"WON'T LET THIS JOB KILL ME": A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY INTO BLACK

WOMENS' STUDENT AFFAIRS DEPARTURE DECISIONS

by

MYA RICHARDSON-ECHOLS

(Under the Direction of Georgianna Martin)

ABSTRACT

The identity of college students continues to shift, requiring the availability of staff dedicated to student development. Black women represent the largest population of minority student affairs administrators (West, 2019). Black women endure a unique within the United States of America, historically enduring violence and societal vitriol due to existing at the margin of both an under regarded race and gender. The workplace is not exempt from trauma experienced by Black women. Microaggressions, pay inequities, and invisibility are a few of the experiences identified in literature by Black women in student affairs (Candia-Bailey, 2016; Miles, 2012; Mitchell, 2018). These experiences have been identified as causes of Black women's student affairs departure (Wiggins, 2017; Williams, 2019).

Additional complications exist as America experienced an increase in televised violence and murders of Black people at the hands of police, racial and political divisiveness stimulated during the Trump era, and terror and confusion caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. These incidents do not exist external to the workplace, as the pandemic illuminated massive rates of employee turnover, deemed the "Great Resignation" (Thompson, 2021), within multiple career

spaces including student affairs. Student affairs practitioners attributed the field's own Great Resignation to a departure from the stress of working in student affairs. Given the contemporary nature of these issues, there is little research on the Black female's student affairs experience nor departure decisions.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Black women who have left the field of student affairs amidst a time of exacerbated societal issues within the United States. Utilizing Black Feminist Thought epistemology and phenomenological design, this study organizes data from the Black female perspective to illuminate the essence of departure phenomena amidst contemporary times. Findings confirm previous literature related to workplace bias and physical and mental distress endured at work. Findings also highlight intra-cultural implications, the revitalization experienced during COVID-19 lock-down, and the revelation of departure opportunity and necessity. This study provides implications towards the student affairs profession in support of equitable environments and to Black women to assume radical self-care within spaces which historically fall short in the support of Black women.

INDEX WORDS: Black, Black women, Black Feminist Thought, gendered racism, great resignation, intersectionality, student affairs, white supremacy.

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2023

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May 2023

DEDICATION

This one's for her, and she knows why.

and I hope I make all of you super proud. Know that everything from me is all for you, and I love you all the mosti-osti-ostest.

My friends told me, "Okay, DOCTA," and stayed hype with me all the way through. To Marty, thank you for the lengthy calls and positive moments. To my LSs, y'all stayed checking up on me and proclaiming victory, and for that encouragement I thank you. Z-Phi!

My family called me "Doctor" before the diss was even done, making it real and encouraging me to make it accurate. Thank you for lifelong love and support.

An abundance of gratitude to my Chair, Dr. Georgianna Martin, for getting me DONE. Your wisdom and support throughout this process was paramount. To my committee, Dr. Harris and Dr. Koo, thank you for supporting this research and providing guidance and encouragement. Thank you, Dr. Eric Tack, for speaking light into the validity of this research and my worthiness. To colleagues near and far who inspired and encouraged me. To the participants of this study, Erica, Quinn, Vanessa, Julia, Opal, Terri, Megan, and Alison, who trusted me with their voices and experiences—my deepest gratitude and love. I will never forget your stories. And finally, to the 117 Black women who expressed interest in participating in this study and countless others with a story to tell, you are deserving of a voice, deserving of humanity, and deserving of acknowledgment. I don't know you, but I love you, and I wish opportunity, peace, and success to you and yours.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Things I am not: I am not the notetaker. The people sitting around this table are perfectly

capable of taking their own notes, and out of all the jobs I perform daily for pennies on the

dollar, "secretariat for all" is not one. I am not the babysitter. The actions and mediocrity of the

grown as hell, non-WOC colleague to my left is not my responsibility. It is not normal for me to

assume their work just because I deliver. Hire more deliverers! I am not a model. If I had a

dollar for every time some man has told me to "smile," I could retire in 60 seconds. By the time

I've heard it, I've experienced at least 5 other microaggressions, same day. I'm here to do my

job well, not to be pretty, despite all this ugliness around me. Tell me to "smile" again; I've got

time today. I am not the punching bag. I never carry disrespect into any room and should not be

met with it. I will not be addressed any kind of way. I love these students to the bone, but this

field is giving "toxic," and I surely love ME way more.

(Richardson-Echols, Personal Reflection, 2022)

The reflection above was written after one of many bad working days in which my best

was done, but it was not enough. On that day, I was too consumed in the Zoom call that I missed

the text message from my superior, requesting my "smile." Unlike most days, I was too tired and

too hungry from missing one of my too-often-had working lunches to think of what my face

looked like, but since he noticed my face, I wonder if he also noticed how in that same call I was

talked at harshly and belittled by institutional colleagues. I wonder if he noticed that everyone's

questions were answered. I wonder if he noticed that my demeanor remained factual and politely

dismissive of the crassness pointed my way. It was a season of stress for all, but I, the youngest and darkest, remained the target of everyone's emotions. It was one of those situations where mental Olympics were played to perfection to provide information and engage in a conversation with no hint of frustration, regardless of the atmosphere. It was one of the times the end of the virtual call was immediately met with a drop of my shoulders, an exhale, a quick internal assessment of "who the hell they thought they were talking to," and a call to my husband to remind myself that there was someone who cared for me outside of this place. Did that man not see my face remained pleasant, as it always does, in the way that my Mama and Granny taught me to respond to disrespect for survival—the way Sista colleagues warned me of and provided tips for during informal meetings after the meetings and well-meaning "quiet as its kept" conversations of professional development throughout my career? Did he not appreciate the way I remained what they called "professional"? I did my part and completed the task at hand, focusing on the meeting's objective rather than reacting to the mess. In that season, although I continued to fulfill my working obligations, connecting with students and colleagues as if nothing had occurred, I stirred and stewed with my husband about the disrespect I experienced in that call and the audaciousness of a request to "smile," anyhow. It was such a pivotal occurrence in an already high-stress period as I operated through a pandemic and motivated students and staff, yet had little motivation left for myself. I needed to know why I continued to endure trauma in this field while I remained dedicated to the work I loved. How much would I tolerate? Given the familiarity and commonality of the experience, yet with resolve being so unnatural, I opened the notes app on my phone, exhaled again, and typed what I knew to be the opening of this dissertation.

Statement of the Problem

The profession of student affairs began with the goal of providing support to the student and their holistic needs (Long, 2012; Nuss, 2003). Given the evolving identity of college students, standards of practice continue to shift to encourage competence in supporting the contemporary student (Long, 2012). Hiring and retaining staff of color is necessary to provide a sense of representation amongst students (Campbell & Campbell, 2007). Research indicates racially diverse staff's influence on students contributes to improved student retention, higher GPAs, and lower student attrition rates (Campbell & Campbell, 2007). Black women represent the largest population of minority student affairs administrators (N. M. West, 2019) yet experience challenges due to their intersecting identities. Hierarchal systems, including those existing in higher education spaces, were never created to allow Black women to thrive (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014), so for Black women, the workplace remains a treacherous space to be navigated carefully. Indeed, Black women are underrepresented in executive level roles in comparison to white male or female colleagues (N. M. West, 2019). Within student affairs, Black women's race salience leads to the specific expectation that they will take on the labor of diversity and inclusion work atop their regular responsibilities, often without additional compensation (Njoku & Evans, 2022). There is rich contemporary literature on Black women's experiences with gendered racism in student affairs (Candia-Bailey, 2016; Steele, 2018; N. M. West, 2020; Wiggins, 2017; B. M. Williams, 2019). Evidence of invisibility and betrayal have presented from the expressed experiences of Black women in student affairs, despite the dedication and overlaboring they bring to their roles (Candia-Bailey, 2016; Steele, 2018; N. M. West, 2020; Wiggins, 2017).

Overachieving is not an unfamiliar concept for Black women, as they attempt to counter subordination within the intersecting oppressions of race, gender, sexuality, and class prevalent in the United States (Collins, 2002). Stereotypes further exhaust their efforts as they fight the perception of being lazy with overworking, then experience the expectation they will overproduce (Harris-Perry, 2011; L. M. West et al., 2016). Regardless of attempts to manage the experience of gendered racism while Black and a woman in America, there is a significant impact on Black women's mental and physical health (Borowsky et al., 2000; Nelson, Brown, et al., 2021; Nelson, Ernst, et al., 2021; Rosenthal & Lobel, 2020; W. A. Smith et. al, 2007; Thomas et al., 2008). Yet, Black women are historically dismissed, as historical prejudice experienced by Black women is so engrained in American culture that it continues to negatively impact the world's perception of the validity of Black female voices and experiences (Harris-Perry, 2011). Black women are not exempt from the effects of gendered racism in student affairs administration, and some are willing to opt out of jobs altogether due to the unfair treatment (B. M. Williams, 2019). Workplace departure in student affairs is a significant concern, as university efforts are lost when individuals depart roles (T. J. Davis & Cooper, 2017, p. 55; Tull, 2006). After 2020, the "Great Resignation" impacted college operations, and many student affairs professionals responded to the stress of work by leaving the field altogether (Shalka, 2022; D. Thompson, 2021).

How do these compounding issues impact Black women's experiences in contemporary times? In 2020, COVID-19 caused panic and terror as the world shifted to living, working, and interacting within a global pandemic. For Black people, stressors of the pandemic were heightened given the prevalence of COVID-19–related deaths within the Black community (American Public Media, 2020; Vasquez Reyes, 2020). Prior to this, many United States citizens

4

had realized the prevalence of white supremacy and anti-Black rhetoric through the campaign and presidency of Donald J. Trump (Alaniz et al., 2021; Clayton et al., 2019). The timing of Trump's presidency provided little space for the mourning of consistent, high-profile deaths of Black Americans at the hands of police, including those of George Floyd, Dion Johnson, and Tony McDade (Black Lives Matter, n.d.). White supremacy reared its head as the world watched Ahmaud Arbery be hunted and gunned down by racist, self-proclaimed vigilantes (Brice-Saddler & Kornfield, 2020). In regards to their specific victimization, Black women are often diminished in police brutality discourse, remaining nameless and dismissed when harmed or killed at the hands of police (Crenshaw & Ritchie, 2015). Given the freshness of all these complex problems, it is necessary to explore the Black woman's perspective of navigating workplace departure, societal chaos, student affairs, and Black womanhood.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Black women who have left the field of student affairs amidst a time of exacerbated societal issues within the United States. This critical and constructive phenomenological inquiry examines Black women's compounded experiences through the utilization of Black feminist thought (BFT) epistemology. Conducting this study from a critical lens, I examine how societal and historical factors contribute to career opt-out experiences. Using a constructive approach, I focus on the compounding of perspectives built through the participants' navigation of a conglomerate of societal pressures. This qualitative research highly regards the validity of Black women's voices as data (Collins, 2002; Griffin, 2015). Through utilization of BFT as a theoretical and epistemological framework, I elicited information on occurrences in the student affairs career space; this information has implications

for practice, as it can be used to enhance working conditions for Black women. The following questions guided this study:

1) How did the COVID-19 pandemic and social unrest between 2016 and 2022 impact the working experiences of Black women student affairs professionals?

2) To what professional and societal conditions do former Black women student affairs professionals attribute their departure decisions?

Theoretical Framework

Patricia Collins introduced BFT to examine and understand the Black female lived experience in the United States (Collins, 1986). Collins (2002) regards intersectionality as the system to explore Black women's experiences of race, sex, class, or other socially oppressive structures. *Intersectionality* was first coined and defined by legal and Black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989/1991). Crenshaw (1991) requested the examination of multiple oppressive factors of the experience of Black women, as neither race nor sex oppression can be explored explicitly to provide insight of the Black female experience. This examination is necessary given the dual oppressions of being Black and female and the specific experience of life amongst this complexity. BFT as a feminist framework places high regard on the Black female perspective as knowledge necessary to extract, share, and add to literature (Collins, 2002). Uncovering the experiences of Black women as an oppressed group provides an opportunity to add the different meanings Black women within my study have toward their career, societal, and personal experiences within recent years. BFT as an epistemological framework identifies the Black woman's experience as credible expertise on the Black female experience and structures data collection and analysis in respect to experiences (Collins, 2002). Researchers utilizing BFT epistemology are encouraged to depend on the dialogue of Black

women, care about the context expressed by Black women, and remain focused on enhancing the voice and cause of Black women. BFT is further highlighted in Chapter 3.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is to offer new knowledge of multiplicative contemporary issues experienced by Black women. The previous section described the use of BFT to add experiences of Black women to scholarly literature, as Black female knowledge in Western literature is uncommon (Collins, 2002). This study examines the Black female perspective on the student affairs career experience between 2016 and 2022, a time of multiple notable societal occurrences. Just as in other Western literature, Black women's experiential knowledge in student affairs research is scarce, as scholarly input on Black female experiences within higher education spaces primarily focuses on students or faculty (Wiggins, 2017). Black women represent the largest minoritized population of administrators within the student affairs field (N. M. West, 2019). Focusing on Black women who chose to leave the student affairs field between 2016 and 2022 highlights the voices of an even more specific group of Black women amidst a period of increased career resignations, or the "Great Resignation" (Thompson, 2021). Literature specific to turnover and the Great Resignation is explored broadly given the sudden nature of the phenomenon (Bluestone, 2022; McClure, 2021; Morales, 2022; Winfield & Paris, 2021). Information on the departure decisions of Black women are necessary to scholarly knowledge, as their working experiences have the potential to be influenced by the burden of doubly oppressed identities (Collins, 2002; Cooper, 1998; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Essed, 1991). Focusing on departure provides access to potentially lost knowledge, as these unseen and unique experiences of Black women outside of the field can be underregarded. For Black women, the workplace is

not a safe place for those who experience identity-based trauma (Case & Hunter, 2012; Constantine & Sue, 2007; Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009; Perkins, 2015).

Between the years of 2016 and 2022, racial unrest, injustices of deaths of Black Americans at the hands of police, and a global pandemic presented additional trauma to United States citizens. Burnout and stress are conditions experienced by Black women who continuously experience gendered racism in their everyday lives. Continued traumatization through media's consistent depictions of deaths of people of color at the hands of police and the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the Black community added additional stress (Pappas, 2021). Several recent studies suggest the importance of continued insight into Black women's experiences in higher education and student affairs amidst the pandemic and social unrest (Chance, 2021; Njoku & Evans, 2022). The significance of this study lies in the contemporary nature of these occurrences and this study's intent of uncovering the essence of experience of multiplicative phenomena from individuals best suited to create new knowledge.

Definition of Terms

To provide clarity and common understanding on key aspects of this work, I offer the following definitions of some terms and acronyms frequently used throughout the study.

1. **B**lack:

    Black with a capital "B" refers to a group of people whose ancestors were born in Africa, were brought to the United States against their will, spilled their blood, sweat and tears to build this nation into a world power and along the way managed to create glorious works of art, passionate music, scientific discoveries, a marvelous cuisine, and untold literary masterpieces. When a copyeditor deletes the capital "B," they are in effect deleting the history and contributions of my people. (Tharps, 2014, p. 69)

8

Capitalizing Black in this study is done intentionally out of respect to all that is packed into the experiences of individuals of the African American diaspora who have never requested to be labeled the color but know how it feels to be it.

2. Black women/sista(s): I use the three terms interchangeably to express my gratitude and positionality to the women of the African American diaspora. Sista is both a noun and an interpersonal relationship among Black women that cannot be defined.

3. BFT: For this study, Black feminist thought (BFT) is understood as an epistemological and/or theoretical framework. Black feminist epistemology is used to enhance the unique experiences of Black women at the intersections of race and gender (Collins, 2002). The researcher developed a conscious approach to tenets of BFT throughout this study, rejecting notions of the Black voice as unsophisticated. Black female authenticity is scholarly.

4. Gendered racism: This hybrid phenomenon of discrimination denotes the specific oppression experienced by Black women (Essed, 1991). In this study, I explore the intersections of race and gender, using the term *gendered racism* to describe this form of oppression.

5. Great Resignation: Dr. Simone Phipps (2022) referred to the Great Resignation as "the trend of voluntary exit of employees from their employment obligations. The pandemic may have simply exacerbated an already occurring, if not yet overwhelmingly pervasive [employment] problem".

6. Intersectionality: Kimberlé Crenshaw defined intersectionality as "lens, a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other" (TIME, 2020).

9

7. Student affairs: The National Association of Student Personnel Services' describes student affairs in this way:

> People who work in student affairs provide services, programs, and resources that help students learn and grow outside of the classroom. Some things that student affairs professionals do for students every day include: enhance student learning, guide academic and career decisions, mentor students, promote leadership skills, counsel students through crises. (NASPA, n.d, para. 1).

Roles in student affairs vary per institution, but often include responsibilities related to housing, dining, career services, veteran services, disability services, and student activities.

8. Whiteness: Liu (2017) conceptualized whiteness as a "location of structural advantage, a standpoint from which white people look at themselves, others and society, and a set of normalized cultural practices" (p. 458).

9. White supremacy: bell hooks preferred the term *white supremacy* to *racism*, as white supremacy expresses the "exploitation of black people and other people of color" (hooks, 1997, p.). As a power structure and attitude, "white supremacy . . . is always keeping things at the level at which whiteness and white people remained at the center of discussion" (hooks, 1997, para. 10).

Finally, a stylistic note: I have made an intentional choice to fully name the Black women I utilize direct quotations from throughout this work. I do this to celebrate their ingenuity and contributions.

Organization of Dissertation

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the topic, problem, purpose, and significance of study. Chapter 2 includes the literature review, which presents knowledge relative to the research topic, acknowledging previous literature on student affairs, societal occurrences between 2016 and 2022, the Black female experience in the United States, and workplace experiences of Black women. Chapter 3 introduces the methodology of the study, defining the research method, paradigms, theoretical framework, research design, and analysis methods used. Chapter 4 presents the data, revealing the participants of the study, themes extracted, and essence of the experience. Chapter 5 discusses the findings in totality, how these findings support and enhance the existing literature, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Researcher's Voice

The data analysis utilized in this study necessitates creative activities to reduce bias, or bracketing (Moustakas, 1994). The epistemological approach to this study promotes the experience of Black women to enhance knowledge, and researchers utilizing Black feminist epistemology must depend on the lived experience for meaning (Collins, 2002). Literature describes scholars who examine topics related to their own experiences or identities as producers of excellent research, providing valuable insight due to their perspective and vested interest in their work (Ray, 2016). As a Black female researcher familiar with the student affairs experience, bracketing is practiced throughout this dissertation in the form of introductions to chapters including personal experiences relative to the research. Bracketing is also discussed in Chapter 4 as a portion of the data analysis method utilized.

Further, use of African American Vernacular English is periodically occurrent in this dissertation. African American Vernacular English is a familiar dialect of the Black community and represents historical and cultural communication (Kellogg, 2016). Restrictions to Black communication are common in American history, with the banning of slaves from reading to restrict knowledge, assigning deficit to Black individuals utilizing cultural tongue, and expressing of vitriol toward common Black language as illegitimate (Kellogg, 2016). Western literature does not promote African American Vernacular English, meaning Western literature does not recognize the Black voice as scholarly (Kellogg, 2016). This study is intended to highlight the voices of Black women and is accountable to justice, experience, language, et. al.

Chapter Summary

If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression.

(The Combahee River Collective, 1977)

The work produced in this study calls attention to the overwhelm of difficulties Black women experience while navigating their place in society. The decision to depart is a political act of resistance (B. M. Williams, 2019), and this work centers those who have departed student affairs to increase the visibility of their thoughts, feelings, and experience while in the field. Black women navigate career spaces while carrying the burden bestowed upon them by the societal perception of their identities. As the nation has presented additional stressors of health crises and cultural, social, and political hardships between 2016 and 2022, specifically, this work is purposed to pause, listen, and contribute to the literature on the impact of society and work on their lives.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

It was a crowded room, and I was so proud. Proud, hopeful, and inspired! The young men of a freshmen, Black male serving living learning community were finally gathered in the large first floor room for their first event of the semester: a meet and greet with the faculty and mentors of the program I worked to recruit for and build. There were so many April/May/June/July calls made to the young men to hype them up about participating in an LLC. There were so many value-add conversations with moms, dads, and grannies at orientations and in emails about the LLC, and finally here all the young men are, and it was a crowded room! The pleasantries were underway, and I sat adjacent to my administrator colleagues and superiors, full of the moment and glowing from the dorm-storming lesson I'd just taught many of them prior to the event. This day was a win. This was a vibrant moment, and by the grin on my colleagues' faces and mine, you could tell we were soul-filled from kickstarting this so-needed work. Our goal was to gather the trust of the students; we wanted them to trust us. We wanted to build a bridge of authenticity that would carry the load of their confidence during their 4–5-year college trajectory. The questions and answers began with the young men, and one raised a hand. "So, I'm curious. Can you all tell me what degrees you all have and how much money you make?" The 12 of us looked around at each other and formed an eyeball agreement affirming all of our go-ahead to respond; these are college students, right? They are here, which was half of the battle. We owe them our time and transparency. The student and his cohort peers listened on as staff members shared their credentials and pay, with my superior responding right before me with an amount 3 times

13

my salary. The student stared at me with his mouth wide open. At that point, he knew my name more than anyone else's. He knew my work and was not familiar with student affairs or hiring and compensation decisions. In his shock, he quickly asked, "Why is it that there's such a gap between what you two make?" Although rarely ashamed, my ears got hot from slight embarrassment. His eyes showed genuine curiosity, and in that moment, was I in the place to avoid the question? The words of response were at the tip of my tongue, but my superior was sitting in earshot. I am supposed to be authentic, still? I have to answer, convincing myself by remembering all the work done to get these young men into this room. Slowly, carefully I replied "Unfortunately… in the United States, at least… my identity makes it so that it's a bit harder to make as much… but with time or with my next degree, I may come close to his amount." I couldn't go into detail and stopped there. My brain signaled to me that my response was just enough of a response for today. It was real and it was respectful of his curiosity and the space we were in. As I held my breath to find out if there was follow-up, his eyes quickly lowered and expressed both his understanding and pity. All the excitement I entered the event with still existed, but my balloon was deflated. The high we were all on from months-long work came crashing down, for me, with the reminder of my place: all of the vigor, all of the effort, all of the calls and connections, but a reminder of my compensation being improper and unjust. This realization usually materializes when I am in my own home, or in vent sessions to my mom. It usually materializes in conversations with Sista colleagues, discussing what we know to be the "same ole, same ole," the well-known wage gap naturally experienced by us all. But this time, the students know. My colleagues heard it, and as I looked to the right, my superior nodded in affirmation but was prepared to move the conversation forward. The men carried on, breaking

14

up to talk man-to-man with the students, and only in that moment did it dawn on me that I was

the only woman in the room. Haunted, hopeless, and embarrassed in that crowded room I built.

(Richardson-Echols, Personal Reflection, 2022)

Introduction

This review of literature provides context to the research questions presented in Chapter 1. First, I explore the history of exclusivity in student affairs and higher education and events occurring in the United States between 2016 and 2022. Next, I discuss Black women through an intersectional and Black feminist framework. Finally, Black women's working experiences inside and outside of the field of student affairs are explored.

Brief History of Student Affairs

Student affairs has a short history, yet it remains a growing field with complex roles and demanding positions (Nuss, 2003). In the early 1920s, traditional functions of student affairs materialized at colleges and holistic support of students gained validity as university "deans of men" began being appointed by colonial college presidents (Long, 2012). Academic support and vocational guidance roles gained recognition as positions necessary for student success, which led to networking of student services personnel. In 1937, the American Council on Education drafted the *Student Personnel Point of View,* a guiding text of modern student affairs that confirmed the validity of student affairs personnel as practitioners (Long, 2012).

Focused on the whole student, student affairs professionals were challenged to support a broadly diverse body of students, as Black, Hispanic, and indigenous students opted into all colleges in the 1980s and 1990s (Long, 2012). Care and support for nonwhite students are not a part of the profession's history. The history of student affairs us exclusionary, as postsecondary institutions were constructed with the purpose of educating and training white, Christian men

(Magolda et al., 2019). In their research on the impact of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) on Black students' success, Arroyo and Gasman (2014) wrote, "No higher education model that was founded upon, draws from, or perpetuates Eurocentric power or privilege is capable of adequately serving historically marginalized populations. Exclusion is at their very foundation" (p. 61).

Although this section opened with brief history of the student affairs profession, the foundation of student services for Black students is rooted in exclusion. Before the Civil War, educational opportunities for Black students were scarce due to discrimination against Black people and the opposition of Black opportunity (Black History in Two Minutes or So, 2020). In response to this problem, educational institutions for African Americans were created. In 1837, the Institute of Colored Youth, now known as Cheyney University, became the first institution now known as an HBCU. After, numerous HBCUs blossomed as a direct response to racial discrimination, providing opportunity for Black attendees. Currently, HBCUs make up 3% of colleges in United States. Although HBCUs are revered for creating the most Black doctors and terminal degree wielders (Black History in Two Minutes or So, 2020), the history of their inception provides context to the contentious nature of other American experiences.

The United States Experience of 2016–2022

Chapter 1 introduced the timeframe of 2016-2022 as the focus of this research. This timeframe saw a series of historical social and cultural occurrences impacting all Americans. Tiffany J. Davis (2019) discussed student affairs educators' need to engage in consistent self-care during turbulent times. Davis (2019) acknowledged the compassion fatigue, or "cost of caring," student affairs professionals often experience when student hardships become the personally felt burden of administrators (p. 433). Davis (2019) described the effect of the

16

additional stressors of the national environment on students but also on administrators as they navigate contemporary societal issues. Davis acknowledged that the nation would continue to provide tumultuous experiences like racial unrest and political turmoil to students and practitioners.

Donald J. Trump

November of 2016 was historical, as the world learned of the election of the 45th president of the United States, Donald J. Trump. Known for his eccentric television personality and investment wealth, Trump began his unconventional run at the top seat in June of 2015 (Clayton et al., 2019). His argumentative demeanor during campaign efforts along with his history of unapologetic racist, sexist, and xenophobic candor left many Americans surprised at continued campaign success and network of supporters (Clayton et al., 2019). In the 1970s, Trump's real estate companies were sued multiple times for race-based rental discrimination (Burns, 2016; Clayton et al., 2019). He further displayed his racial bias by running ads calling for the death penalty of the Central Park Five, five young men of color indicted for crimes they were later convicted of (Burns, 2016; Clayton et al., 2019). Doubling down on racist rhetoric, Trump famously questioned the American citizenship of former president Barack Obama despite the availability of certified copies of Obama's birth certificate (Clayton et al., 2019). Branding himself a nationalist, Trump's divisive rhetoric inspired white nationalists and sympathizers (Clayton et al., 2019; Rascoe, 2018). The former president utilized the slogan "Make America Great Again" and touted "America First" policies, solidifying his role as a white nationalist influencer (Alaniz et al., 2021). Trump's candor served as an aggressive call to arms for white supremacists and sympathizers, who were emboldened by the then-president's aggressive vilification of marginalized individuals (Alaniz et al., 2021). Media regularly covered events that

showcased biased language and aggressive calls for supporter action. During a 2015 rally, Trump ordered Black activist Mercutio Southhall Jr. to be escorted out of the rally after Southall Jr. shouted, "Black Lives Matter" (Cineas, 2021). Trump supporters did not hesitate to kick and punch Southhall while Trump boisterously encouraged security to "Throw him out!" (Alaniz et al., 2021). The unification of white supremacists bore irreversible consequences. In August of 2017, neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups gathered in Charlottesville, Virginia, for a "Unite the Right" rally. David Duke, former Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, marched alongside protesters endeavoring to fulfill the promises of Donald Trump to take "their" country back (Peters & Besley, 2017, para. 2). In a climaxed response to counter protesters, Trump supporter James Alex Fields Jr. intentionally drove his Dodge Charger into counter-protesters, injuring 19 and killing Heather Heyer of Charlottesville (Alaniz et al., 2021). Although Trump did not claim the popular vote in either the 2016 or 2020 election (Electoral, 2020), the effects of his influence on his devoted followers ballooned in January of 2021. January 6, 2021, revealed the level of impact Trump had on the aggression and lawlessness of followers, as the world watched news coverage of the U.S. Capitol Building under siege during an insurrection attempt by loyal Trump supporters (Alaniz et al., 2021). This event occurred after unprecedented claims of voter fraud by Trump and his demands on supporters to "fight like hell" (Alaniz et al., 2021).

Clayton et al. (2019) examined the harmfulness of Trump's presidency on marginalized communities, specifically as policy affected criminal justice, voting rights, and environmental racism. A year into Trump's presidency, 60% of Americans believed that his election led to worse race relations in the country (Clayton et al., 2019). Higher education was not exempt from the effects of the Trump presidency. During a 2017 testimony for the House Oversight Subcommittee's hearings on challenges to free speech on college campuses, the Anti-Defamation

League (2017) reported 159 racial incidents on 110 college campuses between 2016 and 2017 and an influx of white supremacist, anti-Semitic communications.

The Endemic of Racism

In August of 2014, 18-year-old Michael Brown was gunned down by police in Ferguson, Missouri (Crenshaw & Ritchie, 2015). Although the incident was not the first reckless, state-sanctioned murder of a Black man, the incident unfolded digitally in such a way that it could not be ignored. Immediately after the event, calls for justice began in the form of rallies in Ferguson and across the nation in an overwhelming response to anti-Black violence. The year prior, activists Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Temeti formed the political movement Black Lives Matter in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman, who took the life of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin while the teenager walked home from the store (Black Lives Matter, n.d.; Ramaswamy, 2017). The call to action was heard often in following years as the media turned each tragedy into casual viewings of Black executions (McCoy, 2020). The names of the protesters and organizers requesting consideration of Black lives are endless. They demanded the liberation of all Black identities, including those of children like Tamir Rice, whose 12 years of age did not exempt him from being deemed a threat and who was shot to death over a toy police mistook to be gun (Black Lives Matter, n.d,; Crenshaw & Ritchie, 2015). It was by their presence within Ferguson in 2015 that the group inspired the creation of 18 additional Black Lives Matter chapters across the US.

Violence against Black people at the hands of police continued and remained visible on the television and phone screens of Americans. The back-to-back, highly televised murders and coverage of the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery in 2020 initiated a racial reckoning, as it was evident that race bias caused their demise (De Witte, 2021). Floyd's

murder, a constant 8 minute and 46 second video loop of asphyxiation caused by a police officer who ignored Floyd's requests for reprieve, was a turning point for Americans grappling with the reality of anti-Black violence (Pasquerella, 2020). Following these three murders, one third of Black Americans reported feeling angry or sad, and one million Black Americans screened positive for depression (De Witte, 2021). Research has shown that police kill more than 300 Black Americans each year, many of whom were unarmed (Bor et al., 2018). Killings of innocent Black Americans can be a traumatizing for other Black Americans (De Witte, 2021). Within higher education, calls for support of Black studies, diversity among faculty, and response to racism brought forth numerous statements from institutional leaders intended to distance themselves and their colleges from claims of racism (Pasquerella, 2020). As if the endemic of racism was not enough, Black Americans grappled with deaths at the hands of systemic racism simultaneously.

The COVID-19 Pandemic

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) provided a difficult time for the world, as society learned to navigate a global pandemic, affecting life, labor, and safety for all. The pandemic claimed many lives between 2020 and 2022, and minority communities were disproportionately affected primarily due to long-standing, systemic conditions affecting wellness in communities of color (Vasquez Reyes, 2020). The enactment of the Affordable Care Act into law in 2010 helped lower the rate of uninsured nonelderly African Americans between 2013 and 2016 from 18.9% to 11.7% (Sohn, 2016). However, uninsured rates for African Americans (11.7%) far surpassed those of whites (7.5%; Sohn, 2016). Disparities in access to affordable care cause individuals to neglect necessary medications, medical visits, tests, and treatments, problems that were amplified as Americans navigated a complex and unknown virus (Bovbjerg & Hadley,

2007; Vasquez Reyes, 2020). For African Americans, testing access inequities complicated nationwide efforts to slow the spread; as a result, Blacks were overrepresented in COVID-19 deaths but were tested considerably less than whites (Vasquez Reyes, 2020). Data from the American Public Media

(2020) confirmed Black Americans were 2.7 times more likely to die from the virus than whites. A September 2021 report of all COVID-19 deaths demonstrated increases in deaths of individuals from minority groups, with 97.9 out of every 100,000 African Americans dying from the virus in comparison to 46.6 out of every 100,000 whites (American Public Media, 2020). The pandemic was just one of many historical events that has exposed the visceral nature of structural racism. With Blacks more likely to hold low wage "essential" jobs exempt from stay-at-home orders, they were more likely to contract COVID-19 (Green, 2020; Rogers et al., 2020). Further, with high-density housing mostly populated by communities of color, the lack of personal protective equipment combined with the inability to isolate caused Blacks to be explicitly vulnerable to the virus and its effects (Chambers, 2020; Rogers et al., 2020; Schumaker, 2020).

For student affairs professionals, 2020 triggered a scramble in operations as institutions of higher education reacted to COVID-19. COVID-19 revealed the fragility of mental health, taking a toll on practitioners who needed to respond to the pandemic's effect on students and university operations while the threat of illness health and the unknowns of the infection created fear across the globe (Njoku & Evans, 2022). Ellis (2021) highlighted the disconnect between the health and welfare of practitioners and the pressure for student affairs practitioners to do more to combat dwindling enrollments.

The Great Resignation

Texas A&M professor Anthony Klotz coined the now-popular term "The Great Resignation" to address the workplace attrition rampant in the nation over recent years (Thompson, 2021). Abbasi (2022) described the Great Resignation within health care as driven by COVID-related work conditions atop the lack of work-life balance, work overload, and lack of organizational support. Aside from the cost and time spent to replace individuals who leave their jobs, their departure also creates a loss of institutional knowledge (T. J. Davis & Cooper, 2017, p. 55; Tull, 2006). "Attracting and retaining qualified professionals is important to the implementation of positive learning environments that promote student learning and development" (Davidson, 2016, p. 79).

In a 2021 survey of student affairs practitioners, low pay and high stress were the top reasons individuals sought to change careers. Scholars suggest the attrition of entry-level professionals to be the most cumbersome, finding that 50%–60% of new professionals leave the field within the first five years (S. M. Marshall et al., 2016). A qualitative study presented by Dr. Tara Frank (2013) on new professionals who have left the field of student affairs found that practitioners left due to the need for environmental and supervisory stability, low pay, poor work-life balance, and few chances for upward mobility. Supervision also impacts the decision of a student affairs professional to leave or stay in the field. Winston and Creamer (1997) acknowledged the importance of intentionality in supervision and support of subordinates. When surveyed about their experiences with supervisors, respondents described supervisors focusing more on task management than support or rapport-building (Winston & Creamer, 1997). More recent studies depict practitioners experiencing the toll of additional stress and labor stemming from working amidst the pandemic within a field where work-life balance was already

nonexistent and resources and funding are traditionally scarce (McClure, 2021; Winfield & Paris, 2021). The National Association of Student Affairs Administrators conducted a survey in 2021 requesting insight on what led to resignations. Results revealed salaries were not competitive enough and that there were increased risks for burnout due to crisis management and stress (Morales, 2022). Further, a 2022 MacMillan Learning and Southern Association for College Student Affairs study divulged information on the student affairs experience from 324 student affairs professionals. A summary of results provided information that participants noted the expectation to do more work with even less support (Bluestone, 2022). The study also found that over one third of student affairs professionals are actively job searching, with 37% seeking a new job and 50% being encouraged to change jobs by contacts either at other institutions or outside of higher education (Bluestone, 2022). Encouragement from within the institution was further found to derive from professionals not seeing a future at their current institutions. Pain points identified in the study included pay, with only 17% considering their salaries competitive to the market; departures, with 43% of participants being negatively impacted by the departure of close colleagues; leadership, with 30% of participants not believing that leadership takes action on employee feedback; meetings, with 48% believing too many ineffective meetings impact their satisfaction; and workload, with 45% stating increased workloads during peak seasons negatively impact their satisfaction (Bluestone, 2022).

Discrimination and lack of support continue to be detrimental for student affairs professionals of color, but especially Black women (Perna, 2002). The next section discusses the premise of intersectionality to provoke thought on the exclusive and unique experiences Black women face in culture and society at the intersections of race and gender and the hardships experienced at the hand of gendered racism.

Black Women in Student Affairs

Lucy Diggs Slowe

Lucy Diggs Slowe is esteemed for her career work and position as the first African American Dean of Women (Bell-Scott, 1997, Hevel, 2015). Slowe was a student affairs trailblazer as the first president of the National Association of College Women, cofounder of the first Black women's sorority (Alpha Kappa Alpha), cofounder of the Association of Deans of Women and Advisers to Girls in Negro Schools, and cofounder of the National Council of Negro Women (Bell-Scott, 1997; Cheatham, 2012). Upon becoming Dean of Women at Howard, Slowe quickly began her work in improving the conditions of Howard's female students (Hevel, 2015). Slowe was known for her demands for respect and equal status with male colleagues (Bell-Scott, 1997). Specifically, Slowe challenged women's exclusion, salary discrimination, underrepresentation within executive bodies, and unsuitable living conditions for female students (Bell-Scott, 1997). Slowe's own experiences with racism and sexism is well documented in literature biographing her 15-year Howard tenure. Mordecai Johnson was named Howard's first Black president in 1926 and is infamously known for his antagonization of Slowe (Bell-Scott, 1997; Cheatham, 2012; Hevel, 2015). Slowe's 1927 *Memorandum on the Sexual Harassment of Black Women* was inspired by events at Howard under Johnson's presidency. Under Johnson, Slowe advocated for female students after allegations of inappropriate conduct by Black male professor (Bell-Scott, 1997). Within the memorandum, Slowe described sexual harassment as a concern of the professor's actions but also referenced her experience being discriminated against as a Black female employee at Howard (Bell-Scott, 1997). Johnson was open in his distaste of Slowe, known for removing Slowe from regular dean meetings, publicly belittling her, reducing her operational budget, shifting her responsibilities to others, and attempting to move her

residence near a landfill (Cheatham, 2012; Hevel, 2015). Though Slowe is touted for her leadership in Black female students' experience, her experiences reveal power-related challenges at the intersections of race and gender within the student affairs space.

Black Women's Experiences in Student Affairs

This current study focuses on the unique experiences of Black women choosing to leave student affairs but also adds to literature on the thoughts of Black women and their various experiences in student affairs. Steele (2018) explored the experiences of Black women at predominately white institutions. Participants in Steele's study divulged work challenges such as a lack of support, invisibility, a negative environment, and difficulties navigating the institution (Steele, 2018). Invisibility appears in literature as scholars researched role and compensation inequities experienced by Black women in student affairs. Miles (2012) discussed wage and advancement gaps of Black women in student affairs. The study found that Black women participants were overrepresented in both entry- and mid-level roles compared to other groups. Participants in Miles's (2012) study claimed to have been overlooked for promotions for less qualified individuals. N. M. West's (2020) mixed-methods study received 492 responses from Black women who participated in the African American Women's Summit, a professional development program offered to Black women student affairs professionals attending the annual NASPA conference. They considered terminal degrees necessary to be prepared for potential opportunities, despite only 3% of Black women ascertaining Chief Student Affairs Officer positions (2020). Mitchell (2018) reported specific experiences of Black women in mid-level student affairs roles. Data collected from 25 participants divulged challenges of tokenism and isolation felt from being an only, their inability to remain authentic, and the need to meet higher standards as Black women. Obstructions to advancement were evident from participant

experiences, with lack of support and development cited as barriers (Mitchell, 2018). Similarly, Candia-Bailey's (2016) findings produced evidence that even in executive and senior-level roles, Black women experience obstructions, including from other Black women. A particular participant from an HBCU stated, "It sickens me. We are our own worst enemy and why? There are so few of us . . . and one would think that we would celebrate fellowship, create meaningful networks, and uplift each other" (Candia-Bailey, 2016, p. 72).

Additional themes of challenge and betrayal appear in contemporary scholarship on Black women's experience in student affairs. Wiggins's (2017) phenomenological study produced evidence of Black women having the desire to leave the student affairs field due to the overwhelming lack of personal and professional balance and lack of supervisory support; however, when considering "opt-out," participants described the need to maintain socioeconomic stability outweighing the need to maintain emotional and mental wellness (Wiggins, 2017). B. M. Williams (2019) furthered discourse on "opt-out" by examining Black women's choice to leave student affairs and higher education. Williams, too, examined the characteristics of the variety of workplace factors that led individuals to choose life outside of it (B. M. Williams, 2019). Findings included the essence of betrayal felt by women who experienced workplace trauma, inequitable pay, and different labor expectations. Williams's study closely mirrors the present study with the difference of additional trauma experienced at the start of 2020.

The events of the year 2020 was a surprise for most of the world, so much so that the literature on them continues to grow. Njoku and Evans (2022) discussed the invisible burdens faculty and administration faced post-2020. The scholars provided an in-depth analysis on disparities caused by the public health crisis, as multiple variants of COVID-19 claimed lives within communities of color at a faster pace than white communities (Njoku & Evans, 2022). As

Black Americans faced this disastrous health phenomenon, work life continued with the expectation of productivity. Atop this was the added stressors of cultural unrest and constant incidents of police brutality and murders at the hands of police permeating the media and diseasing the spirits of Black women holding close salience to victims (Njoku & Evans, 2022; Young & Hines, 2018). Njoku and Evans's work is more applicable to administrators within academia than student services administrators, with the caveat of a section pertaining to the enhanced effect of limited resources Black women administrators experienced while working through the pandemic. My research adds specificity to recent studies within the student affairs field by considering the influence of working and departing the field during this influx of societal crises.

Intersectionality

"The colored woman of to-day occupies, one may say, a unique position in this country. In a period itself transitional and unsettled, her status seems one of the least ascertainable and definitive of all the forces which make for our civilization. She is confronted by both a woman question and a race problem and is yet an unknown or an unacknowledged factor in both."

(Anna Julia Cooper, 1892/1998, p. 112)

The earliest accounts of the impact of racism and sexism date to 1892, as evidenced by the above excerpt produced by Anna Julia Cooper (1892/1998) in *A Voice from the South by a Woman of the South.* Cooper journaled her observations and experiences from the lens of a Black female and former slave turned scholar and philosopher, and the above excerpt broadly captures the burden Black women carry facing doubly oppressive structures. Cooper urged Black male leaders to discuss the sexism experienced by Black women during times when protesting inequality in America (Cole, 2009; Giddings, 1985).

The Combahee River Collective was a Black feminist organization formed in 1974, named after Harriett Tubman's raid on the Combahee River in South Carolina that freed 740 slaves (Taylor, 2019). This group was responsible for a manifesto titled *A Black Feminist Statement,* which described race-, class-, and sex-based oppression experienced by Black women. The manifesto included four major topics: contemporary Black feminism, the specifics of the group's politics, problems in organizing Black feminists, and Black feminist issues (Taylor, 2019). The group detailed the types of oppressive forces that interlocked to create a specific system of oppression for Black women. The group requested the attention of the specificity of the Black woman's call for justice, and for serious consideration to Black women's issues (The Combahee River Collective, 1977; Taylor, 2019). The group expressed the toll on the psyche of Black women as they are picked apart and exhausted by racism and sexism. *A Black Feminist Statement* acknowledged the variation of civil and human rights fights occurring during that timeframe, such as the women's rights movement. The *Statement* acknowledged the violence occurring to Black men and their shared activism because of it. Despite Combahee's efforts, their manifesto remained a plea to Black men and to themselves to regard Black women's struggles, too.

Legal scholar and race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) introduced *intersectionality* as a term while discussing the intersections of race, class, and sex-based oppressive influences that shape the ways Black women experience the world. Crenshaw's (1989) *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics* centered the multidimensional experiences of Black women, using court precedence and work experiences to expand on the intersection of race and sex discrimination. Crenshaw (1989) contended, "Focus on the most privileged group members

marginalizes those who are multiply-burdened, and obscures claims that cannot be understood as resulting from discrete sources of discrimination" (p. 140). Crenshaw's (1991) *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color* revealed the necessity of intersectionality as a critical inquiry and praxis, as she requested a deeper understanding of occurrences happening to Black women due to economic, societal, cultural structures that influence violence and unjust treatment. In the article, Crenshaw (1991) centered violence against women of color while recommending focus on multiple grounds of identity when examining "how the social world is constructed" (p. 1245). Like the Combahee Collective, Crenshaw acknowledged the organized fight that turned society's formerly quiet discussions of rape and sexual assault into a "broadscale system of domination" affecting women as a class (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1241). Crenshaw explained this dilemma by invoking the United States Senate hearings during Clarence Thomas's confirmation to the Supreme Court. During the hearings, Anita Hill, former legal aid to Thomas, described sexual harassment that occurred during her employment with Thomas. According to Crenshaw, this dilemma depicts the essentialization of Blackness, as the Black community and antiracist allies supported Thomas in spite of the allegations, which erased sexism experienced by Hill (1991). Crenshaw called for the use of intersectionality as a means for better acknowledging and grounding "the differences among us [to] negotiate the means by which . . . differences will find expression" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1299). Additional Black feminist scholars affirm intersectionality as an experience and framework.

Gendered Racism

The term *gendered racism* was first used and defined by sociologist Philomena Essed (1991) as the specific intersection of racial and gender discrimination which combine to form a

"hybrid phenomenon" of discrimination (p. 31). Like Crenshaw, Essed (1991) argued that the oppressive experience of Black women remains complex and rooted in both gendered and classist forms of racism that stereotype and devalue Black womanhood. Collins and Bilge (2016) requested the acknowledgment of intersectionality as the "continued investigation of intersecting power relations influencing social relations across diverse societies as well as individual experiences in everyday life" (p. 2). Collins and Bilge (2016) asserted the use of intersectionality as a critical inquiry and praxis, as both focal points are perfectly positioned to be used as an analytic tool. Psychologist Elizabeth Cole (2009) requested the use of intersectionality as a framework to combat erasure of Black women and others systematically underrepresented in research. Cole (2009) acknowledged other scholars' reluctance to use an intersectional framework due to the lack of established empirical guidelines (p. 170). To bridge this gap, Cole (2009) developed three questions to guide the study of identity, difference, and disadvantage:

1) Who is included within the category?

2) What role does inequality play?

3) Where are there similarities?

The hybrid phenomenon of gendered racism experienced by Black women produces multiple elements of harm and discomfort and affects the sense of safety others would otherwise assume.

#SayHerName

Another example of requests for intersectional discourse can be seen in the rallying cry and hashtag *#SayHerName*. In her description of the need to #SayHerName, Andrea J. Ritchie (2016) wrote, "What is the first name that comes to mind when I say police brutality? The answers tend to be . . . Rodney King, Amadou Diallo, Oscar Grant, Mike Brown, Eric Garner, and Freddie Gray. Did any women's names come to mind?" (p. 1). Crenshaw and Ritchie (2015)

called out the erasure of Black women in state violence discourse in *#SayHerName: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women*. The authors contrasted the notoriety Black men receive when accosted and/or murdered by police with the very different recognition of Black women who experienced similar treatment. In their requests to hold police accountable, the authors challenged research and data collection that center Black men: "The erasure of Black women is not purely a matter of missing facts" (Crenshaw & Ritchie, 2015, p. 3). It is not that Black women experience different policing experiences than Black men. For example, "driving while Black," or being pulled over due to the biased suspicion of criminal activity, is a shared racialized experience of both Black women and men (Ritchie, 2016). Crenshaw and Ritchie (2015) displayed the names and photos of numerous Black women unjustly killed: Gabriella Nevarez, Aura Rosser, Michelle Cusseaux, Tanisha Anderson, Alexia Christian, Meagan Hockaday, Mya Hall, Janisha Fonville, Rekia Boyd, Sandra Bland, and numerous others. The authors warned it is not enough to just "say her name"; it is essential to allow Black women's experiences to also drive advocacy (Crenshaw & Ritchie, 2015).

Misconceptions

Myers (2002) asserted that "[Black] women live in a society that devalues both their sex and their race" (p. 6). Within the United States, Black women have been targeted by stereotyping within political and societal spheres. The "welfare queen" stereotype was sensationalized by President Ronald Reagan, as the former president challenged the taxpayer-funded welfare system and characterized the utilization of the welfare system by Black women as fraudulent (Triece, 2012). By contrast, the hardworking trope does not always carry a negative connotation. An analysis of 133 Black college women found that the "strong" connotation was used as a protective measure of their mental health; being "strong" assisted in forward-thinking and

31

resilience despite hardships and bias experienced (L. M. West et al., 2016). Data from a 2017 study of the reproductive health experiences of 478 Black, Latina, and white women revealed Black and Latina women more frequently reported concerns of everyday discrimination and stereotype-related gendered racism, and these experiences produced stress in Black and Latina women (Rosenthal & Lobel, 2020). Black women have been also stereotyped as hypersexualized, loud, and sassy (Harris-Perry, 2011). The societal impacts of the hypersexualized Black woman trope include the inadequate prosecution sex crimes by law enforcement and justice systems and challenges Black women face in finding social service support to cope with sexual victimization (Arthurton & Farahani, 2018). These stereotypes cause Black women to be viewed as less deserving of justice and immune to victim status. Further, Black women face the perception of being difficult or carrying attitudes. Television and media continue to perpetuate this stereotype, as Black women were historically and continue to be portrayed as loud, animated, sassy characters (Harris-Perry, 2011). In the working environment, the stereotype of the difficult Black woman results in a perception that they are reluctant to listen to authorities and apt to talk back to their superiors (Harris-Perry, 2011).

There are consequences for Black women who experience gendered racism in their daily lives. Scholars associated psychological distress with higher rates of physical health issues among Black women (Nelson, Ernst, et al., 2021; Rosenthal & Lobel, 2020; Thomas et al., 2008). Further, Black women are chronically misdiagnosed and undertreated for depression (Borowsky et al., 2000). Stress caused by racism, specifically, is associated with psychophysiological symptoms like headaches and pain (W. A. Smith et al., 2007). A 2016 study of Black college women's gendered racism coping strategies revealed social isolation and withdrawal from others as a strategy for disengagement (Szymanski & Lewis, 2016). This style

of coping helps manage negative psychological effects, but also leads to lack of emotional support and further internalization of gendered racism (2016). A 2021 study using data from 263 Black women utilized a path analysis to examine the effects of gendered racism on anxiety and depression. The study concluded that gendered racism was a statistically significant predictor of gendered racialized stress (Nelson, Ernst, et al., 2021). The inevitable stress negatively impacted Black women's mental health. Self-care and community support assist with staving off anxiety and depressive symptoms (Nelson, Ernst. et al., 2021).

The "strong Black woman" generalization assumes that Black women are strong enough to endure inordinate amounts of stress, which impacts interpersonal relationships and produces negative health effects (Woods-Giscombé, 2010). Similarly, the "Superwoman" generalization stems from Black women's counteraction to negative stereotypes through taking on roles of the mother, nurturer, and breadwinner (Mullings, 2006; Woods-Giscombé, 2010). In a 2010 study intended to develop a framework on this phenomenon, Dr. Cheryl Woods-Giscombé collected qualitative data from 48 Black women to extract the benefits and liabilities of their socially inherited "Superwoman" role. Results from the study provide depth to the experience. Women characterize the Superwoman role as: the obligation to manifest strength, the obligation to suppress emotions, resistance to being vulnerable or dependent, determination to succeed despite limited resources, and the obligation to help others (Woods-Giscombé, 2010). Benefits extracted from the Superwoman experience in Woods-Giscombe's (2010) study include: preservation of self/survival, preservation of the African American Community, and preservation of family. The liabilities to the role fell under the categories of strain in interpersonal relationships, stress-related health behaviors, and embodiment of stress.

In response to these misconceptions, there is a carefulness exhibited by Black women for survival. Collins (2002) wrote, "As members of a sub-ordinate 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" (p. 157).

Gendered Racism at Work

"How can we lean into a table if we are not even in the room?"

(Tsedale Melaku, 2019)

Sociologist Dr. Tsedale M. Melaku's (2019) *You Don't Look Like a Lawyer: Black Women and Systemic Gendered Racism* presents an impactful perspective of the intersection of race and gender for Black, female lawyers. Melaku compared the experiences of Black attorneys to those of their white counterparts, recognizing the comfort and protection white women receive that Black women do not experience. The book described the unique intersection of Black womanhood in the career space by acknowledging what is shared with and what is adjacent to that of Black men. Just as institutions of higher education are Eurocentric spaces, designed for the enhanced power of white men (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014), law firms are innately white spaces, with attorneys of color underrepresented within prestigious corporate law firms (Melaku, 2019). However, with Black men holding power in their gender salience, they have a closer proximity to white males in terms of power, providing enhanced career experiences (Melaku, 2019).

As a nod to racial reconciliation, the existence and acceptance of individuals of color in organizations is a loud but passive gesture of equality (Evans & Moore, 2015). The workplace is not exempt from discriminatory practices, but a space poised to perpetuate oppression due to the dominance of white racial framing, feelings, ideas, and perspectives (Melaku, 2019). This creates

an upheld standard of how to act, react, and operate that naturally stereotypes other individuals of color (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2002; Essed, 1991). Although there has been an increased focus on diversity, equity, and access within institutions and workplaces, Black women's inability to present authentically remains a reality. In avoidance of stereotyping, Black women often present a persona at work different from their persona in their safe space (Collins & Bilge, 2016). In professional spaces, Black women experience invisibility, exclusion, and racism. Historically excluded from leadership roles, Black women are provided fewer opportunities for professional development and education (Perkins, 2015).

Research provides further evidence of workplace oppression through inequities in pay, experienced microaggressions, and inequitable treatment. Research illuminates pay inequities of Black women, whom statistics revealed are paid less than white females and other persons of color (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009; Perkins, 2015). According to the National Partnership for Women and Families (2020), women receive 80 cents for every dollar earned by men, and Black women receive 62 cents to every white man's dollar. Some Black women feel pressured to exemplify the "strong Black woman" trope at work, often taking on additional tasks without help and refusing help and development opportunities in the workplace (Dow, 2015). Dow (2015) conducted in-depth interviews with 60 Black working mothers and identified themes of participants feeling like failures as mothers if they needed to ask for help. The interviews also revealed the mothers' expectation that they should "do it all," as the perception of the stay-at-home mom for Black women means the mother is "not pulling their weight" for the home, which heavily contrasts what the scholar coined "the cult of domesticity," or the soft perception of domestic home-based work often prescribed for white women and mothers (Dow, 2015).

With standards of professionalism rooted in white supremacist, hegemonic structures, Black women often navigate spaces created to harm them to obtain economic security and career growth (T. Patton, 2004). In work and career spaces, Black women experience challenges rooted in bias. Microaggressions are subtle, unconscious acts of racist behavior or commentary that affect persons of color. Examples of microaggressions include deflecting eye contact, claiming to be "color-blind" when confronted about discriminatory behavior, discrediting the work of specific individuals of color, or acting surprised at the qualifications or speech of individuals of color (Constantine & Sue, 2007, Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). Microaggressions also affect Black leaders within senior or executive roles (Constantine & Sue, 2007); these professionals continue to adjust their voices and physical appearance to fit into norms deemed palatable and professional (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014).

Despite these challenges, the expectation of resiliency and continued professionalism exists (Case & Hunter, 2012). *Women in the Workplace*, a large study performed by McKinsey & Company and LeanIn (2021), provided findings based on interviews with 65,000 employees at 423 organization. In large, bold font, Page 27 of the report presents Part 3 of their assessment, titled "Women of Color Continue to Have a Worse Experience at Work" (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn, 2021). The section recognizes the increase of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in the workplace, while also acknowledging the continued discrimination faced by women of color. The study pointed to Black women as most likely to experience challenges to their competence in the workplace, which included being interrupted and spoken over, having their judgments questioned, and having others comment on their emotional state. Experiences of disrespectful behavior experienced most frequently by Black women participants included hearing people express surprise at their language skills and other abilities, hearing or overhearing insults about

36

their culture or people like them, feeling like they are expected to speak on behalf of all people with their identity, and having others comment on their hair or appearance. Black women and Asian women were most likely to be confused with someone else of the same race/ethnicity (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn, 2021). The study affirmed research findings previously discussed in this chapter that Black women cope with racism and racial trauma more frequently than other employees surveyed. I would be remiss, however, if I did not acknowledge the high numbers of responses of experiences of workplace disrespect and challenges to competence experienced by other women, including LGBTQ+ women, women with disabilities, Latinas, and Asian women also included in this report. According to the results, women with disabilities, altogether, experienced challenges to competence more frequently than any other group (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn, 2021). In the present study, my focus on Black women is due to my identity salience, but also in recognition of the invisibility Black women face due to their distance from power in relation to white males. The workplace data provide quantitative evidence of what this chapter shares as fact regarding the outcomes of gendered racism, yet there are far more narratives waiting to be told.

Black Feminist Thought

"I need Black feminism because I yearn for a socio-political praxis that teaches me how to fight the oppression of Black girls and women as raced, classed, and gendered objects in a world that values men over women, white over Black, and wealth over poverty. I need Black feminism to breathe air from my lungs to the lungs of another sister to help her live . . . more free."

(Vivian Evans-Winters, Pedagogical Reflection, 2017)

The challenges Black women experience within a myriad of white spaces while being expected to subscribe to white socio, political, and economic constructs reveal the need for BFT

as a framework. Black women, as opposed to white women and Black men, experience both race and gender oppression. BFT, as a theoretical framework, is used to help Black women survive in, cope with, and resist oppressive treatment (Collins, 2002). BFT extends feminist theory to the intricate perspective of Black women, who experience the United States of America differently than all other cultural groups. Visions and thoughts shared by Black women are best understood through a common bond Black women develop as they experience "a unique angle of vision on self, community, and society" (Collins, 1990, p. 390). When used as a framework, BFT carries the expectation for action. Collins (2002) asserted that the multiple "isms", primarily racism and sexism, Black women are subject to present internal and external stereotypes, providing the need to better understand coping and meaning to the Black woman's experience. The original tenets of BFT include:

1) the acknowledgment of the Black woman's standpoint

2) the acknowledgement of the unique, American experience of Black women and varied reactions to oppression

3) the call for research to consider how the Black woman's standpoint resists oppression

4) the responsibility researchers have to highlight the Black woman's experience

5) the theory that the experiences of Black women change as society changes, shifting knowledge and practice

6) a commitment to social justice everywhere (Collins, 1990)

For this research, "everywhere" includes student affairs, and as a Black woman, it is my aim to illuminate the experiences of other Black women.

Chapter Summary

The literature I have discussed in this chapter provides evidence on the Great Resignation and a tumultuous period of racial and health injustices occurring within the last few years in the United States. It also acknowledges the educational attainment earned by Black women and the continued oppression occurring within the workplace. This chapter discusses multiple concepts pushing back at Black women's attempts to not only succeed and advance despite the expectation of overwork (Dow, 2015), but also to remain healthy and well in their roles. Black feminist scholars have described race and gender as independent forces within the Black female experience that cannot be disentangled, as their affects produce a unique system of oppression for Black women (Collins, 1990; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Cooper, 1998; Crenshaw, 1991).

Can I pause for a moment to be a bit less scholarly and a bit more real? Often, I browse through different works of literature on the impact that race, gender, class, and status have on Black women. I pause when I recognize the variety of dates on pieces of scholarship. From 1892 to 2022, there has been no reprieve for Black women, who experience the world differently due to their identity but continue to provide context on the plight of their experiences through research and heart-work. As I write this work, this is inspiring but also daunting as I realize the number of daughters, Sistas, and mothers requesting respect and love from a society historically content with their suffering.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Committees sure will teach you about your colleagues. That one search committee—about 20 of

y'all at the table, but three faces of color. It came down to the final two: a man and a Black

woman, and they found all the excuses to eat her up. She came from a HBCU, met all required

qualifications, and served a similar institutional type. She was ready ready, but that wasn't

enough. All of a sudden, her programmatic experiences "weren't sophisticated enough," yet we

were struggling with retention and engagement. Then, all of a sudden, she was too "busy"

because she was finishing a dissertation. Then, she was too busy because she had a son... who

was 19. The other guy had 4 kids and nobody mentioned it. Then, that other committee—that one

homegirl candidate was ready ready. She met the required and preferred qualifications and was

the only one of the final three who did. But she just had to be a Sis, so they ate her up. The white

male colleague that everyone knew to be chronically crass and pompous made a comment about

sis's ability to be "personable." Like... fixed his mouth to say that in public—and folks sat there

and let it happen!? All she did was answer questions, but I guess she needed to cartwheel on the

ceiling, too. When I was invited, it was cool to be considered for the table, but not to corroborate

restricting other good people from it."

(Richardson-Echols, Personal Reflection, 2022)

In this chapter, I explore the methodology and methods I used in this qualitative study. I

introduce the phenomenology used to explore the essence of the experiences of Black women

who departed student affairs between 2016 and 2022. I unveil the critical and constructivist

approaches used, specifying the axiological, ontological, and epistemological contexts to further

define my perspective toward the research performed. Lastly, I describe the research plan I used to gather participant data. As described in Chapter 1, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1) How did the COVID-19 pandemic and social unrest between 2016 and 2022 impact the working experiences of Black women student affairs professionals?

2) To what professional and societal conditions do former Black women student affairs professionals attribute to their departure decisions?

Reflexivity and Subjectivity

Ever since I can recall, my family members have passed down best practices in navigating Black girlhood and Black womanhood, advising on the life choices and actions to best protect my innocence and provide for my future. Family often reminded me of the limits to what a Black girl could do and how society viewed Black girls. We were to be seen but not heard. To ensure my safety, I was taught that even when I was seen, I could not draw too much negative attention. We apologize, even when an apology is not due. We were to be educated and respectful. "Getting your education" was emphasized by my Granny in such a way that education seemed synonymous with strength. We were to speak only when spoken to, but not too loudly, and remain respectful, regardless of the circumstances, to counter the expectation of exhibiting disrespect. Lessons in Black girlhood shaped how I was raised, navigated confidence, and utilized my voice into Black womanhood. These lessons pertain to all aspects of day-to-day life, including decision-making, awareness of safety, and the ways I present myself to any room. Research shows that Black women often experience stereotyping in the workplace, impacting their sense of belonging (D. R. Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Perkins, 2015). Since joining the student affairs field 10 years ago, I have been constantly reminded of my place by managers and

leaders. Racism and microaggressions in the workplace have affected my confidence and sense of belonging. These experiences have served as reminders to heed to the lessons from my family to remain unheard, unseen, or small to maintain safety. While working at mid-size public institutions, I assumed these experiences to be isolated to me and my work, since I had little access to Black female coworkers or colleagues. After transitioning to a smaller public college with many Black female colleagues, I discovered the racism and microaggressions were shared experiences. In leaning on these Sista colleagues, then watching some depart the field, I began drawing conclusions about the environment and experiences forcing their departure.

When deciding to focus on Black women departing student affairs for my dissertation, I was nervous that the topic would not be considered necessary or valid. Lessons of safety outweighing confidence triggered my imposter voice to tell me that my research was too personal and would be unwanted. This dissertation has seen so many words typed, then deleted, then retyped in a process of acceptance of the scary nature of speaking my Black woman thoughts about Black woman problems into existence. My nervousness also stemmed from the slim research available on Black women in administration, and that this research was primarily produced by Black women. I questioned if the field wanted this and if the topic was "scholarly" enough. In 2020 and 2021, news of more and more Black women colleagues departing student affairs and personal experiences of gendered racism solidified the validity of my interest the problem my research explored.

There is a particular duty I hold while learning the experiences of Black women in mid-level student affairs roles. I also have an obligation to the research I do and the field I expect it to influence. Reflexivity helps in "situating the research and knowledge production so that ethical commitments can be maintained" (Sultana, 2007, p. 376). Thurairajah (2019) posited that

reflexivity is a process, just as my experience in student affairs has been a process. I am learning, and my research is an outcome of my learning process. Reflexivity contributes to the readers' learning as they are presented with unaltered and unbiased findings. As a phenomenological researcher holding experiences closely tied to the work I conducted, I remained cognizant of the impact of my research. While engaging in qualitative research and having a strong personal connection with the topic, I remained ethical and impartial in my work by notating my thoughts and feelings at each step of the research process (Thurairajah, 2019). I did so by keeping a written journal of my process, thoughts, and reflections. With BFT as the theoretical framework for my research, it was paramount that this reflexive exercise remained consistent given my proximity to Black womanhood, potential shared experiences with participants, and a never-ceasing yearning for freedom of life, work, and expression for Black women.

Methodology

When determining the design I would use for this study, I considered both narrative inquiry and phenomenological inquiry as methods that would provide meaning-making context from the experiences of Black women. Researchers argue that no one method or collection of methods represents the royal road to knowledge (Lincoln et al., 2011). The conflation of contemporary events and prevalence of workplace departure of Black women who experience oppression led to my decision to utilize phenomenological inquiry. "Phenomenologists are interested in the lived experience of participants" (van Manen, 2014, p. 26). Chapter 2 provides a myriad of potential conditions which may evoke feelings in Black women: emotions stemming from societal occurrences between 2016 and 2022, as well as reactions to gendered racism occurring in the workplace. When the experiences trigger emotions, phenomenology is often used (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Multiple phenomena exist in this study: the essence of being

Black, the essence of being a woman, the essence of working in student affairs, and the essence of rejecting the field altogether.

Research Paradigms

The research paradigms for this study are critical and constructivist. Mertens (2010) described the critical paradigm as placing importance on the experiences of marginalized groups to analyze how inequities are reflected in what is known. The critical paradigm held validity in this study as I explored the experiences of those who have chosen to depart student affairs and investigated whether a rejection of oppressive structures exists as a shared experience given the participants' shared identities. This research also centered on the phenomena and experience of career and role departure. Although not classically labeled as a conjoined paradigm and methodological approach, scholars consider critical phenomenology a way to explore the lived experience of power and expression, necessitating its use to uncover the essence of an experience of a historically oppressed group (Guenther, 2019).

The constructivist's goal is to gain a "deeper understanding of a phenomenon by uncovering aspects that have been hidden" (Jones et al., 2014, p. 17). The proximity of this study to contemporary issues of workplace departure, COVID-19, and social and political unrest requires a constructivist approach to learn how participants make meaning of their experiences. To gather data, the words and experiences of Black women are required. Minoo (2015) describes the use of Black Feminist Thought as an intersectional framework which reconceptualizes the relationship between domination and resistance from holistic to pedagogical. BFT empowers the Black female perspective on making career decisions, being Black, and being a woman. By exploring Black female voices and meaning-making regarding departure decisions, I affirmed

perspectives that may vary from recognized, majority-led experiences. The interviews revealed a myriad of the participants' student affairs experience until the point of departure.

Ontology

Ontology relates to the nature of reality and its characteristics (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 20). With respect to the critical paradigm, perceptions can be flawed. For example, for the tumultuous years of 2016-2022, alone, Black women's reality is ontologically different from anyone else's, as their social realities, alone, contrast significantly (Evans-Winters, 2019). Career departure is not a new concept to members of the student affairs field. With Black women historically excluded from leadership roles, professional development, and promotion opportunities (Perkins, 2015), the ontological nature of this work provides a reality not congruent to that of the white or white female majority. Identity shapes the concept of departure through the lens of a double-oppressed population.

The constructivist nature of reality respects multiple socially constructed realities (Guba, 1994). The external world is a place that brings reality into existence based on society, culture, institutions, interactions, and conditions that structure perspectives (Guba, 1994). This research was designed to explore experiences based on the race and sex of participants but also considers additional realities affecting perspective, such as career experience. Exploring contemporary occurrences provides the opportunity to form new knowledge from newly constructed realities.

Axiology

Constructivism focuses on principles often documented in the researcher's professional code of ethics. It is pertinent that information on the topic and the intention of study is presented to participants. Lincoln (2009) included reflexivity, rapport, and reciprocity as necessary factors to guarantee intentionality in participant awareness of the research process. Axiology focuses on

the researcher's values, and within a critical paradigm, it also emphasizes the purpose of research to realize social justice (Mertens, 2010). I concluded Chapter 1 with the following quote: "If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression" (The Combahee River Collective, 1977). This quote reflects the purpose of this study and acknowledges the historical position of Black women, even in professional contexts. The essence of Black women's workplace experience leading to final departure is prioritized to present appropriate conclusions and implications for practice.

Epistemology

Epistemology conveys philosophical assumptions about what constitutes knowledge (Jones et al., 2022). Constructivism requires an interactive method of data collection. Data must be able to be tracked to the researcher's source (Lowrey et al., 2017). The critical paradigm's epistemological assumption mimics the constructivist's in the interactive relationship between the researcher and participant. By utilizing BFT as an epistemological framework, I translated participant inquiry to information and information to practice. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 asserts that there may be a parallel in how culture, oppression, and marginalization empower assumptions of knowledge with the historical exclusion of Black women and Black women's voices as valuable. Since I hold a similar identity to participants, I must focus on the outcomes and interactions with participants to gather knowledge. It is common for researchers who choose to use BFT to request personal conversations or symbols and metaphors from participants to convey information (Dillard, 2000; Evans-Winters, 2019).

BFT

> For this study, BFT served as a theoretical and epistemological framework suited for producing data from Black, female voices to constitute knowledge. Collins (2000) wrote, "Because white men control Western structures of knowledge validation, their interests pervade the themes, paradigms, and epistemologies of traditional scholarship. As a result, U.S. Black women's experiences . . . have been routinely distorted within or excluded from what counts as knowledge" (p. 251). BFT as a theoretical framework is primarily used to acknowledge the unique American experience of Black women enhancing conditions of social justice (Collins, 2000). The Black woman's standpoint changes constantly yet is underrepresented in research and is therefore underused (Collins, 2000). BFT serves to "unapologetically center the embodied knowledge of Black women and foster opportunities for Black women to respond to systemic oppression" (Griffin, 2015, p. 1). Collins identified four dimensions of BFT as an Afrocentric feminist epistemology:

1) *Lived experience as a criterion for meaning*: Black women living through the experience are experts on the experience and more credible than those who have read or thought about the experience.

2) *The use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims*: Connectedness and the use of dialogue are criteria for new knowledge.

3) *The ethics of caring*: Emphasis is placed on individual uniqueness, appropriateness of emotions and expressiveness, and the capacity for empathy.

4) *The ethic of personal accountability*: Individuals are accountable for their knowledge claims (Collins, 2000).

This research investigates the possibility of all these elements affecting Black female professionals. Examining the Black woman's thoughts and feelings toward their conditions, specifically those leading to their departure, allows for new and significant knowledge (Collins, 2000).

Research Design

BFT requires exploring Black female experiences to demonstrate respect of their perspectives and affirms the use of phenomenology as a research design. To fully understand the experience of individuals potentially exposed to the phenomena of student affairs administration, Blackness, womanhood, and departure, it is necessary to access their information (Johnston et al., 2016). Phenomenology illuminates the voices and experiences of participants as they provide meaning to phenomena experienced (T. Patton, 2004). Revealing the experiences of Black women requires the illumination of the essence of their experience, and as a qualitative research method, phenomenology focuses not only on experience, but how experiences shape consciousness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Singh, 2015, p. 103). As a phenomenological researcher, I must maintain ethical and bias-free research. Due diligence is performed in the process of *variation,* as gathering information requires examining perspectives from all angles to extract meaning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Specifically, the method of bracketing, or translating self-thought and reflections during data illumination, both places emphasis on BFT (in respect to my experience as knowledge) and serves as a legitimate method to organize themes to understanding. With insight into the Black woman's experience within student affairs administration, I am positioned best as a phenomenologist, given my ability to use personal experience to both access participants and explicate assumptions and preunderstandings

(Johnston et al., 2016). In requesting memories, thoughts, feelings, and emotions leading to career departure, I utilized a phenomenological approach to initiate new knowledge.

Sampling Plan

For this study, I utilized purposive sampling with the following selection criteria: (a) Black women (b) who have worked in a student affairs role for a minimum of two years (c) who resigned from a student affairs position between 2016 and 2022 and (d) are no longer in the student affairs career space. The research site for this study is the United States of America. Purposive sampling allows me to identify participants based on their proximity to the central phenomena explored (M. Patton, 2015). M. Patton (2015) acknowledged that purposive sampling assists with obtaining the most information to have the greatest impact on knowledge development.

Recruitment Plan

Given the specificity of the population I targeted, I utilized social media to achieve the best recruitment results. I created a colorful flyer detailing participation criteria with a QR code to a Qualtrics screening survey to find and vet those interested in the study. This flyer was posted on my personal Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn pages. To find Black women who have departed student affairs, I posted the flyer in the Facebook group Expatriates of Student Affairs, a group of individuals interested in vacating or who have vacated the student affairs field. I also utilized the Black Student Affairs Professionals Facebook group to draw interest, which was allowable through the Facebook group's member guidelines. To control the number of potential participants recruited, I limited survey responses to a 10-day period. To keep participants' attention, I conducted daily scheduling outreach to eligible participants able to begin interviewing within a five-day period.

Data Collection Plan

Merriam (2002) asserted that interviewing provides the most data when the intent of the study is to explore the experiences, attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs of an individual. Interviewing in phenomenology provides a voice to participants and focuses on "what was perceived, how its described, what feelings exist, how its judged, how sense is made of it, and how its discussed with others" (C. Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 21). To collect data, I conducted two semistructured, phenomenological interviews with eight participants to capture their perspectives on their unique experiences. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), phenomenological research should include 3–10 participants, but participant number is based on the needs of the study. The population I interviewed resided in various areas of the United States, and for participant accessibility, I utilized Microsoft Teams or Zoom video calling to conduct the two recorded interviews, the first lasting 90-minutes and the second lasting up to 30 minutes (see Appendix D). The two-interview structure involves an initial interview and a follow-up interview used to fill any gaps in the data collected during the first interview (Giorgi, 1985). The second interview also allows participants to assess the experiences previously described more precisely (Giorigi, 1985). Participants in the study received a $50 gift card, provided after the first interview, for their time.

Semistructured interviewing assists with establishing rapport between interviewer and interviewee and allows the researcher to collect a product of what the interviewer and the interviewee talk about (Josselson, 2013, p. 1; Lauterbach, 2018). Further, the purpose of semistructured interviews is to "enter the world of the participant and try to understand how it looks and feels from the participant's point of view" (Josselson, 2013, p. 80). In this phenomenological study, interviewing encouraged conversation and trust between the

50

interviewer and interviewee , and through semistructured interviews, the interviewer relies on the

memories and reflections of the interviewee (van Manen, 2016). Open-ended questions were

asked during the semistructured interviews. First, I requested background information from

participants, then I followed a fluid guide to ask questions to understand their experiences,

thoughts, and feelings surrounding their time in student affairs until the point of departure. The

questions in the second interview focused on the meaning participants made from the topics

discussed during the original interview. Not all questions on the guide were asked of all

participants, as perspectives are reached differently by individuals, and each question may or

may not elicit the best responses depending on the individual's perspectives (Biddix, 2018, p.

143).

Data Analysis

In researching Black women departing from student affairs from a BFT epistemological

perspective, I aimed to highlight the thoughts, experiences, and essences of the Black female

experience. As the Black female researcher responsible for data production, it is also important

for me to include my own Black female experience as data as a variation of the accountability

encouraged in Black feminist epistemology (Collins, 2002). The data produced during interviews

were analyzed through the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen (SCK) method of phenomenological

data analysis, as outlined by Moustakas (1994) and later simplified by Creswell (2013). I prefer

the modified SCK method, as it focuses on the wholeness of the experience of phenomena,

including that of the researcher, to analyze the phenomena in totality. Merriam (2002) cosigned

this method and asserted that the researcher is the main instrument in a qualitative research

study, as their interpretation of qualitative data is, in fact, data.

The steps of SCK are as follows:

1. Bracketing/epoche: Bracketing, or epoche, is a way to reduce bias creative activities performed by the researcher to explore responses to findings (Moustakas, 1994). I described my personal experiences, memories, thoughts, and feelings related to the phenomena through written and creative expression (Creswell, 2013, p. 159; Moustakas, 1994, p. 87). Dahlberg (2006) stated that the act of bracketing encourages openness on behalf of the researcher. Through including oneself in the research process, bracketing allows the researcher to acknowledge their primacy in the research act, recognizing the lived experience more fully through textual reflexivity, or the written interpretation of the author's reflexive voice near the text interpretation of the participant's shared experience (Vagle et al., 2009).

2. Horizontalization: Next, I developed a list of significant statements and phrases pertaining to the research questions. The purpose of the horizontalization is to identify the range of perspectives about the phenomenon and assign equal value to each significant statement.

3. Grouping: Then, I eliminated statements that were repeated or unrelated to the research questions, practicing hematic analysis and horizontalization by allowing all other statements to be clustered into themes or meaning units.

4. Textual depiction: This step necessitates imaginative variation, or the explication of experiences given participants' provided scenarios. Variation as a mental exercise reveals researcher descriptions of what was experienced.

5. Structural depiction: Next, I wrote how scenarios described by participants were experienced, which required me to reflect on the setting and context in which the phenomenon occurred.

6. Essence: The completion of the previous steps allowed me to produce a synthesized description of the phenomenon experienced, or the "essence" of the culminating experiences (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994)

Participants were emailed the essence section to allow for changes or comments on the validity of their phenomena experienced.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness requires validity and reliability in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Rodriguez and Smith (2018) posited that the quality of phenomenological research is dependent on grounded findings and a clear decision trail. Reflexivity is the ability of the researcher to reflect upon themselves and their own biases and preconceptions to eliminate twisted interpretations of data (Merriam, 2002). This process is important, as it "situates the research and knowledge production so that ethical commitments can be maintained" (Sultana, 2007, p. 376). Since I have a strong connection to the topic, I reflected through maintaining a journal, notating my thoughts and feelings during the research process to both understand and question data and themes along the way (Sundler et al., 2019).

Along with journaling my reflections as a researcher, I maintained an audit trail to keep an account of all methods utilized, decisions made, and all questions presented during the process, which led to the production of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). For example, one entry contains my notes about the steps I completed of the modified SCK method as detailed by Moustakas (1994). By following the method precisely and documenting the procedures, I ensured detail would be captured throughout the phenomenological data analysis process.

Lastly, after receiving the zoom transcription of interviews, I reviewed the transcripts and performed member checks by providing participants with the constructed essence of

accumulated experiences to ensure validity and credibility. Internal validity can be achieved when interviewers uphold the ethics of the research process by confirming findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Through the process of respondent validation, I further involved participants of the study by providing transcript and researcher interpretation data to all participants so that plausibility could be confirmed or corrections in understanding could be made.

Conclusion

This research poses the opportunity to provide data and literature where they are currently scarce. When determining the design of this study, I considered both narrative inquiry and phenomenological inquiry to provide meaning-making context from the experiences of Black women. Researchers argue that no one method or collection of methods represents the royal road to knowledge (Lincoln et al., 2011). Phenomenological inquiry provides the opportunity to extract the rich experience of individuals to create new knowledge. Use of the modified SCK method presented the opportunity to organize data through adhering steps. Given the modern nature of each problem explored, meaning was explored through phenomenological inquiry. Through a BFT epistemological foundation, Black women provided data where they are necessary and scarce (Collins, 2002). This foundation along with bracketing methods provides the opportunity to fully extract the researcher's voice from the participants' for accountability. Creative expression, as encouraged by bracketing and reflexivity, allows the validity of the Black female voice and further context into the essence of the experienced phenomena.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

I'm blessed to even be here. We were so excited we were having a little girl. Even my son, who'd

sing, "That's my baby" while rocking and swaying with my belly bump. I was finally truly

showing when my supervisor left right before COVID, meaning my immediate response to the

students, the residence halls, was waiting for directions—hell, praying for some. Telling students

to go was scary. It made the concern of COVID so real. The stories that came into my office

broke my heart. Going home isn't an easy option for a young person who hasn't experienced one

outside of campus. Moms and dads had all the questions and concerns about their babies, and

hell, so did I. We moved so quickly, with me leading a team without a title. Learning to be a

stand-in leader and in such a crazy time and space rocked me. So much at once, and my body

responded—BP 167/103. Took it again—BP 165/100. Was it the wrong cuff? 165/101. Into

trimester 3, and now I'm high risk. I tried to take it easy, but how easy is leading during

COVID? When everyone went home, my team was still on-site handling residual students. We

never closed and needed to go into spaces to close out the semester. Going into student rooms

during COVID? I don't know what this illness does. I don't know where it is. Does it harm

pregnant folks? Their babies? How do you navigate pushing back when being counted on and

not wanting to be perceived as difficult? The job has to get done, and all eyes are on you for

guidance. And was it strange to be a little jaded about taking direction from folks safe at home?

Even if it was, you better not had shown it. The baby is fine. The students were gone, and you

were only cussed out twice for making them go. 150s/100s, 150s over 90—all at resting. The 36-

week appointment was a trauma I'll never forget. All I came for was a quick check and to get a

breast pump and stayed for hours. 160s/100s, 150s/100s, and one 140s/90s. I had to be induced

THAT SAME DAY. I called my husband, since COVID prevented him from being by my side at

the appointments. We didn't even take our big boy to the lake for our family babymoon yet. We

had no bag packed yet. I don't know how many times you told your husband, "We're going to the

lake, I don't care." We enjoyed the water and sand with our biggest baby, and while he dug in

the sand, I thought about the possibility of this being my last time playing with him. Headed to

the hospital was like an impending doom—was that what folks on death row feel like? At the

hospital, I'm over here worried that they won't take me seriously. With my big boy, they didn't

believe me. They poked and prodded in ways that exhausted me. A woman of color convinced me

to not give up by begging for a c-section. Two days later, our girl was there—no cuts necessary.

To God I thanked. She was so beautiful and worth the struggle. A total 7 days in the hospital to

make sure that I didn't...die. Was it inevitable? Who knows. But was I stressed? Absolutely. I

can't determine causation, but when we learned of #3 on the way, I knew one thing: as hard as it

will be and as hard as I want to go, I sure as hell won't let this job kill me."

(Richardson-Echols, Personal Reflection, 2022)

This chapter highlights the findings from this study, which examines the experiences of Black women who have left the field of student affairs amidst a time of exacerbated societal issues within the United States. As described in the previous chapter, the modified SCK method was utilized to organize data and produce the essence of the experience. To familiarize the reader with the voices behind the data, this chapter introduces the eight participants who shared their experiences from the field of student affairs. Participant responses were derived from semistructured interview questions created in respect to the following research questions:

1) How did the COVID-19 pandemic and social unrest between 2016 and 2022 impact the working experiences of Black women student affairs professionals?

2) To what professional and societal conditions do former Black women student affairs professionals attribute to their departure decisions?

Following participant introductions, I identify themes and subthemes derived from the process of horizontalization and imaginative variation. Then, I utilize textual-structural depiction to provide meaning to themes. Finally, the essence of the experience is discussed, concluding the analysis. Prior to the conclusion of the chapter, I include excerpts from the reflexivity journal, a tool utilized to maintain trustworthiness and authenticity throughout the data collection process. These actions contributed to the process of bracketing, the first step of the modified SCK method.

Bracketing

Bracketing, the first step outlined in the SCK method, has been practiced throughout this dissertation. Chapter 1's reflexive excerpt included a reaction to microaggressions experienced within a work scenario. Chapter 2 began with a separate extracted experience that triggered feelings of disappointment, embarrassment, and deflation. Chapter 3's excerpt discussed bias recognized within committee settings, which stirred up feelings of disbelief and annoyance. Chapter 3 also introduced researcher positionality and subjectivity, as well as methods for maintaining researcher trustworthiness, including reflexive journaling. Chapter 4's excerpt introduces a painful and impactful experience that occurred amidst COVID-19 and the concern about the unknown illness with operations assumed amidst work uncertainty and the physical response to stress. Further bracketing is evident with the introduction of passages from my

reflexive journal. Chapter 5 follows suit with a reflection written in response to the study's outcomes.

Reflexive Journal

Throughout the data collection process, I remained intentional with taking notes on both my progress and feelings. Prior to each interview, I assessed my inner thoughts to emotionally prepare for each conversation. After interviews, I notated my thoughts and feelings in an attempt to remain engulfed in content. Further, memories or experiences induced throughout the research process were documented. This section contains selected verbatim excerpts from my reflexive journal to highlight the progression and my authentic thoughts and emotions.

September 2, 2022 (Post IRB approval). *IRB approved. You played yourself waiting so long to get it done for it to be approved in less than a week. Post the call for participants this afternoon on FB. Check for responses to begin outreach next week. Feeling: Relieved.*

September 5, 2022. *63 responses?! Use wheel randomizer to select participants and send emails to 12 to start. 63 is wild. Feeling: Ready.*

September 25, 2022 (Interviews scheduled). *115 responses. Talk to Martin about what can/can't be allowed with those not selected as candidates. First interviews set and scheduled. Feeling: Indifferent because of the number of responses vs. amount I can chat with.*

September 29, 2022 (Post interview). *She didn't have to go through all that. Feeling: Defensive? She left already, but somebody should answer to what she went through.*

October 4, 2022. *Three interviews down. Feeling: Frustrated. Highlighting significance from transcripts and listening to their experiences provokes feelings of annoyance. I'm annoyed at what has happened to them—the content. *Continue to pause to ask open questions**

58

October 5, 2022 (Post interview). *Keep participants on track. Get answers to your questions. Print and check off q's as you go. Circle back if no answer produced. Feeling: Dehydrated a lil bit? Stand during that 90 and keep water on you.*

October 6, 2022 (Post interview). *Six interviews down. Feeling: Pissed the hell off. Bothered by content. Need to sit with emotions for a bit to regroup for second interviews and coding. Noticing themes but refraining from naming them until all transcripts are collected and coding begins.*

October 12, 2022 (Post interview). *Some second interviews completed. Feeling: Prepared. I recognize themes. Feeling: Haunted by own experience + participants'. Make sure to chat with [therapist] about post-interview feelings. Need to go back for edits of Ch. 1-3.*

October 25, 2022. *I swear everyday proves the validity of this dissertation. Feeling: Tired. Ready to fight.*

October, 28. 2022 (Post interview). *All seconds are finished. I need a break. Feeling: Very pregnant and tired, physically, emotionally. Calendar set for coding mid-November and Thx break.*

November 10, 2022. *Started coding and finished four participants extracting significance with attention to research questions. Plenty on Q2, less for Q1. Feeling: Encouraged. Great conversation with [therapist] about the impact of research on mental state. More aware of significant incidents at work toward myself and others—regulating its impact.*

December 7, 2022 (Post data analysis). *Go back to methodology and make sure all steps good. This is taking a lot. I hope I make sense. Feeling: defensive, heavy/burdened, pissy? Like.. how you gon need her but not believe her?*

The reflexive journal helped me to track my progress and notes and served as an effective tool to help me remain ethically grounded in the research. As a career student affairs professional and Black woman, I entered this research aware of my proximity to the content of the research. With phenomenological research, participant experience is data. With BFT as my epistemological guide, it is my aim as a researcher to honor the experiences of Black women, making reflexive exercises a way of honoring both the trustworthiness of my research and validity of all experiences relative to the phenomena explored.

Introduction of Participants

Inclusion criteria for this study called for participants to identify as Black women within the United States of America, to have departed the field of student affairs between years 2016 and 2022, and to have served within the field for a minimum of two years. Eight women were scheduled to participate in this study, which included two sets of virtual interviews. The first interview was a 60–90-minute interview requesting preliminary information from candidates using the semi-structured set of questions provided in Appendix D. The second, 30-minute interview delved into previous responses to allow me to request additional thoughts and feelings relative to research questions. This section provides a brief biography of each participant to give the reader a sense of familiarity with the eight research participants. Pseudonyms were used for all participants to secure anonymity.

Table 1

Participant Information

Pseudonym	Years in student affairs	Year of departure
Vanessa	15	2022
Julia	10	2022
Quinn	6	2022
Alison	7	2020
Terri	15	2022
Opal	5	2022
Erica	7	2022
Megan	10	2021

Vanessa

Vanessa is in her late 30s and has been married for 15 years. She centers herself in her Black, female identity. Although her military family moved around a bit, she claims the South as home. Her military upbringing was central in her identity development, as the individuals around her did not always look like her. Her hair would be braided, unlike the other girls'. She first understood race and discrimination when her family moved to the South. To secure her safety, she recalled, "You had to stay in your place." Her introduction to student affairs was as a resident assistant. Vanessa received her master's and began her first full-time position in 2006. Her institutional experience ranges from small public institutions to large public institutions. Her interest in student affairs grew from witnessing students thriving. Early in her career, she wrote notes to herself to solidify her student affairs "why"; she often returned to these notes during hard moments in her career as a reminder of her student affairs purpose. Her dedication to development is exemplified in her attainment of a terminal student affairs degree. Vanessa centered her family and children into much of her narrative and loves motherhood. She worked in student affairs for 15 years and left the field in 2022. She now works for a nonprofit for adult education development.

Julia

Julia is from the South and is in her early 30s, is the youngest of four siblings, and is her parents' only girl. She loves music and values relationships and connections. Julia is often sought out as the one to "pull-up" in support of her friends but also to be the voice of reason to keep her friends out of trouble. Her first acknowledgement of being a Black girl was early in her childhood. In elementary school, she was introduced to inferiority by little white girls mentioning being better than her. In the home, Julia was reminded of her Black girlhood by family members as the only little girl in the family. Julia recalls being reminded to "act like a little girl" by elders and was often responsible for the gendered chores of cleaning the home while witnessing her brothers and cousins playing outside in areas restricted to her. In her adolescence, Julia's interests were limited due to ideals held by family members of what was safe and appropriate for girls and what was not. Julia described this experience as "sacrificing desires." She also credited Black girlhood for her ability to work harder and be smarter to secure stability outside of the home. Julia began her student affairs journey as a resident assistant. She loved interacting with students and became interested in their experience and development. She was challenged to begin her career in student affairs by a Black female supervisor who pushed her to abandon comfort and to trust her abilities to excel in the field. She began her student affairs journey full time in 2011 and climbed the ladder at three separate mid-size and large institutions. In 2022, Julia decided to depart the field altogether and now works in city leadership.

Quinn

Quinn is in her late 30s and is a proudly hails from the Midwest. She is pro-Black and is proud of her salience to Black womanhood. She is a lover of learning and exploring and has

lived in more than 10 different states. During her interviews, Quinn spouted many fun facts about history and politics. She was also quick with cultural references. Quinn always knew and acknowledged her Black girlhood. For 16 years, Quinn worked in public service and K-12 education. She enjoyed her experience serving predominantly Black K-12 students, addicts, homeless students, and LGBTIA students. Quinn prides herself on being a hard worker and has often been told she is too passionate. After her K-12 experience, she interviewed for her first full-time position in student affairs. Quinn began working in student affairs in 2016 within academic support. From 2016 to 2022, she served at mid-size private and large public institutions. In 2022, Quinn left student affairs and now works for a major airline company.

Alison

Alison is from the Southwest but now lives on the West Coast. She is in her late 30s, is a self-proclaimed "large, Black woman," and attributes this fact to her identity development and life experiences. She has worked in higher education spaces for the entirety of her career, most enjoying her experience in community colleges. During her undergraduate years, she enjoyed helping other students. Her first experiences in student affairs were in the outreach and admissions spaces. As a first-generation college student, she remained passionate about the comfort and success of students transitioning to college. Alison expressed her enjoyment of the graduation pomp and circumstance; she gains professional and personal gratification from watching students succeed. She served in orientation and outreach for seven years prior to leaving student affairs in 2020. Alison obtained her terminal degree in 2022 and now works for a community college district.

Terri

Terri is from the Midwest and is in her late 30s. She grew up in state care, to which she attributed her ability to be perceptive of the actions and intentions of others. She has a bright smile and a quick wit. Terri began her career in high school teaching and leadership. She described her start in student affairs as accidental. She began her student affairs career in residence life, where she excelled, moving up steadily in leadership. She attributed her success within the field to ambition and mentorship. Terri expressed a keen sense of connection with the students she served due to her ability to utilize her identity to relate to others. Terri described speaking to students in her "Black woman way" to get them to respond to her well. Of all participants, Terri served in student affairs the longest. After 15 years of service within the residence life functional area, Terri vacated the field in 2022. At the time of her interview, Terri continued to serve in proximity to high school–aged students, working within administrative leadership. She is a doctoral student slated to complete her degree in 2023.

Opal

Opal is from the North and was a first-generation student obtaining her bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees from predominately white institutions. She was introduced to student affairs as a resident assistant, and through the counsel of a senior housing leader, she sought to obtain her Master of Education while simultaneously serving as a full-time hall director at a large, private research institution. After graduate school and years of full-time service in housing, Opal moved into student success roles at both a mid-size public institution and a small private institution. After five years and obtaining her terminal degree, Opal transitioned to an executive leadership role in student affairs at a small public institution. Opal spoke passionately about supporting students. She shared, "One of the most poignant things was being able to be in

a position of power to enact change to impact the students. . .. They didn't always have those types of advocates to help them." In early 2022, Opal decided to depart her student affairs role without a position to transition into. At the time of her interview, Opal worked for a nonprofit that focuses on the educational and career advancement of historically underserved students.

Erica

Erica grew up in the South and moved around due to her military upbringing. This experience instilled in her a love of travel. She loves to stay active with dancing and playing tennis as major hobbies. Erica attended a large public land-grant research university and obtained her bachelor's in psychology. Erica was heavily engaged in the college experience. She began her student affairs journey as a resident assistant while she worked in the multicultural center. Erica served as a peer mentor, joined a sorority, and was active in her institution's Black student union. After she sought advisement on entering student affairs from mentors, Erica enrolled in graduate school at a large public research institution with a graduate assistantship in multicultural affairs. Her first five years of full-time student affairs work were of service to orientation programs at a small private university and a large public land-grant research university. Regarding her interest in orientation programs, Erica shared,

> I always come back to the thought of seeing students lost in the sauce of orientation. They couldn't even tell you their name looking at their parents to check them in. Then, those same students come back to apply to be an orientation leader. . . . And I got to work with those students.

After serving in orientation, Erica served for two years in student life, then led a department in student transition services. Erica obtained her terminal degree in 2022. In late 2022, Erica

departed student affairs altogether. At the time of the interviews, Erica worked in corporate services at a major airline company.

Megan

Megan is from the Southwest and is proud of the community she was raised in. She described herself as a "strong Black woman" and attributed this to the efforts of her family and community. As a first-generation college student at a large public research university, Megan aspired to a career in sports medicine. She remained engaged in her undergraduate experience as a tutor and sought volunteer opportunities within the community. After she obtained her bachelor's, Megan enrolled in a higher education and student affairs program at a large public land-grant institution. Mentored by Black professors, Megan found a graduate assistantship at the university. Megan remained engaged in graduate school by seeking opportunities within her graduate program. Megan's first full-time position, in which she served for four years, provided support to student athletics at a mid-size private liberal arts college. The position aligned heavily with her wishes to serve others. After leaving this role, Megan served for two years in academic affairs at a community college, then for four years in student affairs executive leadership at a small private liberal arts college. Megan left student affairs in February of 2021. At the time of the interviews, Megan worked for a nonprofit focused on higher education's relationships with the community.

Identified Themes

At the conclusion of all interviews, I began the process of coding statements of quality, relevance, and significance that directly reflected a response to the research questions. In total, 186 statements of significance were highlighted. These statements were then organized to eliminate repetition. Through imaginative variation, themes were produced to textually organize

66

significance. Within each broader theme emerged subthemes that further specified meaning

extracted from participant commentary. The table below catalogs identified themes and

subthemes extracted.

Table 2

Identified Themes Based on Research Questions

Research question	Identified themes
1. How did the COVID-19 pandemic and social unrest between 2016-2022 impact the working experiences of Black women student affairs professionals?	"I had to work as if nothing happened": The Emotional Impact of Exhaustion and Invisible Mourning 　Exhaustion 　Invisible mourning "Don't let the academy free and keep the staff in chains": Experiencing Apathetic Leadership and Operational Confusion 　Experiencing apathetic leadership 　Operational confusion "A taste of a different type of life": The Opportunity for Self-Revival 　Self-revival
2. What professional and societal conditions do former Black women student affairs professionals attribute to their departure decisions?	"Student affairs treats Black women like the world treats Lizzo": The Emotional Provocation of being Devalued, Disrespected, Overburdened, and Distressed 　Devalued 　Disrespected 　Overburdened 　Distressed "They want to siphon our energy, but won't protect us": The Challenge of Identity Erasure, Cultural Betrayal, Opportunity Barriers, and Tokenism 　Identity erasure 　Cultural betrayal 　Opportunity barriers 　Tokenism "I don't want to die doing this job": The Revelation of Deception and Honoring Oneself 　Deception 　Honoring oneself

The first research question sought to uncover participants' thoughts, feelings, and inferences based on their experiences in student affairs during the political landscape derived from the campaign and appointment of Donald Trump, the various police murders of Black and brown men and women, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The narratives of participants generated the themes of emotional impact, institutional response, and opportunity. Various subthemes were derived from a consistency of experiences (see Table 2). The BFT framework requires the use of dialogue to assess knowledge claims. In the following section, I utilize unbridled commentary from the participants to present a textual depiction of each theme.

"I had to work as if nothing happened": The Emotional Impact of Exhaustion and Invisible Mourning

Each participant was asked to provide context regarding the nature of their work environment during the major social and political occurrences of 2016-2022 and their feelings during these times. The most recurrent theme was the participants being emotionally affected by national incidents within and outside of the workplace. When all eight participants were asked if their jobs extended additional support to staff, each participant denied such occurrences. Further, candidates described the apathy of leadership toward events that affected Black staff.

Exhaustion. Referencing their working experience occurring in tandem with major current events, participants described moments of exhaustion experienced at work, including the enhanced workload assumed in response to COVID-19. Julia shared, "I was already doing 150% and treated as if it were 75%. I was exhausted pre-COVID, but after COVID, it was like the emotional labor was heightened." Megan detailed the additional programmatic work expected of her during the pandemic, regardless of the emotional toll the ramifications of COVID produced for Black and brown individuals:

I had to create a class during COVID while all of this was going on. There's a whole

vaccine crisis, inequitable practices. You'd see Black people standing in line needing aid

during the crisis. You see all of that, yet I'm putting on all kinds of programs? I was tired

and on edge but had to practice optics for white people.

Alison expressed enduring busy-work due to her supervisor's mistrust of employees working

from home:

She kept giving us busy work. Like, she kept giving us things to prove we were working,

and we had to do these reports and hold these hours that nobody came to. I felt like it was

ridiculous. Like… we're grown.

Vanessa described doing additional work while her supervisor remained scarce:

So COVID was weird because I felt like my supervisor all but disappeared during the

worst of it. Like, I was figuring it out on my own, and I remember being very conscious

to make sure that I'm telling them what I'm doing, because they needed to know that I

was working… despite the fact that my workload increased significantly.

Opal discussed her exhaustion was in reference to surprising tasks requested of her during

COVID:

It was like an emotional roller coaster, right? I was a person in student affairs, so all of a

sudden, I was kicking people off of campus. Then, somehow, I was notifying faculty

about exposures. Being the Black one, I was the one having hard conversations with

Black students. Me telling them isn't going to make them feel any better, but okay. It was

constant . . . yet they laughed when I tried to take COVID serious from the beginning.

The impact of work-from-home confusion and the addition of responsibilities assumed were in addition to the realization of scary occurrences happening in the country, televised for their consumption during an already exhausting time.

      Invisible Mourning. Participants discussed feeling as if they were mourning in silence while being impacted by societal occurrences of murders of Black people at the hands of police and COVID-19's impact on historically underserved communities. Julia summarized the subtheme of invisible mourning, saying, "I can't bring my emotions to work. This mask will stay on. These people don't care." Vanessa described feeling angry, depressed, and fearful after the 2016 election with no physical or social space within the work environment to express her thoughts: "I was kinda able to share amongst other Black people, but when that happened, we were admonished because we were [utilizes air quotes] 'in each other's offices too much' and the white people didn't want that." Quinn expressed the emotional impact of witnessing murders of Black people by police on television while working. She said, "I remember Gayle King crying over the George Floyd situation on TV. I remember the day vividly. . . . I was so tired of Black pain being displayed. I had a virtual Zoom meeting to be at and was definitely drinking." Alison presented similar sentiments of invisible mourning at work:

> So, I remember being on one of the town hall calls and there's like five Black people at my job, one of them being me, and we are always the ones to say, "let's head up this committee"—"let's fundraise for this"—"let's do this event." But this time we're trying to explain to these people that we're hurting right now. We have a lot going on, and we don't have the emotional bandwidth to try to explain why there are protests happening right now.

Two candidates expressed their personal proximity to two incidents of violence against Black individuals and described how they felt alone in mourning. Julia worked in the South at the time of a highly televised mass shooting. Julia shared, "When Emanuel Church occurred, I made sure my family was safe, but the next morning I had to work as if nothing happened." Terri and her family were personally impacted by the police killing of an unarmed Black family member that provoked national media attention. During both interviews, Terri mentioned that during her grieving process, her boss questioned her intentions when she needed to be away from work during the time:

> I was new and I had to wait 90 days to get leave. I was at, like, day 60 when [they] were murdered. I already negotiated time off for my own graduation when I was hired, but when I came back from the funeral, my boss mulled over my attending my graduation ceremony, so I didn't go. We didn't even talk about what happened.

"Don't let the academy free and keep the staff in chains": Experiencing Apathetic Leadership and Operational Confusion

Experiencing Apathetic Leadership. Participants discussed the personal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Black community. Julia expressed, "People of color are dying at rates others aren't and supervisors didn't understand why we were holding virtual events. We're too busy decolonizing the academy. Don't let the academy free and keep the staff in chains." Vanessa described the lack of concern and inaction exhibited by her minority-serving institution following the 2016 election of Donald J. Trump:

> I remember there was one conversation about sending out a message to students about the election—it was obvious the students were feeling things, but it was just glossed over. It was really like these white people don't care about me or these students.

Terri also referenced the demographics of her institution when expressing thoughts about leadership response following the shooting deaths of unarmed Black and brown individuals:

> I worked at a Catholic place, and I had to leave. Social justice is rooted in Catholicism. Our res life team was majority Black, but no discussion of what affects your staff. How do you have a meeting and not mention this?

Julia questioned the intentions of leadership in their response to shooting deaths of unarmed Black and brown individuals:

> I didn't have folks around who really cared. I'll never forget, after George Floyd, my supervisor just wanted to know my opinion like that was a point of conversation. Not "let me see how you are doing," just "tell me what you think about everything." I told him respectfully that this was a performance.

In response to the lack of institutional concern for individuals impacted by the Trump era, Opal observed,

> I worked in a small southern town, and it didn't feel good nor safe. And there was no support. At work, others were way too comfortable with saying what they wanted to say. I was supposed to be recruiting. I couldn't help to recruit other minorities into unsafe spaces.

Operational Confusion. Four candidates described observing their institutional response and the confusion experienced from colleagues and leadership while colleges adapted to operating during an unprecedented global pandemic. Alison weighed in on the human resource operations changing due to the inability of supervisors to monitor employees working virtually:

> During the pandemic, my boss would keep giving us, like, busy work. She kept giving us things to like [air quotations] prove that we were working. We had to do reports, hold

these office hours. No one would come to office hours. It felt like it was ridiculous, like,

we're all grown.

Similarly, Vanessa described being subject to additional oversight during virtual work while also

needing to take on more:

> COVID was weird because I felt like my supervisor disappeared during the worst of it. I
>
> was figuring things out on my own. I remember having to tell them exactly what I was
>
> doing so they'd know that I'm working even though my workload increased significantly.

In addition to the confusion over how to operate during the pandemic, Julia expressed a lack of

continuity in appropriate institutional offerings amid social distancing measures:

> We were in multicultural affairs knowing that there were a lot of people who were
>
> coming to our programs. We were very careful, but my supervisor didn't understand it.
>
> He was like, "I don't understand why student activities isn't having in-person events."
>
> Like, yeah, people coming are dying at rates other groups are not.

Julia expressed the difference in operations given students' ability to attend college online and

how this impacted her expected deliverables:

> I was done when I was having meetings with students. I'm supposed to be having
>
> programs and students were in Miami, going to concerts. They don't have to be here
>
> because they can be a student somewhere else. That made it very difficult. It changed the
>
> campus culture.

Quinn described the labor expected while staff were afflicted with COVID-19 and expected to

isolate: "When I got COVID, [supervisor] was like, "You can't hop on this meeting?'"

"A taste of a different type of life": The Opportunity of Self-Revival

Self-Revival. Candidates discussed the opportunity for reflection and re-established capacity, as working from home provided a less hurried lifestyle during the pandemic. Most candidates described the change as the chance to exhale. Vanessa shared her enthusiasm for the flexibility of working from home provided by the need to social distance at work:

It was like getting a taste of a different type of life. I could work from home or hybrid. We did this hybrid schedule which I absolutely loved, and I just thought I didn't want to go back into going into the office everyday to be performative.

Megan echoed the sentiment that virtual work allowed her to remain reflective, saying, "I felt like I was taking better care of myself. I was more productive. And at first I didn't want to work from home, then I used COVID to, like, reevaluate my wishes."

Participants also described the benefits of cutting commute times. Vanessa explained the new options she had for childcare due to cutting out her commute time. Alison shared,

So COVID, and the subsequent shutdowns, was like a gift and a curse to me. My doctoral program was whooping my behind, I was commuting going to events, I gotta be on this committee, I gotta sit in this and that and do classes, but then I could cut all that commute time.

"Student affairs treats Black women like the world treats Lizzo": The Emotional Provocation of being Devalued, Disrespected, Overburdened, and Distressed

The second research question sought to determine what led to participants' departure decisions. The participants' responses prompted the themes of emotional provocation, challenge, and revelation. Most participant responses presented during the data collection process reflected the feelings they experienced. The semistructured interview questions often prompted

consideration, and many participants paused to prepare to express the extent of emotion experienced. Participants' accounts of incidents they experienced triggered reflection, which provoked descriptions of emotions that occurred either during the occurrences themselves or later as a continued reaction to a previous provocation. These accounts were highlighted and texturally truncated for organized synthesis. The theme of emotional provocation is used to express the experiential occurrences to which the candidates attributed their decision to vacate the field.

Devalued. All participants described feeling devalued while working in student affairs. A common experience was feeling unappreciated. Julia summarized sentiments of being devalued in the field, voicing, "Our safety is not the default. Our comfort is not the default." Opal also described feeling excluded from leadership circles and diminished in her role, saying, "That banter and chatter that would happen in some spaces, that didn't happen for me. I had to try to get the same communication and social interactions as the white men." Vanessa described being used due to her identity: "There were times where just as a Black woman, they like this idea of my Blackness, but they don't want my Black response."

The women also described being underpaid for work they produced. Terri captured the sentiment, stating, "If y'all want extra time from me, run me some coins . . . or hire extra people." Alison also dove into the subject and discussed concerns of compensation versus achievement:

No other group is expected to do the work of five individuals but paid to do the work of one. . . . If you're in charge of something, you'll be doing extra work. Devaluation of Black women seems to seep into everything. Entry level and mid-level salaries are

75

disrespectful to folks' experience, talent, and education. In my last position, I qualified

for food stamps. Now that I left, my salary justifies my worry.

Vanessa described receiving unjustifiably low pay:

I was making about as much as my previous position. Meanwhile, my husband is out-

earning me, and he has an associates. He's making what I make a year in overtime, and

that's humbling. I was like, what am I really doing. I love this work, but if something

were to happen to him, I could qualify for food stamps because I don't make enough to

support myself.

Vanessa then described a situation where she was issued the work of a department leader but was

not provided a salary adjustment:

I had this title that did not accurately reflect what I did, and I could not shake it. I

constantly had people telling me that [her supervisor] told them I ran the department. . . .

It's like, okay, you have me listed as a director attending the administrative meetings, but

you won't accurately pay me for it.

Julia recalled being dismissed and devalued in decision-making spaces:

I kept saying that our students of color and our LGBTQ students experience the

university in different ways, and we needed to be considered about in the orientation

process. I gave program ideas, and they'd ignore it, then I'd be in meetings and

somebody else, a white woman, would say the same thing and it was all a sudden a great

idea.

Questions about or dismissal of the participants' qualifications was also a common occurrence.

Julia described feeling annoyance when individuals from her last student affairs position reach

out to her with accolades and words of appreciation, saying, "Now folks are saying, 'You were a gem to the university.' But when I was there, I was ignored."

Disrespected. The women presented experiences of having felt disrespected by colleagues, supervisors, and students while working in student affairs. They explained feeling othered given their Black, female identities. Quinn encapsulated the sentiments, stating, "Student affairs treats Black women like the world treats Lizzo." She described the double standard using a hip-hop analogy:

> You see how no one treats Fat Joe, DJ Khaled, or Big Pun [poorly] for being big? But if you come into student affairs empowered, like Lizzo embodies confidence, everyone is going to tear you down. Like, how dare you?

Vanessa recalled instances of microaggressions by colleagues and supervisors related to her appearance and eloquence:

> This one day I wore my hair naturally, and my supervisor asked if I stuck my hand in an electrical socket. The thing is, I've heard him ask similar of another Black woman. Like, he had the audacity to repeat it. . . . I was more surprised that it came from him, someone of another marginalized identity.

Megan described a time when a white male berated her, a full-time professional, in front of an audience of colleagues,

> I was berated for five minutes. I sat there and listened to this white man asking me who I thought I was, [saying] I don't know how to do my job. I knew what I was doing. I remember feeling so violated. . . . This happened during a time my dad was really sick. There was so much going on; I have an event to go on; my dad is sick. I never cried in an office before, but that was my first big cry. I couldn't stop shaking because of how

violated I was. My boss was upset and wanted me to meet with him. They wanted ME to

fix it, and I said I wouldn't. I never felt the same or comfortable.

Two participants presented instances of physical harm being inflicted upon them going

unchecked. After having a writing object thrown at her by an upset, white male colleague, Terri

expressed unease with his actions going unchecked, stating, "I suffered greatly from white

mediocrity and supremacy." Quinn's concerns about physical and verbal abuse arose from

interactions with her last supervisor, a Black male.

I truly felt physically unsafe in my last position. With him, it was like the femicide of

Black women was so prevalent. My uncles knew, and they really believed this man was

going to physically harm me if I continued to say no to him. Like, when I got another job,

this man told me he would punch me in the face.

Overburdened. Participants described manipulation and additional labor being expected

pf them. Vanessa captured these sentiments by stating, "One of the things I've learned as a Black

woman is, you know, we've got to dot every *i* and cross every *t* to remain well-covered." Terri

discussed the overwhelming expectations placed upon by Black women:

People treat us like we're not real, right? Because we can do a lot and can process super-

fast, and we have high capacity, and our work is sharp, and we're putting out high quality

things, right? But just because I'm magic doesn't mean I'm not real.

Megan provided a synopsis of her idea of the Black woman in student affairs being burdened to

do more than required to advance in her career:

They don't see you as a human being, but as a robot. . . . Yet, it's jumping through hoops

and challenges to get to an end goal. It's lonely. You feel like a wanderer. You don't have

78

the privilege to build roots into an institution. There's no moving all the way up without

having to navigate past gatekeepers.

Alison expressed similar perceptions of extreme expectations, explaining, "Lots of folks see

Black women as their mules, like a beast of burden. [We're] just expected to carry the load with

no support." Similarly, Julia expressed, "I would show up for people in ways others didn't for

me. People expect more of Black women. I can't slack off. Even though I was doing 150%, I'd

be treated like it were 75%."

***"They want to siphon our energy, but won't protect us": The Challenge of Identity Erasure,
Cultural Betrayal, Opportunity Barriers, and Tokenism***

      Identity Erasure. The theme of identity erasure represents the participants' experience

of being diminished and being expected to act unnaturally for the appeasement of others. Terri

expressed the airs she was expected to put on:

> I'm someone whose usually palatable because of this, that, and the third. Then, you move
>
> into this space where you know the palatability is still an issue, and it's like . . . you have
>
> to put on these airs and give your extra time.

Megan described the feeling of having her authentic self-diminished at work, stating, "There was

an expectation for me to diminish myself for egos." Quinn recalled the job search process and

the need to act hyper-positive to be noticed. She said, "When I got into this, I almost walked

away. It felt like I needed to put on a show to get a job." When asked what a healthy work

environment would have been compared to her student affairs experiences, Julia stated, "Safe

places would be where I can be myself in my vernacular, wearing my attire. A place that

aesthetically has the things reflective of my culture and places where other Black women and

women of color can be themselves."

Cultural Betrayal. The theme of cultural betrayal was derived from candidates'
unpleasant experiences with other persons of color. Some participants described negative
experiences with Black men in the field. Julia described feeling competitiveness from Black
men.

> I remember one supervisor told me his leadership style was to haze the hell out of me.
> It's like the strongest opposition is from Black men threatened by my leadership. It was
> like I was some bitch and they expected me to be matronly and kind.

She described experiences of Black male colleagues ignoring her leadership, stating,

> It was like they tried so hard to work around me. Some Black men feel like they have an
> advantage over Black women, because they're like, "Well, you're starting a family," and
> that means I'm on a journey to leave. . . . They see it as a negative. For me, it becomes an
> uncomfortable conversation. I'm thinking we're having a community conversation, and
> you're seeing this as an opportunity to advance [past] me in some competition that I
> didn't even know that we were in.

Terri described the surprise and betrayal she felt when a Black male supervisor she believed to
have good intentions tried to use her professionalism to his advantage by asking her to take on
work of white male colleague who was not pulling his weight:

> Like, ultimately you can lean on me because I'm gonna make it easy for you, you know
> what I'm sayin? But somebody you have a very good relationship with, we've written
> together, we've presented together and all this stuff, but it was like that was a frustrating
> moment, because it's like the person so well intentioned can do this to me instead of
> holding this white man accountable. I cried in my office. I love you and I care about you,
> and that's what you did as a supervisor. That is a piece of power.

Quinn recalled experiencing harm in her last position from her Black male supervisor, whom she described as condescending and toxic. She stated, "Enough Black men don't call each other out about their own crap."

Participants also described feeling betrayed through unpleasant mentorship experiences or experiences with Black women they perceived to be well meaning. Quinn explained notions of professionalism presented by Black women, stating, "The grossest introduction to professionalism was by Black women. This one mentioned I wasn't displaying my 'best self.' It was like funny socks was the expectation, and I believe my work should be presentable enough." Julia recalled political experiences with Black women. She said, "It was like they wanted to be in charge and liked by others. They started rumors about me because I needed to be put down further." Megan described similar experiences, saying,

> When I got an interim boss, this person bullied me, gaslit me with anything I had. What was worst was it was a Black woman doing this to me. I found out she bullied Black people because she wanted to be the only one. Black people I knew would last a year and a year and a half. Even though I was dealing with that, I was still successful . . . and they did not like that.

Distress. Several participants discussed the mental, emotional, and physical distress they experienced at work. Opal explained,

> My demeanor had become very annoyed and over it; I was going through the motions. I don't deserve this, and I was tired. It was hard to leave, but it was unhealthy. I was burnt out from years of being others' source of strength.

Vanessa discussed the anxiety she felt each Sunday when she contemplated the workweek. She said, "I was tired of the Sunday scaries. The stress, crying at home." Megan described

recognizing that she was living through grief and trauma. She said, "I learned what trauma truly was. Even now, parts of the year, even news, can trigger feelings based on what institution you worked at the time and what happened to you. . . . Experiences in student affairs have hardened me." Quinn recalled concerns her primary care provider had for her:

> I remember the time she asked if I had a lot of stress in my job, because it shows in my body. Since, I've lost weight, the stress is coming off. My leg hasn't swollen up like it used to.

Julie also described experiencing physical distress, saying, "The first time I thought about leaving, everything was all over the place. My hair was falling out; I was gaining weight; I had no sense of balance. There was so much pressure."

Opportunity Barriers. Participants commented on opportunity barriers, including questionable hire decisions they witnessed while within the field. Additional opportunity barriers included lack of support for the development and promotion of participants by leaders within the field. In summarizing experiences of being passed over for opportunities, Alison contended, "In higher ed, terrible people will get promoted." Further, Quinn expressed her thoughts about being exempt from opportunities, describing her last supervisor as underqualified for the position he was hand-picked to assume. She said, "He had no business being there. He was the ultimate 'pick me' and wanted proximity to whiteness so bad they decided to give it to him regardless of his qualifications." Julia also witnessed others less qualified advance within the field. She explained,

> It would have been helpful to be acknowledged beyond the working horse I was. When it was time for opportunities to advance, it was like my worth was never seen, but I saw folks far less qualified who were just better connected.

82

Megan also had experiences with underqualified individuals continued, as she was expected to pad the work of the cherry-picked individual:

> I met with the president, and they were bringing in a new person, a white woman who did not have a master's like I did, or the number of years I had under my belt. She didn't have experience globally, domestically, urban—It was because she was a white woman who was an alum of the institution. I was then told I would have to make her be successful. . . . I'd have more work, still not get any help, and I was supposed to be okay with it? I did all this work and they still treated me inhumanely.

Terri expressed her thoughts about not being taken seriously as a contender in the career field, saying, "I'm not seen as a threat. I appear youthful, not seen as competition or taken seriously." Opal described a scenario in which her supervisors questioned her desire to be involved in a development program six other colleagues had already attended. She was required to do presentation prior to being approved for the opportunity. She asked, "Why do I [gestures toward self] have to do a presentation when other people in the department have gone through it too?" Quinn was kept from opportunities at the request of leadership, regardless of her accomplishments. She said, "It's like they want to siphon our energy but won't protect us." Alison described a similar experience. She stated, "People see me, this large Black woman, and it influences what I'm qualified for."

Tokenism. The women described being used due to their identity. Alison discussed the labor expected of her when diversity, equity, and inclusion needs arose, saying, "I was expected to do the labor of unpacking racism. Like, 'I want to learn racism, explain it to me.'" Similarly, Julia described the labor of being affected by events involving Black and brown people within the United States while simultaneously being expected to remain available for students' trauma.

83

She said, "There was this expectation that 'Oh, people want to talk about this. You need to create space to talk about this.' But it was more to control the message and we shouldn't want to control the message." Vanessa described being aware of being used by leadership:

> There were other times where just as a Black woman, like, the idea of my Blackness . . . they just wanted my Black response. I was being used for the labor of Black response. And it seemed like it was self-serving for them. It wasn't to learn more; it was to prove they were right to other people that they were trying to argue with. . . . so they could feel a little less racist.

During the height of COVID-19, Opal described her assigned role conducting student isolation communications due to the perception of her relatability to students, saying, "It was an emotional roller coaster. We kicked people off campus, and it felt horrible. Then, I had to notify faculty about exposure. It was tokenism having to have hard conversations with the Black students." Similarly, Erica described being invited to the proverbial table for visual representation:

> Definitely when it comes to like, my work, it'd be, "Oh let me get [her] to serve on this committee." I'd like to think that they were asking for my work, solely; I think they were checking a few boxes. Like yes, you're going to get do work, but yes, you can say you have a Black woman at the table.

Julia felt used when she was pressured to help colleagues and superiors understand what was culturally appropriate:

> So typically, if I had a white male supervisor, I was supposed to be like, their cultural compass—their Black cultural compass. I was supposed to let them know what things were okay for them to do. . . . And this was frustrating for me, because I almost felt like I was limited in what I was supposed to be doing.

"I don't want to die doing this job": The Revelation of Deception and Honoring Oneself

Deception. Participants described the feeling deceived when comparing their intentions within the student affairs career with what was their experience. Some participants knew that their values were misaligned with their work. Terri described the dedication she had to her work despite the harm inflicted upon her, saying, "Student affairs chewed me up and spat me out. Was that shit a cult? I wasn't getting paid my worth, my schedule was brutal, why was I even doing all that?" Julia was also aware of her discontent in her last position. She said, "I felt like I was living my life in semesters, then I just started to feel like my voice didn't matter. I felt like I wasn't appreciated." Megan's revelation that she had been deceived outweighed what she believed to be her largest career triumph of making it to leadership within an Ivy League institution. She explained,

> Got to an Ivy League closer to the city. I'm thinking "I have made it." I had a great boss
> who was a woman of color. After everything I'd dealt with—every white woman who
> had cried because they felt offended by me and my leadership and my power, it was all
> worth it. And to be quite honest—it was the worst. My woman of color boss left because
> she dealt with a lot within three months. . . . I tried so hard to do the job and I would ask
> for help and didn't get it—no support. When I got an interim boss, this person became a
> bully. . . . It came to a point where . . . after that and having some conversations and
> seeing the reality, I resigned.

When discussing her own values misalignment, Megan described the reality of her treatment and her lack of interest in promoting the field: "The student affairs experience was rewarding, seeing students succeed and build[ing] relationships. . . . It's tough, because they make it worth it, but

the toxicity creates insanity. I see people of color having to work multiple roles, being paid little."

Honoring Oneself. The subtheme of honoring oneself was derived from the statements candidates made that validated their own thoughts, feelings, and wishes. Megan discussed her personal revelation of feeling depleted and uncomfortable:

> You're that caretaker and that nurturer, the strong one who still deals with everything in the face of adversity. But at the end of the day, who takes care of you? Who supports you? Where do you go to be vulnerable?

When asked about her thoughts on returning to the field, Terri talked about how she was treated in student affairs and the expectation for her to be inauthentic:

> You know, I never expected to rise like I did in student affairs, have master's degree in it or anything. It's just—the ways I'm not palatable to whiteness is what will keep me on the fringes of higher ed. Nothing I ever did would've been good enough, and now, I don't care as much.

Vanessa acknowledged her worth and the needs of her family, saying,

> I was bitter. The job wasn't serving me or my family. . . . I would have been in poverty if anything happened to my husband's job. . . . I didn't want to be a Black woman that settled for security. I wanted to get what I deserved for what I was worth. I can be a mother and make a livable wage outside of student affairs.

Terri mentioned a disconnect between the social justice words and social justice actions she observed during her student affairs experience. She stated, "There were no allowances for you if you had a rough week—no adjustments for the nature of the work. That's abuse. After inventing

86

all of this social justice language, and just don't practice it." Opal expressed honor for her values in relation to what her career field could provide:

> I didn't feel like I could continue to help to recruit other minority students to that type of environment. . . . I was tired of selling them a dream, I didn't want to lie, and I was tired of being ignored. I was tired of being talked to any kind of way.

In a statement also reflecting the theme of distress on her revelation that she needed to leave the field to honor her own health, Quinn declared, "I don't want to die doing this job."

Structural Depiction

Phenomenology is the recommended methodology when a researcher's goal is to explore concepts from fresh and new perspectives (Cohen et al., 2000; Lin, 2013). This research aims to highlight experiences of Black women; literature from Chapter 2 exposed this population's poor treatment stemming from a historically misogynistic and racist worldview. Researching Black women's career decisions presents opportunity to understand career experiences of Black women and how they are impacted by assumptions and reactions to their identity. The first research question sought new insight into the phenomenon of these experiences in time period of 2016 through 2022, which held a host of social, environmental, and political occurrences.

The women of this study described their experiences coming into student affairs and their dedication to their work within the field. They explained the reality of their dedication being acknowledged through their responsibilities and working expectations growing. Although their work was recognized through the continued addition of further labor, the women did not reap much monetary or promotional benefit. This reality is represented by the theme of being undervalued within the student affairs workspace.

The women acknowledged how their identity influenced their treatment and how they became aware of dismissal and disregard. The participants strongly perceived that this dismissal and disregard led to career limitations. Promotions were either withheld from these women, or when promotions occurred, treatment of these women remained unpleasant. The participants expected their good or hard labor to lead to further career access and access to decision-making spaces, yet this was inconsistent. Reward and acknowledgement were also inconsistent, leaving little to expect from hard work or labor within the student affairs field.

Disrespect toward the women's Black female identity and experience was common within the workplace. Microaggressions from other professionals and leaders were common, which presented an othering of the women. Due to the accolades received by those expressing microaggressions and their actions going unchecked, Black women felt a lack of protection and aloneness within the workplace. Further verbal abuse was felt through racist and misogynist language. The women felt aware of their inferior status within the career space through verbal harm.

The political and social atmosphere beginning in 2016 was discussed briefly by the women. Feelings of fear due to the 2016 election of Donald Trump were common. Within the workplace, political conversations were slim, and fears or thoughts related to politics at work went unshared. The women were cognizant of their environment during this time, with multiple women feeling unsafe in red, conservative communities.

Personal reactions to multiple deaths of Black and brown people at the hands of police often went unshared and under regarded at work, as well, which created feelings of invisibility amongst the women. Due to their treatment and expectation that they would remain collected and emotionless, the women had no safe space within the workplace to be authentic or grieve. The

women remained silent in spite of personal connections to high-profile murders. The women understood that their grieving was valid; however, leaders within the workspace did not acknowledge or provide time or space for grieving.

Beginning in 2020, the participants' work changed drastically due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They experienced changes in their responsibilities due to the pandemic. Responsibilities related to student engagement and retention-building during the pandemic were heightened, which presented a chaotic shift in the working environment. Participants felt they worked more during the pandemic; however, they experienced greater mental clarity due to an emptier campus and work from home opportunities. Working from home provided career and lifestyle options for the women. COVID-19 also heightened awareness of racial and economic disparities. The women grieved the massive number of deaths within the Black community due to COVID-19 and the lack of access to testing and vaccines. Still, the weight of this grief and these disparities went unacknowledged within the workplace as workloads were heightened and personnel wellness was out of focus.

The women described having a reckoning with their own acknowledged worth and their sense of belonging in the student affairs field through their journeys toward field departure. The women felt that their pay and treatment did not match the energy they placed into their daily work. Although many women expressed that they previously expected to remain in student affairs as a career, the accumulation of the trauma and grief experienced between 2016 and 2022 and lack of career and pay options assisted in their decision to departure.

Essence

The essence of the experienced participant phenomena is developed from the action of researcher's finding and understanding of the soul of experiences gathered in response to

phenomena studied. For this study, I explored the soul of experiences of Black women who chose to depart student affairs between 2016-2022; I gathered information to understand the thoughts, emotions, and reactions which led to their overall departure. Through imaginative variation, I studied participant responses and developed the overarching essence understood from data collected. The essence derived within this study is "resistance to inhumanity".

I arrived at "resistance to inhumanity" as this study's essence due to the prevalent themes of devaluation and disrespect highlighted the breaking down of eager, hard-working student affairs professionals into underappreciated and unmotivated field expatriates. The expectation of silence during hard periods provided the participants with an awareness of having little personal or professional support. The overarching essence of resistance to inhumanity is derived from the participants' response to the verbal, mental, and physical abuse they experienced within seemingly professional workspaces. In spite of the social justice language and goals of student affairs professional organizations such as NASPA and ACPA, individuals earning stature as leaders in the field were named as perpetuators of harm, resulting in participants' inability to consistently seek and trust in support to eradicate the cruelty they experienced. Participants received a copy of this constructed essence along with the request for response or changes necessary. Ultimately, four of eight participants responded affirming the encapsulated essence.

Conclusion

This chapter presented findings from a phenomenological study on Black women who departed the student affairs field between 2016 and 2022. The modified SCK approach to phenomenological research outlined by Moustakas (1994) aided in data collection and analysis and identification of the essence of the experience. Throughout the chapters, I bracketed my personal experiences through journal reflections of my own experiences as a Black woman in

90

student affairs. Within this chapter, I introduced multiple excerpts from my reflexive journal to enhance trustworthiness. The second step of horizontalization occurred through the coding phase of data collection, which took place after I collected and analyzed all transcripts from participant interviews. The third step, grouping, is illustrated in Table 2, where themes of significance are presented and context from participant selections is offered. The textural and structural depictions are then provided, leading to the essence of the women's departure experiences between 2016 and 2022.

The research questions sought to identify on Black women's working experiences between 2016 and 2022 and their experiences within student affairs that led to their departure decisions. The summation of the lived experience of Black women departing student affairs between 2016 and 2022 was resistance to inhumanity. The experiences described by the women exposed various moments of undue treatment, which led to departure decisions. The events of 2016–2022 provided additional environmental stressors that exacerbated undue treatment. All participants found ways to reckon with their experiences within their decisions to vacate the field altogether. In the following chapter, I discuss these findings in the context of extant literature along with implications for future research and practice within student affairs.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

How you gon need her but not believe her?

How you gon play her and not pay her?
We see you preaching equity, yet work overtime to betray her?

Isn't she what your post describes?
Internally, she could rise.
Instead, the committee's itching to compensate some underqualified guys.

All she does to fit the part...
degrees on top of degrees,
but making an amount of money that can't meet her family's needs?

You don't remember how hype she was to make it?
The dedication to education?
And somehow her tenor of work is seen as "unsophisticated"?

And watch her shift and mold to appease—
Making her values matter the least,
Carrying the burdens from work home with her talmbout some "is it me?"

"They see my Black as too Black, maybe I should tone down what they see.
Press my hair, put my voice on, and humor shit that's not funny."

Working harder and harder and so much more competently
than the ones sharing her ideas—
the recognition she'll never see.

She puts on the persona
Ramps up the palatability,
And yet it's tone deafness, microaggressions, and violence she still receives.

She's typing and erasing,
Nixed exclamations and uppercasing,
But she's wrong to report and call the racist shit they do racist?

She's told, "It's just the way you're treated until you work hard to make your name."
It came from her mentors, so what they say to her must be right and okay.
Yet, she's depressed every Sunday because it leads to a Monday.

Time continues to pass and it seems like it's not gon' change.
The "why" she used to have is outweighed by too much pain.
My good Sis starts to snap out of it and treats herself to well-deserved grace.

Revelation, "Nah it's not me.
You're doing all the right things.
This space produces a level of noxious toxicity

Do better, it's much out there.
You deserve peace and security
And not somebody down your back when you try to take you some leave.

But these students, they deserve the best of the best
And hell, that's me.
Nah Sis, not if you're the only one actually seeing what they should see."

She's back, because bump whatever it was that they was on.
The opportunity is out there, and that pay is looking strong.
The value in her is sought out, so the stress she will not prolong.

Them folks back at work sweating her, 'cause she's finding where she belongs.
"Who's gon do this extra work she's not paid for but still took on?"
Her two weeks, and it's panic while they scramble to right their wrongs.

All a sudden, there's more money to offer—
"Let's see if she'll stay hooked on."
It's too late, she's motivated to honor herself, so, so long.
Her flowers should have arrived early
Don't send them after she's gone.

(Richardson-Echols, Reflexive Journal Excerpt, December 7, 2022)

This chapter opened with a reflective poem and thought bracketing practice that was
written after the essence of participant experiences was derived. This excerpt marries the
research process, thematic findings, and BFT's request to appreciate the thoughts and feelings of
Black women, including my own. This chapter includes a summary of the results of this study, in
which BFT was utilized as a framework to produce the essence of Black women's experience of
phenomena examined. I discuss how the data collected supports the literature presented in
Chapter 2. Then, I address how the results enhance the literature on Black women's student

affairs departure experiences between 2016 and 2022. Next, I address implications for practice provoked by this study. Finally, this chapter closes with limitations of the study and recommendations for future research relative to the Black women considering or currently working in the student affairs career space.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Black women who left the field of student affairs amidst a time of exacerbated societal issues within the United States. This study allowed me to honor the voices and experiences of Black women and was guided by the following research questions:

1) How did the COVID-19 pandemic and social unrest between 2016 and 2022 impact the working experiences of Black women student affairs professionals?

2) To what professional and societal conditions do former Black women student affairs professionals attribute to their departure decisions?

The literature review provided in Chapter 2 presented comprehensive information surrounding the research questions. Key sources within the chapter introduced the reader to the career field of student affairs and the concept of "The Great Resignation." Material on the dual oppression of racism and sexism introduced context to Black women's positionality within the United States within and outside of the workplace. As an introduction to the epistemological approach to this study, the scholarly contributions of Black feminist leaders were discussed, including BFT, as framework to extract and appreciate the Black female voice as scholarly data.

This study was a phenomenological inquiry intended to assert the essence of experienced phenomena. The critical and constructivist approach to discovering the essence of the experiences of Black women who have departed student affairs between 2016 and 2022 required

researcher examination of marginalized voices to discover hidden data. To address the research

questions, two semi-structured interviews per participant were conducted to gather data from

eight women who fit the criteria of identifying as Black women who departed the field of student

affairs between the years 2016 and 2022. I then utilized the modified SCK method of

phenomenological research described by Moustakas (1994) to organize and analyze the data

extracted from individual participant interviews. The coding process involved thoroughly

scanning interview transcripts for significant statements that addressed either research question.

These statements were then reviewed for quality, repetition, and relevance to deduce themes.

Three themes emerged in response to the first research question: the emotional impact of

exhaustion and invisible mourning, experiencing apathetic leadership and operational confusion,

and the opportunity for self-revival. The theme of emotional impact of exhaustion and invisible

mourning described the emotive effects presented by candidates while describing work and life

between 2016 and 2022 and provided the subthemes of exhaustion and invisible mourning.

Participants' discussions of operations within the workplace during 2016–2022 revealed the

subthemes of apathetic leadership and operational confusion. Significant statements regarding

opportunity for reflection, pause, and rest were made by participants, extracting the subtheme of

self-revival. Quality responses related to the second research question presented three additional

themes: the emotional provocation of being devalued, disrespected, overburdened, and

distressed; the challenge of identity erasure, cultural betrayal, opportunity barriers, and tokenism;

and the revelation of deception and honoring oneself. As candidates discussed experiences that

led to departure decisions, feelings of being devalued, disrespected, overburdened, and distressed

emerged as subthemes. Participants provided comments on occurrences that provoked

challenges, leading to the subtheme's identity erasure, cultural betrayal, opportunity barriers, and

tokenism. Participants' responses related to their departure decisions revealed the subtheme of the revelation of deception, as well as the subtheme of participants honoring themselves. Structural depiction then presented language and context to associated themes and subthemes. Phenomenology requests the essence, or accumulated summation of thoughts, feelings, and reactions to experienced phenomena. The analysis of these findings presented the overarching essence: resistance to inhumanity.

Findings Supporting the Literature

Resistance to inhumanity was identified as the essence of the phenomena due to the accumulation of thoughts, feelings, occurrences, and trauma that provoked departure decisions. Chapter 2 provides literature on the duality of racism of sexism experienced by Black women within the United States inside of and outside of the workplace. My study affirmed Clayton et al.'s (2019) findings on the emotional trauma triggered by the election of Donald Trump. Participants within my study acknowledged the visceral nature of Donald Trump's leadership as being scary or causing worry, as highlighted by Clayton et al. (2019) and Alaniz et al. (2021). In addition, my study's participants notated regional inferences which heightened worry, such as working in rural spaces or southern towns. Safety appeared as a concern when participants discussed both their internal and external working environments and the lack of conversation occurring on these matters in the workplace. This study also confirmed data presented by De Witte (2021) on the potentially depressive impact witnessing unjust deaths of Black individuals within the media has on Black people. The participants in the current study addressed the emotional exhaustion prompted by the repeated murders of Black individuals at the hands of police. The subtheme of invisible mourning showed a heavy emotion occurring within the career space which went under regarded at work. Data within the subtheme of exhaustion included

detail on health disparities illuminated by the pandemic, including reduced access to testing materials, higher uninsured rates, less economic power, and high numbers of "essential" employment, which voided options to isolate (American Public Media, 2020; Green, 2020; Rogers et al., 2020; Vasquez Reyes, 2020). These experiences provided validity in researching societal events and their correlation to Black women's experiences within the working environment. The emotions presented and invisibility withstood illuminated a lack of compassion at work, influencing departure decisions.

Responses related to Research Question 1 birthed the subtheme of invisible mourning. Participants discussed the burden of acknowledged strife and grief stemming from it but having little ability to express emotions within the workplace. Data collected within this study related to attempts to cope with trauma experienced between 2016 and 2022 included reaction of confusion stemming from leadership. The lack of response to stress is described as an indicator of further internalized gendered racism, isolation, and stress (Szymanski & Lewis, 2016). My study supports findings from previous research that after campuses reopened in 2020, operational challenges within student affairs were further exacerbated as student affairs professionals responded to institutional goals during a global health crisis (Ellis, 2021; McClure, 2021; Njoku & Evans, 2022). Participants in my study acknowledged concern regarding the return to face-to-face practice, including programmatic efforts. Context around experience is provided by Ellis's (2021) and Njoku & Evans's (2022) investigations on the emotional toll of the pandemic, concerns of practitioner wellness, and the pressure to continue efforts toward institutional goals. Operational challenges described in my study further supported literary contributions regarding the effects of the lack of work-life balance, low pay, and rare opportunities for advancement on

student affairs practitioners prior to the pandemic (Ellis, 2021; McClure, 2021; Winfield & Paris, 2021).

My study affirms previous literature on the treatment of Black women. The theme of the emotional impact of exhaustion and invisible mourning within this study highlights the participants' experiences that rendered significant emotional impact. The subthemes of devalued, disrespected, overburdened, and distressed appear on numerous occasions in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. In the 1920s, Lucy Diggs Slowe combatted inequities in pay and treatment of Black women practitioners (Bell-Scott, 1997). Per my study's participants, the same experiences are prevalent in 2022. My study furthers the findings related to pay inequities uncovered by B. M. Williams's (2019) research on Black women's experiences within student affairs. Pay inequities within general career spaces are also affirmed (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009; Perkins, 2015). Discrimination and microaggressions, prompting the subtheme of disrespected in this study, were frequently addressed in literature. McKinsey & Company and LeanIn's (2021) study on women within the workplace asserted that women of color continue to have a worse experiences at work. Data collected within that study are duplicative of this study's findings of disrespect, questions of competence, and microaggressions. The overburdened subtheme presented is also apparent throughout previous literature. In comments provided by study participants, evidence of the "strong Black woman" and superwoman schema from previous literature were presented (Woods-Giscombé, 2010). Participants described the expectation of hard work due to their identities despite criticism they received related to their competence. This study detailed the experience of gendered racism inflicted upon Black women within the workplace. This study's finding of stress stemming from these experiences corroborates the psychological distress and higher rates of health issues presented in previous

literature (Nelson, Ernst, et al., 2021; Rosenthal & Lobel, 2020; Thomas et al., 2008). Mental distress resulting from microaggressions, and gendered racism experienced at work by my study's participants proves findings related to stress and burnout in literature (Nelson, Ernst, et. al, 2021; W. A. Smith et. al, 2007).

Responses that provided data to answer Research Question 2 revealed substantial challenges experienced by study participants. Identity erasure was commonly noted in previous literature. Descriptions of misconceptions or stereotypes explain the harm to the status of Black women and perceptions held that threaten their safety and livelihood (Harris-Perry, 2011). The subtheme of identity erasure describes the careful nature of Black women's self-expression within the workplace and the lack of authenticity described by my study's participants. Literature on gendered racism within the workplace also reveals of the lack of authenticity experienced by Black women who must be careful to not be undesirable employees (Collins, 2000; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1991; Essed, 1991). Commentary in this study highlights the increase of diversity, equity, and inclusion within higher education spaces as well as the lack of action taken to eradicate poor treatment experienced by Black practitioners, verifying similar discussion by Collins and Bilge (2016).

Responses on the use of Black women's work revealed the subtheme of tokenism. Previous literature on tokenism in student affairs is corroborated. Like Mitchell's (2018) data collected from mid-level managers in student affairs, participants within my study reported feelings of being used because of their identity as Black women. The title chosen by Mitchell (2018), "They Want My Black Face, but Not My Black Voice," resounded through commentary provided by multiple participants who cited the need of their physical presence but the silencing of their ideas. The subthemes of identity erasure and tokenism influence the subtheme of

opportunity barriers, which is also evident in the literature presented in Chapter 2. Participants described being passed over for promotions despite their achievements and witnessing accolades and promotions being given to less qualified individuals holding white and/or male identities. This furthers findings from Miles (2012) and N. M. West (2020), whose data revealed the achievement gap experienced by Black women and Black women's experiences of being passed over for underqualified individuals.

Findings Enhancing Literature

The contemporary nature of this study fills a gap left by a scarcity of literature on departures from student affairs between 2016 and 2022 and the Black female experience in student affairs administration. There was an expectation that data would be uncovered that would enhance literature on multiple phenomena. Data collected from participants on their experiences at work between 2016 and 2022 revealed subthemes of experiencing apathetic leadership, operational confusion, and unexpected opportunity, findings that enhance the literature.

The onset of COVID-19 presented a hurried institutional response, leading to the subtheme of operational confusion. A study published in late 2022 produced data about the pandemic crisis leadership responses of 22 senior student affairs officers. Themes that emerged were focus on the students, institutional context, and financial realities. However, the participants expressed the tension of balancing their own values and that of institutional leadership and external stakeholders which hold ultimate decision-making power (Gansemer-Topf, 2022). Participants within my study mentioned the push-and-pull response to changing priorities; student and staff safety was often sacrificed by reactions to institutions' financial obligations. This relates to the subtheme of experiencing apathetic leadership. Student affairs administrators are front-line workers with continued positionality during pandemic operations. Values

misalignment recognized by participants may be a result of stakeholders' priorities and personal values. Participants in this study were affected by health inequities within the Black communities due to COVID-19. Participant discussion on safety as it related to operational changes within the workplace suggests participants' personal reactions to working amidst the pandemic. This requires further knowledge.

The experience of apathetic leadership was also revealed as a subtheme based on participants' reactions to institutional responses, or nonresponses, to police killings of Black individuals. A flood of highly televised killings of unarmed Black people in 2020 created reasonable uprise within the United States, inclusive of campus activism. A 2022 study examined 99 statements from collegiate presidents in response to the 2020 murder of George Floyd (Casellas Connors & McCoy, 2022). Textually, statements acknowledged the racialized incidents and presented a commitment to inclusion. Institutions of higher education have a longstanding history of equitable discourse, but statements were largely exclusive of actionable steps to address systemic racism at the university level (Casellas Connors & McCoy, 2022). The participants in this study described being emotionally influenced by societal racial occurrences. Participants described performative action in institutional commitments to antiracist practices and care. Their responses expand literature relative to Black women's reactions to working amidst influential, racialized incidents and leadership apathy.

Literature continues to develop regarding work-from-home experiences for Americans, leaving a lack of information on student affairs professionals and even more so from the perspective of Black women student affairs administrators. Previous literature describes the stress of lacking a healthy work-life balance and scarcity of resources experienced by student affairs administrators prior to and after the pandemic (Winfield & Paris, 2021). Participants in

this study described benefits from working from home, and the subtheme of self-revival suggests a positive reaction to work-from-home opportunities. An American Opportunity Survey presented by McKinsey & Company (2022) found that when offered the option to work flexibly, 87% of the 25,000 respondents to their survey took it. One of the factors contributing to the decision was a toxic work environment, but the study did not measure responses according to the demographics of the study's respondents. The combination of stressors presented by student affairs work and the type of environment experienced by Black women at work leaves a gap in knowledge about Black women's work-style motivations.

Chapter 2 includes an excerpt from Candia-Bailey's study (2016, p.72), in which a participant reacted to experiences with other Black administrators at an HBCU: "It sickens me. We are our own worst enemy and why? There are so few of us . . . and one would think that we would celebrate fellowship, create meaningful networks, and uplift each other." Participants within my study also described negative experiences with other Black colleagues and leaders within student affairs. The experiences were described as bullying, possessiveness of roles and responsibilities, and exclusion. When making meaning of this experience, participants expressed surprise of having endured this, and acknowledged these negative experiences to typically stem from other identity groups. This revealed the cultural betrayal subtheme. Gómez (2012) uncovered context related to within-group trauma, otherwise known as cultural betrayal trauma. Gómez (2012) explained that this type of trauma is caused by a betrayal of within-group trust assumed from loyalty suggested due to the deep, shared trauma of societal inequity. Participants in Gómez's (2012) study on Black women's perceptions of leadership in a predominately Black work environment revealed the experience of competition and the undermining of Black women's authority. When this is experienced among Black women, reasons include insecurity

and jealousy. This phenomenon is otherwise referred to as *intragroup discrimination.* A 2020 study on intragroup discrimination in hiring practices revealed a theme of reluctance toward hiring Black candidates based on physical appearance and stereotypes (Gauthier-Soulouque, 2020). Twelve of 20 participants in the study had observed bias in leaders' treatment of job candidates, with leaders commenting on physical appearance, such as colored hair, and related to candidate personhood, with one study participant expressing distaste for candidates "sounding ghetto" (2020). These statements and participant experiences suggest the prevalence of overwhelming white gaze at work producing further intragroup harm. More knowledge from related to experience is necessary. In the present study, participants Quinn and Terri discussed negative experiences with Black male leaders. Similarly, a 2012 study suggested that Black men express more dissatisfaction of Black women's leadership than other groups (Hall et al., 2012). Intersectionality discourse focuses on the power differential and perceptions of Black men related to Black women as harmful to Black women's safety (Crenshaw, 1991). Of the participants, Quinn described concerns of workplace safety given the actions of a former supervisor.

The subtheme of revelation reveals the participants' exasperation in response to workplace conditions, compensation, treatment, and complacency. The theme provides evidence related to the factors affecting the departure decisions of Black women in student affairs between 2016 and 2022. The subthemes of deception and honoring oneself are additive knowledge of meaning-making rare in literature previously found on Black women's work experiences. Participants discussed the passions that once motivated them to enter and evolve within the student affairs field. The subtheme of deception describes participants' acknowledgment of harm experienced within the field and the loss of sight and passion once embraced.

The subtheme of honoring oneself explains participants' career decisions being the result of their self-worth. Participants within my study began their interviews by discussing their education and career trajectory. When the participants described their departure decisions, they acknowledged they deserved better than the conditions they were experiencing. Pinckney Jones's (2022) study produced data on working Black women's acknowledgement of their self-worth while overcoming barriers of societal prejudices making them feel inferior. This study's participants, too, faced gendered racism. They discussed finding their passion and purpose, which helped them realize their worthiness of higher-ranked positions and pay (Pinckney Jones, 2022). B. M. Williams's (2019) findings are further descriptive of departure decisions, with Black women's opt-out experiences found to be based on resistive responses to bias and supremacy experienced within institutions of higher education. Participants know they deserve better and place their sense of self-value above their desire to remain in the career-space.

Relation to Theoretical Framework

It is because of this tyranny of race prejudice that the colored girl is called upon to endure and

overcome more difficulties than confront any other women in our country. In law, religion, and

ethics, she is entitled to everything, but in practice there are always forces at work that would

deny her anything. But yet, as meanly as she is thought of, hindered as she is in all directions,

she is always doing something of merit and credit that is not expected of her. She is irrepressible.

She is insulted, but she holds up her head; she is scorned, but she proudly demands respect. Thus

has it come to pass that the most interesting girl of this country is the colored girl.

(Fannie Barrier Williams, 1987, p. 151)

Participants in this study described experiences that exemplify the oppressive blend of racism and sexism that affects the daily lives and livelihoods of Black women. BFT is used to

104

make meaning of the unique life experience of Black women navigating society and culture while suffering from multiple oppressive forces. Participants within this study described being overburdened due to the misconceptions around their identity that led others to make assumptions about their credibility and worth. Participants also discussed the economic disadvantages they experienced due to barriers to opportunity and violence in the workplace. Collins (2002) highlighted the psychological attacks often levied at Black women. Departure decisions were made by the participants for the reclamation of their own validity as Black women. Collins (2002) acknowledged resistance as the legacy of Black women doing what is not expected, as historical experiences of Black women include the abuse of stereotypes and the mental, physical, and economic harm generated from these oppressions. In statements leading to the subtheme of honoring oneself, participants described the practice of affirming their right to take up space and acknowledge their worth. Resistance to dehumanization is a reclamation of worthiness and opposition to the construct of whiteness.

Implications for Student Affairs Practice

Create Safe Spaces

Within semi-structured interviews, participants were asked about the conditions that would have kept them in student affairs. This question provided participants with the opportunity to consider their own student affairs experiences and to provide recommendations for future practice. Many participants recommended the creation of safer spaces. Julia noted,

> It could just be safe places where other Black women and women of color can also be themselves. It has to be a viable number of Black women there, too. Just, reimagined spaces for Black women with their needs in mind.

105

Megan suggested remote work could provide Black women the ability to avoid oppressive behaviors occurrent within office spaces. She asked, "Can there ever be an equitable workspace? Not having to be in an office space is critical for the safety of Black women." Participants' suggestions and data collected from this study indicate confirm action is needed to transform workplace conditions. As I write this, I feel slightly hopeless and annoyed, as the major overarching organizations for student affairs practice, NASPA and ACPA already request competency in social justice; yet Black women experience harm in the student affairs career-space to the extent of fear of physical violence, as expressed by Quinn, and crying on Sunday night, as expressed by Vanessa. In 2015, the American College Personnel Association and NASPA issued a response to racial injustice in student affairs and higher education. The imperative established racial justice as being at the core of work of higher education and student affairs administrators. With themes of decolonization and justice being central to the mission of the top student affairs professional organization's mission, institutions of higher education must be held accountable to the cause to prevent harm to Black women. Yet, in the participants' experiences, there seems to be practitioner naivety and pushback to such imperatives; their harmful actions are evidence of continued opposition to such a focus on decolonization. Student affairs administrators and hiring managers within the field must be prepared to embrace the actionable resistance to the bias that harms Black women.

There is existing organizational infrastructure within all institutions that makes safe spaces possible. Participants in this study described harmful actions being overlooked by human resource associates on campus. Brown et. al (2020) affirm that human resource practices must transform to address systems of domination in the workforce, addressing white supremacy and harm. Institutions can formulate how instances are responded to, and aggression in human

106

resource accountability must occur to garner support and eliminate instances of workplace trauma. At an on-the-ground level, action can occur through intentionality and change of power structure through supervisory influence.

Ensure Access Through Supervision and Development

Participants acknowledged no longer having the patience to endure career stagnancy or the overwork needed to be considered for accolades or leadership. Black women are challenged with the need to present as close to perfect to be seen as credible; expectations to wear hair to European beauty standards, code-switching, and the inability to remain authentic given negative perceptions of the Black female voice and attitude add difficulty to daily experiences. These challenges are not created by Black women. With acknowledgement of these inequities, institutional leadership and human resource practices could adjust to mitigate such challenges. To highlight actionable steps toward equitable supervision and hiring practice directed towards leaders and hiring managers in student affairs, scholar Claire Beaudro and I formulated a presentation conceptualizing strategies utilizing Winston and Creamer's (2008) integrated model of staffing in student affairs.

- **Develop inclusive hiring practices:** Posting to diversity-specific job boards, using a blind hiring program, using structured interviews, interviewing female and minority applicants prior to white male applicants, eliminating the use of social media as a candidate vetting tool, and recruiting candidates from HBCUs and minority-serving institutions.

- **Create an inclusive atmosphere during orientation:** Incorporating diversity and inclusion workshops into orientation, requiring staff to participate in periodic bias training, and examining institutional policy relative to appropriate appearance.

- **Remain intentional with supervision:**
  - Supervisors: Educating oneself by studying current events involving racial and gendered bias, adopting practices that promote equity including zero tolerance for biased practices within staff, challenging oppressive language and behavior in the moment and often, reviewing existing polices for their impact for individuals within historically underserved groups, and applying the same commitment to inclusion for students to your direct reports, as supervisees are just as deserving of care, cognizance, and intentionality, and considering how to lighten the burden of impacted staff in times of heightened stress and amidst traumatic societal events (e.g., offering time off, creating or encouraging a safe space, allowing additional time on a project).
  - Supervisees: Acknowledging areas for growth, improve competence by doing one's own work, avoiding putting marginalized people in the role of educating you, and admitting areas where knowledge is needed and pursuing that knowledge.
- **Focus on Staff development:** Assessing both oneself and one's organization by asking employees for feedback, encouraging in-personal and virtual safe spaces, initiating conversations with experts or trained facilitators to discuss thoughts and feelings on bias exhibited or experienced, listening to employees, and discussing the importance of actionable allyship.

The experiences of Black women in student affairs are dependent on individuals with power and influence. Their support and sense of belonging is dependent on supervisory practices which are rich in cultural competency, to diminish harm in any place it may appear.

Pay Black Women

In addition to the firsthand accounts of participants regarding fair pay and promotion opportunities, studies present data regarding the pay gap affecting Black women. A 2018 report on the pay wage inequity faced by women of color in higher education administration found that Black women were paid least equitably overall at 67 cents to every white man's dollar (McChesney, 2018). When pay equity was compared across staffing levels, Black women were found to be paid the least as faculty, staff, and professionals (McChesney, 2018). Constrained in lower-paying roles already suffering pay gaps, Black women in student affairs hold the largest number of lower-level positions despite of having the highest educational achievements (McChesney, 2018; N. M. West, 2020). The promotion of equity and inclusion cannot be a cry maintained for the benefit of students; student affairs' word must be bound through intentionality and action. Paying Black women for their good work means strategizing pay scales and decisions to remain equitable at the institutional level. It means human resource input on salary offerings to match in-house and regional standards. It also means anything less must be met with consequences to protect the economic stability of Black women. They are worth the effort.

Implications for Black Women in Student Affairs

This study focused on the contemporary career field experiences of Black women who departed student affairs. Given previous literature on decades of oppression experienced by Black women, it is haunting and unfortunate that there will be no quick fix towards their treatment in any American institution or space. Given this, it is pertinent that Black women care for themselves, radically and intentionally. S. M. M. Smith (2021) examined the connection between the demands of decision-making in 2020 and stress outcomes for Black women in leadership. This study found self-prioritization necessary to persistence. S. M. M. Smith (2021)

acknowledged stressors that are mediated by discrimination that arises from intersectional

identities of Black women. She highlighted research that corroborates Chapter 2's literature

establishing disproportionately higher rates of chronic illness and morbidity in Black women that

are attributed to stress (Duru et al., 2012; S. M. M. Smith, 2021). Unfortunately, we cannot

predict when oppressive forces may cease to afflict the daily lives of Black women. Instead,

strategies for self-preservation and survival may help to prolong the quality of work-life balance.

S. M. M. Smith (2021) proposed the need for Black women to create a personalized plan that

prioritizes individual needs. Further, Smith's idea of "radicalization" involves the prioritization

of self, which is not always easy for Black women. S. M. M. Smith (2021) found that the

demands of work-life balance, the responsibility of planning in response to multiple pandemics

and racialized endemics, and the weight of carrying the burden for friends, family, and students

produces debilitating stress. This was encapsulated with a conceptual framework, HEIRS:

> H-Heal: Black women must heal by expressing healthy anger rather than internalizing
> oppression and marginalization. Critical race self-care framework component one aligns
> to this tenet.
>
> E- Equip: Black women must equip themselves with a Self-Centering Liberatory Self-
> Care Regiment that meets their needs by giving themselves and others the space, time
> and structures to thrive and survive. Critical race self-care framework component three
> aligns to this tenet.
>
> I-Identify and Inform: Black women must identify the harm and inform individuals when
> you are harmed so that they bring awareness to acts of gendered racism+(Plus). Critical
> race self-care framework one aligns to this tenet.

R-Recognize: Black women must recognize the harm that was done and what needs to be done to address it by conducting a self-audit with a self-care assessment that will allow them to develop a self-care plan to address the harm that was caused now and harm that may occur in the future. Critical race self-care framework component two aligns to this tenet.

S-Self-Centering Liberatory Care: Black women must use Self-Centering Liberatory Care because it will allow them to determine what self-care looks like for each unique Black woman. This type of self-care does not fit into the traditional self-care standards. It may often include a collective social cultural self-care approach rather than an "individualistic" approach but the most important part of this type of self-care is that it is "self-centering and liberating". This is an essential element. In addition, a social self-care paradigm that is designed for and by Black women without influence from mainstream America's version of self-care that is predominated and rooted in white cultural norms is salient. Critical Race Self-Care framework component three aligns to this tenet. (S. M. M. Smith, 2021, p. 239).

Limitations

Study limitations are common in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). Eight participants were interviewed for this study in accordance with the sampling criteria suggested for phenomenological research. The eight participants provided rich stories from multiple perspectives, encompassing multiple institutions of higher education and multiple regions of the United States at various times. Significant statements provided valid data that formed themes, and a change such as a shift in number of participants could have provided different outcomes impacting the themes extracted.

Participants of this study provided their whole experience as Black women who departed student affairs. In their accounts of challenges and emotional provocation, there were questions I asked which requested insight into their identity playing a part in their treatment. These questions encouraged the wholeness of their Black female experience to be shared for examination. Chapter 2 introduced the concept of intersectionality and gendered racism to familiarize readers with the reality of the dual oppressions Black women face. After examining the interview transcripts, I considered my ability to parse participants' thoughts on experiences as racial discrimination vs. gendered discrimination. This does not fully exist as a limitation, as Black women do not have the ability to shed one identity for the benefit of the other. This is mentioned as a limitation as there was the possibility to further explore essence and meaning into gendered racism as a phenomenon. Further, this means that the outcome of this study does not delineate education on either the Black or the female experience. Black men who have departed the field may produce varying data if asked similar semi-structured questions; non-Black women may produce varying data, as well. There is an importance in the understanding of the uniqueness of the Black woman's experience when approaching this research.

Eligibility criteria for this study required that participants must have been Black women who departed the field of student affairs between 2016 and 2022. The participants in this study provided various accounts of their experiences during this period within student affairs, making their accounts ungeneralizable. Self-selection bias also presents ungeneralizable accounts, as individuals responding to the call for participants self-selected into the study. Other individuals who met the study criteria but did not self-select into this study have valid data to contribute to this research that may be qualitatively different from what was collected. With limitations come opportunities for further inquiry. The research questions investigated and the data presented

within this study helped fill gaps in knowledge that this research did not have the ability to fully assuage.

The literature review parsed multiple topics informing this research. This research was formed as a continuation of prior literature on Black womens' student affairs departure experiences with the addition of the exploration of how current events also influenced thoughts, feelings, and actions. At the time of defining research, there was no research which matched the exploration of all phenomena I explored. The limit of previous research on this topic provides an accumulation of similar previous data, and begins the formation of available data on the particular topic.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was poised to explore experiences of Black women. Phenomena experienced by Black women are underrepresented within scholarly contribution due to traditional Western scholarship being controlled by white men's knowledge validation (Collins, 2000). Previous literature provides that Black women are the curators of knowledge on Black women's experiences (Collins, 2002). Experiences occurring between 2016 and the time of research conducted qualify as contemporary research, and literature on working amidst the pandemic continues to be added as knowledge. Black women represent the most minoritized group of higher education administrators within the United States (N. M. West, 2020). The combination of phenomena necessitates additions to student affairs experiences of Black women amidst contemporary events. This study also focused on Black women who departed the field altogether. There is opportunity within qualitative longitudinal research, in which the paths of participants who have departed the student affairs field can be further explored. A longitudinal narrative can illuminate implications of departure comparing the working conditions of post-

113

student affairs opportunities to those prior to departure. Since this study extracted emotions of Black women as they experienced student affairs, emotion after departure can be assessed and compared. Given the ongoing nature of oppression within the United States, there is the unfortunate opportunity to gather workplace experiences amidst further troubling societal events.

There were no extreme inclusion limitations to this study, allowing the input of Black women who have worked within the field full time for at least two years prior to departure between 2016 and the time or research, 2022. The endemic of racism and/or gendered racism is ongoing, and there is further opportunity in continuing research to consider workplace conditions during the current time of analysis. Although significant similarities among the participants' responses were identified, there is validity in studying the experiences of Black women at specific career levels. Those individuals who have reached executive status could produce specific observations different than those of individuals who reached only entry-level status prior to departure. The career history included in their stories could assist in presenting rich implications toward best practices relative to the entry and departure point discussed.

When I first considered my dissertation topic as a first-year doctoral student, I held interest in discussing the experience of Black women student affairs practitioners between 2016 and 2022. When discussing this potential topic with the University of Georgia's Professor Emerita of the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services, Dr. Diane Cooper, I was advised to consider individuals who had already made the decision to depart. Dr. Cooper, distinguished student affairs scholar-practitioner, illuminated my ability to enhance voices of the unheard. The voices of Black women were already underrepresented, but further limited in student affairs discourse were the voices of Black women who made the decision to leave the field. Their contributions and experiences had the potential to be lost in their departure, because

who would take interest in their story once they were gone? At the conclusion of my call for participants, a total of 117 women responded and were qualified to participate in my study. Future research should continue gathering the experiences of Black women who left the field as data to recover knowledge from voices leaving unheard.

A reproduction of this study could also include data on the demographics of institutions Black women depart from. In 2020, I worked within a state system institution. The institution's operational guidance amidst the pandemic was provided by the state, with much attention paid to press releases from the governor and system office. There was little variation to institutional operations amidst state system schools, but there seemed to be flexibility in operations at private institutions within the region. Further, scholarly work highlights the impact of predominately white institutions on practitioners of color (Steele, 2018). In contrast, experiences at HBCUs are also presented as challenges from Black women in literature (Candia-Bailey, 2016; Hevel, 2015). Institutional response, culture, and operational structure have the potential to alter the experience of the practitioner who is bound to the goals and practices of the institution. Future research could focus on experiences within different institutional types to find similarities or differences between professionals' departure decisions based on experiences within separate institutional structures.

Literature on student affairs departure grew amidst the pandemic, given the impact of additional work and limited resources during an already trying societal experience (McClure, 2021). The timeframe that was the focus of this research on Black women's departure from student affairs could be explored further; for example, pre-pandemic experiences and post-pandemic experiences could be compared.

115

Lastly, an interesting finding within this study was the theme of cultural betrayal. Participants associated the shock of challenges presented by Black women and men with their overall student affairs departure decisions. Future research into this phenomenon involving individuals who have experienced similar disappointment from intragroup career bullying has the potential to present rich findings.

Conclusion

This phenomenological study examined participant meaning making related to the student affairs career departure decisions of Black women between 2016 and 2022. This timeframe molded social shifts within the United States. For Black women, many events during this period triggered additional emotions such as fear, grief, and exhaustion. Student affairs has a reputation for excess work with limited resources; this did not subside during the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to institutional responses inclusive of participant-defined operational confusion. These events were impactful inside and outside of the workplace, and Black women remained silent on the widely acknowledged and televised state-sanctioned violence. When engaging in meaning-making related to their departures, participants revealed multiple traumatic events that revealed the essence of resistance to inhumanity. For student affairs, a field that acknowledges social justice as a practitioner competency, results of this study necessitate further action to ensure sufficient bias training and equitable hiring and supervision practices to reduce harm inflicted upon Black women.

In this study, BFT epistemology was used to gather hidden knowledge from the often-ignored voices of Black women. Departure decisions made by study participants further highlight their resistance to oppression faced in the career space. The continued societal incidents affecting Black women inside and outside of the workplace provided insight into unnecessary

inhumanity suffered. Though participant experiences do not necessarily represent the experiences of all Black women, the themes developed from the interviews of eight Black women do suggest shared experiences. The acknowledgement of self-worth that led to the ultimate decision to depart the field suggests resilience. Actionable responses to implications to practice have the potential to prevent further unnecessary harm.

Final Thoughts

I introduce this section to further respect the nature of adding voice to the Black female viewpoint as it relates to this research. There is no question that this research was heart work. I exist as a Black woman advocating for Black women and a student affairs professional advocating to further the profession. As a mother of three, I explored this research from the perspective of mothering, meaning that a nurturing nature existed as I listened to the stories of participants, a mentoring nature existed as I considered implications, and a wish for conclusiveness existed as I sought recommendations. Those recommendations provided potential means to influence the future experiences of Black women within the student affairs field. However, it would be with complete mindlessness to fully lean into hope. With all identities combined, it was impossible to avoid the multiplicity of emotion experienced throughout this research journey. I experienced both challenge and therapy. My reflexive journal contains spaces of vulnerability as I practiced impartiality through parsing out my own feelings and experiences, wrinkling the pages from being impacted by the harm expressed from participants. The therapy existed as eight Black women affirmed the need for occupational wellness and that there is validity in a certain type of frustration existent in serving student affairs while navigating Black womanhood. Therapy existed in the opportunity to remain hopeful for Black women currently within the field or seeking to serve it. Hope and pride exists in witnessing stories of Black

women prioritizing wellness, and that their duties to themselves outweighed their occupational duties. For Black women, I exude hope, as I know Black women as well as I know the word "resilient". I know Black women as well as I know the term "possibility". I know Black women as well as I accept the verbs "can" and "will. It is their/our environment that brings me concern. There is a partial hope I harbor when making meaning of implications existing outside of the Black woman's control. Institutions have a way of othering Black women; it is a popular pastime to expect the Black woman's mental and physical labor without providing honor to its owner. And although the encouragement for social justice competency exists as a means to provide inclusivity within the student affairs profession, the historical under regarding of Black women exists so deep into the fabric of institutions that I cannot find hope. It is the physical harm experienced by participants that lets me know education and achievement was not enough to warrant humanity. It was the mind-altering stress experienced by participants that does not convince me both care and action have the possibility exist quickly. There is no professionalizing the field while terrorizing its workers; there is no leaning into social justice competency without actively disrupting the unsafe spaces. If the slave woman who nursed a child that was not her own could not attain humanity through freedom, if the professionalism of Lucy Diggs Slowe could not attain humanity from cultural proximity of Black men who also knew oppression, and if Vanessa, Julia, Quinn, Alison, Terri, Opal, Erica, and Megan chose resistance after seeing their service and time did not warrant respect, then I cannot lean fully into hope. With this dissertation, it is with hope that readers experience and feel the trauma expressed by participants in the same way I heard and felt my trauma during the data collection and analysis process. It is my hope that their experiences can provide validity to the experiences of Black women directly within the reader's grasp. It is my hope that this research inspires action in the sense of future

research and advocacy through action for the sake of the student affairs field and for the sake of Black women. It is important to mention that although this hope exists, my Black woman experience forces a gullibility within this hope, as our history continuously requests where our help will finally come from.

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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Hello,

I am a doctoral candidate under the direction of Dr. Georgianna Martin in the Department of Counseling and Human Services at The University of Georgia. I invite you to participate in my research study on Black Women Departing Student Affairs Between 2016-2022. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Black women who have left the field of student affairs amidst a time of exacerbated societal issues within the United States.

I am seeking to interview Black women who have worked in student affairs for a minimum of two years and have departed the field anytime within the last six years. Your participation will involve: 1) a pre-screen survey (10 minutes); 2) reading and reviewing an initial outreach letter and consent form (10 minutes); 3) participating in one virtual Microsoft Teams or Zoom interview (60-90 minutes); 4) reviewing the responses of transcript for clarification (20-30 minutes 5) participating in second virtual Microsoft Teams or Zoom interview (30 minutes) 6) reviewing the responses of transcript #2 for clarification (10-20 minutes). Upon completion of your first interview, you will receive a $50 gift card which will be emailed to you for your participation in the study.

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to discontinue participation without penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to. No individually identifiable information about you, or provided by you during the research, including your name or former place of employment, will be shared outside of the interview without your explicit permission. You will be able to select a pseudonym which will be used for confidentiality during this study. The results of the study may be published, but your name will not be used. Please be advised that your identity will not be associated with your responses in any published format.

As a participant in this study, you will have the opportunity to discuss your previous, student affairs work experiences. Since interview questions will be based on your identity and experience, emotional discomfort may occur. Appropriate resource referrals will be provided in the event you need help identifying assistance in addressing discomfort.

A consent letter is attached which further explores your rights as a participant. **If you are interested in participating and would like to schedule your first interview, please respond with 3-5 days and times within the next two weeks in which you are available for 90 minutes.** I appreciate your interest and hope to hear from you, soon!

Cordially,

Mya Richardson-Echols

PRE-SCREEN SURVEY

https://ugeorgia.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eECECkh6GabmpPE
Black Women Departing SA - Screening Survey

Thank you for your interest in my qualitative research study on Black Women Departing Student Affairs Between 2016-2022. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Black women who have left the field of student affairs amidst a time of exacerbated societal issues within the United States.

Please review the following questions to determine if you qualify for this study. This should take only 10 minutes of your time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer and may exit this response form at any time.

Please note, if you qualify for this study, you will be asked to
- Review and complete a consent form and a participant information form.
- Participate in one 60–90-minute Microsoft Teams or Zoom virtual interview which will be transcribed
- Review the transcript and the identified themes from your interview.
- Participate in one 30–45-minute Microsoft Teams or Zoom virtual interview which will be transcribed
- Review the transcript and the identified themes from your interview.

Participation in this study should last 2.5-3 hours. Upon completion of your first interview, you will receive a $50 gift card via email for your participation in the study.

Do you identify as Black, of the African American diaspora?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Do you identify as a woman?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Have you worked as a full-time professional in a student affairs/student services role for a minimum of two years?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Have you voluntarily resigned from student affairs/student services position sometime on or after 2016?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Are you willing to be contacted to participate in two in-depth, virtual interviews where you will discuss your experience within student affairs and departure decision?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- First and Last Name
- ☐
- Email Address
- ☐

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Black women who have left the field of student affairs amidst a time of exacerbated societal issues within the United States.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or cease participation at anytime without giving any reason without penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to. You can request all of the information about you be returned to you, removed from the research, or destroyed.

As a participant in this study, I will ask you to:
- Review and complete a consent form and a participant information form;
- Participate in one 60-90 minute Microsoft Teams or Zoom virtual interview which will be transcribed
- Review the transcript and the identified themes from your interview.
- Participate in one 30-45 minute Microsoft Teams or Zoom follow up virtual interview which will be transcribed
- Review the transcript and the identified themes from your interview.

Participation in this study should last 2.5-3 hours. Upon completion of your first interview, you will receive a $50 gift card for your participation in the study.

(Provide the participant with a copy of the consent and participation form.)

We will begin the interview. I will ask you some questions regarding your experience within student affairs as a Black woman. I am interested in your career trajectory and motivations for student affairs work. I am also interested in the specificity of occurrences, thoughts, feelings, and actions leading to your departure from the field. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. You may stop this interview at any time.

Interview Questions

1) Talk to me about you, what makes you, you?

2) What can you tell me about the first time you recognized you were a Black girl?

3) Recall the first moment you had interest in student affairs. What experiences

   enhanced your desire to enter your first student affairs role?

4) Recall a time where you felt positivity in your role. What events, relationships, or experiences brought joy?

5) Recall the first moment you felt race and gender influenced your treatment at work. Can you tell me about that moment?

6) Talk about your best working relationships? Who were they, and what did they mean to you?

7) Talk about your worst working relationships? Why were they your worst? How did the experience influence you?

8) Can you tell me about a time you had a negative experience at work? What happened and who did it involve?

9) What moments influenced your decision to resign from your position?

10) What feelings were involved in your decision to resign from your position?

11) What was it like being a Black woman in student affairs?

12) How, if at all, did your identity impact your decision to resign?

13) What did your network of support look like when you decided to resign?

14) How did making the decision to resign feel? Can you tell me about the process?

15) If applicable, how did the COVID-19 pandemic impact you at work? What was it like being a Black woman working in student affairs during a pandemic?

16) How did racial unrest impact you at work? What was it like being a Black woman working in student affairs during this time of racial unrest?

CONSENT LETTER

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT LETTER
Black Women Departing Student Affairs Between 2016-2022

Dear Participant,

My name is Mya Richardson-Echols and I am a doctoral candidate under the direction of Dr. Georgianna Martin in the Department of Counseling and Human Services at The University of Georgia. I invite you to participate in my research study on Black Women Departing Student Affairs Between 2016-2022.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Black women who have left the field of student affairs amidst a time of exacerbated societal issues within the United States. My research questions are:

3) How did the COVID-19 pandemic and social unrest between 2016-2022 impact the working experiences of Black women student affairs professionals?
4) What professional and societal conditions do former Black women student affairs professionals attribute to their departure decisions?

You have been invited to participate in this study due to meeting study eligibility criteria. Specifically, I am looking for Black women who have worked in the field of student affairs for at least two years and have resigned from a student affairs role between 2016-2022.
Your participation will involve:

1) a pre-screen survey (10 minutes)
2) reading and completing a consent form and participant information form
3) participating in one virtual Microsoft Teams or Zoom interview (60-90 minutes)
4) reviewing the responses of transcript for clarification (20-30 minutes
5) participating in second virtual Microsoft Teams or Zoom interview (30 minutes)
6) reviewing the responses of transcript #2 for clarification (10-20 minutes).

Upon completion of your first interview, you will receive a $50 gift card for your participation in the study. Information used to provide the gift card will not be shared.

Participation is voluntary. You can refuse to take part or stop at any time without penalty. Your decision to refuse questions or withdraw will not affect any benefits otherwise entitled to you or other activities that are otherwise conducted.

Since interview questions will be based on your identity and experience, emotional discomfort may occur. Appropriate resource referrals will be provided in the event you need help identifying

assistance in addressing discomfort. There are questions that may make you uncomfortable. You can skip these questions if you do not wish to answer them.

This study will add to research on Black women's multidimensional experiences as they navigate student affairs while developing an understanding of specific themes inducing the decision to vacate the field within recent years.

Your responses may help us understand how to retain Black women student affairs practitioners during contemporary times.

Research records will be labeled with study IDs that are linked to you by a separate list that includes your name. This list will be destroyed once I have finished collecting information from all participants.

The information provided in this study will be used or shared after the identifiers have been removed. For example, it is possible that information may be shared with other researchers and/or for future studies without additional consent.

This research involves the transmission of data over the internet. Every reasonable effort will be taken to ensure the effective use of available technology; however, confidentiality during online communication cannot be guaranteed.

If you are interested in participating or have questions about this research, please feel free to contact me at 404-625-6201; myarichardson@uga.edu. You may also contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Georgianna Martin at glmartin@uga.edu. If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the IRB at 706-542-3199 or by email at IRB@uga.edu.

Please keep this letter for your records.

Sincerely,
Mya Richardson-Echols