, and trustees" (McPherson, 1970, p. 1357). Education was seen as a means of being a part of the self-improvement and a part of the fabric of society. In a letter to Fisk University president, one family member wrote, "I send her to try to learn to be of use to herself & her people who so long have been oppressed" (Sterling, 1984, p. 381). Colleges and universities were havens for change, for opportunities, and for growth. Those that received even partial formalized education were the ones that became educators. Often teaching children rather than adults in the evening, the "schoolmarms" were often tied to clergy or missionary groups (Sterling, 1984).

The increasing number of women attending college mainly came to the expansion of educational availability, and for most that was the expansion of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU.) A few institutions that are still in existence today started prior to the civil

war; Cheney State (1837), Lincoln University (1854), and Wilberforce University (1856) with an additional 200 private schools established through the Black community, Black churches, the American missionary association, and the Freedman's bureau (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). Many of the aforementioned institutions were considered elementary, and Black colleges and universities grew into higher education centers through religious and community backing. One such school was Bethune Cookman College, initially the Daytona Literary and Industrial School for Training Negro Girls (Rashid, 2009). Mary McCloud Bethune, one of 17 children had a giving spirit even at a young age; her biggest gift would be education to all individuals that were around her. Bethune attended a Presbyterian mission school, learned to read, and taught her family scriptures; she then learned arithmetic and helped her family with the family business (Rashid, 2009). As she advanced her educational endeavors, Mary McLeod Bethune confirmed that her life's purpose was dedication to "improving the social conditions of African American children" (Rashid, 2009, p. 31).

Mary McLeod Bethune knew that education was the only way to help African American progress. Starting the institute would be a dream come true. Mary McLeod Bethune established the Daytona Literary and Industrial School for Training Negro Girls with educational philosophy and curriculum that mirrored W. E. B. Dubois and Booker T. Washington, integrating practical education influenced by self-help and the ability to adapt to the surroundings as well as utilizing a core group of educational elite to help propel African American women forward (Rashid, 2009). Mary McLeod Bethune was a strong advocate for educating African Americans, particularly in educating African American women. Mary McLeod Bethune also believed in hiring African American women; she stated, "I need strong women to help me realize this vision" (Holt, 1964, p. 103). Mary McLeod Bethune recognized that this effort was not without

conflict: "This group of pioneers whose belief in education and dedication to the improvement of Black women bravely endured assaults of racism and sexism" (Rashid, 2009, p. 52). Understanding the needs of students and what it would take for them to be successful was a trait of many university presidents. Bethune was no different as she sought out, negotiated, and provided an opportunity for administrators, faculty, and students to be successful (Rashid, 2009).

Another HBCU has been credited with advancing the Dean role specifically for women. Many terms exist to identify the Dean of Women position, including Matron, Lady Principal, Head, and House Mother (Schwartz, 1997). These types of positions were created to focus solely on the student population of women, their needs, and their environment (Schwartz, 1997). African American women's presence in a senior leadership position in student affairs started with the appointment of Lucy Diggs Slowe as the first Dean of Women at Howard University. The role was established to advise and "watch after" the women on campus. Dean Slowe, raised by her aunt, was instilled with the value of education. She graduated second in her class, received a scholarship to Howard, and was a very involved student. Lucy Slowe graduated with a bachelor's degree in 1908 from Howard University and a Master's degree in 1915 from Columbia University, where she also studied in the student personnel program at Teachers College (Perkins, 1996). The formal training she received and her progressive work at a DC High School put Lucy Slowe in a prime position to be chosen as Dean of Women for Howard University.

Lucy Diggs Slowe, a pioneer in many regards, started her career as the first African American Dean of Women, and the president of the National Association of College Women. Dean Slowe's first priority was women. As for herself, she was not an exception. Dean Slowe first advocated for herself by successfully negotiating her title, salary, administrative support,

ability to live off-campus, and the fact that all matters concerning girls come directly to her

office. Her concerns were similar to those around the country, finding adequate housing for

women, funding for women to attend school, counseling career and mental health, as well as

academics for advising (K. Anderson & Slower, 1994).

> College women need guidance in their choice of vocations in the light of realities which
>
> they face after they leave college, and it is the business of the Dean of Women to see that
>
> such guidance is furnished. Since vocational information is directly related to courses of
>
> study, the Dean of Women should be in close touch with the academic policies of the
>
> college and should be in position to advise the administration on curriculum matters of
>
> especial interest to women. (K. Anderson & Slower, 1994, p. 140)

As the Dean of Women at Howard University, Lucy Diggs Slowe challenged the status

quo internally and externally (K. Anderson & Slower, 1994). Dean Slowe, along with other

Deans of Women across the country, stood up to institutions of higher education, societal views,

and the men they worked with on a regular basis to fight for their students, staff, and themselves.

> The appointment of well-trained deans of women on black college campuses was also a
>
> major goal of Lucy Slowe and the National Association of College Women. Slowe
>
> attempted to convince the presidents of the other black institutions that this position was
>
> an important one and should be filled by a person formally trained with a BA degree than
>
> the traditional "matron" who was usually appointed women students. (Perkins, 1996, p.
>
> 91)

Slowe was able to advance her career at Howard, but advancement for African American women

at predominantly White institutions was slower to increase.

Issues Related to African American Women in Leadership Roles

This section will explore biases, representation bureaucracy, and the need for a critical mass of women of color in leadership roles. SSAOs are often required to have a terminal education degree to fulfill the senior student affairs roles on campuses. African American women in 2015 received 60,948 of the 452,118 masters degrees awarded and 8,800 of the 93,626 doctoral degrees awarded (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). The educational skill is equivalent to their male and White counterparts, but the experiences are very much different. African American women have endured bias, discrimination, and institutionalized practices that aim to oppress them regardless of their education. Whether it is the image or perception of the mammy, the bad Black bitch, the sexual prize, or the educated Black woman, it is the opposite of the values connected to White women (Collins, 2002). White women were considered to possess four cardinal virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity (Collins, 2002, p. 79). Those virtues helped to perpetuate stereotypes and biases for both Black and White women. The gains of minoritized students in colleges and universities and the gains of masters and doctoral degrees are not represented within the leadership roles at the top of the institution.

> Most professionals begin their career at an institution of higher education. Time spent earning one's degree not only prepares one for her profession, it shapes one's perception of a profession in terms of what is "normal" and what is possible within that profession. (Hannum, Muhly, Shockley-Zalabak, & White 2015, p. 66)

The underpinnings of the oppressive nature of not having African American women lead within institutions of higher education can be systemic and personal. Institutions are dominated by White male senior leaders, White faculty, and White students- those entities are the ones creating the social and systemic norms for the campus. There is a lack of understanding the worldview

and constant pressures of African American women working in student affairs. M.K. McEwen et al. stated:

> Particularly within the student affairs profession where it is of great importance for the profession to reflect the increasing diversity of our student populations, we must consider the degree to which the profession's reflection of Anglo, Euro-American values promotes a cultural environment that is not responsive to visible racial and ethnic group persons. Careful analyses and consideration of these issues of race, culture, and gender are in order. (as cited in Flowers, 2003, p. 445)

Student affairs administrators have had the ability to impact the lives for students, whether helping them achieve short-term success or graduate from college, helping a student develop is rewarding. SSAO roles are different depending on the institution and the student affairs organization; therefore, each professional may engage their constituents differently. One study concluded that there are six components of leadership, including cultural, social, physical, legal/political, resource, and ethical, in which SSAOs were engaged (Kuk & Banning, 2016). The areas of leadership may be required to handle situations with students, staff, alumni, or senior leadership. The interactions may be interpreted differently based off of someone's gender, age, stature, sexuality, race, or the intersection of multiple identities.

Representation Bureaucracy

This idea of representation is further explored in the theoretical concept of representative bureaucracy. Representative bureaucracy is defined as having representatives of the population of people in administrative power (Krislov, 1974). Colleges and universities are prime environments in which African American SSAOs can have an impact. In the study conducted by Flowers (2003), representative bureaucracy was examined through passive (ethnicity) and active

(act on behalf of representative) representation. He found that there is a need for African American administrators, as this population indirectly affects undergraduates through policies, resources, and the training of incoming professionals. African American senior leaders are expected to represent the diversity of senior leadership, the diverse needs within the divisional area, and the diverse student population. Collins (2002), stated that "African American women in leadership positions have a choice, to uplift others in racial solidarity which could put them at risk or resolve that success was achieved alone and perpetuate keeping Black women as subordinates" (p. 75). The path to senior leadership positions within student affairs is not the same for each person, but administrators may have similar experiences or have to develop a similar skill set. A student affairs professional starts out in a position with high student impact, which may last from two to five years, transitions to a supervisory role and then to a position that provides oversight of multiple areas (Biddix, 2013). Biddix (2013) concluded that it took an average of 23 years and seven job chances for women to move into an SSAO position. Although this is one path, other paths include showing institutional loyalty and promotion at one institution or being hired from outside the academy to senior positions. A pipeline through various relationships formed.

By the Numbers

The lack of diversity within student affairs leadership is often blamed on the lack of academic credentials. One speculation is that there are not enough Black students graduating with doctoral degrees (Hughes et al., 2012; Gregory, 1995; Weinberg, 2008). According to the Department of Education, in 2009 there were over 10,000 Black graduates who earned a doctorate degree compared to 7,000 ten years earlier (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Additionally, in 2014 it was reported that over 98,000 Black students were enrolled in

masters and doctoral programs in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013).

There were 251,388 people at institutions of higher education classified as executive, administrative, or managerial professionals in 2013. More than half were women (55%) and 9.7% of women identified as Black (Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 2016). The number of African American women in senior student affairs positions is comparatively small (Tucker, 1980), and often these women are expected to do more work than their counterparts. The demands of minoritized senior level administrators can be unspoken and unnoticed by their peers or colleagues. Byrd (2014) acknowledged the construction of race, gender, and class in society and how that hierarchical oppression replicates itself in the workplace. "Black administrators must possess skills to cope with normal administrative duties assigned, but also the special demands placed upon them, particularly in predominantly White universities, by virtue of their blackness" (Tucker, 1980, p. 313). The demands and expectations for African American senior leaders differ based on where the expectations are coming from such as supervisors, employees, students, and also the nature of the demands (Henry, 2010). Navigating the reality of African American women holding senior student affairs roles at various institutions across the country includes understanding the discrepancies on critical mass, salary, and experiences. The National Association for Student Affairs Professionals (NASPA) published a study in 2014 of the responsibilities, opinions, and professional pathways of chief student affairs officers. The study reported demographic data that spoke to the lack of representational bureaucracy. African American professionals accounted for 114 senior administrators, while White professionals accounted for 633; relatively, women administrators represented 49% of the 863 respondents and men represented 51% (National Association of Student Personnel

Administrators Policy Task Force, 2014). The NASPA IV-E region that is represented by Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Minnesota, Iowa, and Wisconsin has proportionate numbers that are even smaller. African Americans account for 10% of the number of Senior Student Affairs officers, while White administrators account for 78%. A gendered perspective shows that men account for 81% and Women account for 10%, and combining the data shows that more than half of the African American senior student affairs officers are women (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators Policy Task Force, 2014). The representation shows that there is still work to be done with increasing the diversity of senior-level positions.

Recruitment and Retention of Student Affairs Professionals

Recruitment

Student affairs practitioners enter the fields for various reasons. The experiences and the relationships built in undergraduate co-curricular spaces is often the introduction many receive to the field of student affairs. There is a constant number of African American student affairs professionals graduating and entering the field of higher education, many with hopes of advancing to senior-level positions. This section will review concerns that hinder and aid in the recruitment and retention of African American student affairs professionals. The section will also explore the series of obstacles, including entering the field, experiencing racist or sexist environments, not feeling supported, and navigating moving to senior-level positions as African American women.

Student affairs is not an undergraduate major or minor at most institutions, Bucknell University being the exception (Brown, 1987; Hunter, 1992). There is a fortuitous element to entering the field for many people. Brown (1987) stated, "People enter student affairs careers by accident or by quirk, rather than by design" (p. 5). Brown provided five characteristics

explaining the student affairs career choice: first, it is not a career chosen early in life; second, exposure comes from a mentor or role model; third, experience is gained in a student leadership or student employment role; fourth, the students major does not hold significance to entering the field; and lastly, the information relayed about career possibilities comes from those working in the field and interacting with the student on a regular basis. The high reliance on personal relationships, mentoring, and opportunities for co-curricular leadership, while essential to the growth of student affairs, is key to recruiting minoritized students to become student affairs professionals. Authors studying the diversity of student affairs potential labor pool found the following:

> Representation of African American, Hispanic, Asian American, and American Indian professionals in student affairs will not match the representation of these groups in the undergraduate student body, because the available candidates are at most about a quarter of the labor pool. This fact challenges student affairs administrators in their efforts to provide positive and appropriate role models within the profession with whom all students can identify and to provide programs and services that adequately represent the diverse voices of the campus. (Turrentine & Conley, 2001, p. 89)

The more representation of African American SSAOs at HBCUs and predominantly White institutions can have a substantial impact on African American students (Flowers, 2003). Intentional recruitment of minoritized administrators is different for each institution and department. Although universities, student affairs divisions, and industry standards advocate and value diversity, there have not been conclusive strategies focused on recruiting. Techniques have been established by some including creating an institutional pipeline of graduating students and then hiring them as professionals and allocating funds for recruiting diverse administrators

(Jackson, 2003). The institutional climate plays a significant role in the recruitment and retention

of African Americans in leadership at colleges and universities (Fraser & Hunt, 2011; Glover,

2012). Working at an institution of higher education can provide stability, comfort, and

continuous learning. Unfortunately, many campuses lack the welcoming climate to facilitate a

positive experience for African American staff and faculty. Institutions of higher education

struggle with the lack of diversity of students, staff, and faculty (Birnbaum, 1988; Gardner et al.,

2014; Kuk & Banning, 2016). The lack of staff diversity at an institution can be attributed to

poor recruiting and retention efforts, a chilly campus or community environment, or lack of

academic credentials (Biddix et al., 2012; Gardner et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2004). The "chilly"

climate of a university can be presented through interactions with students, staff, and faculty but

is kept in place by the administration. Hughes et al. (2012) found that three subjects "noted the

stress experienced when diverse hires try to access the privilege and power of the larger

academic world while trying to redefine and move the discourse within their fields forward" (p.

596). Being an authentic candidate for a position is crucial to being successful at an institution

and within a department. Operating within a "chilly" climate is not feasible or warranted for an

African American woman (Hinton & Patitu, 2003). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) stated,

"American society prefers to place its citizens in boxes based on physical attributes and culture.

No science supports this practice; it is simply a matter of habit and convenience" (p. 78). There

are no consequences to the racist, sexist behavior that takes place in the hiring process. African

American women, unlike African American men, White women, or White men, have to

recognize and be aware of the potential challenges they are up against and determine if they will

enter into a campus environment where they will be alienated or supported (Hinton & Patitu,

2003). This relationship can be described as oppressed. Freire (2015) stated, "To resolve the

oppressor-oppressed contradiction … the oppressed must confront reality, critically, and simultaneously objectifying and acting upon that reality" (p. 52). The fight necessary to prove oneself and be seen as a value is hard and is a challenge African American candidates have to face. Although institutions, departments, mentors, or colleagues cannot assist with each individual challenge experienced, they can recognize them and anticipate needs in order to provide advocacy and support for SSAOs (Gregory, 1995; Smith et al., 2004; Weinberg, 2008).

Retention

Understanding the experiences of African American professionals is key to retaining them at institutions of higher education. In this section general retention concerns and isolation are reviewed in how they impact African American SSAOs. Staff retention concerns can be attributed to burnout, perception of the field versus reality of the work, unclear job duties or expectations, low pay, and lack of growth opportunities (Jackson, 2003; Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Turner, 2015). African American professionals in student affairs can also feel isolated in addition to the reasons listed above. Microaggressions as well as lack of critical mass can lead to professional isolation within a department. Professional isolation has been defined as "the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of social relations at work is deficient in some important ways, either quantitatively or qualitatively" (Dussault et al., 1999, p. 944).

To counter professional isolation and the other concerns that contribute to the loss of African American staff, many institutions develop a mentoring program. A mentoring program provides an opportunity to connect professionals, provide a confidant or mentor to help navigate the political waters of an institution and provide a connection to help retain newer staff (Flowers, 2003; Kuk & Banning, 2016). Institutions may have a formal or informal program. Formalized

programs provide a structural component and show university support. "Ultimately the sum of these activities promotes a sense of belonging for the person of color as well as engagement with and committeemen to the institution" (Jackson, 2003, p. 12).

Taking into account the experiences and the expectation of African American women is essential to understanding every aspect that encompasses their presence at an institution. They may be recruited to a place where there is a minimal number of places to worship that coincide with their culture. There may not be critical mass in the greater community that they feel connected to; there may not be places for them to take care of basic needs of hair maintenance. It is important to realize that these pieces of cultural connections and outlets help retain individuals by helping them find places of refuge when experiencing stress. The next section illustrates the expected daily life of a senior student affairs role and how personal well-being is integral to one's life but is often overlooked for African American women (Jackson, 2003).

Work– Life Balance

Senior-level administrators are working 12-15 hours daily, which include meetings, events, cultivation of human capital, and management of a multi-million dollar division. This section will address the concept of work–life balance as it pertains to women as caregivers, professionals, their integration of work and life, and the management of individual self-care. Having children can be a fulfilling experience; however, once mixed with the pressures of senior leadership, having a family can become a game of chess. Women that have families are often faced with balancing personal and professional lives. The expectation of gender roles when having a spouse, the expectations of gender roles within the work environment, and how the identity of mother is looked at in the field raises concerns and questions (Beeny et al., 2005; Marshall, 2009). One quantitative study included an 89 -item, web-based survey which was sent

to 1,115 SSAOs. The 324 surveys that were returned reflected the following themes: time as a resource, feelings of balance and control, perceived expectations, satisfaction, role modeling, life circumstance, and flexibility of schedule. The study stated that the themes coupled with the high demands of a senior leadership position provide challenges for continual growth or upward mobility. One example referred to the effects of "self-imposed" expectations and pressures (Beeny et al., 2005). Senior administrators with young children struggle with guilt on having to decide between career and family (Beeny et al., 2005; Marshall, 2009; Vaccaro, 2011). Marshall (2009) posed the following research question, "How does having a family affect the personal and professional realities of women administrators with children? And what rewards and frustrations accompany the shared roles of being a professional and a parent?" (p. 194). Women have typically been seen as caregivers. One's first caregiving priority is to children and to the household. This ideology is still prevalent in today's society, upheld by women that could chose to stay at home, the men they are married to, or the men and women that were raised by a stay-at-home mom. As the labels continue, an African American senior leader bears the label as African American, as woman, and as mother, three distinct observations, expectations, and battles. As with many minoritized populations, the only people that can truly relate to being women, Black, and a mother are those that identify with each identity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Marshall, 2009).

The balance between work and life is not always a balance, but for many it can be juggling act. One concept expressed by authors Cheung and Halpern (2010) is that the integration of work and life can become mutually beneficial. Their article referenced a life management strategy termed SOC: selection, optimization, and compensation. The stage of *selection* focuses on setting goals and focusing on priorities; doing this provides purpose and

clear steps based off one's priorities. The *optimization* stage is reflected through scheduling, multitasking, and being able to achieve multiple goals through fewer actions. *Compensation* is characterized by understanding that time and resources are limited and one may need to find other avenues to complete the task(s). Cheung and Halpern (2010) stated,

> In the studies reviewed, most of the women leaders who are married and have families embrace both their family and work roles. However, instead of being superwomen who hold themes to the highest standards for all of the role-related tasks of being wives and mothers, they adopt different internal and external strategies to redefine their roles. They learn to let go and outsource household tasks just as they would outsource work in a busy office. (p. 184)

The integration of work and life can be expressed through what is termed as the s*pillover effect*. This concept was described as when work in one domain, such as place of employment, spills over into one's personal life and vice versa (Versey, 2015). The spillover can be either positive or negative for either domain. The spillover can refer to identity, such as the identity of leadership expressed in the workplace also expressed in the home, or it can be motherhood, bringing children in the workplace to complete a task or mothering individuals in the workplace. Recognition of the spillover effect and the SOC strategy are opportunities for optimization in the areas of personal life and professional life.

The concept of work–life balance includes self-care. The strategies people manage for their physical, spiritual, and mental well-being are as diverse as each individual. People cannot be fully happy until they can be authentic in every space they inhabit. Whether at home or the workplace it can be exhausting to be a different person in each space. Self-care is defined as providing care for yourself, identifying your needs, and taking the steps to address them (Bepko

& Kreston, 1990). In the field of student affairs, most of one's time is spent caring for others, whether it is the students, the staff, upper administration, or the greater division. Faced with the prevalent issues in higher education such as campus sexual assaults, mental health concerns, political divisiveness, and decreasing budgets, it is easy to be engulfed by the responsibility. Miller (2016) stated, "Far too long, the field of student affairs has paid lip service to the notion of self-care. We talk about it, complain that we do not have enough of it, but do very little to truly change the status quo, or promote healthy lifestyles within our own organizations or intuitions" (p. 141). African American senior leaders in student affairs are in a good position to not only change the culture but also model the behavior of self-care. Miller provided successful self-care strategies, and they start with the acknowledgement of the student affairs field, its complexities, and the responsibilities. The culture and complexities of the student affairs field include late hours and weekend commitments, mentally taxing topics and concerns, as well as high stress pressures from leadership (Beeler, 1988). The call for higher administration to acknowledge and promote wellness for their staff can first be conducted through the administration of a health audit. Beeler (1988) determined a health audit is "a procedure that allows for the identification of positive norms (what's going well) and negative norms (what's in the way)" (p. 286). Conducting a health audit includes reviewing the health policy, the division or office environment, organizational behavioral norms, and individual health (Beeler, 1988). A comprehensive health audit allows for there to be a review at each level, including the individual or personal level. Self-care and overall wellness are not individual problem to be dealt with; they are institutional concerns to be handled at a senior management level.

Senior student affairs leaders at colleges and universities experience stress at various levels and magnitudes. Beeler (1988) believed that

there is a tendency within student personnel work to take on assignments and

responsibilities beyond the range of realistic duties. . . the altruistic nature of student

affairs operations make many individuals feel any added expectations are just part of the

job. Yet to be effective in what is done daily as routine, a balance must be struck. (p. 288)

Geronimus et al., (2006) developed a concept that spoke to the stressors experienced by African

American women and the result on their health, the Weathering hypothesis. Geronimus et al.

"proposed the 'weathering' hypothesis, which posits that Blacks experience early health

deterioration as a consequence of cumulative impact of repeated experience of with social or

economic adversity and political marginalization" (p. 826). The idea of weathering can be used

when reviewing the experiences of African American senior student affair professionals. The

constant stress of overt discrimination and microaggressions are not experienced by White

professionals in society, in leadership positions, and in the workplace. Geronimus et al.

concluded that the weathering effect is most likely to affect African Americans in situations

where high coping mechanisms are exhibited.

Miller (2016) described this in discussing high coping mechanisms:

For women like me, who hold leadership roles both at home and at work, it is hard to

step away from the many "hats" I wear as a spouse, parent, daughter, sister, aunt, teacher,

friend, advisor, counselor, advocate, mentor, supervisor, colleague, and consultant

without at times feeling like I am letting someone down, or disappointing others; even

when I am in great pain and struggling to find my own balance. This is the health and

wellness conundrum that currently plagues our society, the balancing act between taking

care of self and taking care of others. (p. 140)

The Sojourner syndrome, a framework introduced by Mullings (2002), connects the effects of

race, gender, and class with the health of African American women. This framework was named

after Sojourner Truth, as she

> provided a symbolic representation that resonates deeply with African American women.
>
> In many ways, Sojourner Truth personifies the resistance to the interlocking oppressions
>
> of race, class and gender that have defined black women's existence for generations.
>
> Sojourner Truth, like many of the women we encountered in the study, assumed
>
> extraordinary responsibilities (Mullings, 2002, p. 34).

In culmination, the responsibilities of African American women, their health, and self-care are

impacted by race and gender. The exploration of their intersectionality is crucial to paint a

complete picture of how African American women are viewed, are treated, and experience the

everyday occurrences in society.

The Intersectionality of Race, Gender, and Power

Experiences impact who we are, what we believe, and how we process our surroundings.

Experiences are said to build upon one another and to provide a stable foundation to move

forward (Dewey, 1938). Senior administrators do not only bring their own experiences to any

situation, they also are responsible for creating an environment to shape experiences for students

and staff (Biddix, 2013; Collins, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Dewey, 1938). The term

Intersectionality coined by Kimberle' Crenshaw was created to give voice to the dual

discriminatory tactics on Black women created by targeting their race and gender (Crenshaw et

al., 2018). The concept of an intersection was formed as a simple analogy to show a judge how a

particular person can be impacted by both race and gender. Crenshaw et al. (2018) stated her

objective was

> to illustrate that many of the experiences Black women face are not subsumed within the

traditional boundaries of race or gender discrimination as these boundaries are currently

understood, and that the intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women's

lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions

of those experiences separately. (p. 12)

Crenshaw (2016) was inspired through the research in a legal case where an African American woman was denied employment and she sued the business for discrimination because she is an African American and a woman. The judge saw that the business hired African American men and White woman and believed the women was not experiencing two forms of discrimination and tossed the case out of court. Crenshaw provided the concept of an intersection as a simple analogy to show how an individual can be impacted by both race and gender. The traffic in the intersecting roads are the hiring policies of the business. In the examined case, the intersection is where the African American woman was located, being impacted by both. In the example, the law did not have a mechanism to see or have a framework by which to understand the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2016).

Intersectionality of race and gender are historically not considered to impact leadership capability (Curtis, 2017; Davis, 2016). Collins (2002) defined intersectionality as "an analysis claiming that systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organization, which shape Black women's experiences and, in turn, are shaped by Black women" (p. 299). In this section, intersectionality describes the way race, gender, social class, and power intersect to affect African American women (Collins, 2002; Curtis, 2017; Davis, 2016). The presence of African American women in leadership role also shapes the experiences of minoritized men and women (Collins, 2002; Hinton & Patitu, 2003; Jones & Dufor, 2012). Collins (2002) stated, "Through the lived experiences gained within

their extended families and communities, individual African American women fashioned their own ideas about the meaning of Black Womanhood" (p. 13). African American women were often overshadowed by White women and Black men in society, in the workplace, and in the educational system (Carbado et al., 2013; Collins, 2002). Intersectionality can be used to understand the dynamics of power and inequality as it provides a foundational platform to recognize what is happening (Cho et al., 2013). Dewey believed it is the individual's responsibility to understand not only what affects her but also how she uses those situations: "A primary responsibility of educators is that they not only be aware of the environing conditions, but that they also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth" (Dewey, 1938, p. 40). African American female senior leaders experience institutional racism, microaggressions, racism, and gender bias (Hinton & Patitu, 2003; Jackson, 2003; Lorde, 1984; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Tucker, 1980; Turner, 2015). Lorde (1984) defined racism as the "belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance. Sexism, the belief in the inherent superiority of one sex over the other and thereby the right to dominance" (p. 495). The systems of oppression can impact self-definition, perceived expectations of conformity, and career advancement (Collins, 2002). An African American female senior leader may walk into a meeting, a program, or an office and know that she is the only minoritized person; she may be the only woman, only African American, and the only one in the room that believes in her own ability. An African American woman understands the visibility and vulnerability her race and gender may impose. Furthermore, she understands neither (race nor gender) stand alone or are overpowered by one another as they are a constant double jeopardy (Davis, 2016). The focus has and continues to be on the identity of a person's race, gender, and sexuality instead of comprehending that the

intersectional benefits, challenges, and reality of a person represent much more than a single identity (Collins, 2002; Dussault et al., 1999; Lorde, 1984).

Added to the consciousness of how race, gender, and social class are perceived in society are the painful experiences with microaggressions. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) defined microaggressions as "stunning small encounters with racism, usually noticed by members of the majority race" (p. 167). Solórzano et al (2002) elaborated on the definition of microaggressions by characterizing them as automatic verbal, visual, or nonverbal subtle insults at minoritized people. The microaggressions experienced by administrators at institutions especially at predominately White institutions can take a physical and mental toll on their well-being. In a study conducted by Holmes (2003), the African American female SSAOs expressed words such as "tiring, exhausting, hard, and burden" (p. 52) in regard to the everyday demands of being a Black administrator. The African American female senior leader is forced to understand what others see when they look at her, what assumptions are made, and use that information in the mental or political battle she must engage in as an African American woman at that level. Collins (2002) stated,

> The category of "Black Woman" makes all U.S. Black women especially visible and open to the objectification of Black women as a category. This group treatment potentially renders each individual African American woman invisible as fully human, but paradoxically, being treated as indivisible. For individual women, resolving contradictions of this magnitude takes considerable inner strength. (p. 110)

In a recent study conducted on African American women senior leaders in business and academia, many of the participants described their experiences of "being invisible, voiceless, discriminated against, isolated, undermined, treated unfairly, oppressed, challenged and

demoted" (Davis, 2016, p. 8). The study further affirmed that the "feelings of racial and gender bias resonated with all of the participants" (Davis, 2016, p. 8). Faced with perceptions of tokenism, the responsibility of overcoming or overcompensating to combat negative stereotypes and images, as well as the constant conscious fight for inclusion, are burdens not experienced by White administrators (Davis, 2016; Holmes, 2003; Solórzano et al., 2000). African American senior level executives are required to carry the burden and be successful, as failure would perpetuate the stereotypes they are fighting (Davis, 2016). In a study conducted by Rosette et al. (2016) that examined a variety of traits and behaviors of African American, Asian, and White women and their cultural stereotypes, the intersectionality framework was used to represent the narrative of the over 1,500 respondents. As the researchers presented the data, they first examined the stereotypes for all women, the expectations set on women, and how each group was presented differently. The self-identified traits and behaviors, coupled with societal stereotypes, worked against Black and Asian female leaders as opposed to White female leaders when the researchers looked at a recognition-based process of leadership (Rosette et al., 2016). The study revealed that Black women "are perceived as dominant not competent" (Rosette et al., 2016, p. 434). Through the dominance lens, Black women were also perceived as more masculine than feminine (Rosette et al., 2016). The study went on to reveal that the expectations and characteristics associated with women in general, such as being warm, feminine, and inviting, are not associated with all women especially African American and Asian women (Rosette et al., 2016). Providing the counter-narrative is imperative to the success and continued demolition of the stereotypes against African American female leaders.

The assumptions and stereotypes about each race of people permeate society, laws, institutions of education, and individual people. What is not considered is the human traits of

individual people, to understand their intellect, the moral beliefs, and who they are as a person (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Racism is the first tenet of critical race theory and provides the foundation for understanding. Racism is ingrained in every facet of society, overtly, institutionally, and in everyday subtleties (Solórzano et al., 2000; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; McPherson, 1970). Critical race theory contends that even with efforts to diminish overt racism and discrimination, racism cannot be eradicated (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Race is an essential factor in how inequality persists in humanity. The second tenet of critical race theory is interest convergence. This aspect of the theory is based on the successes of racism, the success in the interest of the elite White race to gain in whatever area that provides the greatest return (Solórzano et al., 2000; McPherson, 1970). Interest convergence is when minoritized individuals receive rights, services, or benefits that are already experienced by Whites. The benefits received represent motive for Whites and those in power to gain something ultimately greater by providing a benefit intended for all people. (Solórzano et al., 2000; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Lorde, 1984). The third tenet of critical race theory is that race is socially constructed (Solórzano et al.; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, Lorde, 1984). It translates into the stereotypes that Blacks are lazy, Whites are more educated, or Muslims are all terrorists (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Credibility, Competency, and Confidence

The attack on African American women leadership is based on the belief that they are not competent in the work they do, they are not credible in their professional sphere, and they lack the confidence to fulfill the job responsibilities successfully (Rosette et al., 2016). This section will examine the three aspects, credo, competency, and confidence, as these relate to the credibility of African American SSAOs.

Credibility

Exploring the dynamics of credibility first starts as an internal process. Kouzes and Posner (2011) stated, "Discovery of self and self-knowledge are essential to building leader credibility" (p. 188). Through self-awareness one can choose to self-regulate or compensate for deficiencies. People must discover and reveal who they are, the values they hold, and how they exemplify them. As stated by Kouzes and Posner (2011),

> You must discover and develop three aspects of yourself; your credo, your competencies, and your confidence. Your credo is the set of values and beliefs that serve as a guide to your decisions and actions. Your competencies are the knowledge and skills, and abilities that you use to transform your words into action. And confidence is the will to make use of those skills. (p. 43)

Exploring the development of one's credo, their value and belief system is rooted in their experiences, their environment, and their family. Critical race theory states that one person does not have a single identity; he or she may claim identity formed in race, gender, religion, marital status, and parental status. This diverse identity also provides layers to one's credo (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The diversity of one's credo provides an opportunity to change, alter, or influence work, colleagues, and university policy. Credo can also be explained through conflict. When an administrator is at odds with another administrator or university official, and both parties believe they are fulfilling their leadership capacity, it can result in a battle fueled by one's credo (Birnbaum, 1992). An example could be that an African American, openly lesbian SSAO fighting for gender inclusive housing against the university president or board of trustees could easily be misconstrued as holding a personal agenda. "It is in the social realm that racial and gendered stereotypes are continually used as ways of defining black women's identity and

behaviour" (hooks, 1984, p. 44). Minoritized leadership will constantly battle the perception that their agenda or focus is only fueled by their race, ethnicity, and sexuality. The key is to build consensus and foster shared leadership to achieve goals that benefit the institution (Birnbaum, 1992).

Competence

The National Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and the American College Student Personnel Association (ACPA) jointly created a list of 10 competencies for student affairs administrators. The competencies include the areas of:

1). Advising and Supporting, 2). Assessment, Evaluation, and Research, 3). Social Justice and Inclusion, 4). Personal and Ethical Foundations, 5). Values, Philosophy and History, 6). Organizational and Human Resources, 7). Law, Policy, and Governance, 8). Leadership, 9). Technology 10). Student Learning and Development. (American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators Policy Task Force, 2015).

The competencies were constructed through an inclusive lens but are measured against interpretations and structures built by White heterosexual men. Additional competencies are placed on African American women. Black feminist thought described the idea of transforming work. African American women must have the ability to accomplish real change and not simply delegate the work that needs to be done (Collins, 2002). Collins (2002), described that when they "define their jobs as institutional transformation versus trying to fit in an existing system, they gained a degree of spiritual independence" (p. 236). African American female SSAO's values and beliefs serve as the foundation. Their competency in the field of higher education includes commitment to what is right and appropriate for the institution and their position. Patton-Davis

and Howard-Hamilton (2005) stated, "There is an ability for student affairs professionals to practice reflective thinking and conceptualize their experiences in a way that can be helpful to current and future members of the profession in efforts to scourge the injustices that continue today" (p. 107).

Confidence

The exploration of confidence is twofold for African American women. One arena is characterized by one's ability to lead and provide a vision for an area; the other is characterized by the confidence others have in his or her leadership. Confidence is action, the ability to do the things that one has set out and feel fully competent in doing. The first hindrance to confidence is self-doubt. People often fail when they believe they cannot move forward even when they have all the skills necessary to do so (Kouzes & Posner, 2011). In addition to self-doubt, African American women are battling the negative images, perceptions, and contradictions against what they personally understand to be an African American woman (Collins, 2002). To overcome this constant battle, they must have inner strength, an understanding of their personal worth, and an ability to think and act outside the oppressive constructs of what is presented (Collins, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Holmes, 2003).

Leaders who are confident and believe in themselves often seek challenging levels of professional growth and endeavors (Kouzes & Posner, 2011). High achieving African American women also can experience what is called the imposter syndrome. The imposter syndrome is characterized as an internal belief that one they are intellectually inept, they are a fake, and they can be found out at any moment (Trotman, 2003). African American women's existence in higher education has been questioned through microaggressions or overt racism at every interval as a student, as a faculty member, and as an administrator. Davis (2016) revealed in her study on

African American Women executives that "while African American Female leaders in this study have developed their leadership competencies and are confident in their leadership abilities, they still lead under a weighted canopy of scrutiny and predictions of failure" (p. 8). The constant barrage of attacks can enable them to question their very capable ability (Trotman, 2003). Trotman (2003) poignantly asked,

> In the White male dominated ivory tower, how does the ebony woman manage to survive the constant assaults on her academic contributions, her intellectual capacity, and her humanity without doubting herself and feeling like the imposter that many in the academy seem to perceive? (p. 79)

Combatting the imposter phenomenon can be complex, as assertiveness or aggressive self-promotion can be mischaracterized as arrogant or worse an angry Black woman (Collins, 2002). Self-affirmations and self-talk coupled with encouragement from mentors can counter the internal narrative of doubt. Another strategy used to combat the imposter phenomenon is to share experiences in a safe space with other African American women (Trotman, 2003).

Resiliency

Resilience, historically examined in youth reading and their ability to overcome, social and environmental obstacles, has been used to explore experiences and how adults exhibit resilience (Unger, 2011). The research on resilience has examined various environmental, individual, contextual, and cultural components (Coutu, 2002; Richardson, 2002; Unger, 2011). Richardson (2002) examined the metatheory of resilience and resiliency in regard to inquiry and focused on three waves of resilient qualities, the resiliency process, and innate resilience. The first wave, resilient qualities, describes the qualities of people and their support systems. The second wave, the resiliency process, describes the ways in which people manage adversity and

how the qualities from the first wave are used. The third wave, innate resilience, describes the internal motivation within people and how they can apply the motivation to overcome adversity. During exploration of connections across academic fields that focus on internal processes that lead to success, we find various examinations of how individuals develop. The development of leadership skills and confidence provide the foundation for self-motivation and self-preservation (Coutu, 2002; Donnellon & Langowitx, 2009; Guillen et al., 2015). Affective domain is used as a theory to understand a person's intrinsic and extrinsic decisions regarding leadership. Donnellon and Langowitx (2009) tried to understand if senior leaders have intrinsic motivation to learn and develop as senior leaders or if they are motivated by external factors. Additionally, McNeely-Cobham and Patton (2015) presented a qualitative study that was conducted using Bandura's social cognitive theory to explain how personal attributes, environmental factors, and behaviors affect learning. The findings were categorized in the following themes: families and mothers as a key influence, ability to overcome adversity, and early influences on career trajectory (McNeely-Cobham & Patton, 2015). Key concepts from this article included understanding self-efficacy, family, career success, and how others overcame adversity. Hinton (2012) produced a study that provided the basis for a theoretical framework entitled the Nexus of Black Leadership Efficacy (N.O.B.L.E), named in honor of higher education pioneer Jeanne Noble (p 71). This analysis of the study concluded that N.O.B.L.E represented the experiences of African American mid and senior student affairs leaders within four contexts (Hinton, 2012). The four contexts or connections are relevant to show how African Americans can not only develop their resiliency but develop as professionals long before starting in a career. According to Hinton (2012),

> The theoretical model posits the following elements or connections to leadership and professional development: Connection 1: family background and early education;

Connection 2: higher education experiences; Connection 3: career experiences;

Connection 4: transitional and growth experiences. The connections represent the nexus

that link the developmental process from early childhood experiences through career

opportunities. (p. 72)

McNeely-Cobham and Patton (2015) stated, "Overcoming adversity most often required

participants to resist messages from various institutional groups (i.e., faculty, staff, and students,

etc.) that attempted to demean their race, gender, or both" (p. 11). This further provides the

importance of people's credo and their background, values, and beliefs being a strong force

against adversity.

The resiliency of women was characterized in an article by Christman and McClellan

(2008) as the impetus for leading to their transformation and leadership style. The multitude of

experiences and adversity that comes with being an African American senior leader often

presents a conflict of values and a silencing of one voice (Davis, 2016; Howard-Hamilton &

Patitu, 2012; McNeely-Cobham & Patton, 2015; West, 2015). Pressing forward and finding safe

spaces to address the negative experiences of African American SSAOs is crucial to their ability

to continue their work and for well-being this is, as described earlier, the resilience process.

Howard-Hamilton and Patitu (2012) described a reframing technique for African American

women who encouraged them to have the ability to reframe negative situations into positive ones

to aid in their resiliency and success. The reframing process is only possible when women do not

focus on or allow their deficiencies to overshadow their skills and capabilities. The goal is to

persist, to use the innate resilience wave to continue on, knowing that the African American

women in senior leadership positions are there to show they have the strength, knowledge, and

right to be there, whether that is for the president of the university or the new professional

working in residence life. "Persistence is a fundamental requirement for this journey. Black women's persistence has been fostered by the strong belief that to be Black and female is valuable and worthy of respect" (Collins, 2002, p. 132). The powerful recognition of resiliency is that it is not a superpower that is turned on 24 hours a day. Masten and Powell (2003) stated, "One would not expect a resilient person, however defined at one point in time, to be doing well every minute of the day, under all imaginable circumstances, or in perpetuity" (p. 4). Resiliency can present itself through qualities and skills maintained and exhibited during situations of adversity. Resiliency is not grown or maintained in a bubble. Using networks, mentors, and friends helps strengthen one's resolve through affirmation (Hinton, 2001).

Isolation, Peer Mentoring, and Pipeline & Sponsors

Positional Isolation

Positional isolation is a concern for many SSAOs, their senior level position within a university has strategically placed them in isolation. Kuk and Banning's (2016) research on student affairs leadership revealed that many SSAOs do not have friends/peers within their divisional areas, lack friends due their hectic work schedule, and do not have friendships due to their small communities within and outside the institution. There is an expectation of engagement regarding the role of student affairs, but that is different than having true friendships, peers, and confidants (Kuk & Banning, 2012; West, 2015). A participant in the Kuk and Banning (2016) study stated, "There is only one vice president of student affairs on campus" (p. 73). That statement implies that there is only one person on campus that comprehends the level of experiences, challenges, and opportunities that an SSAO can face, and it is the SSAO herself. The study recognized there were variable differences between female and male SSAOs, minoritized and White, the length of their tenure at an institution, the size and location of the

institution, and the size of the staff that all affected their engagement in social activities (Kuk &

Banning, 2016).

Focusing on the positional isolation for African American women SSAOs there are

additional factors to be included: the only woman within leadership team, the only African

American within the leadership team, their behavior, their physical presentation, experiences

with harassment, overt racism or sexism, and microaggressions compared to the majority

leadership of White men (Collins, 2002; Howard-Hamilton & Patitu, 2012; Kuk & Banning,

2016). The experiences of isolation for African American female SSAOs can be detrimental to

their self-identity and their outlook on student affairs and or higher education. The survival of

African American female senior leaders on a campus can be cut short without a system or

network of support. Hinton and Patitu (2003) provided context on how women can survive:

"Survival for Black women is contingent on their ability to find a place to describe their

experiences among persons like themselves" (p. 25).

Collins (2002) described a group of African American women as sisters that support,

affirm, and understand the dynamic of being an African American woman and the necessity of

such groups where each person can be "safe" to reveal their experiences. Collins (2002) stated,

"This process of trusting one another can seem dangerous cause only Black women know what it

means to be Black women" (p. 114). Administrators have come up with creative ways to create

"sister networks." This includes virtual means, including Black Student Affairs Professionals

(Facebook) or websites like CiteASister and email listservs specifically for African American

Vice Presidents for Student Affairs.

Mentoring

The connections made with other African American administrators proved vital to one's

well-being (Collins, 2002; Hinton, 2012; Jones & Dufor, 2012). The traditional approach to

mentoring or professional networking has typically happened for incoming professionals and

graduate students. Senior-level administrators are incorporating peer mentoring into their

professional connections. An administrator is more inclined to have more peers than mentors.

Peer mentoring is believed to have many of the same effects as a hierarchical mentor model

(Kram & Isabella, 1985). This model of mentorship is described as relationship that allows for

easy communication, mutual support, and collaboration (Holobeche, 1996; Kram & Isabella,

1985). A common foundation or entry point may serve as the basis for the formation of peer

mentoring opportunities. Common points of connection can be but are not limited to holding the

vice president for student affairs designation, having the same gender or race, being in the same

conference (i.e., Big 10), or working at similar institutions.

Peer mentoring has a variety of characteristics; one study revealed a continuum of peer

relations: information peer, collegial peer, and special peer (Kram & Isabella, 1985). The

relationship characterized as *information peer* is simply described as sharing information

amongst peers; *collegial peer* is described as exchanging feedback on one's career, strategizing

upward mobility, and having a genuine friendship; and *special peer* is described as a friendship

where confirmation support and integral feedback takes place. The continuum concept of peer

relationships provides a foundation for the interaction among African American female SSAOs.

A historical hierarchical mentoring approach may be limited as university presidents are small in

percentage compared to the number of vice presidents, dean, and administrators. African

American female SSAOs may connect as peer mentors on many levels- location, institutional

conference, gender, race, career responsibilities, and family life. The three stages along the

continuum may operate differently depending on the career stages of the people involved,

particularly early in one's career versus the late stages of one's career. Peer mentoring provides

many of the same benefits as mentoring, including upward career mobility coaching, political

acumen, and social and interpersonal behaviors (Kram & Isabella, 1985). Mentoring and peer

mentoring differ in terms of mentoring a single pathway versus peer mentoring privileging an

exchange between the peers. (Holobeche, 1996; Kram & Isabella, 1985). The challenges

expressed with peer mentoring are rooted in competition for the same position, notoriety, or if

the peer relationship is forced through a systematic institutional program (Kram & Isabella,

1985). The reality of peer mentoring relationships is that they are happening regularly and are

providing a space for African American women to communicate, share experiences, be each

other's cheerleaders, and confirm the need to support other African American administrators

(Collins, 2002).

Pipeline & Sponsorship

The path to senior leadership positions is hardly attained without mentors and colleagues

advocating on one's behalf, which is especially true for African American women (Hinton &

Patitu, 2003; Howard-Hamilton & Patitu, 2012). The pipeline essentially becomes a network of

people that can validate your work, advocate for opportunities, and provide you feedback to be

successful. It starts by encouraging undergraduates to obtain master's degrees, and graduate

students to obtain doctoral degrees. The pipeline continues through meeting and working with

those that are in senior leadership positions, those that can provide insight on institutional

knowledge and political potholes. What the previous travelers of the pipeline possess is lived

experiences, and this for African American senior leaders is essential (Collins, 2002). Collins

(2002) stated,

African American women need wisdom to know how to deal with the "educated fools"

who would "take a shot gun to a roach." As members of a subordinate group, Black

women cannot afford to be fools of any type, for our objectification as the other denies us

the protections that White skin, maleness, and wealth confer. This distinction between

knowledge and wisdom, and the use of experience as the cutting edge dividing them, has

been the key to Black women's survival. (p. 275)

Sharing the experiences good and bad aid in the successful navigation for those in the

pipeline, the university culture, from start to finish. The relational nature of student affairs lends

itself to the relationships formed to increase the pipeline of African American female student

affairs administrators (Flowers, 2003).

Often those decision makers are called sponsors. Sponsors are the people that can make

decisions and speak on your professional work (Hewlett, 2013). Hewlett (2013) described a

sponsor as a person that believes in your value and your potential and is prepared to link

reputations and go out on a limb on your behalf; has a voice at the decision-making tables and is

willing to be your champion, convincing others that you deserve a pay raise or promotion; and is

willing to give you air cover so that you can take risks. No one can accomplish great things in

this world if they do not have a senior leader in their corner making it safe to fail (p. 12). Many

people have mentors and not sponsors. They have people that can help them navigate the

troubled territory but not people that can elevate them to new arenas. In a study on leadership

development of African American women in higher education, Davis and Maldonado (2015),

stated, "Participants acknowledged that sponsors significantly contributed to their career

ascension to leadership" (p. 58). The participants of the study also pointed out that in many cases

their sponsors happened to be White men, as those were/are the people in power (Davis &

Maldonado, 2015). White men are more likely to have sponsors than minoritized persons, as

"those in power tend to invest in other members of their tribe because they're the ones they trust most readily" (Hewlett, 2013, p. 24).

Gravitas: Professional Presence

Gravitas is defined as, "high seriousness (as in a person's bearing or in the treatment of a subject" (Merriam Webster, 2019). The definition of gravitas in relation to this study is to include female African American SSAOs and their maturity, presence, appearance, self-esteem, and awareness of self and others. High-profile examples of those characterized as having gravitas include Jackie Onassis Kennedy, Michelle Obama, and Oprah Winfrey; others include Malala Yousafzai and Venus and Serena Williams. Dutch Baughman, an executive director of the Division IA athletic directors association, said the following to aspiring athletic directors:

When executives and administrators rise to leadership on campus, it's only partly through their technical skills. Many began their careers with excellence in academics or athletics, adding expertise in management and budget along the way. But rising stars also bring less tangible quality: executive presence. They inspire trust and confidence from the moment they enter the room. (Cook, 2012, p. 25)

Collins (2002), stated, "Race, sexuality, and gender converge on this issue of evaluating beauty" (p.98). Women, especially Black women, must have a professional presence in order to be successful. Appearance including skin tone, dress, shoes, makeup, hair, as well as jewelry are subjective to the individual countering the standards of beauty put in place by White men, Black men, and White women (Collins, 2002).

African American women's hair is of major importance, especially in the African American community. It is paramount that the style of one's hair is as pristine as one's attire. Hair in the African American community has been used as a source of pride, political statements,

cultural identification, creativity, community, growth, division, self–awareness, and actualization (Caldwell, 1991; Collins, 2002; Weitz, 2001). Styling one's hair as natural, relaxed, straightened, dyed, or with weave has additional connotations and assumptions (Weitz, 2001). An African American woman with an afro in a professional setting is looked at differently than a woman with straight hair. The most iconic representation of female activism, protest, confrontation, and Black pride, is the picture of Angela Davis with a large afro and her fist raised in the air. Could that same picture be seen as a leader of a student affairs division? Her appearance is the first indication of what type of leader she is, how she will respond to others, and what her values are at the institution (Caldwell, 1991). Caldwell (1991) contended the visibility of one's profession and the contact with the public is most likely to bring attention to one's physical characteristics. Yoder-Wise and Benton (2017) reviewed appearance as an aspect of executive presence and believed that "if our appearance is too discordant with an organization's culture, we are not likely to be seen as having presence and thus not seen as a good fit" (p. 174). The effect of appearance is not one that will ever be spoken aloud, except in privileged mentoring spaces. Hair is personal; it is a reflection of who we are to the outer world, and it says so much about a person. One author explored the sociology of hair, exclaiming the relationship both internal and external:

> Hair is perhaps our most powerful symbol of individual and group identity – powerful first because it is physical and therefore extremely personal, and second because, although personal, it is also public rather than private. Furthermore, hair symbolism is usually voluntary rather than imposed or "given." Finally hair is malleable in various ways, and therefore singularly apt to symbolize both differentiations between, and changes in, individual and group identities. (Synnott, 1987, p. 381)

The concentration on hair in this section is to acknowledge the direct bias and discrimination that can affect a Black woman based on her hair styling choices regardless of her knowledge, experience, confidence, and education (Weitz, 2001). It is not just how she looks but also how she acts within the higher education spaces that affect who she is and how she leads.

Code-switching is a term used to describe how a person weaves through different languages or dialects. To provide context and relevance to this term, the definition will also encompass how a person must present themselves in order to be heard or accepted within the environment. African American elders may have referred to this term as "acting White." This would encompass language, dress, mannerisms, and public persona. A researcher on collective identity and acting White, John Ogbu (2004) gave insight on Black Americans experiences in contemporary United States. Ogbu provided the notion of collective identity, understanding that based on how people see themselves as belonging to a group with which they identify and have many of the same experiences, this group of people belong to would possess a collective identity. This concept of collective identity also referenced status problems. Status problems are defined as "External forces that mark a group of people as a distinct segment from the rest of the population" (Ogbu, 2004, p. 4). Ogbu continued to say,

> White Americans created Black Americans as a separate and an enduring segment of the United States society through enslavement. Status problems are collective problems which members of the subordinate group find difficult if not impossible to solve within the existing system of majority–minority relations. (Ogbu, 2004, p. 4)

Providing this contextual understanding allows us to discuss how African Americans "cope with" or navigate the systematic status problems that impact them daily. The author posited many coping mechanisms, but for the connection to code-switching, the primary focus

will be on "*accommodation without assimilation*. This is defined as *adopting* White cultural and language frames of reference where they have to in order to succeed in school or in other White controlled institutions that are evaluated by White criteria. They do not, however, give up their Black identity or cultural and language frames of reference. Ogbu (as cited in Wiederman 1985, p. 222) described this as having a "seventh sense," which is being able to recognize the invisible barriers and institute ways to cope with being Black in America.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks for this study are the N.O.B.L.E (Hinton, 2001) and Black feminist thought (Collins, 2002). Understanding the experiences of African American women can only be fully examined through a critical or cultural lens, specifically in terms of their race, gender, and social class (Byrd & Chlup, 2012). Utilizing the theoretical frameworks of N.O.B.L.E and Black feminist thought provided the "framework that is appropriate for explaining how African American Women learn from their experiences with the intersectionality in predominantly White environments" (Byrd & Chlup, 2012, p. 41). N.O.B.L.E is the recognition of four themes related to leadership and professional development, "family background and early education, higher education experiences, career experiences, and growth experiences" (Hinton, 2012, p. 74). N.O.B.L.E was developed from its creator and relentless seeking to understand how African Americans administrators' experiences informed their leadership and professional presence (Hinton, 2001). Black feminist thought is a critical social theory, used to provide a standpoint on the oppressive experiences experienced by African American women in the United States. Collins (2002) did not explicitly define Black feminist thought but provided six features,

Black Feminist Thought cannot be static, it is connected in a greater sense to all

injustices, knowledge shared with intellectuals, a connected experience of African

American women in the U.S as a group, as well as the tension between experiences of

African American women, and the relationship of Black Feminist thought linking

oppression and activism. (p. 22)

The foundation of this research is rooted in Collins' (2002) Black feminist thought and

critical race theory. The stated theoretical frameworks build on each other by understanding

African American women and their experiences.

Nexus of Black Leadership Efficacy

The N.O.B.L.E. model, developed by Hinton (2012) provides four distinct themes.

Hinton revealed the themes as "marginalization, support/network, lack of support, survival and

coping strategies, and transition and growth" (p. 74).

Focusing on family background and early education, the first connection gives insight to the

upbringing and familial values of an individual. Hinton provided that early leadership

experiences can happen through community involvement, religious communities, and parental

influence. The second connection focuses on the experiences at colleges and universities. Hinton

(2001) revealed that women that attend institutions of higher education as well as engage in co-

curricular opportunities show leadership ability and skills. The third connection of the N.O.B.L.E

model is career experiences. This connection recalls and expands on the previous two

connections as foundation. Throughout Hinton's study on women leaders, the participants

recalled their experiences with supervisors, through political agendas within their areas, and how

they were able to handle the situations. This third connection on career is not described as

experiences that are built on one another or that are sequential. The connection is described as

opportunities to learn, grow, share, and persist. The fourth connection of the N.O.B.L.E theory expands on transitional and growth experiences. This connection is defined as an understanding of self, owning who they are and what they bring to the table (Hinton, 2001). This connection theme reveals confidence, strategy, and resilience. The N.O.B.L.E model gives foundation to focusing on the experiences of African American women by taking into consideration their background, family, experiences in college, career, and self-reflection and growth as a leader. Jeanne Noble, for whom the model is named spent her career on the study of African American women. This posits the model to directly reflect the participants sought out in this study.

Black Feminist Thought

For the purpose of this study, Black feminist thought was significant in accurately reflecting the narratives of African American Women within this study. Black feminist thought focused on "fostering both Black Women's Empowerment and conditions of social justice" (Collins, 2002, p. xii). Collins's work was built on critical social theory that examines the population of Black Women to understand the oppressive practices, societal pressures, and institutional discrimination that this population faces. Furthermore, the theorist recognized that every Black woman does not have a single identity, but multiple identities (Collins, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Lorde, 1984).

The collective acknowledgement of the lived experiences of Black women is the essence of Black feminist thought. Black women informed the understanding of what is Black womanhood (Collins, 2002). Black womanhood is the collective self-identities of Black women to counter directly the oppressive and discriminatory narratives in society (Collins, 2002). The identities of the Black mother, the Black woman in church with her crown (hat), the Black woman working, the Black woman as a politician or a professor, the Black woman that has

graduated from undergraduate and graduate school, the Black woman that leads her community, and the Black woman who leads in the military are not exclusive, but they are experiences used to battle the images of welfare mother, uneducated woman, over-sexualized being, and angry or with attitude (Collins, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Collins (2002) described the mere visible identity of being a Black Woman in the United States is what makes this population so vulnerable and open to the oppression placed on Black women as a whole. This, as Collins (2002) stated, places Black women in in a position to not be considered fully human (p. 110). Black women are then placed in a space that forces them to have to prove themselves in White spaces and to stay encouraged internally (Collins, 2002). Black feminist thought is recognized in the network of Black women that create spaces and opportunities to affirm that oppressive situations are real, to understand holistically the internal struggle of imposter syndrome, and to provide affirmation to women that experience many of the same things (Collins, 2002).

The theoretical framework of N.O.B.L.E and Black feminist thought provided the validation of Black woman's experience and the many additional identities she may hold (Collins, 2002; Hinton, 2001). Institutional racism and microaggressions plague African Americans at every age, socioeconomic status, gender, and background (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Hinton, 2001; Lorde, 1984; Solórzano et al., 2000).

Summary

This literature review examined the many facets of complex experiences of African American women in the United States. Opening with information on the history of African American women in college, experiences were shared regarding the hardships and determination of women graduating when many institutions did not allow them to attend. This chapter also

introduced literature of women and African American women who became the first and foundation of what is now called student affairs positions. Through the literature, the recruitment and retention experiences, along with the unspoken expectations of work– life balance, provided context to understanding the nuances of African American women in the field of higher education. Adding to the complexity of African American women in the field is the theory of weathering and the sojourner syndrome used to describe how oppression and discrimination can affect the well-being and health of African American women (Geronimus et al., 2006). The intersection of race and gender has played a large part in how women are treated and perceived while also furthering how they are able to build resilience. The literature also illustrated the lack of critical mass for African American women in higher education administration, the isolation for those that are on campuses and the mentoring that is needed for career advancement and personal growth. The final facet reviewed is the N.O.B.L.E and Black feminist thought, the theoretical frameworks used to encompass this work.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methodology was described as a "lens to explore a phenomenon" (Durdella, 2017, p. 90).

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of African American female vice

presidents for student affairs to understand better their challenges serving in the senior leader

role. Qualitative research was used to explore the experiences of African American female

SSAOs. "Qualitative research grew attention by and from anthropologists and sociologists and

their inquiry into people's lives and their understanding of the world" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016,

p. 15). Qualitative research is described as "understanding the meaning people have constructed;

that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world"

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 15). The four characteristics noted as the key concepts for

understanding this type of research are: "The focus is on the process, understanding, and

meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is

inductive; and the product is richly descriptive" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 15).

This qualitative study is centered on the premise of understanding a human experience in

higher education (Clandinin, 2006). Under the umbrella of qualitative research, narrative inquiry

serves as the "method and phenomena for the study" (Clandinin, 2006, p. 12) and will guide this

research. Qualitative research has philosophical perspectives that range from a positivist orientation, interpretive research, social constructivism, as well as to critical research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Critical research is "mediated by power relations that are historically and socially constructed and attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 17). The research into the experiences of a minoritized population such as African American women is critical research.

Qualitative Approach

The study of African American female SSAOs was completed using narrative inquiry. Machi and McEvoy (2016) stated, "All successful research begins with inquiry" (p. 7). This study utilized narrative inquiry which allowed for the exploration of relevant factors to the experiences of African American vice presidents for student affairs. The exploration of this population is "the experiences and narratives of person" as they focus on "one group of people on the basis that they all are individual African American female senior leaders in student affairs with different narratives that provide different meanings" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.17). "The main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways humans experience the world" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2).

Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) description of narrative inquiry provides an understanding of the relationship of narrative inquiry in education, especially its importance in understanding people's lived experience within an educational context. Using narrative inquiry requires the researcher to interact with participants through "observing, listening, and probing" (Durdella, 2017, p. 110). Prior to the start of narrative inquiry-based study, it is important for the researcher to comprehend the significance of the participant's voice. It is imperative they

develop the trust, have time, and have a safe space to tell their story, and in turn they can be

validated (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). This form of inquiry requires being in the same

environment with the participant and focusing on their life events, the space they were in at the

time of the event, and the interactions they had (Durdella, 2017). Within narrative inquiry there

are two types of analysis. The first type of analysis is to collect the stories, analyze them, and

establish themes that are collected across all stories. The second type of analysis is to collect the

data, analyze the data, and then form the data collected into one organized story. When utilizing

narrative inquiry, the research must take into account who is talking, the researcher or the

participant, and who is the intended audience, as well as balance the researcher's cultural lens

versus the participants story (Durdella, 2017).

This study falls under the case study approach. A case study is a methodological

approach that allows the ability to study complex phenomena within a specific context. The case

is the analysis of what is being studied, the case here is the experiences of African American

SSAOs. Yin (2017) provided three questions to help identify when to use a case study approach:

(a) The focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions; (b) you cannot

manipulate the behaviour of those involved in the study; (c) you want to cover

contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under

study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context. (p.

545)

There are three types of case studies, "explanatory, exploratory, and descriptive" (Baxter & Jack,

2008, p. 547). This case study approach is descriptive, which is defined as understanding the

phenomena and the context for which it occurred (Yin, 2017). The case study will also be

bounded. The context of a "bounded system" means the inquiry is identifiable by specific

characteristics in which there is a definite end (Ary et al., 2010). The act of binding or the

bounded system ensures the size and scope of the research does not get too large (Baxter & Jack,

2008; Yin, 2017). This particular study is bounded by the characteristics of location, race,

gender, job title and/or responsibilities, as well as type of institution. Clandinin (2006) referred to

a connection of the Deweyan theory of experience and narrative inquiry. The foundational

approach of the "experience" is it is not the concepts and opinions formed but how a person

engages personally and socially within the environment (Clandinin, 2006). The inquiry into the

experiences of African American female SSAOs reflects the connection of Deweyan theory and

narrative inquiry as it places the focus on the individual experience as well as the exploration on

the narrative as a result of that experience.

Research Questions

The following research questions frame this study:

1. What are the experiences of African American women in senior student affairs

   leadership positions at institutions of higher education?

2. What are the factors leading to the successful advancement of African American

   women in senior student affairs leadership positions?

Qualitative Analysis

Participant Selection

The characteristics of the participants included being African American, female, and

having obtained or working toward a doctorate degree (candidate status), and being currently

employed or retired as the senior student affairs administrator of an accredited not-for-profit

higher education institution. The sample size was seven African American women in vice

president or senior student affairs roles at small to large, public and private non-profit

institutions. The seven participants were obtained through informal networks of advisors, colleagues and other African American vice presidents. This process lead to a "snowball effect" after my first interview of one vice president, as she provided a referral for three other potential participants.

Recruitment

All participants were emailed individually to request their participation in the study. The email (Appendix B) outlined the problem statement, the objective, and the current statistical information on the number of African Americans in senior student affairs positions along with the approved IRB protocol. After the initial email was sent and the SSAO self-identified with the parameters we moved forward.

Once the criteria were affirmed and a meeting was scheduled, the following occurred:

1. The Informed Consent form (Appendix B) was signed at the in-person interviews. The form was sent to participants electronically (Appendix A) before the interview was conducted. During that time we discussed the interview process, explored the interview questions, and reviewed all protocol materials. Many participants signed and dated the form and returned it at the conclusion of the interview or by email.

2. All SSAOs were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time during the process by emailing me or telling me during the on-site visits.

3. Participants were informed that they could reach me via email or cell up to 30 days after their interview to withdraw consent and participation. Once consent was withdrawn, I would delete recordings and destroy transcripts from those participants. They were informed that once the findings of the study were submitted for publication, the ability to withdraw from the study would no longer be possible.

Data Collection

Data were obtained using the following methods: (a) semi-structured interviews, (b) document analysis, (c) observations, and (d) field notes. The interviews were conducted at a location selected by the participant and guided by the protocol designed to capture the experiences of the women through their own voice and lens. I was able to obtain job descriptions, organizational charts, and other documents that relate to the participant's work as an SSAO online or in person. I spent a minimum of 90 minutes with each participant. After each interview and observation, I made field notes of what I observed.

Interviews

Each participant was interviewed in person on their respective campus or in a location of their choosing. The interview was semi-structured with approximately 18 questions (Appendix C) and served as the foundation for the conversation. Semi-structured questions defined as "having no choices from which the respondent selects an answer. Rather, the question is phrased to allow for individual responses. It is an open-ended question but is fairly specific in its intent" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 206). The questions were evaluated beforehand for bias, clarity, and relevance. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. Field notes were taken and enhanced but more specifically provided context to the interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Field notes were described as

> what the researcher has seen or heard. They have two components: (1) the descriptive part, which includes a complete description of the setting, the people and their reactions and interpersonal relations, and accounts of the event (who, when, and what was done); and (2) the reflective part, which includes the observer's personal feelings or impressions about the events, comments on the research method, decisions and problems, records of

ethical issues, and speculations about data analysis. (Ary et al., 2010, p. 435)

All interviews were a minimum of one to two hour time slot to ensure minimal distraction and interruption as well as I established one to two hours after each interview for field notes (Ary et al., 2010).

Observation

The observer role is critical to understanding the various themes and cues expressed during the interview. As the observer I paid close attention to inflections in voice, facial expressions, inferences, as well as interactions between others and each participant. Those contextual cues helped me paint a broader picture and allowed me to ask additional questions or to expand on particular topics. This aided in my understanding of the experiences from the participant. The field notes for each participant helped provide context and add to the construction of themes.

Artifacts

Artifacts about the institution, the division, and the SSAO were collected prior to, during, or after the interview. Artifacts are described as "physical materials and objects found in the study setting" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 203). Promotional materials from offices, data from their website, and strategic plans were used to look at the culture of the institution, the mission, values, and what is portrayed versus reality. Additional artifacts collected included university promotional materials, organization charts, websites, social media, and any video materials.

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Data Analysis

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The collection of materials and interview transcriptions resulted in a large pool of data. A process was formed to analyze these data effectively. To begin the analysis process all data collected were organized, whether interview, artifact, or field notes, into themes. This

"qualitative analysis is a relatively systematic process of coding, categorizing, and interpreting data to provide explanations of a single phenomenon" (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010, p. 364). Predetermined themes were loosely based off the literature review. While interviewing more participants other themes emerged, and other sections were formed to combine the data under that theme. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated, "Qualitative research is not a linear, step by step process; data collection and analysis are simultaneous activities in qualitative research" (p. 191). Analysis of the information began as information was gathered; this included suspensions, questions, and hunches I had from one interview to another. As data collection continued, data were evaluated, compared, and coded. Data that were not further substantiated were not included. Data analysis is described as having "three stages, (1) organizing and familiarizing, (2) coding and reducing, and (3) interpreting and representing (Ary et al., 2010, p. 481). The method used to analyze data was to print, organize, and file by theme. Each participant was also coded by color, and themes were coded by color.

Triangulation, Member Checking, and Trustworthiness

I used multiple processes to ensure data accurately reflected the tone, temperament, and phenomenon of the women participants. Triangulation was used as a validation method to cross-reference the multiple data sources, information, and artifacts to ensure themes were consistent (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). To validate the data collected and themes assessed, participants were given time to review the information gleaned from their interview. Baxter and Jack (2008) referred to this as member checking. Member checking is "Where the researchers' interpretations of the data are shared with the participants, and the participant has the opportunity to discuss and clarify the interpretation and contribute new or additional perspectives on the issue under study" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 556).

Ary et al., (2010) described validity as a "more important and comprehensive characteristic than reliability" (p. 256). Allowing participants to review their transcripts validated the information from the individual perspective. Member checking and the use of peer de-briefers reflected whether the research findings were considered reliable and consistent (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2017).

The initial exploration into this topic was derived from my future career ambition of becoming a vice president for student affairs. I see the lack of recruitment and retention of African American female senior leaders at various institutions. My position as an African American woman in student affairs at a predominantly White institution created a bias and affirmed similar experiences. I am considered an insider as an African American woman in student affairs, but I was able to *bracket* my experiences to understand fully their narratives and experiences as senior leaders. At times I found myself nodding in affirmation or stating, "I totally understand your experiences". After each interview I self-reflected and was able to evaluate my influence and any instances where I might have guided the conversation, and there were none.

Table 1:

SSAOs *Name, Institution, and Demographics*

Pseudonym/Title	Institution Name	Institutional Type	Years at the Institution	Years in the field	Direct Report	Age	Gender Identity	Marital Status
Dr. Amber: Vice Chancellor Of Student Affairs	University of King	Multi-System School-Public	3 years	19	President	44	Cis-Woman	Married
Liz Long: Dean of Students	Paradise State College	Public-HBCU	3 years	18	Provost	44	Cis-Woman	Single
Dr. Hope Love : Dean of Students	Good Morning University	Private-HBCU	1 year	7	Provost	35	Cis-Woman	Single
Dr. Leslie Smith: Vice President for Student Affairs	Power Community College	Public	2 years	14	President	36	Cis-Woman	Single
Yvette Jones: Vice President For Student Affairs	Good Times State University	Public	20 years	16	President	51	Cis-Woman	Married
Dr. Leslie Stuart Vice President For Student Affairs	Thanksgiving University	Private	32 years	32	President	48	Cis-Woman	Married
Sheba Vice Provost and Dean of Students	Face Community College	Public	6 years	16	Provost	48	Cis-Woman	Single

Summary

A methodological approach provides a foundation and concept to examine the many experiences of African American female student affairs administrators at institutions of higher education. The study is qualitative and formed as a case study. The case study approach allowed for the ability to focus on the phenomenon and examine the experiences. The study focused on individuals that identify as senior student affairs administrators, who were led through a semi-structured interview. After the interviews were completed, the interviews were transcribed and analyzed. After analyzing the data, peers and member checking was utilized to make sure that I captured tone, expression, and the essence from the seven SSAOs.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS I

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of African American women who are senior student affairs administrators. Using the life story approach to data collection, this study examined their childhood, family, and professional experiences and their trajectory and retention in student affairs.

A qualitative research method was used to study the participants and their experiences. This method enabled me to gain understanding and perspective from each participant on their own lived experiences. The qualitative approach used for this study was narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry allowed for each participant to tell their story and for their voice to be heard. The theoretical frameworks of Black Feminist Thought and the Nexus of Black Leadership Efficacy (N.O.B.L.E) were employed to examine the experiences particularly of Black women. The study was guided by the following questions,

1. What are the experiences of African American women in senior student affairs leadership positions at institutions of higher education?

2. What are the factors leading to the successful advancement of African American women in senior student affairs leadership positions?

This chapter will explore the participants' individual narratives. This will provide context and insight into each individual and who they are within and outside of their roles as a senior student affairs officer.

Participant Stories

Dr. Amber Jones

Dr. Amber Jones is the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at the University of King, an R1 multisystem institution. I was excited and nervous to begin my interview with Dr. Amber Jones. She is known in the student affairs field for her leadership and engagement and eagerly accepted my request. The drive was quite dull with a mix of interstate and back highways, and upon entering the city it appeared run down and dreary. As I drove through the town, I noticed the hospital appeared to be old and dreary, there were lots of fast food places, and hardly any hotels or modern real estate. I was quite shocked as I was visiting a large R1 public institution and although it was not a large city and more of a college town, it left a lot to be desired. As I approached the institution it began to look a little more modern with high rise apartments and college themed advertising for local establishments. Although I had directions and two points of contact, I still got lost trying to find the right building: fortunately, this allowed me to take a driving tour of campus. I saw fraternity houses, little coffee shops, and lots of construction. I pulled into a parking lot to call one of the contacts and they were able to lead me to the right building. Upon arrival to the 6-car parking lot directly behind, I noticed that the building was fairly non-descript. No markers or signs were visible or distinct.

The Vice Chancellor actually met me at the back door and led me to her office. As we walked to her office, we passed what seemed like 30 plus cubicles many of which were empty.

Along the way I was introduced to many people from clerical, janitorial, and administrative

sectors any and every one we walked past. We arrived at a nicely designed welcome area for the

vice chancellor, equipped with signage backed by lights, a seating area, and reception desk,

notably, this was the most modern and well-designed area on the floor. The entrance into the

welcome area was an oddly heavy metal door with a small window, as if it was for a detention

center or mechanical facility rather than a senior student affairs officer. Amber walked me into

her office, which was mostly boxes of large framed pictures up against the wall, and it appeared

as if she were moving in or moving out. The framed prints on the floor were a collection of

abstract art in various pastel colors; they did not correlate with either the institution or Amber as

she exclaimed they were prints on the wall when she moved in and definitely not hers.

We sat at a round table in her office, and directly behind me she displayed pictures of

family, friends, and colleagues on a bookshelf which was the extent of her decor. As we began to

talk it was noted she would have to move offices again, so there was no reason to decorate or get

comfortable even though she had been in that space over a year and the institution for three

years. This was not my first time meeting Amber, so we were able to catch up on various life

occurrences and work pleasantries.

Childhood. Amber was born in a small Ohio town in 1974. She is the youngest child and

the only girl. Her parents, Harold and Ele, worked hard to provide a middle-class life for their

children, one that was deeply rooted in education. Her great grandparents migrated from the

South via train and settled in the North. While her great grandfather worked on the train her great

grandmother was in charge of educating the children of other railroad families as well as her

own. Amber's parents both have high school diplomas and understood that in order for their

children to go far, education had to be at the forefront. Amber spent much of her childhood with

her parents and grandparents running errands and visiting family and friends. She spent every summer with her grandmother who was diligent in teaching math, writing, reading, and playing memory games. She distinctly remembered the summer schedule.

> My grandmother had me on a schedule. We would get up early in the morning, we would get up at 6:00 in the morning. I would eat breakfast. We would do some straightening up, cleaning, and make sure the bed was together, and get dressed. Then, I actually had a math time, and then I had to go outside to play. Then I came back in and we'd do cursive writing; we'd play memory games. We did it all. I had to read. I was on an intense schedule, like I was at school. I was four, and five years old. I remember these flashcards constantly, and taking a nap, even though I tried to watch the soap opera. She was watching a soap, so I would try to watch it too. I had nap time. It was this intense schedule, learning all these math skills, not being able to count on my fingers. That contributes to who you are.

Amber reflected on experience that could have altered her trajectory in education. She stated that her kindergarten teachers believed she was "not prepared" and would need to attend a "slower learning class." Her parents and grandparents advocated on her behalf, insisting that she was just quiet and reflective and must be placed with the appropriate class. Amber stated she was not the only one that her parents advocated for, they fostered over 250 kids, and were extremely active in church and their community. Fighting back the stereotypes for young black youth began as an inherited trait, Amber jokingly proclaimed. She stated faith, family, service, and leadership were all instilled in her from an early age and she carries these things within her today.

Amber attended a midsized public institution in Ohio receiving scholarships to cover tuition, and she commuted from home to help cut costs for her family. She originally wanted to

teach math in high school but after her student teaching assignment she changed her major to psychology. She stated she saw many children dealing with family stress, financial concerns, and mental issues and felt counseling would be a better fit. After graduation Amber went on to graduate school at Ohio University and continued studying counseling and psychology. She received a graduate assistantship working in leadership and development as part of the Dean of Students' office. There she was introduced to the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators and to the field of student affairs. She kept her major as there would be "more career options," but she was captivated by what student affairs had to offer.

Personal Life. Amber is the youngest of three, with two older brothers, and she takes her role as aunt seriously. She helped provide for them in some capacity for over 15 years. Until recently Amber's parents have cared for two of their grandchildren. Her parents have spent most of their adult lives helping to raise foster kids, grandkids, and take care of their ailing parents. Amber has been married for seven years and has a daughter, although considered to be at advanced maternal age, she and her husband would like at least one more child or a set of twins. Amber has a full house coupled with lots of familial responsibility, in addition to her husband and child, her parents live there to help take care of the baby, her brother and a nephew stay there as well. Outside the home Amber serves as a Girl Scout troop leader, sits on the board for two non-profits, is active in NASPA, and is heavily active in her church.

Career Experiences. After earning her doctorate degree, Amber worked at a small public institution; she also stepped outside of higher education and worked for a high school system providing counseling and intervention. Once she returned back to higher education she worked as an assistant dean, associate dean and then moved to the role of Dean of Students. This was the beginning of her fairly quick transition to the SSAO roles. In the Dean role she was able

to focus on students by attending their events, coordinating group meals, and meeting with them

one on one. She soon became a Vice President for Student Affairs at a R1 institution and her

focus shifted. She was more consumed with budgets and personnel. Amber stated,

> each school has been different in what their dean role, and their vice president, vice
>
> chancellor role ... I would say the most difference is you are greatly more responsible for
>
> the funding and fundraising aspects at this level, and meeting those financial goals, and
>
> contributing to student success. Being able to have those conversations with the dean,
>
> with the senate about what are you doing to help students succeed in the classroom as
>
> well.

In her current role as a Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Amber is still consumed with

budgets and personnel concerns, in addition to student protest and conflict, and the rising number

of students with mental health concerns. Amber intentionally attends student events and

activities to create a presence with students and staff. And, in her words, her future is still

growing. She is researching the possibilities of larger institutions to expand her reach as a Vice

Chancellor and would like to one day become president of a university. In order to do that she

understands the opportunities within her portfolio especially within academic affairs to help that

dream become a reality.

Liz Long

I was extremely excited to interview Liz because her campus was different than those I

attended or was familiar with. To reach the campus I went through one large city, then through a

small town where I eventually found the campus flanked by fields and another university. My

first thought was that the campus was much smaller than I expected, but, excitingly, it had many

references to Black history and culture. The sun was shining, and the campus was vibrant with

students out and about. I met Liz in the parking lot outside the administration building. We

chatted as if we were old friends, she welcomed me to campus, pointed to a few notable

buildings, including a new residence hall, the new Greek plots on campus, and the student center.

Since it was close to noon she insisted we go off campus and grab a bite to eat. This gave her the

opportunity to leave campus and provided us some privacy.

Liz holds the title of Dean of Students at Paradise State College, an HBCU started in

1847. Liz was extremely open about the various aspects of her life, including her love life,

health, mental well-being, substance abuse, and recovery. She stated she wanted me to know it

all and hopefully she was not the only one. Liz revealed that she had two residences and often

commuted almost an hour one way to get to her institution. This commute allowed her to keep

her home she shared with her mother that had passed.

Childhood. Liz grew up with a mother that wanted to provide her with various

experiences and make sure she was "engaged and involved" in their community. Liz's mother

created a summer program that did just that. The summer program operated out of a

predominantly White Presbyterian church and had a mission to help underserved children from

around the city. Most of the summer program participants were Black. Ms. Long stated, "So, we

still had reading and we still had creative play and all that kind of stuff. But we had organized

play, but it still was fun." Liz reminisced on how her mother had a diverse group of friends that

helped to expose her to many different cultures; she was also taken to various festivals to

immerse her in cultures other than her own. Liz was the first African American to attend her

college preparatory high school in 1987. She stated by attending that school she began feeling

pressured because of race, the disparity in her family income versus everyone else's, and the

sheer distinction of access. She remembers that one of her classmates was the granddaughter of

Dave Thomas who founded Wendy's restaurant. Their income levels, and access to income were extremely different. While in high school Liz participated in a program that allowed her to work at Bank One, and credits that experience with understanding how to operate within a corporate world.

Ms. Long started her undergraduate career at a small liberal arts school in the Midwest majoring in Economics Management and Black World Studies. Her ambition was to become a sports attorney with hopes of working with the NBA. After graduation Liz believed, "Nothing was going to stray me from my path, except for the LSAT, which, I took, and it did not go well. So then I stopped. I opted to wait a year to go to law school." Liz did not start law school but instead started her professional career in 1995 as a bank representative and got promoted a year later as an office manager, and as she described, "I absolutely hated it. Literally hated every aspect of it. People cussed me out every single day." In 1998, while speaking with a friend and former resident director at her undergraduate college, she was encouraged to apply for a Director of Student Activities position. She was soon hired and that was the beginning of her student affairs career.

Personal Life. Ms. Long lost her mother, grandmother, and aunts within a matter of two years. She had recently purchased a home that she and her mother shared until her passing. She stated she is not ready to let the house or any of the items inside of it go. Liz loved to go thrift shopping especially to find deals with her mom, but after she passed the love for this hobby did, too. Family is very important to her and is why she continued to keep her family together. Liz took in her nephew that was released from jail for burglary. After almost a year she came home to "SWAT at my house looking for him for a homicide. He was sentenced to 24 to life last spring."

When asked further about her personal life, she exclaimed she did not have one but felt the higher the position held the more difficult it is to date. Liz proclaimed,

Your time is limited, so you have to be with somebody who's understanding that your job is encompassing a lot of things. So, you may . . . and especially in my position, I'm going to get a call at 3:00 in the morning. That's just it. It's going to happen. I'm going to get a call while we're out to dinner, and we may have to leave. That's just going to happen.

She also reported Black men do not want to date women that make more than them, whether it is a significant amount or not. She exclaimed that is one of the reasons her last relationship did not work out. Liz believes that there is a perception especially in higher education that if a person is not married and does not have kids that they have the availability to be at work more often and for longer hours than others. To combat that perception Ms. Long has a male best friend that doubles as her corporate husband. This is someone that she described as polished, who can navigate networking events, and dissipate the questions of marriage and dating.

Career Experiences. Liz began her role as the inaugural Director of Student Activities at a small catholic school with little experience. Liz exclaimed she did not have any experience except being overly involved during her undergraduate days. Nonetheless, Ms. Long found that working with students, student organizations, and creating "traditions" was an absolutely amazing experience. She was introduced and worked with offices such as admissions, financial aid, and career services. "This was eye opening. She stated, I learned about FTE, and how dining services worked, and retention, campus administration, it was exciting." This prompted her to want to get her degree in student affairs. She left her job as Director after four years and began pursuing her master's degree. Liz proclaimed, "I knew that I was afforded the opportunity at that institution, but I knew that wasn't the norm. And if I wanted to continue in the field, I was going

to have to get a master's degree." She received a graduate assistantship from Wright State University where she worked as a residence hall director within an honors hall which exposed her to the housing side of student affairs. During her graduate program Liz exclaimed she was part of a cohort, and she became good friends with three women within the cohort. One of the women, Christina, eventually moved in with her in the residence hall apartment. She and Christina became extremely close almost like sisters.

After graduating, Liz went to work within Residence Life at the University of Dayton, she was there two years until she received a devastating call. While there she experienced the death of her best friend Christina. Christina died of complications of Lupus, while working in her first higher education professional position at Neumann University. Liz felt compelled to "let her Legacy to continue at Neumann." Liz left her institution and stepped into Christina's role to finish out the school year. To this day she communicates with Christina's parents and the other women they befriended in graduate school.   Liz began her role as the Director of Multicultural Affairs at a small school in Delaware were she stayed for 10 years before entering into her SSAO role. Each campus was different from her current institution, an HBCU in the Midwest.

Ms. Long was offered the opportunity to become the Dean of Students at a historically Black college. In this role she serves as an SSAO in charge of student activities, residential life, and student engagements, counseling services, interfaith programs, disability resources, Greek Life, student health and student conduct including Title IX. Liz is working diligently to improve staff and student retention. When asked about how she is perceived by other administrators or her peers, she stated,

> I'm a hard worker. So, if they call at 8:00 at night, I'm going to answer the phone. Even
>
> though my secretary's not there, I'm there. I'll answer the phone. I think they can respect

that.

Outside of the office Liz sits on a community board as a political appointee and is very involved in her community. At home she is joined by a loving cat and dog.

Hope Love

I met Hope off campus at a local Starbucks over a weekend. It was about 15 minutes from her institution located in a rural Midwest town. This was the smallest institution I visited through this study. With fewer than six buildings on campus, I was able to navigate it alone by driving around. The green space around campus was noticeably well kept and beautiful, but the buildings I was able to access were worn and dated. Although there were not many students, I received a "nod" as a sign of hello from a few. My meeting with Hope at the Starbucks was drastically different from the campus she represented, as we were the only Black people in the space. A little under the weather Hope was able to engage and provide her perspective with no hesitation.

Childhood and Background. Hope was born in Detroit, Michigan and grew up with her sister and mom by her side. Her face lit up and she was quite surprised when I started the interview asking about her childhood, "That's a great question, I wasn't ready for that one," she exclaimed. Hope enthusiastically described her mother Lillie as being "magical," and her biggest supporter. As she shared thoughts of her mother it was in the context of her drive, perseverance, and her ability to do whatever it took to care for her family. Hope recalled that Lillie was the first in the family to graduate college, and even now there are still not many family members to do so. She remembered that their little family temporarily received state assistance to help navigate life. But her most distinct memory of her mother was the fact she never compromised on providing support and love for her friends and family. Hope was constantly

surrounded by family, friends, and her church; this community empowered and affirmed Hope. She stated that, "My mother is a single parent, but then everybody at the church is like a family member, you've always got an extra cousin."

Hope remembered being very good in math class and was encouraged by teachers to take two classes; she did well and exceeded expectations in both. The affirmation she received from teachers helped to instill confidence and recognition of her academic achievement. Hope was also surrounded by an extended "church" family. The church family environment continued to validate and affirm Dr. Love in her youth. She was encouraged to participate, to lead, and to teach. She would have certain interests such as technology or math, and then mentors such as the pastor and others figured out a way to help cultivate those interests. The support and affirmation she received was a catalyst to form her on leadership skills.

During her fall semester in college Hope lost her mother Lillie. This tragic incident introduced her to people outside of her family and church circles that were there for her in a time of need. She experienced emotional, physical, and financial support that was like nothing she had ever experienced before, especially from two women at the university.

I had two women who never took their hands off of me. And I'm talking about the one lady, I met this woman seven months before my mom passed away. And literally, they saw me literally going through it. And she was my supervisor. My mom passed away, I didn't even know how they knew. But my mom passes away, she's there (at the funeral).

The other woman was a prominent faculty member she had worked on a committee with and she was surprised that she was at the funeral. "They came to the hood to come to MY mom's funeral."

Hope shared the love and admiration she had with the faculty member. The woman told

Hope, "I will always be your safe space". With a smile on her face Hope exclaimed, "And she was my safe space until the day she passed away." This act of support and selflessness introduced her to the world of student affairs.

Personal Life. After experiencing the death of her mother, Hope immersed herself in her family, in her sorority, and in activities with friends. She decided not to take their presence and support for granted. She often travels to be with family, to celebrate life events like marriage and birthdays, as well as to just to be in their presence. She likes to live where she at least has quick access to family as family is very important to her.

Hope is currently single with no children, but, she has many nieces, nephews, and godchildren to spoil. When describing her dating life, she described the difficulties of dating near where she works. She stated when you live in a college town you have to go to the next town to even begin to date. This is so her peers, supervisors, or others within the college administration are not in her personal business and there is less of a chance of accidently dating a student. Dating has been a challenge, from people understanding what she does as a profession, the commitment it takes to successfully do the job, the amount of money she makes and perceived power dynamics, and the color of her skin. Hope stated, "I don't think it has anything to do with my career, I believe it has all to do with being a Black woman in America at this point."

Outside of work and dating, Hope keeps herself busy by being involved. She is a member of multiple national organizations; she serves the community through various service projects, and is an active member of her church.

Career Experiences. The support she received from her supervisor in college and the prominent faculty member after the passing of her mother caused Hope to be intrigued by the profession of student affairs.

I didn't really know there was this title of Student Affairs, but I knew now that they were

doing the work that we all say that we want to do, they was doing it for me. And every

time I need something, they was there. Always there.

Hope also became close with the Greek Life advisor at her undergraduate institution and one day

had this conversation, "I asked my Greek Life advisor. I was like, "What do you do?" I said,

"What is this?" And my Greek/Life advisor responded like, "Yes, the profession is this, it's that."

And I was like, "Well, I want your job." Hope went on to graduate undergrad and gained an

assistantship in housing while pursuing her degree in student affairs in Michigan.

After graduating from graduate school, Hope worked at several institutions including

small public, large public, private, HBCU's, and Minority Serving Institutions. Her career

focused primarily in residence life, and then she moved to the Dean of Students office. In this

role Hope oversees residential life, student engagement, student conduct, retention, fundraising,

and teaching class. She has ascended to the SSAO role quickly in her career but has often faced

resistance because of her age and gender.

Dr. Leslie Smith

I drove a few hours to meet with Leslie. I previously met her when I attended a

presentation at a NASPA regional conference in Wisconsin. As each panelist in the presentation

introduced themselves she identified herself as an Associate Vice Chancellor for her institution.

After the presentation I introduced myself and my proposed dissertation topic. She gave me her

card and roughly six months later I headed to her campus. There were many things I was excited

for with this interview including the type of institution she worked at, the politics she

encountered, and her relatively quick ascension to an SSAO post. As I arrived at her institution,

it was pouring rain, and due to it being in a metropolitan area parking was scarce. I found street

parking and walked into her building and was promptly greeted by a university guard and welcome attendant. When I asked for her office neither the security guard nor the welcome attendant had any idea who I was there to meet. I walked up and down the hall of the non-descript building for a few minutes before walking into a writing center office. The tile on the floor and walls and there was no personality, no décor and nothing connecting people or students to the space and reminded me of high school. Fortunately, I was able to connect with her administrative staff and we met in the middle of the hallway after she opened a door only accessible by card access. I was greeted by Leslie and she ushered me in her office.

Her office was filled with papers, poster boards, binders, and boxes. There was little personality and no personal pictures were showcased in her office. We sat a small circle table and began the interview.

Childhood. Born in Springfield, Ohio, and growing up with her sister and mother, Leslie said she "never felt unloved or that she didn't have a full family." Her mother divorced when Leslie was five but remarried five years after the divorce to an alcoholic and abusive man. Coming from this environment, she stated "I think it more so served as a driver for my success." Leslie shared, "I think that was a motivation for me to push forward, to not allow anything or anyone to tell me that I can't do, can't be. I'm not going to use it as an excuse. I'm not going to be a statistic."

Leslie reflected on an experience in middle school where she won an award. There was no application, no nomination, just one student picked at the end of the school year. The award was named in reference to the "confederation," but at the time she stated she did not understand this. What she remembered was,

One of my friend's mom stood up and clapped. She came up to me. She was like, "I was

so happy to see that you as an African American woman won this award." I didn't know

the meaning of the award.

What she did recognize was the impact of being awarded and acknowledged and not doing

anything intentionally to gain that recognition.

It wasn't like I had to say, "Hey, pick me, pick me." I think that kind of aspect has

manifested in my life in various ways that I think I've had the most successes when I

wasn't trying to be great, but just being.

Leslie reflected on speaking up for a friend when in high school. The state administered

standardized testing and after several failed attempts her friend was not going to graduate from

high school. Leslie wrote a letter to the governor, describing her frustration and received a

response from the governor. She was excited at that time to receive an acknowledgement but also

reflected on what that meant. She stated, "I actually got a letter back from him. I think it was a

powerful thing about how my voice can actually impact a person." She reflected on how at such

a young age she was already advocating for students.

Personal Life. In efforts to better understand the influence of a person's career on their

relationships, I asked Leslie if she could tell me how her personal life has been affected since

taking on the SSAO role for her institution. She enthusiastically stated **"Oh. My personal life has**

gone great now." The key phrase "now" in the previous statement foreshadowed to what she

would later describe as a toxic environment coupled with Imposter Syndrome in her previous

roles. She left her role in 2017 as an adjunct faculty member and Vice President for Student

Affairs and Enrollment Management at an HBCU to focus on her health, her career, and her

personal life.

Leslie now lives in a large city and is actively engaged in church as well as community

activities. She does not have any biological children however describes herself as a family *fixer*.
Leslie has decided that for her health and well-being that being a doggie parent was most
important and has stepped away from being deeply engaged in family issues. She exclaimed how
this has been good for her health and well-being,

> Deciding not to take on that role as a fixer anymore, deciding that hey, it's not really my
> problem if you don't. I want you to, but you don't have to. Choosing me over choosing
> everybody else's stuff has been another thing that I've adopted for myself.

Removing this role as *family fixer* has created a new dynamic that allowed her to experience her
family in a more loving and healthy way.

Career Experiences. Moving in the direction of a career path in public heath, in 2007
Leslie was interning for a professor collecting data at a local high school. The professor
encouraged Leslie to apply for the community health doctoral program and she would receive
full fellowship and be well on her way to advance in the field of Public Health. According to
Leslie, she was accepted into the program and while attending orientation she began to speak to
someone about all the involvement opportunities available to them at the institution, and in that
moment she had an epiphany.

> I want to do this the rest of my life and go into higher education. I think during that
> summer I was doing some praying about what I need to do, what is life, where do I need
> to go. All that happening at the same time, and not. . . well, not at that time being as
> mature in my spiritual journey and my relationship with God to really know exactly what
> was happening, and how things needed to line up. I go in, and I tell the professor that
> gave me this position, this fellowship that's supposed to start in two months, "I just. . . I
> feel like I'm on another journey, and I just feel led and compelled to not do this." He's

looking at me like okay. I had no plan. I had no job. I had no nothing.

She was hired as an intern in student affairs at the University of Suiter, worked two additional jobs and during that process began to enjoy the field. Her first professional job in the field started in December 2007 working in the University Of Suiter Office Of Admissions and from there her career trajectory moved quickly. Most of her experience has been working on a residential campus working directly with students, staff, and faculty, including working on strategy, focusing on the growth and expansion of an institution.

Leslie was similar to only one other participant in having served as an SSAO at two institutions: a small public school where she struggled with imposter syndrome, and the second and current institution is a school where she is the SSAO over the entire system. In this role there is less contact with students and more strategy and intentional work with student affairs administrators on each campus. Leslie said, "We're working on a retention model. We're working on an advising model. We're working on revamping our college successes." Leslie shared that she interacts with administrators that do not have a degree in higher education and do not know about student affairs but are politically connected or positioned within various areas at the college. Although this is a different scenario than the one which she is accustomed, there are no late nights, very few weekend activities, and student affairs is structured in a way that helps her create balance in her life that was not there before.

Yvette Jones

Yvette Jones is the Vice President for Student Affairs at Good Time State University, and she has served in that capacity for four years she has been at the institution for 20 years. Yvette interestingly declined the opportunity to interview at first based on my criteria of being an African American woman. She did not want to misrepresent herself but also understood that as a

Black woman at a predominantly White institution she is viewed as Black or African American even though she was born in the Caribbean. The drive to her campus was a quite boring trip through fields with farmland and back highways. After a few hours I arrived at a community that did not look any different from the college town in which I currently reside. I had been to this campus a few times in the past to attend professional development seminars and to interview for a position. I met Leslie in the administration building, which was surrounded by beautifully manicured lawns and vibrant campus activity as students were presumably walking to and from classes. Upon entering the administration building it was understood that this is not the lively hub of campus but where business takes place. The marquee on the wall indicated this was the designated space for the university president, the provost, and eight vice presidents including Yvette. Her office was probably the most decorated and welcoming. There was a welcoming front desk with a student worker, and I noticed pictures of her blended family, her artwork, and degrees posted on the wall. I wondered if her proximity to the president's office influenced the look and feel of her office versus the other participants I have previously visited. As soon as I introduced myself she spoke with a thick Caribbean accent. It was absolutely beautiful and I was excited to learn more about her background and how it connected to her present day.

Childhood. Yvette was surrounded by what she called the leaders and role models of the house: her mother, grandmother, and aunts. Under their leadership and instruction, she was position to not only assist leading inside the home but outside as well. Inside the home, Yvette became her mothers' right hand in taking care of her nine brothers and sisters. She credits the experiences and responsibilities of being the first born girl with strengthening her resolve, aiding in her leadership development, and improving her communication skills. As the first born girl in a large family, she had experiences and responsibilities that influence her even today.

Yvette shared that education and its benefits held prominence within her family. They believed that education would bring about a higher quality of life and greater opportunities. She stated,

> My grandma was a teacher for years. For her, she always used to share with us about the importance of education, that education is the way out. With your education, you can do anything. Nobody can tell you what to do. That's how you get a good job. That's how you get a better life, if you take your studies seriously. That's really what she used to say, "You need to take your studies seriously."

As a young child Yvette was very good in spelling and reading. She had to read not only in school but also at home, and in both she was often told she was a good reader and very smart. This helped to build her confidence and affirm her as a good student. "She would make me read books out loud to her, and she would be like, 'You're such a good reader. You're so smart.' "The praise from her grandmother increased as she worked on phonics and word pronunciation, "when I would get it right, there would be a lot of reward from my grandmother, who said, '"You are so smart!"' She used the encouragement to propel her to succeed in all levels of education. She had confidence and instinct to know that if she did well in elementary school she would do well in high school, and then be afforded more opportunities after high school. Yvette did so well that she had one of the highest scores on the island in the mandated exams after high school. This allowed her to go to a better community college and study French, Literature, and History, with hopes of becoming an attorney. Once finished with community college on the island, Mrs. Jones began her undergraduate degree at the University of Mississippi on full scholarship studying journalism focusing on public relations.

In a way, taking her studies seriously became her mantra.

In some ways, I think in a lot of ways, it has been a fulfilling prophecy about the value of

education. So for me, education is crucial or critical in equalizing playing fields that are

otherwise inequitable in so many ways.

Personal Life. Yvette spoke lovingly of her blended family, she married the love of her

life whom and between the two of them, they brought together five children to make up their

little family. She loves to spend time visiting her children and grandchildren, serving her

community on various nonprofit boards, and being a full-time doctoral candidate

Yvette spoke of having a dual responsibility in her community of being involved, and of

representing the university in official capacity.

There are certain spaces that I feel a double responsibility to do that, because I want to

ensure that the community understands that there are people at the institution who can

represent some of the concerns that they may have, and be able to serve in that capacity.

Yvette stated she still finds time to spend quality time with her husband and nurture their

relationship. Although we did not speak of her interracial marriage, the pictures in the office

made it obvious, she was the only participant in my study married to a   person of a different

race.

Career Experiences. While obtaining her undergraduate degree at the University of

Mississippi, Mrs. Jones was a very involved student. She had a student job working with the

Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and learned a lot about getting involved, using her voice,

and working in student affairs. Upon graduation the vice chancellor had encouraged Mrs. Jones

to get her Master's degree in college student personnel. She obtained a graduate assistantship and

began working as a hall director for a residence hall. Yvette continued to have various roles in

residence life at different institutions. She went on to become a Director of Multicultural Affairs,

and then Associate Vice President for Student Affairs before becoming a Vice President for Student Affairs.

The next steps for Mrs. Jones include finishing her dissertation and graduating. She exclaimed once she obtained her doctorate she would like to teach in the Higher Education/Student Affairs graduate program. But also she would like to go to law school and deemed "attending is not off the table."

Dr. Leslie Stuart

Traveling to meet Dr. Leslie Stuart, the Vice President for Student Affairs at Thanksgiving University took the most time and was the worst drive in regard to scenery and navigating a small rural towns. After almost five hours I arrived in a very small college town. The main street was lined with shops and American flags. Everything seemed relatively small, including the theater and local McDonalds. The campus was accessible via the main road and I was still able to get lost as the campus was riddled with various construction projects. With the help of an African American man walking on campus I was able to navigate to a parking space and to the building a few hundred feet away. Leslie Stuart was located in the main student center, which was white inside and out, with a mix of dated architecture and modern signs. On the first floor of the building I found a small café, a lounge, and Leslie's office suite. Walking through a white door, I was greeted by an office painted in the university colors of orange and blue and an eager student working at the front desk. As I waited for Leslie S. to arrive from her lunch meeting, I noticed there were five offices within the one suite. The suite included the Director of Student Activities, Director of Student Conduct, and Director of Residence Life. There was another office that was empty. I was never invited to see Leslie's office as we met in the empty office. She was very passionate about the fact that her space was cluttered with lots of papers and

boxes.

Childhood. Eager to begin I asked Leslie to tell me about herself and her upbringing**.** As she reflected on her childhood and talked about growing up in Cleveland, Ohio in a predominately Black neighborhood that was not quite the suburbs, or downtown, and not quite the hood, but it was home. Leslie, the oldest of three girls, remembered much of her childhood with her father and mother before they divorced when she was twelve. Leslie's grandmother provided a space for her grandchildren to thrive and be successful. Leslie's grandmother purchased a home and she moved upstairs. She allowed both her daughters and their families to move in and make the home their own. In her grandmother's house there were three things that were evident, family is important, going to church was a necessity, and education was of the utmost importance.

One particular experience Leslie remembered was starting a youth choir at her church while in junior high school. She recalled that her church was very conservative and the older members including her grandmother did not like the songs the young people were singing; the church typically sang hymns, anthems, and spirituals. The youth choir introduced contemporary gospel of that time, in which most of the people in the church, "really struggled with it. They did not like it. Our parents defended us, so that's how we got to do it, because the rest of the church was just kind of like, this is heresy." She stated that being able to introduce the idea of something different and being supported provided her and her peers with validation and support to face many challenges. This also helped her to understand the importance of having a space in which you can identify with like individuals.

Leslie was the first of her immediate family to go to college and the first in her extended family to go out of state for college. Her experience in undergrad was not considered traditional

during the time but now is a typical occurrence. Leslie arrived at Howard University to begin her undergraduate studies in 1978. The residence hall was overcrowded so the 17 year old freshman was displaced to an apartment in D.C. not knowing anyone. Trying to find her fit she ended up transferring to two additional universities before obtaining her undergraduate degree in speech from Old Dominion University in 1983.

Personal Life. Leslie shared that she is married to an encouraging and supportive husband, and she credits him with motivating her to go for every opportunity that has presented itself, including every promotion and job opportunity as well as a doctorate degree. Her passions include spending time with her stepchildren and grandchildren, as well as advising the gospel choir on campus. The choir is a source of comfort for Leslie. Although she did not state this explicitly, she lit up when referencing the choir she started at her grandmother's church as well as the choir she started right there at the university as well as her home church choir located an hour away. Leslie did not share a lot of personal information within the interview; she was very short and guarded in her answers. She did open up on when we were talking about family and having children,

> So, I can't say that I made a conscious decision that it was going to be this way. Its things
> that kind of went with the territory, and then you learn to manage. So I don't know that I
> regret it, but it is just different than I imagined it was going to be.

She focused her answers on not having the time or intentionally making the time for life outside of work. She had to make sure she met the expectations along the way, to prove she had what it took to make it to the next level.

Career Experiences. Leslie's untraditional route in student affairs was not characterized by being involved in student organizations or working in residence life and she never stayed on

campus. Her involvement with student affairs started after she graduated from Old Dominion and found a residence life position at the College of Wooster, a small public institution where her sister attended. Leslie's passion for the arts was stronger than her passion for student affairs, and became extremely evident when she auditioned for a summer theater project while still working in residence life. Because of the demanding schedule, she figured quickly that she could not do both, so, she quit the residence life position and continued performing over the summer. After the summer she returned to her childhood home without a job and no direction. She was encouraged by the Dean of Faculty at the College of Wooster to apply to a small private school working in student activities and she did. She interviewed and subsequently received the position. From there, Leslie has worked in multicultural affairs, the student center, as an Assistant Dean, an Associate Dean, Dean of Students and is now the Vice President for Student Affairs. She has spent 31 years of her 32 year career at one institution. She stated it was not always easy but she was persistent. "You may not be the smartest in the room. You may not be whatever in the room, but persistence really is key."

Sheba

Sheba Thomas is the Assistant Provost and Dean of Students for Face Community College. Sheba's institution was about three hours away from my home in a very small town; the biggest store other than a grocery store was a cowboy boot store. This provided context on the culture of the area and what the institution meant to the community. The campus appeared small but very spread out with large parking lots and green spaces that were well manicured. I was able to connect with Sheba's secretary and they both met me in the parking lot to walk me into the department. Sheba had recently moved offices due to allergic reactions and now was taking residence in a one floor building with just her department of three people in the space. The space

was decorated with fresh flowers, candy, and various pictures of students, family, and friends. She ushered me into her conference room, and we sat at a table filled with books, binders, and folders. The most interesting of all books included her Barack Obama book of daily affirmations. Sheba was unapologetic the entire time and made sure everything including her pseudonym affirmed who she was, proclaiming proudly that Sheba referred to the Queen of Sheba, as the keeper of resources in Africa.

Childhood. Sitting straight up proudly, Sheba began to provide background on her childhood. She was born in the south and raised by her father and grandmother as a proper southern young lady. Abandoned by her biological mother, Sheba reminisced about her grandmother, and how her grandmother ensured that her and her sister always had a home cooked meal for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. She also learned the importance of education from her grandmother. During her regular visits to the library with her grandmother and sister her grandmother would meet with other senior citizens and Sheba and her sister would show off their reading skills. "So me and my sister would compete in the library to see who could read more books in a day because we'd be there all day long." Naturally, the daily trips sealed the importance of reading as well as the importance of being involved. Not only was her grandmother active in the senior citizens group but also she was the president. She was also active in their community, their church, and the girls' school.

The importance of education permeated every activity and space for Sheba and her family. Her grandfather served as a principal of a local Black elementary school where her parents, aunts, uncles, and other relative attended prior to integration. Sheba never doubted that she would attend college, specifically an HBCU. She exclaimed she knew at the age of 10 and held on to that dream. It was in high school where she met her high school sweetheart and it was

not long after that she became pregnant and married. Even then Sheba said her dream was only delayed.

Personal Life. As a teen mom and wife, Sheba began working at a local factory to assist in providing for her growing family. Her educational pursuit at a community college was short lived as she attempted to juggle work, home, and being at an institution about which she was not excited. Looking for better opportunities, Sheba divorced her husband and moved herself and her three children to Nashville, TN to have a fresh start. Sheba began working at Tennessee State University as an administrative assistant to the Dean of Students. It was there she was able to see firsthand how an African American woman mentored, shaped, and provided opportunities for young Black youth at this HBCU. The Dean not only mentored the current students but also mentored Sheba, and encouraged her to fulfill her lifelong dream of obtaining her bachelor's and master's degree from Tennessee State University.

Although she rarely visits them, Sheba looks forward to reuniting with her adult children and her young granddaughter. Her time is consumed with being a doctoral candidate, being involved in a long distance relationship, and supporting the students on her campus. Outside of the aforementioned priorities, Sheba serves on the board of a local Black museum, serves as the president for a local leadership networking collaborative, and serves her local community center.

Career Experiences. Sheba' career in student affairs started at State University where she worked in a residence hall, student activities, and judicial affairs over a ten year span. Sheba has been at her current institution for approximately six years where she started as the Associate Dean of Students, became the Dean of Students, and has ascended to the Vice Provost for Student Affairs. Her career of 17 years spans two institutions and seven different roles. Her next steps are to pursue an SSAO role at a larger institution.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of Black SSAO's. Chapter 4 provided insight into each of the participant's childhood, personal, and professional lives. Each one had varying childhood experiences, educational experiences, and career paths that impacted their journey in higher education administration. The N.O.B.L.E Theory provided the direct correlation to how chapter four has been structured. The theory's four connections through family background and early education, connection through higher education experiences, connection through career Experiences, and connection through transitional and growth experiences provided the basis of how each participant provided insight on their experiences. Chapter 5 will reveal the themes that emerged from all the interviews and narratives of the participants that support those themes. Chapter 5 will also connect the themes to the theories established.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS II

The purpose of this study was to examine the lives of Black and African American Senior

Student Affairs Professionals. This chapter will reveal four major themes that emerged from the

data. The emergent themes are: Occupational Hazard, Coping, Health, Building Relationships

and Understanding Self, and Intersection of Race and Sex.

Occupational Hazard

Working in an institution of higher education could at one time be seen as a low stress

environment. Now increasing stress levels are impacting staff health, morale, and productivity

(Gilespie et al., 2001). The changing landscape of how we work with students, their varying

concerns and unique problems as well as mental health, the unwritten role expectations, race and

microaggressions, and the sheer workload add unprecedented stress for SSAOs (Gilespie et al.,

2001).

> For women administrators in higher education, workplace factors like managing multiple
>
> roles; work bleeding into personal life; issues with leadership; discrimination and
>
> marginalization; and role insufficiency (i.e., ambiguity in work roles and reduced sense
>
> of control) contribute to increased workplace stress. (Kersh, 2017).

The stress coupled with the workplace microaggressions, racism, and sexism experienced by

Black women increase the opportunities for heart attacks, strokes, miscarriages, and other health

concerns (Smith et al., 2011).

The term occupational hazard is typically associated with construction workers working on a high-rise, utility lines, or on the highway in traffic, healthcare professional working with an ill patient, or police officers in high speed pursuit. This term is not typically associated with administrators of university and colleges. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) defines occupational hazard as encompassing many types of hazards, including chemical hazards, biological hazards (biohazards), psychosocial hazards, and physical hazards. It is the responsibility of this government agency to set and enforce standards and provide training, outreach, education and assistance. In this case, the term highlights the stressors experienced by participants. To fully highlight the severity of the stressors experienced by African American SSAOs, we have to take into account the impact of stress on their body and the growing pressures in higher education. McEwen et al., (2015), in an article on Resilience, talks about the brain and how it handles stress. They noted that the brain is the key organ in handling stress in a way that can positively or negatively impact the body. They went on to provide information regarding types of stress which is key to understanding the experiences of the women in this study,

> Tolerable stress refers to experiencing stressful major life events that will result in successful coping with minimal allostatic load due to good internal resources and external support. Toxic stress refers to the situation where there is unsuccessful coping due to lack of adequate internal capacities as well as poor external support. (p. 2)

The stress on the body and the neurological response can involve health-related behaviors including high caloric intake, sleep deprivation, smoking, and alcohol which can be toxic. These stressors can also impact pre-existing conditions or be a catalyst for other health concerns.

Smith et al. (2011), described Racial Battle Fatigue as a result of experiencing extreme racisms and incessant microaggressions which result in "various forms of mental, emotional, and physical strain" (p. 300). The stress from Racial Battle fatigue can present itself as various psychophysiological symptoms, including suppressed immunity and increased sickness, tension headaches, trembling and jumpiness, chronic pain in healed injuries, elevated blood pressure, and a pounding heartbeat" (Smith et al., 2011, p. 301). Toxic Stress Syndrome coupled with Racial Battle Fatigue highlights how this type of occupation can pose stress and hazard to the individual well before the added stress from the "industry" of higher education.

The Chronicle for Higher Education publishes articles almost daily on the increasing costs of higher education, and the return on the investment, the increasing concern of students' mental health and well-being, and growing racial and religious tensions. According to the finding of this study, administrators are expected to deal with these aspects as well as complex units and departmental staff, initiatives, and budgetary items along with the everyday business of engaging students to help them be successful.

When asked about the stressors experienced by being in the SSAO role, every participant had experiences to share. Every participant spoke of ways in which their gender and/or race impacted the work they were able to do and how they were viewed by various constituents. Sheba reflected on when she first arrived at her institution,

> I think coming here, I've faced several challenges because I had to prove myself. One, I
> was the only black female in a room full of men, so they automatically come in and they
> think you're dumb, you don't know anything. I had to really, really show them that I was
> strong, you know, and you couldn't challenge me, you know? I had to really, really, even
> with my staff, when I first got the position, because I had some white folks that wasn't

used to a young Black woman being over them, and I knew what it was. They used to

give me, excuse my "French", hell, they did. I had one lady, that she's dead now, but

challenged me at every divisional meeting. Everything, you know what I mean? I just had

to earn my respect. You're going to respect me and I had to make sure they knew I was

strong; I'm not intimidated by you. They know that to this day. They think I'm a crazy

black woman.

Yvette echoed the sentiment of being "the only one at the table."

I would say, I think one of the challenges, and this has changed somewhat over the years,

but one of the challenges that you always face is, I think at this level, being one of the

only, or one of a few, within the academic leadership group of the university, certainly

can be a challenge sometimes. So, at this point, I probably am the highest ranking African

American, Black identifying female at the university. That comes with responsibility;

whether or not I want to accept it, whether or not it has been officially designated to me, I

see that comes with responsibilities. For me, that is a good thing, but sometimes it can

also be a challenge.

Amber, Hope, and Liz, had more diverse senior leadership with whom they interacted. But there

were still challenges that existed. Amber understood that as an African American the

expectations for her were different. She stated,

They go to work, and they go home. They are out maybe at their kid's soccer game or

whatever. They are certainly at any of the programs supporting students, or not in the

dining halls eating breakfast, or lunch, or dinner with them, being seen.

When I want to do any of that, I'll be talked about. I know that people are always

scrutinizing the work that we are doing. It goes back to that as Black women. Everything

that we do in terms of student conduct, our response to the bias incidents on campus, are being looked at with a fine tuned comb from certain members of our board. We are having to submit reports to the board on a regular basis. That takes time, I know for a fact, my counterparts aren't doing that. I noted that. I know my predecessor didn't have to do that, not do the work that I'm doing at all. So you are getting it from all ends. You are getting it from not only the board, maybe your peers, but then you don't have enough time to really be strategic for your division, and so you get it from the naysayers who report up through you. The negativity that goes on like, "We are not doing anything." It's like, we got to get settled, we got to get people in place, we got to go back and try to keep the vision alive and move forward, and we make changes.

Working at an HBCU, Hope and Liz experienced challenges related to their gender. Liz understood the traditional HBCU culture had a particular focus on hierarchy and deference which often kept women from being promoted or moving up the ladder.

So, it is this piece of being a woman and leading at an HBCU. It's something so... Very much watching how I'm perceived and treated. You can almost see that some men are not used to talking to somebody who's their office and/or have more rank than them. So, that's always interesting. So, being able to talk them through that is critical. So, I laugh and joke about it. Before, people wanted to call me a Black B-I-T-C-H. And now, I'm just a sweet one.

Hope's challenge centered on how she looked and how she presented herself in public. She felt it was easier identifying as a woman of color but not as a plus size woman.

My president was not high on people who were heavy-set. And I would tell my friend this, and she didn't agree until she saw it firsthand and experienced firsthand for herself.

He would not talk to certain people. He wouldn't include certain people on committees.

And I always felt like it was more biased towards women than men, but he was like that

with men, too. I also noticed that if you were younger, skinnier, and were decent looking,

you got more props. It didn't matter what you knew or what you did.

Leslie Stuart recognized that often you may not know which identity a person is reacting to or

causing someone to challenge you in this way. Leslie Smith did not experience the same

challenges as the other participants and credited this phenomenon to being in a metropolitan city

as opposed to a college town or mid-size city.

Each woman has oversight of at least five and a max of twenty departments at their

institution. In the case of Amber, her SSAO portfolio included athletics and cultural centers as

well as traditional student affairs areas such as student activities, residence life, and the Dean of

Students. Portfolios may also look different based on the institution type.

Each school has been different in what their dean role, and their vice president, vice

chancellor role . . . I would say the most difference is (as an SSAO) you are greatly more

responsible for the funding and fundraising aspects at this level, and meeting those

financial goals, and contributing to student success. Being able to have those

conversations with the president, with the senate about what are you doing to help

students succeed in the classroom. You really have to interface with the board of trustees.

If you are working with a system you also got to justify your work with the system. You

have to meet your fundraising goals to keep the budget going.

Leslie Smith's portfolio included four campuses and various student affairs departments on each

campus. There is oversight over the division with the responsibility of reporting to the president

or chancellor as well. Leslie Smith spoke about this experience,

 I remember I was in a cabinet meeting one day, and the president at the institution made

the statement like, "You need to tell your significant other that there's a third person in

bed with you, and it's me." I didn't have a significant other, but I just was like, "What?"

The expectation was you answer my phone call when I call you, no matter what time of

night.

Dr. Stuart outlasted four presidents at her institution, and while she reported to only one

of the four as well as the fifth president now, each one was said to have a different style and

expectations. Amber reiterated this statement but also explained that the exit of a president could

greatly impact their cabinet. "Many times your allegiance to the president puts a target on you, so

as they leave, the writing is on the wall for you to leave as well."

Participants discussed the level of politics on the presidents' cabinet, Yvette's statement

provides a great summary that encompasses a majority of Black women's' experiences.

The other thing, the other expectation, and I don't know if it's written or unwritten, but

how you engage with your colleagues on the cabinet. Everybody has their area of

responsibility, which they're responsible for. But collectively, you're trying to make

decisions about the institution, inform the president, make sure that we're moving

forward on what the president's priorities are, making sure we're keeping the institution

out of legal issues. But there are times that areas can be in conflict for competing

resources. So, how do you navigate that, and what is the expectation with regards to how

you engage with your peers? What is the culture around that? I think that's one of those

things that you don't know until you get into the space of the culture of how these

university leaders navigate and experience. The relationships you build with your

colleagues can help propel you, and help you get your goals achieved, or they can derail

you.

Whether on campus or off campus, SSAOs felt as if they were representing the university at all times and had to always be in SSAO mode. Yvette and Amber both spoke about spending a lot of time attending community events, receptions, and meeting with alumni and donors. Yvette believed, "that's part of what you do as a member of the President's Cabinet." Sheba, Amber, and Yvette spoke about the responsibility they had to be present within minoritized communities so they could show there is representation at the university in a senior level position. Yvette stated, "I want to ensure that the community understands that there are people at the institution who can represent some of the concerns that they may have, and be able to serve in that capacity."

Many participants served as the lead in their home life with varying responsibilities and expectations. Amber spoke about her responsibilities and her worries,

My husband has a physical disability and is unable to drive. A lot of that responsibility falls on me, the driving, making sure the house is being run, making sure our child is taken care of and developed. Just buying groceries, paying the bills, all of that is on me. Getting us from point A to point B, getting us involved in activities and by having a demanding job and expectations and a personal life, as well as family life it is hard. I try to be involved in community organizations, in service, in church. My family has been extremely helpful and I'm so grateful that they live here and they help us. As a VP, You literally have no right, nothing to yourself, and you can't ... I mean, you are always under the spotlight. I want to see my child grow up and attend their whatever, recitals, rehearsals, games. Whatever they choose to get involved with, because they will be involved. I want to be able to have the time to go to school functions.

Building Relationships

Student Affairs administrators are often building relationships with faculty, staff, and students, many who do not fully understand what it is like to sit in a leadership role and be the only Black woman. These same women may sit with their family members who do not understand the field of student affairs and what it is like to sit as the only Black woman in a leadership role. This isolation is described by many and can lead to imposter syndrome, stress depression, withdrawal, and burnout (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003, Hinton &Patitu, 2003). The theme Building Relationships represents the relationships built within family, friends, and community that helps to empower the SSAO. These relationships are critical to their success within the institution and the community. Many of the participants reflected on their relationships outside of the office but it led to more internal focus on themselves sharing about their personal lives. The participants provided a lot of insightful moments regarding the decisions they have made to better their lives and relationships. Leslie Smith talked about her commitments and how she realized the unhealthy role she played with the people she cared about.

> Right now my commitments are still spiritual in nature because they're more so my personal time with God, but then also my doggy is the love of my life. Her name is Daisy. I find myself, even with my friend group and family groups, not choosing to take on the role as the fixer, because that's my nature to be a fixer. But deciding not to take on that role anymore, deciding that hey, it's not really my problem if you don't. I want you to, but you don't have to. Choosing me over choosing everybody else's stuff has been another thing that I've adopted for myself.

Leslie Stuart also reflected on the relationship she has with family, and how she chooses to

engage them.

> I'm the oldest sister, so both of my parents have now passed away. My dad just passed
>
> away now recently, so like I was the executor of the will and things like that, so there's
>
> responsibility with the family as far as trying to manage the estate and things like that.
>
> And I guess being the oldest, people expect that the oldest sister has some wisdom and
>
> the responsibility.

The idea of family for each participant was presented in many ways, through children, animals, community, spouses, siblings, and friends. The majority of participants noted being single but this was not presented as a conscious choice. A variety of concerns with time, availability, and social standing were brought up when talking about a potential mate. Amber noted what it took for her to be intentional on building a relationship.

> I didn't spend a lot of time on my personal side in making sure that I was building a
>
> relationship. . . I knew I wanted to be married and wanted to have kids, but I didn't set
>
> that as a true goal to go after. Everything else I would set as a goal to go after. I really
>
> wasn't serious and intent about it. I was like, "You know what? I'm getting a little too old
>
> for this. I got to have more to my life." It was funny how this all, putting it in
>
> perspective, I was watching Mahogany, and there is a line in there, where Billy Dee
>
> Williams is talking to Diana Ross, and he says, "Success is nothing unless you have
>
> somebody to share it with." It just hit me, and I watched that movie all the time. It just
>
> hit me, and I was like, "You are so right." These degrees and awards, that's nothing that I
>
> can grow old with, and interact with, and have a relationship with, and share my
>
> successes, and my downsides. That's not how I want this to be. I don't want to be 70 years
>
> old and look back and say, what I could have, should have done.

Many times there is a perception that at this level one should be married and have a family. It was critical Leslie believed to be seen as stable, and committed to the community, which often times translated to being committed to the university.

Sheba, Amber, Hope, Leslie and Liz have been strategic in creating networks of support. Amber, Hope, and Liz, and Leslie are all members of history Black Greek Lettered sororities, in which they often find the support of other African American women, as well as social, and community engagement opportunities within their college towns. Amber spoke highly of a team of women that affirmed and confirmed who she was as an SSAO, a mom, and a wife.

> My team is a group of highly educated Black Women that are all successful in their own right, and we all have suffered with imposter syndrome, with times where things didn't work out at home, and with problems in the office. Because of each other, because we get it, we help each other survive.

Coping, Health, and Understanding Self

Experiencing the challenges and stressors reflected challenges in participant's health. Each participant stated their health had somewhat suffered because of their positions and the associated pressures. Yvette and Leslie Stuart were thankful that they had not had any major health concerns. Both disclaimed that they needed to take weight management more seriously but did not have the time because of their professional role. Liz puts her health as a second priority to her career.

> The way my life has unfolded in the last five years. Grief and anger and disappointment and stress. I gained about 125 pounds. Got to lose it. I just picked up my third blood pressure medication. So, I take three different pills every day for blood pressure. Does that stop me from stress and binge-eating? No. There have been times I've had to take off

from work because my blood pressure is way too high. There are times I've put my health

second. Trying to get to work and I'm at death's door. Didn't even know it, kind of thing.

Because my gall bladder was so inflamed. It was like, I was fine on Sunday night when I

went to bed, and woke up Monday morning, vomiting, sweating. Couldn't stand up.

Nothing. And still was trying to get dressed to go to work. I actually got on the highway

and a friend had to send an ambulance to come and get me. For what reason? If I had

died that day, they would have found somebody to take my place.

Liz also coped with the stress from her career, loss of her mother, and recent breakup by drinking

alcohol. She said it started out occasionally and progressively got worse.

Honestly, I think I cope, using the wrong things. Which I'm learning now. The alcohol.

And I know I'm not alone. I went to a meeting a couple years ago and the faculty member

said, "The highlight of my day is deciding what cocktail I'm going to drink that night."

And everybody was like, "Yes, yes." And I was sitting around thinking, "Oh, my God.

I'm not the only one. But my drinking had gotten to a point where. . . And I think it was

grief. I don't think it was just work. I think it was grief. I think it was disappointment with

life and myself. I could drink. . . I had my four boyfriends with me. Evan Williams, Ezra

Brooks, Jim Beam, Jack Daniel's all in the same glass. I mean, it got to a point I became,

professional drinker. Like, I can drink people under the table who. . . It's nothing for me

to. . . At one point, I could drink a half a bottle of wine. Then I drank I whole bottle of

wine. Then I drank two. Finally, my doctor was like, "you going to die. You are going to

die." I was diagnosed with fatty liver disease, and I had to go off alcohol for four

months.

After the four months Liz went back to drinking but just not as much. Leslie Smith recognized

she had to make some changes, but not until she was forced to see that others were not suffering at the rate she was.

> I remember driving home one night at 10:00pm. I'm driving down the middle of campus because I had to pass the administration building to go home. I looked to my left. There were no cars in the parking lot. I'm like, "Why am I here this late?" I did several nights at 10:00. Then I did nights at 7:00. Still drove same route. Looked to my left, nobody's here. What the turning point was is that I was diagnosed with high blood pressure at the age of 32. I can't be about this life. It's not cute at all to have high blood pressure. What? I think it was an eye opening experience to me. I can't let this job kill me. I can't.

Leslie Smith left that Vice President role for another one. It wasn't until she left that position she was able to get her health in order and have a better working environment. The expectations for her new role included, not responding to emails after work hours, leaving at five pm, and creating a culture that is not built on stress.

> Amber had many health struggles, including fibroid surgeries, miscarriages, and weight gain.

> I've always had an issue with weight, struggling with weight, ever since I was a little girl. You would be successful in doing diets and healthy eating and working out. There are times when I do, I get on a good roll, I'm focused, but then crisis hits, or work hits, then I'm so tired I can't even get up in the morning to workout, if I prefer to work out in the morning, because I know if I wait till the evening it's just not going to happen. I was doing really well, but the last month or so I have not done anything. I'm like, I know I got to get back on board, or I have pushed off surgeries, because I'm like, "Wait, I got to wait until this event happens. I can't be out because I got to make sure I'm there in

present, before I can have the surgery. I have delayed some surgeries. I'm not necessarily

taking care of myself, because we are always thinking about, "If I'm not visible, then they

are going to think I'm not doing my job."

Amber struggled with miscarriages but ended this year with the birth of her child. She explained

even though she was happy, she worried about not being present on her campus and how that

would be perceived.

Well, I love our daughter. We struggled to have her, but I lost 12 weeks of work. That's

how I view it. Twelve weeks of momentum, of trying to move this division forward, of

building relationships, that I got to go back and strengthen even more, and gain control.

Sheba's health had been recently impacted by her physical environment as she had an

allergic reaction to mold in her office. She said the most difficult part for her was to advocate

that she be moved to a new location, as if this was not a high priority. Her other health struggles

emerged once her new boss was hired. When my boss first got on, it was very, very rough, and I

went through a period of stress. I was stressed out to the point where I couldn't sleep at night,

you know what I mean? Tossing and turning, plus I'm going through the change, but she had me

stressed, you know what I mean. In December, they found a lump, so I had to go in January and

get a biopsy. After my six month checkup, they said they couldn't believe it dissolved.

Facing multiple health concerns including depression, Sheba confronted her new supervisor.

We had to really have a heart to-heart talk. I said, "I don't want to get depressed on

Sundays. Sunday is my Sabbath, that's when I stream my church. I shouldn't have to get

depressed Sunday afternoon because I don't know what attack I'm getting ready to take

on a Monday from you. I just turn it over to God. She can't make me mad, I'm not afraid

of you, I'm not intimidated by you, it's nothing you can do to me. You can terminate me

at will and I can leave at will.

Yvette reflected on her apprehension when looking to become a SSAO. "I'm a pretty

confident person in what I do and what I know. I don't know why I felt like there is some other

kind of skill set, that you need to serve in a Vice President's role." Sheba's strength and

confidence was portrayed through her everyday work within the President's Council. She would

often bring ideas to the table and they would be consistently shut down but she exclaimed, "I

don't give in, and strategically present items so they can no longer shut my ideas down." Liz

believed, "I think sometimes we have that superhero complex, or that black coffee, superwoman

kind of thing. We have to be everything to everybody except ourselves."

Participants discussed where their strength comes from and most of them referenced

religion in some capacity. Sheba stated, "I pray every morning. I have to read my devotionals. I

bring that home on the weekends and make sure I bring it back." Amber expressed something

very similar, "I am taking time to make sure I'm praying and meditating, and I am attending

church." The relationship with religion was described by many of the women as attending church

regularly, going to bible study, or being actively involved in various church ministries. Leslie

and Amber's involvement in their current church provided them an opportunity to learn about the

community and begin to form friendships and relationships outside of their university. Amber

stated, "My skills and expertise transfer to my church as well, I was asked to organize and speak

at the church anniversary gala, when I'm there it doesn't seem like work". Yvette and Leslie

Smith echoed the same sentiment as their time in the church choir was work but in a different

capacity that did not come with the stresses of work. Spending time in church on Sunday is a

time for "mental rejuvenation, strength, and encouragement," believed Hope. Each woman

stated specifically they attended a Black Church, for some that meant driving to the nearest big city over 40 minutes away. That was important to them as it was a safe space to be a Black woman. Not only did they describe how their relationship with GOD provided them strength but their relationship with other people that looked like them and believed like them encouraged them. Sheba believed this "filled her cup" so she could be able to not only do her job, but also do it in a space where people tried to prevent her from being successful.

Participants also described rejuvenation or their cup being filled through various self-care techniques. Amber, Hope, and Leslie Smith talked about the role of receiving regular therapy as part of their self-care regimen. Amber said, "We take on so much from students, staff, the cabinet, as well as alumni and campus partners, we have to be able to reclaim some of ourselves." Hope was adamant about it, "So, I ain't dying in this position. Just not doing it. So, I'm going to live my best life." The self-affirmations for the women presented themselves through reflections, mantras, sticky notes on walls, and speaking out loud to themselves. Liz said she would have to remind herself, "I am worthy and I am good." Leslie had a sticky note hanging in her office which said "Don't beat yourself up."

Meeting at the intersection of Race and Sex

The theme of Intersectionality emerged because the women shared their experiences and expectations surrounding image, identity, and perceptions and realities of being Black and women. "African American women in higher education live at the intersection of two forms of oppression: racism and sexism" (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). All the participants commented on their image and how that impacts the spaces they operate on and off campus African American women combat the visual stereotypes and negative images of past and present that are oversexualized, seen as mammies, or as "the help" (Collins, 2002). Sheba's grandmother

laid the foundation for her perspective on image, "How you dress is how you will be addressed." She stated this is what she thinks while looking in the mirror before she leaves the house every day, even on weekends. "I make sure I dress because I want you to address me that way [as a professional]. I don't care if it's on a Saturday or a Sunday, I'm dressing up. I dress up!" Every participant had a similar story especially Yvette and Amber. Amber said, "

> The expectation is I come professional all the time. I do have to pay attention to clothing choices, and hair, it can't be out of place. Although, sometimes I feel like, "I'm just looking like a mess." On my days when I feel like I look like a mess, I'm looking 10 times better than my counterparts, who roll up in jeans, and disheveled hair. And I'm like, "Really?" Nobody would have any problem with them at all, because that's just who they are. We are expected to bring some class to the position, which we should. That is the expectation. We do, I feel like we have to go above and beyond. We have to make sure that we are representing the president well at all times.

> Liz and Hope provided a slightly different view. Hope liked to break the stereotypes and mix clothing pieces up that are not typical or that even matched. She also styled her hair as unconventional as her clothing. She was not scared to wear wigs, weaves, or her natural hair. She said that this presentation of self often connected with the students and not administration she said. She also believed she had some latitude because she was at a Historically Black College. Liz wanted a more comfortable style.

> Unfortunately, I'm not a Fly Betty. I'm also an AKA. So, there's this expectation, I'm the dean, and I'm the senior administrator, and I'm a AKA, so I need to look like Michelle Obama every time I walk out the house. And I'll look like Fantasia. You know, I want jeans and T-shirt.

One participants' biggest image factor was not her clothing or hairstyle but her age and youthful appearance. Leslie Smith was in her first SSAO role at the age of 31. Her president at times thought she was "too close" to the students which she interpreted as a negative comment. Her dress and hair style was altered to appear older to appease the president. Yvette made sure that every time she stepped out of the house she would look as if she was meeting with the president. It meant a full face of make-up, her natural hair straightened, and a suit. Yvette said with confidence and conviction, "I am a Black woman, a boss, and I represent the university, I cannot give them a reason to talk about me".

Looks and image is just once facet of who the women are and how they represent themselves. Liz, Hope and Yvette talked about the varying levels of expectations because of their gender, and because of their gender they know how to get things done. Liz believed that Black women are viewed as mothers or aunts for the students. Yvette stated,

> People tend to think student affairs is more nurturing, et cetera, et cetera. So, that's where that comes from. I think sometimes, the expectation people have from you as a female, as a Chief Student Affairs officer, is that you're going to . . . that's going to be your bend, right? To be the caring . . . and you have to be. But I tell you, you have to be just as astute when it comes to budgets, and to strategy, and to legal issues, and to risk management issues, and stuff.

Hope stated plainly, "Black women have the backbones to do what needs to be done."

The women were able to provide information that highlighted their strength in their SSAO role. Leslie Smith described herself as a relater; "and by relating to people, then I actually can help them move forward the direction you want them to go."

Amber, Yvette, and Leslie report directly to the president, and serve on his leadership

team as the only African American women. Each spoke of the isolation or lack of understanding

at the table because of their race and gender. Yvette said, "The White women connect with my

gender, but that's not all of me."

Amber stated,

> There are instances that I know I am judged differently when I voice my opinion, or
>
> provide insight on a particular area especially race, I can't separate the experiences I have
>
> had as an African American women and what is hard is I know they aren't always
>
> appreciated or valued. People are always scrutinizing the work that we are doing, I'm
>
> being scrutinized unfairly right now, in terms of how I'm handling student conduct and
>
> antisemitism on campus. I have to submit weekly reports to the board, which my
>
> predecessor (White female) did not.

 Liz's experience at an HBCU was different. She phrased her experience as, "Just

because they're your skin folk don't make them your kin folk." Interpreted this to mean that not

everyone who is Black shares the same experiences, background, and values that you may hold.

Leslie Smith spoke about what it was like to be her authentic self and present herself as such,

> I recently did an interview for a job and was the most being me I ever have been in an
>
> interview. Because when you think about being . . . going in an interview, you are
>
> sending a representative. While that is you, it is not at some certain pieces. But that
>
> interview I was just totally myself. I told them, "If you hire me, this is who you are going
>
> to get. I just want to be clear on that, because I don't want to present something else
>
> because I'm trying to get it, but when I get there I have to expand some more energy
>
> trying to maintain that perception.

Leslie went on to say,

One of the things that I have found very interesting is the notion of someone who comes

in , and who is married, and who is not, and who has kids, and who does not, because that

has a different narrative and dynamic as well. What you value is different. How you

operate in the role is different. Each that is different from a man or White woman.

Many women contended when asked if race and gender played a role in the consideration

of hiring practices by the president and provost, that it indeed was a factor.

Amber stated,

You [President or Provost] don't want to be seen as someone who is going to hire the

same person over and over again. If they were to hire all White males what does that say

to the students? They [students] want to be able to see people who look like them. They

[students] may not interact with them all the time, but they at least want to know there is

some diversity and there is some thought behind what people can add to the work that we

are doing with students.

Leslie Stuart exclaimed,

I think university leadership and students pay attention to who they are hiring, why they

are hiring. I mean, obviously you got to have a competency and a skillset. You can't just

put somebody in the seat because of their race and or their gender. I think they are

conscious about the pool of candidates because it affects how they are viewed and if they

are paying attention to the diverse needs of campus.

This type of view of hiring practices can perpetuate the isolation and affect the retention of

African American SSAOs because the support for their success is not present or even considered.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of African American Senior

Student Affairs Officers. Chapter 5 established the following themes as it emerged from the data collected. The themes are (a) Occupational Hazard, (b) Coping, Health, and Understanding Self, (c) Building Relationships, and (d) the Intersections of race and sex. Chapter 6 will include an interpretation of the data, discussion, recommendations, limitations and the conclusion.

CHAPTER 6

ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

The purpose of this case study was to examine the lived experiences of African American

women SSAOs. Over 20 women were contacted for a face-to-face interview; seven women

consented and became participants for this study. There were many differences and similarities

among the women; their title or position at the institution, the institutions themselves, reporting

structure, family lives and responsibilities. Participants held a doctoral degree or were doctoral

candidates at the time of data collection. Four themes emerged from the data collected through

the interviews: (a) occupational hazard, (b) coping, health, and understanding self, (c) building

relationships, and (d) the intersections of race and sex.

This chapter will provide an interpretation of the data collected while connecting it to the

literature and theoretical framework. This chapter will also include implications,

recommendations for higher education and future research.

The N.O.B.L.E model (Hinton, 2001) provided the context and revealed itself through the

interviews of the participants. Each participant provided experiences that aligned with the

N.O.B.L.E model themes including connection one regarding family background and early

education; connection two regarding higher education experiences, connection three regarding

Career Experiences, and connection four regarding transitional and growth experiences.

Hinton (2001) described the first connection focusing on family background and early

education as representing the first connection a woman had to leadership experience or

opportunity. The second connection represented higher education experiences. This theme is

described as "the next level of professional development" that the women encountered in

undergraduate and graduate school. The theme encompasses experiences such as serving in a

leadership role within a student organization, involvement in the campus community, or working

a campus jobs. The third connection, career experiences, relates their career, leadership

experiences thus far from formal education to the building blocks of early childhood experiences.

The fourth connection is transitional and growth experiences. This connection can best be

described as a mindset shift including the growth, confidence, and understanding a woman has

gained because of her experiences early in her career that helps guide her later in her professional

work.

This chapter will also include how Black Feminist Thought provides context and

correlations for the data. Black Feminist Thought provides the context to examine the lived

experiences of Black women and the oppressive environments of which they are a part. Collins

(2002) states,

> The unpaid and paid work that Black women perform, the types of communities in which
>
> they live, and the kinds of relationships they have with others suggest that African-
>
> American women, as a group, experience a different world than those who are not Black
>
> and female. (p. 52)

The experiences had by the participants in this study reflect the theoretical frameworks of the

N.O.B.L.E model and Black Feminist Thought.

The participants in the study spoke about their childhood experiences through the context

of life with their grandmothers. Many of the participants' grandmothers played a vital role in

their education, community involvement, and understanding of the world. Using connection one of Hinton's Noble model, as the frame for this section we can see the early leadership experiences and support participants received. Hope was first given the opportunity to take on leadership responsibilities through her pastor at church.

> But I always was affirmed in church like, "Oh, you can just go ahead and do this. You can be anything you want to be." I was the church secretary and I was the Sunday school leader. And then, also I was actually able to start a tutoring program in the twelfth grade because I felt like people needed it. But my pastor would always just make sure, "Oh, you want to do technology? Let's figure out how to get you there." So, I always led in that way. So, those were very powerful experiences for me.

Each participant reflected on an early childhood experiences that would be considered what Hinton (2001) describes is their first "professional development experience." Amber witnessed her grandparent's involvement in the community, spent summers with her grandmother, and had her mother advocate for her to not be put in a slow learning class. "My parents were definitely role models too. My dad served as a commissioner for the youthful ball league. He served on a number of boards, helping with students. I learned all of that." Leslie Stuart gained support from her parents and was able to create a youth gospel choir at her church, standing against opposition from the older church members. Liz watched and assisted her mother create and run a successful summer program form African American youth, Yvette won multiple scholarships to help further her education, and Leslie Smith won an award not intended for African Americans. These experiences helped lay a foundation of confidence and affirmed what each woman was capable of achieving. Each participant had a strong parent or grandparent in their life and there was a strong emphasis on education and higher education for each

participant regardless of whether their parent or grandparent had attended college. The majority of participants reflected for the first time during the interview how their childhood experiences related to their demeanor, career path, and their leadership.

These early leadership experiences were gained at a cost. Looking at the sacrifices made by each mother, grandmother, or grandparent allowed for success but for the women those experiences also translated into what was needed for them to be successful. The purchasing of a home by Leslie Stuart's grandmother, was a sacrifice of finances and personal space so the kids could grow up in a home surrounded by love. That act of selflessness became a model for Leslie Stuart. Each participant recalled the time and energy poured into them and though they did not refer to this as a sacrifice, was an example of women doing what they needed to do for their family. Leslie Smith saw a duty to take care of her family,

> I was seven, and my sister was six, and so I remember those times feeling like okay, I have to take care of my sister, and if I can I got to take care of my mom. I think by nature I've always been a person . . . let me help figure everybody else's situation out, and by the grace of God and strength, those moments of pouring in I would say probably came from him versus from somebody I can pinpoint externally.

This thought process connects to the first connection of the N.O.B.L.E model as the developmental experiences provided foundation for who she is today and for things that she values. The idea of a six year caring for themselves, a sibling, and a parent shows that the person will do what it takes even at the expense of self. This indexes the idea or image noted in Collins (2002) of the matriarch and the mammy. Collins (2002) provided this context,

> Taken together, images of the mammy and the matriarch place African American women in an untenable position. For Black women workers in service occupations requiring long

hours and/or substantial emotional labor, becoming the ideal mammy means precious

time and energy spent away from husbands and children.

The images portrayed of the matriarch can be imagined as hard working, sacrifice, supportive, loving, the "make it happen" mentality. Each woman saw their parent(s) working, engaged in the community, raising their kids, and being surrounded by family. That perception of you can do it all was internalized without any context of the sacrifices being made. Leslie Smith shared,

I remember one of my friends had got the letter that she didn't pass the Ohio proficiency

test after taking it so many times, so she wasn't going to be able to graduate. I remember

writing a letter. I think it was to Mike DeWine or somebody at that time. I just don't think

it's fair that we go through all this time in school and . . . I actually got a letter back from

them. I think it was a powerful thing about how my voice can actually impact. But once

again going backwards, having that reflective moment in time of seeing ways in which I

advocated for other people, or ways in which I used my voice in certain spaces to where

now, by nature of my job, I'm doing that, but didn't really realize I've been doing that

pretty much my whole life in various spans.

The coping, health, and understanding self, focused on the impact the SSAO role had on the participant's well-being and physical health. Black Feminist Thought provides the context for understanding and the comprehension of this theme. Black women have different experiences from Black men, White men, and White women. Their experiences form their understanding and knowledge of how they interact with the world and how the world perceives them. This form of consciousness provides the tools to resist multiple forms of oppression. Collins (2002), posits the oppression of Black women,

The supposedly seamless web of economy, polity, and ideology function as a highly

effective system of social control designed to keep African-American women in an

assigned, subordinate place. This larger system of oppression works to suppress the ideas

of Black women intellectuals and to protect elite White male interests and worldviews."

The women in this study persevered but not without detriment to their well-being. Amber

reflected on the constant attack she believed her and other Black women were under.

Even though we are competent. Its like, how dare you all come, and you disrupt our plan.

You all weren't supposed to sit in these seats. Our friends were supposed to sit on this

seat that you hold [as a SSAO]. We are going to try to make your life miserable. We are

going to throw you underneath the bus every time we can. That's why I have to make sure

that I have everything in order at all times.

Collins (2002) states, "Black women professionals are expected to fix systems which are

in crisis due to underfunding, infrastructure deterioration, and demoralized staffs." Amber didn't

make consistent time to take care of herself. She struggled with her weight, she had over five

miscarriages, and had to have multiple surgeries for fibroids and other concerns, consequently

she struggled to stay healthy. Stressed from her new supervisor, Sheba's mindset and self-

preservation did not change until she had a cancer scare, and even after she was stressed to the

point of not eating. Liz who would drink large quantities of alcohol daily and was diagnosed

with fatty liver disease, also struggled with weight and the pressures of being an SSAO. Each of

the above participants felt the constant stress from work and it directly had an impact on their

life, particularly their health.

 Leslie Stuart proclaimed,

The unwritten rule is that you have to be available 24/7. So, how does that really work

with expectations that the rest of the world has, and in this position, how do you guard

your staff against burnout or against just having a life? If there's something going on,

you've got to have a way of being able to address it real-time.

Direct and indirect expectations and in many cases fear, motivated many of the women.

Understandably the role of a SSAO can be different depending on the institutional type (Kuk &

Banning, 2016). When that is coupled with the perception or institutionalized expectation that a

Black woman must "take care" of everyone else's child/family at the expense of her own family

and herself, like the "mammy," that becomes the new narrative for Black SSAOs. The SSAO is

the position responsible for student mental and physical well-being, safety, housing, food, co-

curricular learning, and student protests, in addition to having oversight of budgets, departments,

and being strategic and innovative and an institutional leader. Leslie Stuart envisioned her life

would be different but the demands placed on her life at the small, private, predominately White

institution left her with a life that never came to pass

 I always imagined that I would give birth to my own children, which did not happen.

And I don't recall making that decision along the way either. It's kind of one of those

things that happened. And I did not envision it being where my life would be.

The experiences of African American senior student affairs officers provides support to the

theme of "occupational hazard." All participants believed there were additional expectations that

their White male and female counterparts did not have. The obligation to work 24/7, to be

available, to fix all concerns, and to be held accountable to a greater degree was always at the

detriment to their health and well-being. That manifested in participants putting off surgeries, not

having children, not sleeping, not taking time for relationships, and ultimately feeling guilty

when they spent too much time on themselves. The pressure the women have to not fail, or to

have it all and to be successful does not compare to the systematic oppression the women face

daily. The toll that takes on their body and their health is immeasurable. "People of color lead shorter lives and receive worse medical care" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Exploring all of the responsibilities that each participant had as an SSAO as well as the responsibilities within their personal life helped to understand the pressures that the women were up against. The N.O.B.L.E concept connection 3 examines the career experiences of African American women. This connection explores how a Black woman's experience is intertwined with her consciousness (Collins, 2002, Hinton, 2001).

Participants reflected on the decisions they made intentionally and unintentionally that led them to the field of student affairs. Amber chose to get a degree in counseling because she wanted to help kids that were struggling to be successful in college. Liz started in diversity, wanting to provide students with a safe space on campus. Sheba provided tough love through her early work in judicial affairs and housing and held her students at an HBCU to a higher standard. And it was Yvette's devotion to higher education that served as a backdrop for her to advocate for higher education as a way to change one's circumstance. For many of the participants, their initial focus was helping other African American students achieve just as they had. Sheba spoke on a specific challenge of helping her young Black male students stay out of the judicial system because she not only understood the environment that they came from but more importantly understood what being in the judicial system could do to their future. Collins (2002) provides context for this connection, "the particular experiences that accrue to living as a Black woman in the United States can stimulate a distinctive consciousness concerning our own experiences and society overall" (p. 24). Having experienced the pressures on the rise to the SSAO position, participants felt compelled to do what was necessary to stay at that professional level. Liz proclaimed, "You sacrifice and work late hours to rise to the ranks and get promoted only to

understand that you can't let up, because if you do they will find a way to get rid of you." Hope felt as if she had to stay late to prove herself to her supervisor and her counterparts.

The need to be seen was evident for every SSAO interviewed. The majority of them were looking to be seen as a hard worker, one who supports and advocates for the students. This "work hard" mentality usually meant six to seven, 12-18 hour work days. The hard work being done often meant missed lunches, back to back meetings, late night phone calls, and various levels of crisis. Amber, Sheba, Hope, and Leslie exclaimed that their counterparts in academic affairs, just did not have to work as hard as they did for the same level of respect. Leslie S. stated,

> When there's a crisis, I'm responsible. I actually have to respond, you know? I have to
> be there. It is my job. But also it's more than a job. It's not something I can turn off and
> go." Leslie went on to say, "I don't know how a White male experiences those, but I
> know in my case, sometimes the expectation is, Women are able to juggle everything.
> Shouldn't they be able to do that? No job you have should be that important that it places
> priority over your family.

Amber echoed the same sentiment, "I feel oftentimes I have to go above and beyond to provide that I am of value, I know what I am doing, and I'm competent. I have the skillset to advance the work that we need to do to meet our mission". Higher Education journals and news outlets boasts headlines featuring Senior Student Affairs officers being fired for taking political stances against Greek life, student unrest, or perceived embarrassment of the university because of the women's' personal lives. Each experience, strategy, and decision helps to impact the future one. The experience gained is immeasurable. Yvette believed,

> So, that's one of the things that, in this role, I really am staying keenly aware of, that I

don't want to be stereotyped female Chief Student Affairs Officer, where you become the person they go to when they're trying to figure out sensitive student issues. The caring, nurturing person, we're going to put out there to say something nice to students.

The Intersection of Race and Sex

Collins (2002) presents this idea of "mammy work," under the ideals of "emotional nurturing and cleaning up after other people." The field of student affairs has historically been deemed as the more nurturing field in higher education, where staff must take care of students. Student Affairs also adhered to the philosophy of "en loco parentis" or in place of their parents. While institutions have formally moved away from this notion, there continues to be pressures and perceptions that student affairs staff are in place to nurture students. The nurturing connotation of the field is added to the image of the African American woman as the one who will solve problems, take care of the students, and clean up the messes in student affairs. Collins (2002) referred to this as "corporate mammy work." The mammy was the first image that set the tone of how Black women were viewed, "the faithful, obedient, servant" (Collins, 2002, p. 72). Amber saw herself as a clean-up woman.

> I swear, I need to keep a pooper-scooper in here, because that's what we do. We know we have this reputation of no nonsense, let's get things organized, straightened out, clean up. They know that we are going to be responsive. Yes, my counterparts created messes, and nobody checked them at all, just kind of let it go. Then we come in and we are expected to clean it all up their messes.

Sheba echoed this experience,

> I came here and cleaned up, you know. See, they get black women. Black women are known to be clean-up women, especially in higher ed. They get black women to come

and clean up the mess. Then after you clean up the mess, they're through with you. They'll keep you, but you don't see a black man coming in and cleaning up Student Affairs, you see Black women.

The career experiences coupled with the conscious understanding of what they brought to the institution and the expectations people had for them. Liz stated poignantly, "we're the most vulnerable to be let go. We are the one who usually gets all the strenuous work or the work that nobody wants to do." Women are often associated with one or two of the identities they carry including mother, wife, working mom. This does not accurately reflect the complete picture of who she is, how she presents herself, and what it took to get there. The women in this study provided context on who they were and how they got to that place. Amber feels as if she is under a microscope, "They hold you responsible, because you only got the job because you are Black."

The fourth connection of N.O.B.L.E is transitional and growth experiences. This connection describes transformation or the experiences that have informed decisions and helped the women to best navigate, advocate, and mentor others. This theme from the study focused on image and strength. The connection of image and professional development is one deeply rooted in African American culture.

Through the lived experiences gained within their extended families and communities, individual African-American women fashioned their own ideas about the meaning of Black womanhood. These self-definitions of Black womanhood were designed to resist the negative controlling images of Black womanhood advanced by Whites as well as the discriminatory social practices that these controlling images supported." (Collins, 2002, p. 10)

The expectation for the participants to "look" professional came first from their parents or caregivers, but it was understood what they could "lose" if their look was not polished. The participants all understood that how they looked had an impact on how they were treated by students and staff. They not only had to have knowledge and skill but also, the "look of a professional." The professional and polished look was a stark contrast to negative images of Black women portrayed in the media, television, and marketing. Looking professional also provided the women with an internal response of confidence, affirming the statement, "You look good, you feel good". Yvette stated she wanted to dress young and hip or wear larger earrings but with her position she could not afford too. Amber talked about one time wearing braids while training with a student athletic trainer and the student stated that deans don't wear braids. Their transition from young professional to mature professional did not only include the external looks. Their growth as individual was aided through hands on experiences, mentors, and being strategic.

Amber had this to say,

> Higher education has changed, the demographics have changed, expectations for us have changed, not just from students but from parents and families, and legislators and boards. As you do advance up the ladder of your career path you have more responsibility, there is more liability, and there is more risk.

Leslie Smith added information on how she tackles her work.

> One of the things I'm embracing is elevation and promotion does not happen because you come off that you can take on everything. Elevation and promotion happens when you are efficient, effective, and can accomplish the things you do have on your plate.
>
> As the women rose the ranks to their SSAO positions, understanding the landscapes and

the landmines became very important. They could no longer just do work and meet with

students, they had to be more visible and open, and they had to be strategic. The Black SSAO,

has to be everything to everyone in order to survive in the environment. Amber stated the work

she does is directly connected to that of the president and the board of trustees. She answers not

only to them on a regular basis but also to the students and her staff.

Investigating **the lived experiences of African American women in senior student

affairs leadership positions** has provided context on their childhood, their leadership formation

and style as well as the struggles these women have encountered. Perseverance, education, and

strategy played a large part in their success. All the women exuded confidence during their

interviews and spoke with pride on the work they were doing and their accomplishments.

Strategy and politics were evident and played a role in how they operated on campus and

especially with their peers. Leslie Stuart successfully navigated multiple presidents and cabinet

members on her campus for 30 years. Leslie Stuart also recognized her unique circumstance of

being a Black woman at a PWI for 30 years. She felt they would change many things as soon as

she retired but have essentially left her alone. Many others felt as if there was a target on their

back and they needed to be vigilant about their work and presence on campus. Amber shared that

many people see and want the salary of an SSAO but fail to see the work, stress, or politics that

come along with the role. She spoke of various alumni, faculty, and community groups that

targeted her for the shortcomings of her predecessor, an older White woman.

The women dealt with constant questioning from students, direct reports, community

members and peers concerning their work. Liz among others spoke on making sure they were

always prepared to combat naysayers. For the women at HBCUs their age and gender were a

factor in how people treated them, the women that worked at PWI's their gender and race were

reason for why their discriminatory experiences.   In their careers, these seven women used their

leadership skills daily. These women are leading divisions, multiple departments, and in some

cases multiple institutions. They used every experience to help build their confidence, network,

and ability to move forward. Those skills came in the form of strategy, negotiation, and

navigation of difficult situations. All of the women showed leadership skills early in their

childhood and were affirmed and supported by their families. The women did not elaborate on

their leadership work in college but talked about what they learned early in their careers.

The second research question reviewed the strategies African American women use in

climbing to and surviving in senior student affairs leadership positions. What was evident from

the all the women was that education was a high priority from their childhood until now. The

second quality that was shared was the desire to serve others. Education coupled with service

served as a catalyst for the seven women to join the field of student affairs. Four of the women

were very intentional about their career, they went after specific jobs, and accepted offers that set

them up for the future. Three of the participants were able to move up in the field through

sponsors and networking at their current institution and outside of it. All the women spoke on

the importance of mentors and sponsors and how they helped them be successful. When asked

about their mentors and sponsors, many of the women spoke on how White women and White

men were critical in speaking up for them in spaces that could elevate their position. Aside from

mentors and sponsors, all the women had circles of friends and colleagues. Some of the groups

were described as single sexed or mixed, all SSAOs, some all higher education, and others

represented multiple industries. These circles served as spaces for the SSAOs to be affirmed in

the decisions, were a check and balance on ideas or stances, and served as a release for their

frequent frustrations. The SSAO's I spoke with said there was often no one they could talk to on

their campuses that experienced the same things they did at their level.

CHAPTER 7

RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS, CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of African American women who are senior student affairs administrators. Using the life story approach to data collection, this study examined their childhood, family, and professional experiences and their trajectory and retention in student affairs. The theoretical frameworks Black Feminist Thought and the Nexus of Black Leadership Efficacy (N.O.B.L.E) were employed to examine the experiences particularly of Black women. The study was guided by the following questions,

1. What are the experiences of African American women in senior student affairs

leadership positions at institutions of higher education?

2. What are the factors leading to the successful advancement of African American

women in senior student affairs leadership positions?

This chapter will explore the recommendations for future research, the recommendations for higher education, the limitations of the study, and conclusion. This will provide the next steps to better support African American women in aspiring and current SSAO roles.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for further research allows for the opportunity to continue the research on African American women as senior student affairs officers. The seven participants of this study provided information spanning their childhood to present day focused on their leadership,

experiences as SSAO's, and their life experiences. The four themes that emerged from the study highlighted their education, their struggles as African American women and the sacrifices they make to do their job.

The information garnered from each woman has inspired the following recommendations that can provide key concepts for further research and practical recommendations measures to retain and support African American SSAO.

Understanding how women of any race experience the SSAO position can provide insight into the difference of minoritized women and White women. This step of reflection for an institution can allow one to see their weak spots in regards to institutionalized and overt racism on their campus. Once an institution understands their challenges and opportunities, it can show they are knowledgeable, and hopefully they put a plan into place to address the items. There should additionally be a self-study to review "standard practices" that are unintentionally geared to white men. This could include meeting times that do not account for caregivers with outside responsibilities and dress code expectations. In recruiting and retaining Black SSAOs this gives the aspirant insight into challenges they could face as an African American woman with multiple identities.

Secondly, each of the seven participants spoke on how they believed African American men SSAOs have different experiences than African American women including during hiring process, their compensation, and the expectations of the job. Although there has been a rise in in Black women SSAOs. It would be worthwhile to compare the hiring rate of African American men to African American women, as well as a comparison of the experiences of African American men to African American women SSAO's. This comparative research could show how the intersectionality of race and gender are oppressive to AA women SSAOs.   This

research could also aid understanding of the pay and benefits of African American SSAOs. It would not only be beneficial to see where they equate or differ to their African American counterpart but also to see where they fall comparatively with other cabinet or senior leaders form their campus. Two of the women interviewed had a semi-up to date salary online but there were no conclusive benefits available.

Additionally, there are many rising professionals that have aspirations of being a SSAO. Research that compares the thoughts, perceptions of the role, and motivations of aspirational SSAOs with those of current African American SSAOs. SSAOs can provide insight of the skills needed to be successful as well as the reality of what takes place in the role. This research may provide deeper insight into how standing African American SSAOs could provide a pipeline to the position. It will also provide insight into successfully sustaining in an SSAO position. The additional research that can be done to further this study is to study the experiences of the African American women that have left the field of Student Affairs. One participant spoke of fellow African American SSAO's that have retired early or left all together because of the stress it was having on their lives. Amber stated, I have a backup plan, "I will go and work for the Girl Scouts," Getting the true experiences of why people are leaving the field and not the politically filtered version can provide institutions with the real life consequences of what can happen unless practices and employee support changes.

Recommendations for Higher Education

The recommendations for higher education aims to examine what mechanisms can be put in place to positively affect the well-being of African American SSAOs. The literature provides the foundational understanding that African American women in senior student affairs roles are underrepresented on campus. The literature also supports the competence, credibility, and most

importantly the resilience of this particular population. Resiliency theory is described in three waves. The first wave that includes a person's qualities and support from others, the second wave looks at how one uses their qualities to cope, and the third wave looks at their internal motivation (Richardson, 2002). All of the women interviewed referenced some form of sacrifice they have had to make because of the nature and expectation of their position at the institution. Based on the experiences identified in this study, the women represented future senior leaders will be more likely to continue to be stressed unless institutions take an intentional stance on supporting the most marginalized employees. The college and university professional association for human resources (CUPA-HR) provides insight on what college and universities are doing to support their staff. On their site they refer to a term VOI versus ROI, focusing on the Value on Investment instead of the Return on Investment. The notion of valuing the employee and their well-being can lead to their happiness, health, satisfaction, and work- life balance.

In order to better support, retain, and recruit African American SSAOs it is critical for institutions to place value on the investment for this particular population. It is well noted that African American women are prone to heart disease, fibroids, lupus, and obesity. In addition there are dangers of self-coping with drugs and alcohol. It is recommended for institutions to ensure that there are well-being initiatives on their campus that focus on senior leaders and their needs. That would entail monetary incentives for individuals taking steps for better health. It would also include adhering to safe sleep habits and ensuring senior leadership is not causing the harm by setting unrealistic expectations. The university must also connect the SSAO with the appropriate healthcare providers. A document of all of the African American medical, dental, and counseling professionals within an hour radius should be included with the interview and

hiring materials. The materials should also note if the providers specialize with other identities as well.   It is easy to state that the programs and services are in place for all employees but it is crucial for the supervisors of senior leaders to value their employees' well-being as it is the key to the supervisors' success.   Another initiative that universities must establish to benefit institutional and individual well-being would be to provide semester and academic year sabbatical options for African American SSAOs. The process should not be hindered by formal votes or departmental signatures. It must be fully funded by the university and if possible, written into the SSAO's offer letter and contract. This opportunity would provide self-rejuvenation, opportunity for professional development, and focus on health and family.

Secondly it is recommended that presidents and provosts, the primary supervisors for SSAOs, recognize the gender and race of an individual and how those two identities bring forth varying expectations and experiences that could hinder success. The following should be put in place for SSAO success. Special focus should be placed on SSAO success from the interview process to the time they are actively working on campus. As part of the interview process, an institution must provide opportunities for the SSAO to fully understand the community in which she would be joining, including on campus and off. By providing a lunch during the interview, which helps to build community, and encourages guests from special populations such as other Senior Black women on Campus, and faculty and staff to attend. This provides context for the SSAO candidate as well as understanding. If that population does not exist it would be beneficial for her to meet with others such as her sorority or a group of Black women and men. This type of networking shows the institution is cognizant of the experiences faced by Black women and provides that SSAO with knowledge of the support that is out there for her success and basic needs.

The third recommendation would focus on professional development for African American women SSAO's. Institutions must provide time, funding, and the process noted below to ensure the SSAOs have the most beneficial professional development to aid in their success. Specifically, the university should provide funding, time, and nominations for the SSAO to participate in the American Council on Education (ACE) Fellows Program which is designed to provide real world experiences, and the H.E.R.S. Institute, which is designed for women leaders in higher education. Other programs include the ACPA and NASPA Aspiring Institutes as well as serving on various boards in the associations. The process for nomination for the above opportunities should come from other minoritized faculty and staff as this population best understands the needs and the community. There is also less room for preferential treatment. Universities must also commit funding and time for professional development safe spaces on campus. This includes sponsoring lunches, speakers, and space for populations to gather. Those populations may be all Black women, Black faculty and staff, Black LGBTQ faculty, and staff, and other identities. These safe spaces will provide opportunities for staff to be affirmed, as well as opportunities for community, sharing of resources, and strategies for survival. All, of this will aid in keeping African American SSAOs in a space to be successful on that campus.

Although this study reviewed experiences, understanding the impact African American women SSAOs have made on each campus could provide a holistic view of their experiences, expectations, and perceptions on campus. The burnout and exit of African American may be an inevitable occurrence unless measures are taken to secure their existence and persistence at an institution. Sabbaticals have been utilized by faculty under the premise of research, refocusing, and providing balance. Utilizing this institutional mechanism to provide strategic growth, focus, and rejuvenation should be considered for SSAOs. 37% of institutions provide sabbaticals to

administrative staff compared to 85% providing it to faculty. (CUPA-HR Report, 2016).

Furthermore, institutions that advertise resource options and target minoritized hires especially

SSAOs, can show intentionality and understanding. The university should work with HR and

Cultural Centers to provide list of local establishments that cater to Black and minoritized

individuals including hair salons, churches, and community centers.

Limitations

This study reviewed the lived experiences of seven African American women who are

SSAOs. The goal was to interview at 10 of the 21 that were emailed. This study was limited by

the amount of time I could actually spend with the women due to scheduling problems.

Although the number of African American SSAOs is growing, the number of women

available for the interview was less than expected. Using a larger number of participants might

have revealed additional themes or further substantiated those found. Each interview lasted a

minimum of 90 minutes and a maximum of 120 minutes. Although this was a long time, it was

not long enough to gain an in-depth comfort level with each participant. There were many

participants that were extremely open and a few that were still guarded in their answers. Given

the nature [of their position] it is understandable they would have hesitation because of the

political ramifications. Spending a day or more with the participant could have yielded a stronger

relationship.

The interviews were completed in the span of five months. There was a two month time

when no interviews were completed. The time in between interviews and follow up interviews

lessened the momentum and it took longer to get comfortable. Although this allowed for the

interview to be a little longer there were moments of awkwardness.

Conclusion

Seven African American women were interviewed as part of this study to examine the lives of African American senior student affairs officers. Two essential research questions served as the initial guide to the study in data collection and data analysis.

(1) What are the lived experiences of African American women in senior student affairs leadership positions?

(2) What are the strategies African American women use in climbing to and surviving in senior student affairs leadership positions?

A 90 to 120 minutes interview with each participant was recorded and analyzed to better understand their lived experiences. Four themes emerged from the data, a) Occupational Hazard, (b) Coping, Health, and Understanding Self, (c) Building Relationships, and (d) the Intersections of race and sex. The participants differed in age, marital status, university type, structure, reporting line, and length of time at the institution.

In addition to the themes, the data had a connection to many of the items in the literature review. The items that were presented as part of the literature review and that connected to the themes include representation of race and gender in the workplace, work life balance, credibility, confidence, resiliency, gravitas, and mentoring. Each woman exuded confidence even when they self-identified as having imposter syndrome or questioning decisions. Leslie Smith and Yvette were the two that had the most "balance" when reviewing work life balance. Leslie Smith operated in a much different capacity compared to all other participants because of the way her institution was set up. She had a lot of freedom and was not bound to the pressures of traditional campus cultures. The women of this study spoke about their experiences and throughout there was the theme of resilience. The literature review explores G.E. Richardson's theory of the three

waves of resilience, resilient qualities, the resiliency process, and innate resilience. The seven participants each provided examples of their resilient qualities such as self-reflection and understanding. The women provided examples of having resilience through the many trials or attacks on their character or decisions. And the women all spoke about their innate resilience through the stories share regarding their childhood leadership endeavors. Resilience, weathering, and being the clean-up woman tie all together. Black women continue to endure, from the cotton fields to the corner office. This endurance, whether innate or learned allows Black women to "weather" challenges. The impact of the SSAO job, and how that intersects with their race and gender can lead to being worn down, to carry the weight of the position and the added weight of being a Black woman.

The theories of Black Feminist Thought and Nexus of Black Leadership Efficacy provide the language and context to what the seven women have and continue to experience. Black Feminist Thought informs how African American women are viewed and sexualized, on othermothering, and being the clean-up woman. N.O.B.L.E gave understanding and value to the leadership experiences of the participants from childhood to present day. The theoretical approaches served as a foundation or frame for the study but the alignment was much deeper. The women actually experienced the many concepts associated with the theories themselves. Hope and Liz believed that othermothering their students and staff was part of the job. Amber, Yvette, and Sheba understood that their visual representation including dress, hair, and makeup played a role in how they were treated especially as African American women on a predominately White campus. Each participant had experiences that aligned with the four connections described within N.O.B.L.E. The alignment allowed for participants to see how their leadership and family experiences in their youth, their collegiate and career experiences,

and their growth were all intertwined. For many it was an "ah ha" moment realizing the strength and perseverance as a child has indeed carried over to who they are present day.

I had the absolute pleasure to interview seven different women that lived seven different lives, on different campuses but shared some common experiences. They all opened up fairly quickly and provided me with valuable insight into their opportunities and their struggles. I was invested in their experiences as becoming an SSAO was a dream of mine. That dream has somewhat shifted. The women revealed not only the realities of the careers but the realities of their home life as well as their physical health. Amber talked about the assumption that her peers were there working for the benefit of students and students only but that was not the case. She believed that people had personal agendas and motivations, and their decisions didn't always affect students. This concept or idea bothered me. There is an assumption that the university operates in a less aggressive environment than the corporate world and that is not the case. What I gained from the interviews was a sense that Black women are consistently and institutionally being taken advantage of, that our bodies are being abused because of the stress, that Black women are being undermined, underappreciated, and sacrificed more than their peers. I learned that the income, prestige, and professional accomplishments may cause more pressure and scrutiny especially for the Black women in small, predominately White towns. Those at smaller institutions or community colleges faired a little better in regards to scrutiny and public pressure. After reviewing all the information pertaining to this study, rising to a SSAO role at a small institution feels attainable, but I would need to put safeguards in place to protect my health and wellbeing.

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APPENDIX A: EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS

Email to Known Student Affairs Professionals

Greetings [name],

My name is Martia King, and I am writing you today seeking information regarding my research study on African American senior student affairs officers. Your information has been obtained by networks throughout the NASPA IV-E region.

Currently I am working toward my Ph. D. in Educational Leadership in Higher Education at Indiana State University and have been approved to move forward to interview women for my dissertation study.

Today I am looking for your nomination of an African American woman that you believe or know to be in a senior student affairs role at a university in the Midwest. There is no restriction on institutional type or current employment status, as the individual may be retired.

Nominations should include the individual's name, institution, and contact information. Individual may nominate themselves or others. Nominations will be taken until March 28, 2019, via email at mbrawnerking@sycamores.indstate.edu .

Thanks in Advance for your help with this study!

Martia Brawner King

Department of Educational Leadership

Indiana State University

Terre Haute, In 47809

mbrawnerking@sycamores.indstate.edu

937-367-8503

Email to Potential Participants That Have Been Nominated or Identified

Greetings [Dr. Name]

My name is Martia King, and I am a writing you today regarding my research study on African American senior student affairs officers. Your information was obtained by nomination from colleagues identified in the NASPA IV-E region. Currently I am working toward my Ph.D. in Educational Leadership in Higher Education at Indiana State University and have been approved to move forward with interviews. The goal of this research is explore the lived experiences of African American women in senior student affairs roles and provide a narrative that can inform the future of our profession and our field.

My criteria for participation includes identifying as an African American woman and working or retired from a senior student affairs role at an institution of higher education in the Midwest. Participants will be asked to sign a consent form (attached), participate in a 90 minute interview, and review the transcription for accuracy.

I would like to conduct in-person interviews from February 2019 through April 2019. I believe your story will bring a unique perspective to my study and also one that will assist in expanding the literature on African American women. I hope you will consider participating. Thank you, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Please let me know if you would like to participate by replying to this email. If you have questions, please contact me by email at mbrawnerking@sycamores.indstate.edu or by phone at

(937) 367-8503.

Martia Brawner King

Department of Educational Leadership

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APPENDIX B: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Exploring the Lived experiences of African American Senior Student Affairs Officers

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by *Martia Brawner King, a Doctoral Candidate at Indiana State University*, sponsored by Dr. Kandace Hinton of the Bayh College of Education at Indiana State University. This study is being conducted as part of my dissertation with the purpose of exploring the lives of African American Senior Student Affairs officers. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You should read the information below and ask questions about anything you may not understand before deciding whether or not to participate. You are being asked to participate in this study because you have identified yourself as an African American women in a senior student affairs position that is employed at an institution of higher education in the Midwest.

- **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to understand the personal challenges African American women who are senior student affairs administrators experience in their roles. The voice and experiences of African American women provide a counter-narrative to the majority of leadership positions in colleges and universities. The lack of critical mass of this population places African American, female senior student affairs officers in an invisible scenario at their institution and within the profession of student affairs. Out of the over 106,000 women in student and academic affairs administration, African American women accounted for just over 14,000

(National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013). This study will strive to represent the countless number of women that may believe there are barriers to their advancement into a senior leadership position.

- **PROCEDURES**

By volunteering to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

- Suggest a private location for a face-to-face interview (i.e. a site free of disruption).

- Participate in an interview that will last a maximum of 90 minutes.

- Agree to be digitally recorded.

- Proceed knowing the digital recording will be transcribed by a transcription service.

- Participate in a post-interview review of the transcription to review for accuracy.

- **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

It is expected that any risks, discomforts, or inconveniences will be minor to participants. The likelihood of a breach of confidentiality does exist, but it is minimized by limiting who can access the data stored on the password-protected computers and servers. There is a distinct possibility that the interview will result in you remembering influential and possible painful experiences, which could cause distress. You do not have to answer any questions that make you feel embarrassed or have any discomfort. If at any point you are uncomfortable at any time, you may discontinue participation in the study or withdraw completely without negative consequences. At that time all materials will be destroyed. After the study has been published, there will not be a chance to withdraw from the study.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE

Should you feel triggered as a result of this study, the following resources are available:

GoodTherapy.org: https://www.goodtherapy.org/

This website provides access and information to therapists in your geographical areas. You can search our directory to a find a qualified therapist near you. Your current employer may also offer EAP programs to assist with connecting to a therapist.

Therapy for Black Girls: https://www.therapyforblackgirls.com/about/

Therapy for Black Girls is an online podcast that is not meant to be treatment but a space that can affirm topics on mental health and wellness. Using this type of resource is free of charge but requires access through a website or cellular phone.

- **POTENTIAL BENEFITS**

As a participant you will not directly benefit from participation in this study, but the knowledge gained, transcribed, coded, and written will add to the scholarship on African American senior student affairs officers. Your participation will aid in understanding African American higher education professionals experiences and campus climate at an institution of higher education. More broadly, this could benefit diversity efforts for student affairs and higher education institutions nationwide.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

Confidentiality will be maintained by each participant providing a pseudonym; if participants prefer, Martia King will select one for them. Pseudonyms will be used by Martia King to identify participants throughout the study. The participant's identity and institution name will not be used in any of the information gathered from this study or in any of the research documentation.

Information that can identify you individually will not be released to anyone outside the study. Martia King will, however, see the information collected. She may also use any information acquired from this study for future publications or education. Any information she uses for publication will not identify you individually.

The digital audio recording that we make will not be heard by anyone outside the study. The digital audio files and paper records will be destroyed three years after the end of the study.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether or not to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. After the study has been published, there will not be an opportunity to withdraw. You may withdraw by contacting me via phone (937-367-8503) or by email (mbrawnerking@sycamores.indstate.edu).

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

     If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact myself or my Faculty sponsor:

Principle Investigator:	Faculty Sponsor:
Martia Brawner King	Dr. Kandace Hinton
Department of Educational Leadership	Department of Educational Leadership
Indiana State University	Indiana State University
Terre Haute, In 47809	Terre Haute, In 47809
mbrawnerking@sycamores.indstate.edu)	kandace.hinton@indstate.edu
937-367-8503	812-237-2897

- **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

     If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at Indiana State University, Office of Sponsored Programs, Terre Haute, IN 47809, by phone at (812) 237-3088, or e-mail the IRB at irb@indstate.edu. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with ISU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my

satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____

Printed Name of Subject

_____   _____

Signature of Subject   Date

APPENDIX C: QUESTIONS

Questions for Interview Participants

Hypothetical, devil's advocate, ideal position, and interpretive questions (Merriam & Tisdell,

2016, p. 119)

1. Tell me your thoughts on the study of African American women senior leaders in

   student affairs.

2. Can you describe your journey in higher education?

3. What was your Why getting into Student Affairs and has that changed? How?

4. What is your Why for staying in student affairs?

5. Can you share the opportunities you have experienced in this field?

6. In what ways has your personal life been impacted because of your work?

7. Suppose I was to start my journey today as a Vice President for Student Affairs,

   what would you tell me about working in this position as an African American

   woman? Tips for surviving and thriving?

8. Presidents and Provosts may believe that the identity, race, or gender of a senior

   level administrator does not matter. How would you address that?

9. What challenges have you faced in the various roles/identities you represent? (I.e.

   Black woman, caregiver, within your community, etc.) ?

10. What does your out of work responsibilities look like?

11. What does self-care look like for you?