MOTHERING WHILE WOKE: EXPLORING THE CONSCIOUSNESS DEVELOPMENT OF BLACK

MOTHERS ENGAGED IN STUDENT AFFAIRS WORK

by

QUA'AISA SHANAY WILLIAMS

(Under the Direction of Merrily S. Dunn)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the consciousness development process of Black mothers engaged in student affairs work and how this consciousness impacts their parenting and professional practice. Grounded in Endarkened Feminist Epistemology, this study utilized sista circle methodology to acknowledge the historical contributions of Black women, power of dialogue, and center the voices and experiences of participants. A review of literature includes an exploration of Black women in higher education, historical and contemporary ideals of Black motherhood, socialization, identity development, and consciousness development. Data for this qualitative study was collected using individual interviews, sista circles, and reflections. Black mothers in this study experienced a paradigm shift when becoming mothers leading to a changed perspective and approaches to parenting, developing a critical consciousness, and professional praxis as student affairs professionals. Findings from this study offer implications for future research and students affairs practice to create truly inclusive communities that value and support both students and staff of color.

INDEX WORDS: Black mothers, Black motherhood, Woke, Critical consciousness, Sista circle methodology, Student affairs moms, Endarkened feminist epistemology, Motherwork, Awakening, Black feminist thought

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B.S., Florida State University, 2010

M.S., Florida State University, 2012

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

Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2020

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May 2020

DEDICATION

For Uncle Melvin,

To tell you the truth, this took much longer than I thought.

But to finally answer your question, I graduate May 2020.

Miss and love you every day.

Hope you are proud.

Love always and forever,

Your Qua'Aisa Ann

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my mother, thank you for always believing in me, pushing me to do more, and always being there for the good days and the bad. Thank you for your sacrifices to make sure I had the access to fulfill my dreams. To my Granny, I guess you were right that I should go to college, even though I could have become a famous chef. Thank you for being the voice of reason and always keeping me covered with your prayers. Thank you both for raising me, I love you always and forever.

To my love Russell, thank you for your constant support and encouragement throughout this journey. You believed in me sometimes before I believed in myself. You stepped in when I needed to step away and never made it a burden. I could not have made it through the ups and downs of this journey without you, my partner, my confidant, and receiver of all of my external processing.

To Jordan & Huey, my inspirations and my why. You push me to be a better version of myself daily. Thank you for sharing me and for the love and enthusiasm, you gave when I returned. I started the PhD journey because I wanted to show you anything was possible. So much of my life I felt like I was exploring uncharted territory just figuring it out as I went along. I now lay this path not as the only way but just one way to reach your dreams. The world is yours.

To my UGA community, thank you for being my home away from home. To my #BreadGang TJ & Lauren, thank you for the laughs, the diagnoses, and constant support. To my good sis and "cohort mates" Brit and Lamesha, thank you for always being there, your

constant support, fellowship, and partnership throughout this process. To Black CSAA, thank you for the laughs, encouragement, support, and space to just be. Keep at it, you are closer to the finish line than you imagine. To Drs. Collier and Lacy, thank you for your guidance, sisterhood, and support.

To Dr. Dunn, you have been my constant support throughout this journey. Thank you for being my safe space to vent, process, and speak my truth. You have validated and encouraged me every step of the way. To my committee members: Dr. Dillard, thank you for your work and your voice. I am forever changed by your teachings and my time in Ghana. You helped me find the Black authors, feminists, and perspectives that my soul was always missing even when my mind did not know it yet. Dr. Chapman-Hilliard, thank you for taking the time out to meet and talk with me even though I am not in your program. Our talks really allowed me to figure out what I wanted to study and where I needed to start. In a time and space where I felt disconnected from faculty, you were the support and connection that I needed. I am forever grateful to you both.

To Dr. Means, without your encouragement, I probably would not have applied for the PhD program. You pushed me to think deeper, interrogate the why, and become a better scholar. Thank you for understanding my experiences and gently pushing me to stick to my truth. To Dr. Linder, I am the writer, scholar, and questioner I am today because of your feedback and unapologetic approach to your work. You showed me that my experiences and perspectives were not only valued, but needed and wanted. Thank you for your support, encouragement, and recipes.

To my ATL Family Jessica, Bryan, Felicia, Jayvious, Kim, Shoshana, and Jo-el, thank you for all the brunches, celebrations, encouragement, and support over the past five

years. You all have become family to me and your support in all areas of my life has carried me through the good and the bad. To my long-distance family who despite the miles, continuously kept me company throughout the journey, especially during commutes, Dahdrian, Yareliss, and Lissette, I thank you for checking in on me and your friendship despite the distance.

To my CARE family, it all started with you! Dr. Hudson, Mrs. Richardson, Mrs. Wright, Dr. Felix, and Dr. Tata, thank you for being my home away from home, for your guidance, support, and encouragement. I truly would not have made it this far without each of you. To Dr. Frazier, thank you for believing in me and for taking me under your wing. To this day, I still hear your rules and strategies for navigating professional spaces as a Black woman and balancing it all with being a partner and parent. So much of who I am as a professional and partner is a direct reflection of you and your lessons.

To my sista scholars, I thank you for your voices and so openly sharing your stories with all of us. Your feedback, encouraging words, and experiences kept me going throughout this process and quieted my self-doubt of the study and myself as a researcher.

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INTRODUCTION

The year before I began the doctoral program, I became a mother. Becoming a

mother changed my life but more specifically becoming a mother in the context of 2014

changed my worldview. In February of 2012, the world learned of the killing of Trayvon

Martin in my home state of Florida. I watched as his parents did interview after interview

pleading for justice for their son as his killer had not been arrested. Like many, I attended

marches and demonstrations calling for justice. I remember noticing a shift on social

media, pop culture, and on my institution's campus to constant talks about social justice

and racial inequality.

Once Trayvon's killer was finally charged and the trial began, I was certain the

evidence presented constantly in the media would prove enough for a conviction, but I was

very wrong. The acquittal of Trayvon Martin's killer shattered every ideal I held of justice

and fairness for all in the US. The murder of Trayvon Martin and subsequent acquittal of

his killer became a rallying call across the United States (US). Protests were held across the

country, athletes donned hoodies in support, celebrities and political leaders took to social

media voicing outrage, and the Black Lives Matter movement was initiated. Across the US,

police brutality, racism, discrimination, and the question of whether or not Black lives

really mattered were constantly discussed and debated on the news and social media. The

conversations continued with the subsequent killings of Jordan Davis, Eric Garner, Mike

Brown, Walter Scott, Freddie Gray, Sandra Bland, and Tamir Rice. The once too taboo topic

of racism was front and center. The facade of a post-racial society created by the election of President Barack Obama was shattered.

On August 3rd of 2014, I welcomed a healthy 5 lb 9 oz baby named Jordan to the world. Following Jordan's birth, I stayed home on parental leave for 12 weeks, existing somewhere between a state of anxiety learning to be a parent and a state of bliss looking at this tiny human who lit up when I smiled. As I emerged from my new parent bubble, my anxiousness and bliss turned to fear. On November 22nd, Tamir Rice, a 12-year old, was shot and killed by police for holding a pellet gun. The video of his last moments before, during, and after the fatal shooting was constantly posted across social media platforms and various news stations. A disclaimer precedes the video, 'Warning: This video contains violent images that some viewers may find disturbing.' I thought, shouldn't we all find this disturbing? I recall watching the video of a little boy playing at the park when a police car speeds into view and within seconds, Tamir's body falls to the ground. Just two days later, a grand jury announced there would be no indictment for Michael Brown's killer. Over the course of two years, I had seen similar videos and heard similar verdicts but this moment felt different. I had always feared for my family, friends, and the Black community as a whole but this was an overwhelming fear that left me with a weary spirit. I began to question, would the world see my Black child as a threat? Would violence against my child be seen as justifiable? My consciousness was awakened by these acts of violence against Black boys and men and as I grew in my own development, my awareness shifted with the acknowledgment of the just as prevalent but often not portrayed or credited violent experiences of Black women and girls.

I would find consolation in my community of coworkers, family, and friends turned family. We discussed and debated which turned to strategizing to determine: how would we protect the ones we love and what could we do for the larger Black community? With a community consisting of almost exclusively educators, what could we teach our children to protect them both physically and mentally from a world that seemingly sees no humanity or value in their lives? The discussions and strategies were vast, including: teach them their rights, teach Black history, showcase Black excellence, homeschool, weapons education, Afrocentric childcare and so many others. We found solace in these strategies while still haunted by the notion that it may not be enough to keep any of us safe or keep us alive.

Through these discussions, I realized that despite my years of academic training at "top tier" institutions, my knowledge of Black history and culture was minimal. There was a story and history of my culture that was missing from both the formal and informal education I received. I was prompted to go on a journey of self and cultural exploration to gain this knowledge. As such, I read books, blog posts, articles, enrolled in African American Studies courses, and committed to a study abroad trip to Ghana. My ultimate goal for gaining this knowledge was to be able to share it with my child and my community. I wanted Black children to know where they come from to open up the possibilities of where they could go. I saw myself as being responsible not only to my own child but the children of the Black community and the students I work with. If this heightened sense of self and culture had such an impact on my approach to parenting, community involvement, and student affairs practice, I wondered if other Black mothers engaged in work as student affairs professionals had similar experiences. If so, what

prompted them to exploration? What kind of knowledge were they seeking and where were they getting it from? What were the implications of this process in their personal and professional lives? These questions and my personal reflections on my process were the catalyst for this research study.

Background

In the field of student affairs, Black women constitute the largest minoritized population of administrators (NCES, 2016; West, 2018). Despite this prevalence, little research focuses on the experiences of Black women administrators. Even less research focuses on Black women administrators who are also mothers. Broadly, research on the Black community in higher education tends to focus more on the experiences of Black faculty and Black students. Studies examining these populations often center on the impact and effects of race and racism. When race is centered, the focus tends to be on Black men (hooks, 1981). This single-axis focus of the impact of racism on human experiences ignores the experiences of Black women (Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 1981). Black women exist in a unique social position subject to inequality based on racism, sexism and other oppressions linked with other social identities (sexuality, class, ability status, gender, etc.).

Black Women in Higher Education

For Black women in higher education who are also mothers, the act of mothering in the professional space is also prevalent in their personal lives (Jordan-Zachery, 2013; Nzinga-Johnson, 2013). This challenges the false dichotomy of work life balance widely discussed in student affairs spaces. For many Black mothers in higher education, their professional work is an extension of their mothering (Jordan-Zachery, 2013). Similarly, Patricia Hill Collins (2007) utilizes the term motherwork to challenge theorizations of

motherhood and the dichotomy present in feminist literature on motherhood distinguishing family and work as strict separate entities. For women of color, mothering is intrinsically linked to concerns of the ethic community as a whole. As such, motherwork refers to the work done on behalf of one's own children and the children of one's ethic community to address issues of physical survival, empowerment, and identity (Collins, 2007). For Black mothers engaged in student affairs work, their motherwork is for both their children and students. Motherwork has the potential for radical social change in higher education and society (Collins, 2007; Jordan-Zachery, 2013).

Black women in higher education are often called to take on additional labor outside of their job requirements (Jordan-Zachery, 2013; Nzinga-Johnson, 2013). This additional responsibility often includes the physical and emotional support and well-being of students with shared social identities (Bernard et al., 2012). This practice of Black women supporting and caring for children not biologically their own is also known as othermothering (Collins, 2000a; Guiffrida, 2005; Hirt, Amelink, McFeeters, & Strayhorn, 2008). Although othermothering practices have been noted at both Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Historically white institutions utilized by both Black women and men, these expectations often differ. Gender roles and stereotypes impact these relationships as Black women are often looked to as surrogate mothers and expected to also nurture and provide emotional support (Jordan-Zachery, 2013; Nzinga-Johnson, 2013).

These notions of Black women as othermothers are reflective of the continuation of West African values of community child-rearing adapted by Black Americans to combat racism, sexism, and classism (Collins, 2005). This social responsibility calls for support of

those within the community regardless of familial ties. As such, the act of "mothering" is not solely designated to biological or legal guardians. Black women in higher education are often overworked and undervalued in their institutions and for those who maintain othermother status for students, must balance student needs, community expectations, and job requirements (Jordan-Zachery, 2013; Nzinga-Johnson, 2013). While the rewards of othermothering such as giving back to the community are rich, challenges for Black women in higher education can include unrealistic expectations and burn-out (Bernard et al., 2012).

Black Women's Consciousness

For oppressed groups, consciousness is composed of identification as a member of an oppressed group, rejection of oppressive systems and disparities based on the illegitimate system, discontent of power inequality, group pride, and commitment to collection action for group advancement (Gurin, Miller, & Gurin, 1980). During the 60s and 70s, Black liberation movements emerged to combat white supremacy and women's rights movements developed to oppose patriarchy. Both movements aimed to increase the political consciousness of respective members. Political consciousness represents a shift from acceptance of one's individual and group position in a stratified system to challenging the status quo and structural inequality (Gurin, Miller, & Gurin, 1980.

In women's rights movements, the practice of consciousness-raising was utilized to get women to view the personal as political and organize for collective action (Whittier, 2017). This ideology was grounded in the notion that individual and personal issues were the result of systemic oppression and thus political in nature. Consciousness-raising consisted of a self-reconstruction of identity entailing an acknowledgement of systemic

influence and identifying as part of a group with shared experiences. Consciousness-raising often occurred through small group discussions with the intent to promote collective action eradicating sexism. These early consciousness-raising sessions centered on the experiences of white women not taking into account the impact of race, class, ability, etc. Therefore, Black women organized, creating consciousness-raising sessions and political agendas of their own prioritizing the unique anti-racist and anti-sexist position of Black women (Combahee River Collective, 1995).

Black women in the United States (US) exist at the intersection of oppressions resulting in commonalities fostering the formation of a group consciousness (Collins, 2000a). While these common experiences foster a collection standpoint, the heterogeneity of Black women experiences and other intersecting identities creates varying dimensions of consciousness. The development of Black women's consciousness is characterized as a journey from "internalized oppression to the 'free mind' of a self-defined womanist consciousness" (Collins, 2000a, p. 112). Collins (2000a) describes this process and the outcome,

> when an individual Black woman's consciousness concerning how she understands her everyday life undergoes change, she can become empowered. Such consciousness may stimulate her to embark on a path of personal freedom, even if it exists initially primarily in her own mind. If she is lucky enough to meet others who are undergoing similar journeys, she and they can change the world around them (Collins, 2000a, p. x).

Historically, Black women's consciousness has been nurtured in relationships with one another, art and music, and the works of Black women writers creating an alternate space

for self-definition and development. This connection between the everyday lived experiences of Black women and the consciousness that develops as a result encourages action towards change (Collins, 2000a).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the consciousness development process of Black mothers engaged in student affairs work and how this consciousness impacts their personal and professional practice. This critical study was undergirded by Endarkened Feminist Epistemology (EFE) which honors Black women's ways of knowing and acknowledges the unique cultural standpoint of Black women influenced by historical and contemporary systems of oppressions and resistance to these systems (Dillard, 2006). As the theoretical framework, Black Feminist Thought (BFT) was utilized to center the voices and experiences of Black women and recognize the knowledge created by and for Black women as legitimate (Collins, 2000a). BFT calls for Black women academics to continue a rich herstory of merging theory and activism by investigating Black women's experiences *with* and for them. As such, sista circle methodology was employed to explore the consciousness development with sista scholars allowing knowledge of this experience to be created within the circle. Sista circle methodology challenges positivist notions of research providing culturally relevant methodology that creates space to gain first-hand knowledge of Black women's experiences (Johnson, 2015). Beyond being spaces to gain information, sista circles also serve as spaces for support and empowerment. My hope was that by creating this space sista scholars would be able to reflect on their experiences in a supportive environment and collaboratively construct what it means to be conscious and how that consciousness impacts their lived experiences.

Research Questions

This study is guided by two research questions:

1. How do black mothers engaged in student affairs work describe their consciousness development?

2. How has a heightened sense of consciousness impacted the parenting and professional practice of Black mothers engaged in student affairs work?

Epistemological Framework

Endarkened Feminist Epistemology (EFE) was utilized as the epistemological framework of this study to both challenge the notion of objective, culturally ambivalent research and ground my work in Black women's ways of knowing (Dillard, 2006). Dillard (2006) explains

> in contrast to the common use of the term "enlightened" as a way of expressing the having of new and important feminist insights (arising historically from the well-established canon of white feminist thought), I use the term "endarkend" feminist epistemology to articulate how reality is known when based in the historical roots of Black feminist thought, embodying a distinguishable difference in cultural standpoint, located in the intersection/overlap of the culturally constructed socializations of race, gender, and other identities, and the historical and contemporary contexts of oppressions and resistance for African American women (p. 3).

As a Black mother researching other Black mothers my connection to this community informs my work. I am responsible to both my sista scholars and the larger community they represent. This intellectual work is a continuation of my life's work toward social

change for the communities I represent. Additionally, EFE honors the meaning making process engaged within in-group dialogue that challenges and resists dominance (Dillard, 2006). An extended description of the underlying assumptions of EFE is outlined in Chapter 3.

Theoretical Framework

Black feminist thought (BFT) is a critical social theory that reclaims Black women's ideas, knowledge, and activism often overlooked by traditional ideology and scholarship (Collins, 2000a). As a theoretical framework, BFT centers the self-defined lived experiences of Black women, acknowledges the interlocking nature of oppression, and acknowledges diversity among Black women based on varied social locations. Historically, Black women have produced social thought in the form of academic works, music, poetry, and literature as a means to escape, survive and resist dominating systems of oppression. Black women within and outside of the academy construct and reconstruct knowledge on the meaning of Black womanhood and the respective social and political standpoint (Collins, 2000a).

Collins (2000a) outlined six distinguishing features of BFT. First, race, gender, class, sexuality, and citizenship status are aspects of interlocking oppressions constituting a US matrix of domination which frame the oppression experienced by Black women. Second, Black American womanhood is shaped by the dialectic relationship linking oppression and resistance. Third, within the shared collective identity as Black women, divisions and differences of experiences exist based on one's position within other social structures of class, sexual orientation. Fourth, Black women academics must continue the tradition merging theory and activism continuing to investigate Black women's experiences with and

for Black women outside of the academy. Fifth, Black feminist thought as both a critical

social theory and practice must be dynamic and adjust to resist everchanging social

dynamics. Lastly, acknowledgement that Black women's struggles are part of a larger

struggle for social justice and commitment to solidarity (Collins, 2000).

BFT served as a theoretical guidepost while making decisions on this research

design. I selected sista circle methodology because it centers Black women and provides a

space for sista scholars to self-define what consciousness means to them and how it

impacts their lives. While cultural influences surrounding race served as the impetus for

my consciousness process, I chose to not specify racial consciousness because I recognize

the varied social locations of other Black mothers engaged in student affairs work may

impact them differently. Additionally, BFT informed my data collection, analysis, and final

write up process.

Conceptual Framework

Neville & Cross' (2016) Emerging Racial Awakening Model was utilized to

conceptualize the awakening or transformation of consciousness process and the perceived

outcomes of this process. Racial awakening is defined an experience or event triggering

"personal exploration of one's heritage and the histories of one's racialized ethnic group"

prompting "increased critical awareness of what it means to be Black and also a series of

changes (e.g., new insight, different behaviors, etc.) that led to establishing a sense of

connection to something broader than the individual self" (Neville & Cross, 2016, p.

3). This awakening of consciousness process is closely related to identity development but

differs with the focus on critical awareness in a hierarchical society. Awakening is

prompted by personal experience or observations, informal and formal education, and

political involvement. Outcomes of awakening include increased sense of self and possibility, leading to pride and acceptance through continued exploration, and commitment to social justice through activism (Neville & Cross, 2016).

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it utilized critically relevant research design and methodology to center Black mothers engaged in student affairs work, a population rarely studied in the field of student affairs, and explored the change of consciousness, a concept rarely explored in empirical studies (Chapman-Hilliard, 2013; Neville & Cross, 2016). This study provides student affairs administrators with knowledge about the experiences of Black mothers in the field and the additional communal expectations existing beyond the job description. Administrators can utilize this information to identify ways to support Black mothers in student affairs to prevent burnout, turnover, and exiting the field. The knowledge produced from this study can also be utilized to encourage administrators to critically examine practices, policies, and procedures that disproportionately assigns additional labor to Black mothers and penalizes community work.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

This chapter includes a review of literature related to the experiences of Black women in higher education, student affairs mothers, and Black motherhood to provide context and additional background information on the target participants for this study. An overview of socialization, identity, and consciousness is provided with a focus on the impact of race and gender on these constructs.

Black Women in Higher Education

Institutions of higher education in the US are a microcosm of the larger cultural society and reflect similar organizational structures and power hierarchies. To contextualize Black women's experiences in higher education it is central to understand Black women's position in US culture and society broadly (McClinton, 2010; Collins, 2000). US society is undergirded by patriarchal and racial hierarchies privileging both male and whiteness. Black women exist in direct opposition to these positions and as such are delineated to the margins (Beale, 1995; Collins, 2000; King, 1995).

Theoretical analysis of Black women's subjugation has primarily focused on a race-sex positionality highlighting the confounding nature of racism and sexism. Beale (1995) introduced the concept of "double jeopardy" describing dual discrimination of racism and sexism often resulting in economic discrimination. Similarly, bell hooks (1981) describes the Black woman as being "socialized out of existence" rarely being identified separately from Black men or counted among women. hooks explains, "when Black people are talked

about the focus tends to be on Black *men*; and when women are talked about the focus tends to be on *White* women" (p. 7).

Other Black women scholars have acknowledged this duality, while also extending the conversation beyond race and gender making room for other identities and their linked oppressions (Crenshaw, 1989; King, 1995). King (1995) critiqued oversimplified analysis assuming oppression as additive which fails to address the interdependent nature within systems of oppression. Instead, King (1995) utilized "multiple jeopardy" to emphasize the multiplicative and simultaneous nature of oppressions. Focusing on the interconnection among systems of oppressions, Crenshaw (1989) argued "any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140). In spite of the obstacles, Black women have been pioneers in the field of education, much of which is intentionally left out of historical record (Mosley, 1980).

In the late 60s and 70s, institutions of higher education were forced to recruit Black faculty and administrators in response to protests, civil unrest, and the threat of withheld funds from the federal government (Mosley, 1980; Smith 1980). As a result, the once "closed door" was slightly cracked opened to a small number of Black faculty and administrators only granting access to the periphery while being excluded from decision-making power and policy. Many Black faculty and administrators were given job responsibilities but not access to the power and authority required to meet the responsibilities. Black women specifically were often employed in low-policy making positions (Jackson, 2003; Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009; Mosley, 1980; Smith, 1980).

Black women make up 9% of individuals employed in administrative positions in higher education institutions. Within student affairs, Black women represent the largest minoritized population of student affairs administrators in postsecondary (NCES, 2016; West, 2018). Mosley (1980) conducted one of the earliest studies on Black women administrators in higher education fueled by her frustrations with the dearth of literature on Black women administrators. Mosley's (1980) study focused on Black women administrators at predominantly white institutions and found declining numbers within the field deeming Black women administrators as "endangered species" (p. 296). Mosley (1980) describes Black women administrators as tokens and "most often in positions peripheral to the policy and decision making core of higher education. They feel overworked, underpaid, alienated, isolated, uncertain, and powerless" (p. 296). Despite explicit differences in the experiences of Black administrators based on gender, Mosley (1980) found the literature on Black administrators focused solely on men and in response outlined the need for additional research on Black women administrators.

This sentiment was reiterated by Moses (1989) who critiqued the monolithic focus on Blacks in higher education research which assumes "what is true for minority men must also be true for minority women" (p. 2). Instead, Moses (1989) calls for a decoupling to "examine and honor the distinctive contributions of these unique subcultures within academia" (Henry, 2010, p. 2). When looking at the literature on Black women in higher education, studies are concentrated in areas focusing solely on Black women faculty, Black women students, and the composite of Black women faculty, student affairs administrators, and students. Research exploring the experiences of Black women student affairs

administrators is scarce despite their significant impact on facilitating student learning and development (Henry, 2010; Jackson, 2003; Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2011).

Within the limited literature on Black women student affairs administrators, scholars have indicated unique challenges endured in the field related to microaggressions (Howard-Hamilton, 2003), tokenism (Mosley, 1980), salary discrepancies (Walker, Reason, & Robinson, 2003), and barriers to career advancement (Belk, 2006). Other scholarship has noted Black women administrator's resistance through the creation of counterspaces at institutions, professional associations (West, 2019), and utilization of self-care strategies (Kersh, 2012).

Black Motherhood

There are competing perspectives on what constitutes motherhood. The dominant perspective in the US posits a Eurocentric view of motherhood supported by this ideal of the "cult of true motherhood" (Collins, 2007; Collins, 2000a; Collins, 2000b). From this perspective, motherhood is upheld as the highest calling for a woman's life and as such, women focus solely on child-rearing, maintaining the household, and support of the father. Three implicit ideals from this perspective include the privatization of a nuclear family with the mother holding sole responsibility for child-rearing, strict sex-role separation with disctinctly separate family roles, and a linkage between motherhood and economic dependency. Despite resistance from some White women this ideology remains dominant (Collins, 2007; Collins, 2000a; Collins, 2000b).

Black motherhood exists as a paradox to this perspective and underlying ideals (Collins, 2007). While the ideals of the cult of true motherhood have been used to demonize Black motherhood, a history of racial and economic oppression has denied Black

families the resources required to uphold this ideal. More commonly, for Black mothers work outside the home has been a requirement through forced enslavement or economic preservation and as such, child-rearing has been a shared responsibility among family and the community as a whole (Collins, 2007; Collins, 2000a; Collins, 2000b).

The Eurocentric view of Black motherhood revolves around the socially constructed images of the mammy, matriarch and welfare mother designed to justify Black women's oppression and restriction to subordinate domestic service (Collins, 2000a; Collins, 2000b; Nichols, Gringle, & Pulliam, 2015). Historically, the mammy image centers on a happy obedient domestic slave who accepts subordination and privileges care of white children over their own. More contemporary images include the strong and aggressive matriarch whose child-rearing failures creates deviants and emasculation of men causes single-parent homes and the welfare queen who abuses public assistance and selfishly neglects children for personal gain. (Collins, 2000a; Collins, 2000b; Nichols, Gringle, & Pulliam, 2015).

Black motherhood challenges the dominant ideology of what constitutes motherhood which requires a shift in theorizing and conceptualizing motherhood (Collins, 2007). Mothering and motherhood in Black and other ethnic communities is inextricably linked to concerns of the ethic community as a whole. This notion of motherhood as an extension beyond the survival and advancement of blood relatives is described by Collins (2007) as motherwork. Motherwork requires recognition that "individual survival, empowerment, and identity require group survival, empowerment, and identity" and therefore can be "on behalf of one's own biological children, children of one's racial ethinic community, or children who are yet unborn" (Collins, 2007, p. 373). Issues of physical

survival, empowerment, and identity are the foundational themes of motherwork (Collins, 2007).

Black women are four times more likely to die during or soon after childbirth than white women (Roeder, 2019) . Similarly, the infant mortality rate for Black babies is twice that for white infants and has been for over 35 years (Collins, 2007; Smith, Bentley-Edwards, El-Amin & Darity, 2018; US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Minority Health, 2017). This fight for physical survival extends beyond infancy with threats from industrial pollutants, violence, and/or poverty. The struggle for maternal empowerment has typically included control over when or if to become a mother, physical or psychological separation, and control of children's worldview through education. Motherwork is also fight to maintain children's positive identity, sense of self, and community in a culture that denigrates non-white people and culture. This includes preparing children with the skills and tools to navigate and survive systems of oppressions while simultaneously challenging them (Collins, 2007).

Black Motherhood Is Political

"Some problems we share as women, some we do not. You [white women] fear your children
will grow up to join the patriarchy and testify against you; we fear our children will be
dragged from a car and shot down in the street, and you will turn your backs on the reasons
they are dying" (Lorde, 2007, p. 119).

Originally written in 1984, Audre Lorde describes a fear that Black mothers still hold to this day. The realities of Audre Lorde's words are felt even more today on a national scale with endless videos, images, and news coverage of Black bodies broken, Black mothers mourning, and verdicts and policy enactment justifying it all. Black

motherhood is and has always been political (Morgan, 2018; Nash, 2018; Story, 2018). Anti-blackness, the dehumanization of Black people through the denial of Black pain and obstruction to Black agency and mobility (Dumas, 2016) continues to play a role in this ongoing struggle. Black children are denied the sense of humanity and innocence afforded to their white counterparts. Black motherhood in spite of racialized and gendered assumptions of motherhood and Black life is and has been a site of resistance (Morgan, 2018; Nash, 2018; Story, 2018).

In 1955, Mamie Till-Mobley chose an open casket to display the mutilated body of her 14-year old son illuminating racial injustice and antiblack violence, reigniting what would become the Civil Rights Movement (Nodjimbadem, 2015). Mamie Till-Mobley's visible Black motherhood is one form of resistance utilized by Black mothers to challenge white supremacist frames of Black motherhood and the degrediation of the Black body (Morgan, 2018). Almost 60 years later, the murder of 17-year old Trayvon Martin and his killer's subsequent acquittal ignited the Movement for Black Lives or #BlackLivesMatter (Black Lives Matter, n.d.). In the months and years following Trayvon's murder, televised accounts of Black mothers grieving for their murdered Black children and calling for justice and change were constantly in the media. Their cries for the children, for justice, and for change were met with the criminalization of their children as justification for their murders and accusations of poor parenting (Morgan, 2018; Nash, 2018; Story, 2018). Coined 'Mothers of the Movement', Sybrina Fulton, mother of Trayvon Martin; along with Lezley McSpadden, mother of Michael Brown; Lucy McBath, mother of Jordan Davis; Geneva Reed-Veal, mother of Sandra Bland; Gwen Carr, mother of Eric Garner; Cleopatra Pendleton, mother of Hadiya Pendleton; Maria Hamilton, mother of Dontre Hamilton; Wanda Johnson,

mother of Oscar Grant; and Samaria Rice, mother of Tamir Rice have all lost their children to police action and gun violence (Branigin, 2019). They have created advocacy campaigns and spoken against gun and police violence at the Democratic National Convention, United Nations, Congress, 2017 Women's March, award shows, red carpets, and more (Branigin, 2019). Mamie Till-Mobley, the Mothers of the Movement, and other Black mothers prompted to political action are apart of a genealogy of Black maternal activism (Story, 2018). In the midst of their grief, these Black mothers and so many like them have had to counter character attacks and advocate on behalf of their slain children and the community of children they represent (Nash, 2018; Story, 2018).

During the Congressional Caucus on Black Women and Girls, Geneva Reed-Veal exhibited these sentiments in her speech:

I'm here representing the mothers who are not heard, I am here representing the mothers who have lost children as we go on about our daily lives. When the cameras and lights are gone, our babies are dead. So I'm going to ask you here today to wake up….Let's get something straight. I as a mother do not believe she committed suicide. I will say that until it's proven. But if you want me to believe that my daughter—that I sent down there sitting up, driving her own vehicle—would be sent home in a capsule in the bottom of a plane with luggage on top of her, that I'm going to shut up? I will not. I will not. I will continue to speak for every mother paralyzed because of the loss of their child….The tears are real, the pain is real, the problem is real. So, I don't come here playing games with you all. I don't come to sit and be a part of a caucus where we talk and do nothing. You, you, you, you don't know my pain. God forbid you go up to another grieving mother and say you know

how she feels, that is a lie. Unless you have lost a child. Am I angry? Absolutely. I'm

not angry enough to create a riot where I burn things down, but I will create a riot, I

will set off so that people will understand that this is real. Movements move.

Activists activate. We have got to stop talking and move. So I leave you with this: it is

time to wake up, get up, step up, or shut up (Geneva Reed-Veal, mother of Sandra

Bland, as cited in Meyerson, 2016).

Geneva Reed-Veal's fight is one shared by so many Black mothers before and after

her who "refused to believe the white supremacist, racist, and sexist narratives that law

enforcement, prosecutors, and the criminal justice system tried to conjure up in an attempt

to represent their children more as criminals, less as victims, and ultimatelt to convince

society to see their children's deathas as justified, self-inflicted, and/or indicative of their

familial background" (Story, 2018, p. 890). Black pain is often made visible through

grieving Black mothers. The political currency associated with their suffering is a site of

Black motherhood widely visible and acknowledged. Across time, in scholarship, media,

and mainstream culture, Black motherhood has been represented as both a "site

constituted by grief and expected loss and as a political position made visible only because

of its proximity to death" (Nash, 2018, p. 700). The political visibility and dominant

discourse of Black motherhood should extend outside of loss.

Black Student Affairs Mothers

When searching for literature on Black mothers working in student affairs within

the already limited research of Black women administrators broadly, I found there to be an

extreme lack of research. In search for more, I attempted to "break down" the categories of

Black student affairs mothers. I found the bulk of research related to motherhood in the

higher education context focused on faculty but not Black women faculty (Fochtman, 2011; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004. Literature on student affairs mothers while limited similarly focused on mothers broadly with some studies utilizing "diverse" samples but still devoid of any analysis inclusive of other minoritized identities and systems of oppression (DeMinck, 2017; Isdell, 2016; Marshall, 2009; Nobbe & Manning, 1997). As such, the following sections briefly outline the current literature on faculty mothers and student affairs mothers while also acknowledging that neither speaks to the invasive nature of misogynoir impacting Black student affairs mothers.

Much of the research on women faculty with children focuses on work-life balance and barriers to tenure (Fochtman, 2011; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2004) found that both women and men struggled with work-life balance but women carried the bulk of the responsibility and burden, a sentiment echoed across the literature. A unique aspect to Ward and Wolf-Wendel's (2004) study was the inclusion of the unanticipated benefits of having dual roles as mother and academic, adding perspective to their academic work. While the research on women faculty with children provides a strong foundation, additional research specifically focused on student affairs professionals is warranted due to differential role structures (Fochtman, 2011). Faculty contracts often include flexible work hours, optional summers, and shorter contract options in comparison to student affairs professionals who are generally required to work regular business hours year-round with flexibility options at the discretion of supervisors or institutional policy (Jones & Taylor, 2013; Lester, 2013).

Similarly to faculty, the research investigating student affairs mothers typically focuses on work-life balance (DeMinck, 2017; Isdell, 2016) and impact of motherhood on

career advancement and/or aspirations (Marshall, 2009; Nobbe & Manning, 1997). In one of the early studies on student affairs mothers, Nobbe and Manning (1997) found the majority of mothers gave up or put off pursuing terminal degrees, changed career goals, and opted for slower career progression. These findings were echoed more than ten years later in Fochtoman (2010) where mothers owned their decision to postpone career aspirations. They also reported feeling required to designate one role over the other. Spangler (2011) noted mother's decline in conference attendance and extended time at an institution despite costs to professional development. Student affairs mothers are met with challenges and consequences negotiating balance between family and professional with "career progression depend[ing] on their ability to develop strategies that provide some personal balance" (Yakaboskil and Donahoo, 2011, p. 272). Strategies for managing multiple demands identified by mothers in Nobbe and Manning's (1997) study included maintaining job effectiveness through compromise, efficiency in delegation and organization to maximize efficiency, and support systems. For Black women, these support systems included extended family, community organizations, and church and were essential for coping especially those employed at historically white institutions (McClinton, 2012).

Othermothers

The Igbo and Yoruba proverb "It takes a village to raise a child" is one that exists in different forms across many African languages and within Black American communities. The meaning reflects the values of cooperation and community in African diasporic communities and the belief in communal child rearing responsibilities (Goldber, 2016; Healey, 1998). Children are seen as belonging to the community and as such

responsibility belongs with the community (Healey, 1998). These communities of extended family often include, biological relatives, othermothers, church community, and fictive kin McAdoo, 2007). Othermothers are "women who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities, traditionally have been central to the institutions of Black motherhood" (Collins, 2000b, p. 271). Othermothers have been a critical component in Black communities providing not only support to the child but also to the bloodmother.

During enslavement, othermothers cared for children orphaned and separated by death or sale, for those rejected or unsupported by their bloodmother, and provided childcare while blood parents endured forced labor. These cooperative practices continued post-emancipation transforming into communal neighborhoods, remnants of which can still be seen in many Black communities (Collins, 2000a; Collins, 2000b; Collins, 2005). This extended family structure is "both a continuation of West African cultural values and functional adaptations to race and gender oppression" (Collins, 2005, p. 153). Black women's experiences as othermothers provides a framework for their social activism. Communal responsibilities and caring for extended networks initiates an ethic of care for all Black children regardless of familial ties which can prompt political action for advancement of the community. This social responsibility carries over into professional careers (i.e. educators, doctors, social workers, etc.) where Black women utilize this ethic of care and responsibility to develop familial relationships extending traditional notions of mentoring (Collins, 2000a; Collins, 2000b; Collins, 2005).

For education, the historical and contemporary role of Black teachers in schools extends beyond academic preparation (Guiffrida, 2005). Foster (1993) argues "an appropriate pedagogy for Black students cannot be limited only to academics, but must

deal with political, social, and economic circumstances of children's lives and communities"
(p. 118). This pedagogy is also seen in the othermothering practices of Black faculty and
student affairs professionals at institutions of higher education (Guiffrida, 2005; Hirt,
Amelink, McFeeters, & Strayhorn, 2008). Hirt et al. (2008) utilized othermothering
framework to examine the relationships between students and student affairs
professionals at HBCUs. As a framework, othermothing is grounded in three components,
ethic of care, cultural advancement, and institutional guardianship. They found student
affairs professionals utilized othermothering practices to promote student retention and
create a sense of belonging among students.

Socialization

Socialization is defined as a child's preparation of learning acceptable behavior and
responsibilities to be an adult in their given society (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Harris, 1995;
Thomas & King, 2007). While parents and guardians are highly influential to the
socialization process, friends, extended family, media, and the larger community play an
integral role in communicating the norms, values, and beliefs of society (Boykin & Toms,
1985; Demo & Hughes, 1990). While much of the literature on socialization focuses on
children and adolescent development, it is important to note that socialization continues
throughout the lifespan (Murfree, 2011). Much of the early research on socialization
prompted a framework centering on Eurocentric ideals and values identifying deviations as
dysfunctional (Boykin & Tom, 1985). In the late 70s, mostly Black scholars pushed forward
a research agenda to provide a revisionist perspective on Black life and culture. Revisionist
scholars challenged years of scholarship on the Black experience deemed as derogatory
because it differed from mainstream Eurocentric thought and values. They instead

highlighted the "resilience, adaptive strength, and integrity" (Boykin & Toms, 1985, p. 36)

gained by the unique experiences of Black Americans. The work of these revisionist Black

scholars has led to a greater appreciation for the unique cultural perspective and

resourceful nature of Black people and illuminated the shortcomings of using Eurocentric

ideals as the mark for normalcy (Boykin & Toms, 1985).

Racial Socialization

From the revisionist perspective, scholars explored racial socialization as a means to

explore the messages and process Black parents utilize to teach their children what it

means to be Black in America and have a positive self-concept in a society fraught with

racism and oppression (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Brown, Blackmon, Rosnick, Griffin-Fennell,

& White-Johnson, 2017; Thomas & King, 2007). They posit this as a necessary shift

because:

> unless we can put some conceptual handles on capturing what Black children are
>
> being prepared to become, emanating from Afro-Americans' own social-cultural
>
> frame of reference, we will simply gain insight into how well these children
>
> approximate a Euro-American social-cultural frame of reference as a basis for
>
> successful socialization (Boykin & Toms, 1985, p. 37).

Boykin and Toms (1985) identified a conceptual framework referred to as a triple

quandary which outlines three psychological realms which Black parents must negotiate

within: mainstream, minority, and Black cultural experience. The mainstream realm

outlines the general acclimation process to mainstream US culture and values (Boykin &

Toms, 1985; Thomas & King, 2007; Tyler, Boykin, Boelter, & Dillihunt, 2005).

Individualism and competition are two of these values rooted in Eurocentric ideology

(Tyler et al., 2005). This realm is experienced by all socialized in the US but complicated for Black Americans who must also negotiate the minority and Black cultural realms. The minority realm encompasses the "political and social injustices associated with being a racial minority in the United States" (Tyler et al., 2005, p. 293) including lived experiences with racism, discrimination, and oppression. The Black cultural or Afrocentric realm highlights cultural practices, behaviors, and ideals influenced from West African traditions (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Tyler et al., 2005). One value from this realm which conflicts with values in the mainstream realm is communalism, the "sensitivity to the interdependence of people and the notion that group concerns transcend individual strivings" (Boykin & Toms, 1985, p. 41). Other values include spirituality, movement, verve, and orality (Boykin & Toms, 1985). In navigating these realms, Black Americans often become bicultural, being influenced by both African culture and traditions and mainstream US ideals and customs (Boykins & Toms, 1985; Thomas & King, 2007).

Black parents in the US face the challenge of preparing their children to navigate and be self-confident within a society laden with historical and contemporary racial oppression and discrimination (Brown et al., 2017; Thomas & King, 2007). These messages of racial socialization often vary depending on the child's age and gender but typically include the realities of racism and discrimination, coping and resistance strategies, Black cultural values and history, and self-pride in cultural heritage (Thomas & Blackmon, 2015; Thomas & King, 2007; Thomas & Speight, 1999). Racial socialization has been linked to positive self-esteem and racial identity attitudes (Thomas & King, 2007; Thompson, 1994), resilience (Brown, 2008; Brown & Tylka, 2011), and academic persistence (Neblett, Philip, Cogburn, & Sellers, 2006).

Contextual Influences

Other major influences on racial socialization messages are the racial climate and race-related social change occurring in a given society (Brown & Lesane-Brown, 2006; Thomas & Blackmon, 2015; Threlfall, 2018). Brown and Lesane-Brown (2006) examined the racial socialization messages transmitted to children coming of age before and after Brown vs. Board of Education. They found Black parents transmitted messages of submission and fear of white people during times of overt racial discrimination and brutality and inversely and an influx of racial pride messages during times of protest and social progression. Messages of the reality of prejudice were consistent while messages of fear fluctuated given the racial climate (Brown & Brown-Lesane, 2006).

Recent studies have investigated the impact of Michael Brown and Trayvon Martin's murders and reinforced the influence of racially motivated events and their prevalent media portrays on socialization practices (Thomas & Blackmon, 2015; Threlfall, 2018). These events brought the realities of racism and injustice long experienced by the Black community to a national stage. Following the shootings and nationally televised civil unrest, racial socialization messages centered on the reality of racism, resistance through achievement, and fear for Black boys and men. Parents stressed the fundamental and historical racism embedded in the fabric of US society and the need to both cope and survive. Much attention was focused on the safety and protection of Black boys and men. Many Black parents believed Black girls were less likely to be targeted due to racism and thus shifted socialization to focus more on different aspects relating to self-esteem and gender roles (Thomas & Blackmon, 2015; Threlfall, 2018).

Gendered Racial Socialization

Although studies have identified differing racial socialization messages and strategies between genders, there is a lack of research investigating the intersectional socialization messages Black women and girls receive in regard to racial and gendered identities (Brown et al., 2017; Thomas & King, 2007). An intersectional approach to socialization allows for a more comprehensive view of Black women's self-concept than just focusing on race or gender in isolation. Black women and girls hold a unique social position in the US facing both racial and gender inequality (Brown et al., 2017; Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015). Communities and families prepare Black women and girls with resistance and coping strategies to navigate the complexities of the intersecting nature of oppression related to racism and sexism (Brown et al., 2017; Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015; Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Browne-Huntt, 2013; Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011).

Gendered racial socialization is defined as a process where Black boys and girls receive differing messages based on the perceived different social and cultural climates (Brown, Blackmon, Rosnick, Griffin-Fennell, & White-Johnson, 2017; Thomas & King, 2007). The socialization of Black girls is often focused on education, relationships with men, independence, and racial pride in beauty while Black boys receive messages focused on racial barriers and discrimination (Brown et al., 2017; Thomas & King, 2007; Thomas & Speight, 1999). There is a perception that Black girls and women are less likely to be victims of racism and violence in comparison to Black boys and men, which directly impacts the differences in socialization between Black boys and girls (Brown et al, 2017; Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015; Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011). This perception is often

influenced by research, media, and initiatives that exclude the ways in which Black girls and women are vulnerable and susceptible to the same issues as Black boys and men (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015). Criminalization, over-policing, and police brutality are issues also affecting Black girls and women. In addition, sexual violence against Black women and girls highlights the intersectional effect of racism and sexism where Black women are targeted based on their status as both Black and women (Ritchie, 2017).

Gender role socialization. Related to gendered socialization is the concept of gender roles which are socially constructed ideals, beliefs, and behaviors deemed socially appropriate for men and women (Brown et al., 2017; Bronstein, 2006). Attitudes and beliefs about gender roles are developed through the process of gender role socialization through implicit or explicit messages. The majority of research and definitions of gender roles are viewed through Eurocentric perspectives (Brown et al., 2017; Bronstein, 2006). In contrast, "the sociopolitical history of African Americans has created a dynamic in which the survival of African American families hinged on the flexibility of traditional gender roles" (Brown et al., 2017, p. 180). Historically, Black women were held to the same labor expectations of men during slavery and with the abolishment of slavery Black women continued to work to provide for their families. While similar aspects of Eurocentric gender roles related to appearance and nurturing are still prevalent, there is a significant focus on androgynous roles and traits such as economic independence, assertiveness, strength, and self-determination in the gender role socialization of Black women (Brown et al., 2017; Hill, 2002; Thomas & King, 2007).

Overall, the process of gender socialization "serves as a form of dual socialization designed to address the realities of the African American female experience and teach them

how to cope with the gendered racism (e.g., racialized sexual stereotyping) they may encounter" (Brown et al, 2017, p. 181). These practices play a crucial role in gaining an understanding of the meaning of racial and gender identity and the implication on their experiences and perceptions of the world. Often this socialization process assists with developing a positive gendered-racial identity (Brown et al, 2017; Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011).

Black Identity Development

The experience of Black Americans in the US is historically undergirded by a legacy of racial discrimination and oppression from forced migration and enslavement to institutionalized laws and policies established to reinforce Blacks as inferior to whites (Sellers, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). The process of slavery was set to dehumanize and disconnect enslaved Africans from their indigenous communities and culture (Dillard, 2012; Sellers et al., 1998). As a result, aspects of retained traditional African culture have fused with American society to create an original culture as African Americans. Within American society, race has played a significant role in the experiences of Black Americans despite its social creation. This history of racial oppression and creation of African American culture has unique implications for the impact of race on the self-concept of Black Americans (Sellers et al., 1998).

As a construct, racial identity has been heavily researched mostly in the field of psychology from a mainstream or underground perspective (Sellers et al., 1998). The mainstream approach focuses on "universal aspects of group identity, using African Americans as a specific example" (Sellers, et al, 1998, p. 19). Much of the research from this perspective assumes self-hatred and internalized devaluation as central components of

Black identity excluding the impact of culture. To challenge this predominant ideology, African American psychologists established the underground perspective to redefine Black identity to emphasize unique experiences with both culture and oppression. Research from this perspective assumes a positive self-concept is possible even in a society that devalues African Americans (DuBois, 1903; Sellers et al., 1998). Underground models emphasize the unique history and culture that impacts Black Americans racial identity (Sellers et al., 1998). In this study, I will explore underground models, specifically Cross' (1971, 1991) Nigrescence model which describes the unique experiences associated with Black American identity development.

Nigrescence Model

Cross' (1971, 1991) Nigrescence Model is the most widely used and cited model pertaining to the racial identity of African Americans. In the initial development of the model, Cross (1971) described the identity change process as a "Negro-to-Black conversion" which could be seen during the Harlem Renaissance with the shift from enslavement to self-determined cultural, economic, and political expression. Cross' (1991) reconceptualization of the model shifted to describe a (re)socialization process depicting a transformation from a pre-encounter identity of low racial salience to an Afrocentric identity. The Nigrescence Model consists of the following five stages: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment.

In the pre-encounter stage, white westernized culture and norms is valued while Black culture is devalued or rejected (Cross, 1971, 1991; Sellers, et al., 1998). This typically results from informal and formal education that embraces and celebrates white culture and history while presenting a miseducation or exclusion of the role and contributions of Black

people in history and culture. Individuals in the pre-encounter stage typically hold attitudes characterized by low racial salience, race neutrality and/or anti-blackness. Those with low racial salience identify with being Black but view race as having an insignificant role in everyday life and may place more value on other aspects such as religion, occupation, and class. While those with attitudes of racial neutrality may see themselves as transcending race and identifying as a human being. Individuals with anti-black attitudes loath other Black people and separate themselves from the Black community. Feelings of anti-blackness are perpetuated by racist stereotypes of Black people and positive stereotypes of white people (Cross, 1971, 1991).

The encounter stage includes a two step process initiated by experiencing a racial event (Cross, 1971, 1991). This encounter includes a personal experience impacted by race and/or racism that challenges previous notions and ideologies of a color-blind, equal opportunity society . The encounter can be a negative or positive experience. Personally experiencing racism or even viewing a televised or societal racial incident (i.e. assassination of Martin Luther King Jr, slaying of Sandra Bland, etc.) can catapult an individual to challenge previous thinking of race just as interacting with Afrocentric individuals or learning about the various contributions of African Americans to history, science, art, and culture. The concluding step of this stage is personalize, which occurs when the encounter experience fosters the need for a change resulting in an individual taking action to reexamine their worldview and thinking of race (Cross, 1971, 1991).

The immersion-emersion stage of Nigrescence entails the process of change from the pre-encounter worldview to the construction of a new perspective based on the new information received during the encounter about race (Cross, 1971, 1991). This is a period

of transition where change is starting to occur based on a commitment to learn more. During this stage, there is an immersion into Blackness and Black culture with a deliberate separation from whiteness. This process is often fueled by a strong sense of rage at White people and culture and guilt at being once uninformed about Black culture and contributions or tricked into thinking negatively about Blackness and positively about whiteness. It is often accompanied with a developing sense of pride in Blackness which is often a catalyst for seeking out Black history and culture previously obscured. The emersion piece comes from an emergence from an oversimplified either/or ideology often initiated by recognizing role models operating from a more advanced and nuanced stage of identity recognition and development (Cross, 1971, 1991).

The internalization stage encompasses the development of a positive and secure internalized Black identity (Cross, 1971, 1991). Less focus is given to how or what others think and more focus is put on how one views themselves. This develops into a more critical view of racial identity and its impact on everyday life. As a result, individuals embrace their appreciation and love for their Black identity which provides a sense of belonging and defense from psychological insults in a racist society (Cross, 1971, 1991; Ritchey, 2014).

The internalization-commitment stage entails a devotion of time and energy to translate one's personal sense of Blackness into a plan of action for issues affecting the Black community (Cross, 1971, 1991). With the new internalized Black identity, there is a dedication to social change and progression for the community. Much of the dissonance present in previous stages has been resolved resulting in an increased self-internalized identity accepting of other cultures (Cross, 1971, 1991).

While the Nigrescence model provided a much needed shift from the previous narrative of Black identity centered on self-hatred, it posits a monolithic view of Blackness with there being an ideal level of Blackness to achieve. It also lacks an emphasis on distinctions within the Black community as it relates to gender, sexuality, class, and other social identities and the ways in which these identities intersect to impact experiences and development. The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity is introduced to provide an alternate view of racial identity that is self-defined (Sellers et al., 1998).

Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity

The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) integrates concepts from both mainstream and underground approaches to Black identity which provides a "conceptual framework for understanding both the significance of race in the self-concepts of African Americans and the qualitative meanings they attribute to being members of that racial category" (Sellers et al., p. 19). The MMRI addresses the importance of race to one's self-identity and the meaning and value placed on being a member of the African American community.

The MMRI is grounded in four assumptions with the first being the dynamic nature of African Americans racial identity being both a stable aspect of identity and contextually influenced (Sellers et al., 1998). Racial identity is self-defined and can be externally influenced. Secondly, the MMRI assumes individuals self-determine a hierarchy of identities with race being just one of the identities contributing to an overall sense of self. Within this model, the focus is on the importance an individual gives to race in defining a sense of identity. The third assumption is one's self-perception of their racial identity is the most credible gauge of their identity. Focus is given to an individual's

construction and perception of their racial identity with no value ascribed. There is no positive or negative Black identity as the nature of what it means to be Black differs based on individual notions and ideals. Lastly, the MMRI focuses on a specific time in one's racial identity as opposed to viewing from a certain stage within a developmental model. This allows and accounts for the inherent changes in various contexts and across life spans. These assumptions provide context for understanding the four dimensions of the MMRI: salience, centrality, regard, and ideology (Sellers et al., 1998).

The dimensions of racial salience and racial centrality focus on the significance an individual places on race (Sellers et al., 1998). Racial salience refers to the extent that race is seen as an integral part of one's identity in a given context or situation. Salience is dynamic as it changes based on circumstance and can vary among members of the same community in the same context. Racial centrality refers to the extent that one defines themselves in regard to race. Unlike salience, centrality is stable as one's self-perception and self-definition of race is constant regardless of context (Sellers et al., 1998).

The dimensions of regard and ideology focuses on the meaning one ascribes to being Black (Sellers et al., 1998). Racial regard refers to the extent one views their racial membership as negative or positive and entails both a public and private outlook. Public regards refers to the extent an individual feels African Americans are viewed positively or negatively by society at large. Private regard refers to the extent one feels positively or negatively about themselves as an African Americans and the racial group as a whole (Sellers et al., 1998).

The final dimension of the MMRI, ideology, is defined by an individual's worldview of how African Americans should exist in society with nationalist, oppressed minority,

assimilation, and humanistic as prevelanet ideologies within the Black community (Sellers et al., 1998). The nationalist ideology values the unique experiences of African Americans and prefers to participate in organizations and focus on issues central to the Black community. A nationalist perspective is often a result of a deep connection and appreciation of African American cultures and/or as a form of resistance to the systemic oppression of African Americans. The oppressed minority ideology views the oppression faced by African Americans as being similar and linked to other oppressed groups. This perspective values coalition building and joining with other oppressed groups to create social change. The assimilation ideologist focuses on the similarities between African Americans and the mainstream society. While they may acknowledge systems of oppression, focus is given to working within the system and with white people to make change. The humanist ideology is less focused with identities that make us different and more on the unifying identity as humans. This perspective de-emphasizes race and other identities and focuses on "universal" issues such as environmental concerns (Sellers et al., 1998).

The assumptions of the MMRI place the definition and significance of identity with the individual (Sellers et al., 1998). Race is not deemed as an overarching identity which makes space for Black people who hold other salient identities that impact their self-defined identity and worldview. As this study focuses on Black women, it is important to also explore gender identity development and the intersectional nature of identities and oppression.

Womanist Identity Development Model

Helms' (1990) developed the womanist identity development model by building upon literature on gender identity, Black feminism, and racial identity development (Moradi, 2005). Helms argued that implicit across the literature was a notion of women's healthy gender identity being related to a movement from external to internal definition (Osana, Helms, & Leonard, 1992). As such, the womanist identity development model outlines stage progression towards an "abandonment of external definitions and adaption of internal standards of womanhood" (Osana, Helms, & Leonard, 1992, p. 403). The term "womanist" is used to emphasize the similar process of moving from external to internal self-definition regardless of race, class, and other social identities.

Three assumptions of the womanist identity model distinguish it from feminist identity models. First, the womanist model assumes healthy identity development is gaining "personal and ideological flexibility that may or may not be accompanied by acknowledged feminists beliefs or social activism" (Osana, Helms, & Leonard, 1992, p. 403). Second, the process of a woman learning to value herself is emphasized more than the roles she chooses to take on. Lastly, there are many paths and perspectives women can employ for self-identity exploration with feminist being one of these options not the goal of development (Osana, Helms, & Leonard, 1992).

In the pre-encounter stage, women conform to societal expectations about traditional gender roles with unconscious beliefs and actions that women are subordinate to men (Moradi, 2005; Osana, Helms & Leonard, 1992; Parks, Carter, & Gushue, 1996). There is a denial of social inequality and discrimination against women. An experience that challenges this worldview can result in a shift to the next stage, encounter.

This experience can be a result of learning new information or an interaction that conflicts with previous beliefs. This typically leads to confusion and questioning of societal gender roles and expectations resulting in an exploration of solutions to address the dissonance.

The immersion-emersion stage is characterized by two phases.   The early phase consists of a rejection of patriarchal definitions of women and gender roles and idealization of women and womanhood. The latter phase is characterized by a pursuit for a positive and affirming definition of womanhood and community with other women. During the final stage, internalization, a positive self-defined definition of womanhood is developed with a refusal to be bound by external definitions, ideals, and roles. This newly integrated perspective is informed but not fully dependent on traditional nor feminist notions of womanhood resulting in a unique perspective informed by internally determined values, experiences, and beliefs (Moradi, 2005; Osana, Helms & Leonard, 1992; Parks, Carter, & Gushue, 1996). While the womanist model provides a framework for women's identity development it does not take into consideration the impact of intersecting identities and their interconnected levels of oppression (Moradi, 2005).

Intersectionality Theory

Each of the models previously outlined focused solely on a specific identity (i.e. race or gender) with some acknowledging other identities. They have not explored the true impact of intersecting identities on identity development. Intersectionality challenges the "tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139). This focus on interconnections posits that experiences are not shaped solely by race or gender but by the intersection of identities. Additionally, focus is given not only to intersecting identities but also the nature of oppression

associated with these identities. Social identities are intricately linked to social structures and the structural inequalities of those structures. Intersectionality rejects the single-axis framework because "the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140). Across the literature on intersectionality there are four common core concepts.

Centering the experiences of people of color. Intersectionality theory is rooted in Black feminist thought. It centers on the unique perspective of Black women in the US highlighting the pervasiveness of racism throughout society while also including gender, other social identities, and their impact on lived experiences. An intersectional approach centers on the experiences of people of color by naming the pervasiveness of racism while also highlighting the complexities that exist when race intersects with other identities. In centering the experiences of people of color, a counternarrative is created that gives voice to previously excluded communities and views these voices as legitimate knowledge (Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Wijeyesinghe & Jones, 2013).

Complicating identity. Intersectionality challenges this notion of identity and instead posits that a complete and holistic view of identity incorporates the complex ways identities intersect on a personal and group level and the connection to the larger societal context (Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Wijeyesinghe & Jones, 2013). Within the larger US societal context, there is an established hierarchy that values certain groups/identities (White, male, cis-gender, Christian, etc.) while simultaneously devaluing any state differing from these valued groups. An intersectional view recognizes this hierarchical system and

highlights that the combination of these identities creates the complex notion of identity (Crenshaw, 1989; Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Wijeyesinghe & Jones, 2013).

Unveiling power in interconnected structures of inequality. To explore the intersections of identity and inequality, there has to be an exploration and revealing of established power systems. This concept of intersectionality provides an explanation of the domains of power in which inequality is created and perpetuated. The literature on intersectionality identifies four domains of power: structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal. An intersectional approach recognizes and addresses each of these domains of power. It exposes the ways in which power is created and utilized to sustain inequality. It also reveals the ways that systems of inequality are intertwined across all levels stemming from systemic structures to personal thoughts, attitudes, and expressions (Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Wijeyesinghe & Jones, 2013).

Promoting social justice and social change. The overall goal of the intersectional approach is to promote social justice in order to create social change. Social change is created by the elimination of inequality but in order for elimination, established systems of privilege and power must be evaluated and critiqued to determine and how they work together to maintain inequality (Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Wijeyesinghe & Jones, 2013). Intersectionality theory provides a framework to evaluate systems of inequality by listening to the voices of minoritized groups and their experiences with systems of inequality and identifying the domains of power that exist to perpetuate an overall system of inequality. The intersectional approach promotes justice by bringing to the forefront and validating the voices of excluded groups and fights for social change to have the voices

and experiences of minoritized people viewed as knowledge (Dill & Zambrana, 2009;

Wijeyesinghe & Jones, 2013).

Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI)

The Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI) is a conceptual model which

emphasizes the fluidity of identity and takes into account various social identities within a

given context. The MMDI consists of four layers: core, multiple social identities, identity

salience, and contextual influences also illustrated in Figure 1 (Jones & Abes, 2013).
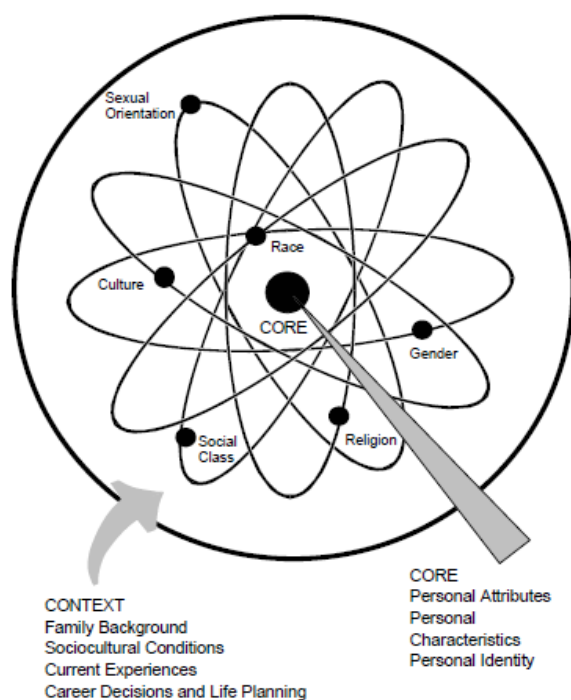
Figure 1. Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity

Within the MMDI, the core is depicted as the central point (Jones & Abes, 2013). The

core is representative of an individual's true self that is less likely to be influenced by

external factors. This true self consists of characteristics and qualities that are not as

visibly notable. The intersecting rings surrounding the core represent an individual's

multiple social identities. The MMDI emphasizes the distinction between social identities

and the personal attributes inclusive of the core. Identity saliency is depicted by the proximity of each social identity's ring in relation to the core. Identities closer to the core are more salient and those furthest away are less salient. The salience of an individual's identity is fundamentally connected to power and privilege (Jones & Abes, 2013).

The core and social identities are situated in a larger context to illustrate that both are not entirely understood without considering the larger external context. The context is the environment in which one experiences the various dimensions of identity. Context both interacts with identities and influences "identity salience, the particular intersection of certain identities, and experiences of identities as both privileged and oppressed" (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 88). For example, an individual's race may become more salient when they are in an environment where they are in the racial minority, but may be less salient in the context of being surrounded by friends and family with the same racial background.

Consciousness

The concepts of identity discussed in the previous section focused on self-perceived identity influenced by race, racism, gender, and sexism. In this section, consciousness is introduced with a focus on consciousness-raising related to race and gender. Identity and consciousness are concepts often confused or conflated in literature. While these concepts are inherently linked, they are separate constructs with identity as an awareness of group similarities (i.e. race, sex, gender, etc.) and consciousness as actions and beliefs based on group similarities (Chapman-Hilliard, 2013; Gurin, Miller, & Gurin, 1980).

Conceptualizing Consciousness

While identity or one's identification to a group includes an awareness of shared ideals, interests, and characteristics; consciousness refers to political beliefs and collective

action resulting from an awareness of the group's position within society. Early studies

exploring group consciousness include a variety of perspectives and group foci including

identity transformation (Cross, 1991), decolonization (Fanon, 1963), class consciousness

(Morris & Murphy, 1966), feminist and gender consciousness (Carden, 1974; Gurin

1985). While each of these and other studies of consciousness focus on different target

groups, similar notions of the critical elements of consciousness are found across topics.

Gurin, Miller and Gurin (1980) posit four key components inclusive of consciousness, (1)

group identification, an awareness of group membership; (2) rejection of legitimacy,

opposition to oppressive systems and disparities based on the illegitimate system; (3)

power discontent, acknowledgement of power systems including dissatisfaction with

power discrepancies and lack of power; and (4) collective orientation and action, shift from

action for individual advancement to action for collective group advancement.

Rejection of legitimacy and power discontent are consistently found in studies and

discussions of consciousness among oppressed groups. Gurin, Miller, and Gurin (1980)

contend the combination of power discontent and rejection of legitimacy constitutes

political consciousness. Political consciousness of oppressed groups represents a shift

from acceptance of position in a stratified system to challenging structural inequality. For

privileged groups, political consciousness is activated when the status quo is challenged.

Justification of advantages and purporting of systems as beneficial for all of society is

utilized to maintain current systems. Political consciousness is not always achieved by

those who identify with an oppressed group. Instead, acceptance of one's status within the

system may occur (Gurin, Miller, & Gurin, 1980).

Alternatively, group identification along with political consciousness often results in commitment to collectivity. Collective orientation and action are often described as a late development or final stage of consciousness and characterized as a commitment to change for the group as a whole instead of just individual advancement (Fanon, 1963; Gurin, Miller, & Gurin, 1980; Morris & Murphy, 1966).

Black Consciousness

In the late 60s and early 70s, there was a global resurgence of Black political ideology, promoting unity, self-determination, and political advancement for the African diaspora. Globally, over 30 African countries were gaining their independence and a sense of unapologetic Black pride was growing (Cokley, Palmer, & Stone, 2019; Obasi, Speight, Rowe, Clark, L., & Turner-Essei, 2012). In South Africa, the Black Consciousness movement, an anti-aparthied crusade, instigated a cultural, policial, and social revival throughout the country and beyond. The term Black consciousness is credited to Steve Biko, a student activist who initiated the South African Students' Organization. The ideology of Black consciousness focused on a psychological shift acknowledging self-worth and value resulting in a positive identity and commitment to collective political action for Black liberation (Hadfield, 2017). International voices like Steve Biko and Frantz Fanon, Afro-Carribean psychiatrist, influenced American Black Consciousness movements and development models of Black identity (Neville & Cross, 2016).

In the US, there was a cultural and political revolution characterized by movements (Civil Rights, Black studies, etc.); cultural statements (1986 Olympics Black Power salute, Mohammad Ali, etc.); political advancement (Civil Rights Act of 1964, Voting Rights Act of 1965, etc.); and political leaders (Martin Luther King Jr, Huey P. Newton, etc.). This cultural

climate provided the opportunity for Black Americans to reconnect with values, histories,

and beliefs previously stifled to create a self-determined identity (Chapman-Hilliard, 2013;

Obasi et al., 2012). The rise of protests, riots, and consciousness movements created "a

growing energy and boldness that transcended the apathetic complacency that resulted

from centuries of survival in an oppressive nation" (Obasi et al., 2012, p. 627). These

celebrations of culture along with the grief from the assassinations of Black leaders and

civilians ignited a racial awakening. Neville and Cross (2017) define racial awakening as a

"process of transformation in consciousness….not limited to abrupt changes in insight and

instead the concept also incorporated gradual and iterative changes in participants' values

and understanding of Black(ness) (p.107). They found racial awakening was prompted

through personal experiences with racism, privileges afforded to white people, and/or

disadvantages for people of color; formal education in courses prompting new

understanding of race and racism and informal education such as travel, field trips and

independent readings; and engaging in activism. The positive outcomes of racial

awakenings include increased possible self and racial pride, through learning about

accomplishments and talents of other Black people opening up the possibilities for what it

achievable, often leading to antiracism activism (Neville & Cross, 2016).

This cultural shift was also seen in literature on Black life within social sciences and

psychology. Prior to this time, research on Black culture and behavior was conducted by

white academics utilizing deficit perspectives reinforcing stereotypes and notions of Black

dysfunction (Cokley, Palmer, & Stone, 2019; Obasi et al., 2012). Dr. Joseph White (1970)

challenged this notion stating, "it is very difficult, if not impossible, to understand the

lifestyles of Black people using traditional theories developed by white psychologists to

explain white people" (as cited in Cokley, Palmer, & Stoner, 2019, p. 113) calling for an anti-

deficit approach to the study of Black people.

Answering this call, several Black scholars introduced theories of Black identity and

consciousness (Baldwin, 1984; Cross 1971, 1991; Sellers et al, 1997). Theories of Black

consciousness are often categorized by differing philosophical orientations including

group-based and African-centered approaches. Chapman-Hilliard (2013) explains:

> The group-based approach, with its focus on regard for one's group and social and
>
> political consciousness, provides a lens through which Black consciousness can be
>
> examined in the context of a person being a member of a stratified society... The
>
> African-centered approach, on the other hand, provides a means of exploring
>
> historical and cultural learning and socialization that are important to the
>
> development and maintenance of Black consciousness. (p. 29)

Both approaches encourage collective action and when aggregately viewed, provides a

holistic view of Black consciousness. The multidimensional model of Black consciousness

illustrated in Figure 2, represents the theoretical conceptualization of Black consciousness

inclusive of both approaches. This model identifies the core components of Black

consciousness as socio-political awareness, cultural-historical awareness, valuing of

culture and history, and collective action orientation (Chapman-Hilliard, 2013).
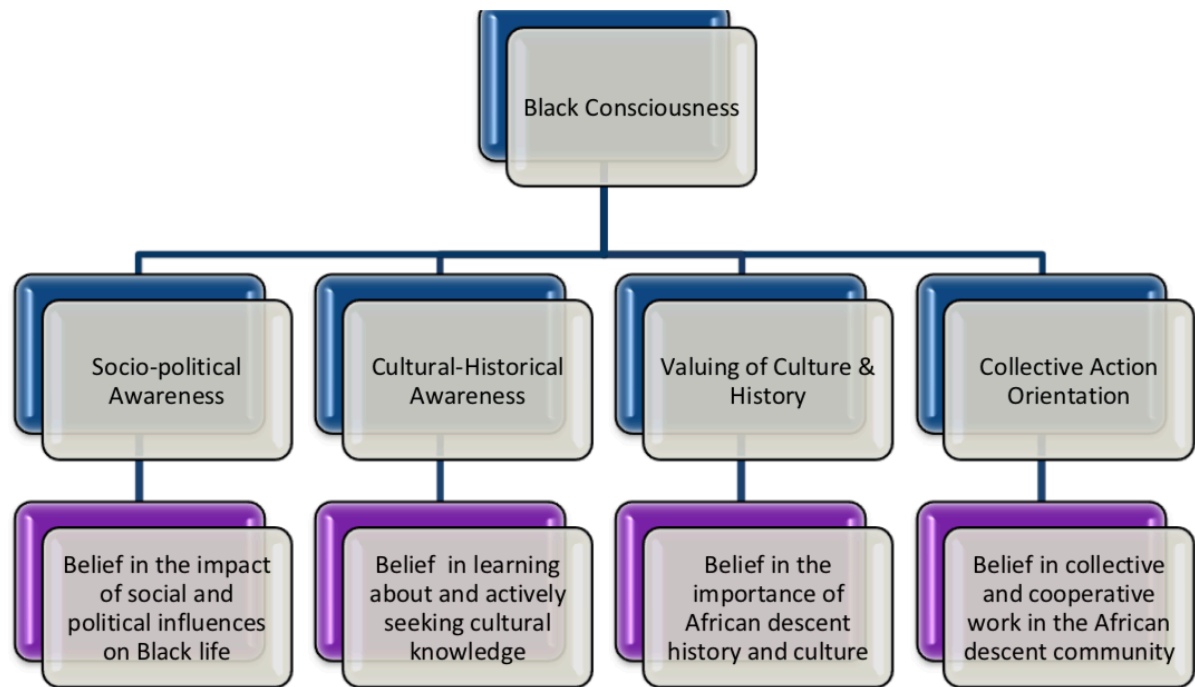
Figure 2: Multidimensional model of Black consciousness (Chapman-Hilliard, 2013, p. 30).

Gender & Feminist Consciousness

Social movements are key components to understanding the development of a group consciousness(Magaziner, 2011). Consciousness-raising efforts of the Civil Rights, Black Consciousness, and Women's Liberation movements have encouraged their targeted audiences towards collective action for liberation (Magaziner, 2011; Wilcox, 1996). The Civil Rights and Black Consciousness movements have both been critiqued for the erasure of Black women' s involvement despite their prominence and critical roles in liberation organizations and events (Magaziner, 2011; hooks, 1989). Gender politics were excluded from Black liberation platforms to avoid division and distraction from primary goal of racial equality (Brush, 2001; hooks, 1989; Wilcox, 1996). hooks (1989) argues Black liberation ideology and efforts have often been made synonymous with Black men attaining equality with white men's patriarchal power and privilege, resulting in a political ideology

focusing solely on racism. hooks (1989) critiques feminism and the women's liberation movements for failing to address Black women.

Within the study of group consciousness, black consciousness and gender or feminist consciousness are the most frequently studied groups (Wilcox, 1991; Gurin, 1985). Studies of gender consciousness focus mostly on women's developmental process of group identification. While some literature includes rejection of legitimacy, power discontent, and collectivist action orientation as latter stages of gender consciousness others consider them to be the development of feminist consciousness. A feminist consciousness implies a political ideology committed to equality while gender conscious does not (Wilcox, 1996). Early gender consciousness literature directly compares gender consciousness among women to racial consciousness of Black Americans finding an underdeveloped group identification and commitment to collective action among women (Wilcox, 1991; Gurin, 1985). Gurin (1985) argues that while gender inequality is pervasive it is often implicit as opposed to racial inequality and segregation. This creates difficulty in perceiving inequality because it is not as apparent and explicit (Gurin, 1985). Alternatively, Wilcox (1996) argues feminist leaders from and those influenced by the women's liberation movements of the 60s and 70s have improved women's development of group consciousness.

These comparisons of gender consciousness to Black consciousness implies a single membership to each group and in turn the activation of a political ideology based on discrimination by gender or race. This single-axis analysis focuses solely on women only oppressed by gender and Black Americans only oppressed by race. Because Black women face discrimination and inequalities on the basis of both race and gender, scholars have

theorized Black women are more aware of discrimination, as a result have higher Black and feminist consciousness, and are more supportive of collection action to alleviate systems of oppression. Additionally, studies suggest racial consciousness makes Black women more aware of gender discrimination and vice versa (Ransford & Miller, 1983; Wilcox, 1996). Despite these assumptions, few empirical studies have investigated these claims (Wilcox, 1996).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides an overview of the epistemological framework that informed the study design. The methodology, data collection methods, and data analysis will be described concluding with an explanation of validity as resistance and researcher positionality.

Epistemological Framework

In preparation for writing this dissertation, one of my committee members suggested I read texts written by Black feminists from various disciplines if I was going to study and write about Black women. Through these readings, I discovered a wealth of knowledge and history of Black women's theorizing and thoughts I never knew existed. Just as important as the intellectual knowledge I gained was the spiritual fulfillment I received in reading writing that spoke to my experience and my soul in a way difficult to explain. Why am I just now finding them? Having attended some of the top universities in the southeast, why was this not taught?

In reading Alice Walker's *In My Mother's Garden*, I found that I was not alone in my questioning. Walker (1983; 2003) also found Black women writers she had "not been allowed to know" (p. 42), who were obscured because "ignorance, arrogance, and racism have bloomed as superior knowledge in all too many universities" (p. 36). As a result, many Black women in academia, by accident or intention, seek out works by Black women

that speak to their experiences and the spiritual nature of their work. Walker (2003) suggests:

> If she is black and coming out into the world she must be doubly armed, doubly prepared. Because for her there is not simply a new world to be gained, there is an old world that must be reclaimed. There are countless vanished and forgotten women who are nonetheless eager to speak to her--from Frances Harper and Anne Spencer to Dorothy West--but she must work to find them, to free them from their neglect and the oppression of silence forced up them because they were Black and they were women (p. 36).

After accessing this information, the dilemma Black women in academia often face is how to embrace and integrate works that speak to both the intellectual and spiritual pursuit of knowledge in an academic setting with a history of rejection and suppression of research from a spiritual place and more specifically from Black women (Collins, 2000a; Dillard, 2006).

In this dissertation, I have intentionally chosen to challenge the notion of objective, culturally ambivalent research and ground my work in Black women's ways of knowing by utilizing Endarkened Feminist Epistemology (EFE) as an epistemological framework (Dillard, 2006). EFE posits research as a responsibility and frames interactions with oppression as a means to inform research. Dillard (2006) explains:

> I use the term "endarkend" feminist epistemology to articulate how reality is known when based in the historical roots of Black feminist thought, embodying a distinguishable difference in cultural standpoint, located in the intersection/overlap of the culturally constructed socializations of race, gender, and other identities, and

the historical and contemporary contexts of oppressions and resistance for African

American women (p. 3).

The following section outlines the six assumptions of an endarkened feminist

epistemology which Dillard (2006) articulated to increase awareness of power dynamics in

academia, provide guidance for those working to understand research from this

perspective, and to "challenge the all too prevalent idea that there is a unitary way to know,

do and be in educational research endeavors" (p. 18).

Assumption 1: Self-definition forms one's participating and responsibility to one's

community

Research from an endarkened epistemological standpoint acknowledges the views

and actions of the researcher are influenced by personally defined beliefs informed by

one's cultural and social position (Dillard, 2006). These beliefs require the researcher to be

responsible to both the members and communities of those under study which those

beliefs are based. Black women scholars operating from an endarkened feminist

epistemological position embrace a culturally African centered worldview with "feminist

sensibility" (Dillard, 2006, p. 19). This results in an ideological shift embracing elements

from both an African and feminist perspective "rooted in the everyday experiences of

African American women" (Dillard, 2006, p. 19).

As a Black woman engaging in research about Black women, I have a connection and

affiliation with the group under study and additionally a responsibility to the sista scholars

and the larger community of Black women. I am responsible for ensuring their stories are

told, believing their lived experiences as legitimate knowledge, and presenting the

knowledge shared for the advancement of the community and not my own.

Assumption 2: Research is both an intellectual and a spiritual pursuit, a pursuit of purpose

An endarkened feminist epistemological stance deems research as not just a pursuit of knowledge but also a spiritual pursuit of deeper meaning and purpose. Dillard (2006) identified elements of Black women's research that highlights the spiritual pursuit implicit in their research which include "an explicit, very powerful sense of self in the role of researcher/teacher, directly linked to an explicit sense of purpose for whatever research moves are made" (p. 21), vulnerability in navigating spaces that center white middle class norms, and the level of care expressed for the study. Research that encompasses spiritual concerns value the unique thoughts and expressions inherent in each individual, views emotions as a legitimate and necessary part of the knowledge shared in the research process, and emphasizes the empathy required to value perspectives that differ from the researcher (Dillard, 2006).

Assumption 3: Only within the context of community does the individual appear (Palmer, 1983) and, through dialogue, continue to become

Dialogue is valued as a source of challenge, resistance, and transformation. The dialogue that happens between Black women "provides a new way to understand our reality and communal responsibility" (Dillard, 2006, p. 22). This dialogue is an invaluable part of the research process that provides space for Black women to share their lived experiences among others with shared identities but varying experiences in a reciprocal process resulting in the formation of collective new knowledge (Dillard, 2006).

Assumption 4: Concrete experience within everyday life form the criterion of meaning, the "matrix of meaning making" (Ephraim-Donker, 1997, p. 8)

The everyday lived experiences of African American people is essential to understanding the meaning making that undergirds the responses and actions as a result of the experiences (Dillard, 2006). This assumption is directly informed by Collins (2000a) assertion that Black women must have knowledge and wisdom, with experience being the gap between the two, to survive a context minoritized by race and gender. Collins (2000a) explains, "knowledge without wisdom is adequate for the powerful, but wisdom is essential to the survival of the subordinate" (p. 257). This study, like so many others authored by Black women, seeks to study and engage with other Black women to elicit stories and experiences to tap into the wisdom gained from those experiences.

Assumption 5: Knowing and research are both historical (extending backwards in time) and outward to the world: To approach them otherwise is to diminish their cultural and empirical meaningfulness

"I write not only what I want to read-- understanding fully and indelibly that if I don't do it no one else is so vitally interested or capable of doing it to my satisfaction -- I write all the things *I should have been able to read"* (Walker, 2003, p. 13). This statement gets at the historical piece described in this assumption of the "absence" of Black women in literature and educational research. While Black women's voices have always present, they have been erased from history and seen as illegitimate knowledge. This omission has led to "a distorted empirical reality fundamentally based on inclusion and exclusion as a way to maintain white and male superiority and as an organizer for our hierarchical social structures in education and society" (Dillard, 2006, p. 24). In recognizing this, I move

forward as a researcher by intentionally seeking out the hidden voices of Black women before me and by bringing to light the legitimate knowledge created from the lived experiences of Black women. I am researching the things I should have been able to read.

Assumptions 6: Power relations, manifest as racism, sexism, homophobia, and so on structure gender, race, and other identity relations within research

The final assumption highlights the pervasiveness of racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia in the structure of the academy and society as a whole (Dillard, 2006). Despite the increase of Black women in the academy, the increase of students of color in historically white institutions, and ending of segregated schools, the oppressive and exclusive structures and beliefs that uphold these structures are still prevalent. Research from an endarkened feminist epistemology seeks to combat these structures by embracing and centering Black women in the research process. The purpose of research from this perspective is to "resist and transform these social arrangements as well, seeking political and social change on behalf of the communities we represent" (Dillard, 2006, p. 27).

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Sista Circles

</div>

Sista circles are "support groups that build upon existing friendships, fictive kin networks, and the sense of community found among African Americans females" (Neal-Barrett, et al., 2011, p. 267). They have been a staple in Black women's history for over 150 years with formalized sista circles established during the Black women's club movement (Giddings, 2010; Neal-Barnett et al., 2011). The establishment of these formalized sista circles was in response to women's groups focusing on white women, Black groups focusing on black men, and the subsequent ignoring of Black women. These sista circles

provided space for Black women to provide support, encouragement, knowledge, and discuss issues related to both race and gender (Giddings, 1985; Neal-Barrett, et al., 2011).

Over time, sista circles have taken on various forms both informally through friend groups and formally as national organizations and sororities (Johnson, 2015). As an undergraduate, I was a member of a Black women's organization with meetings called sista circles where organization business was discussed followed by "sista to sista" when members shared personal experiences, success or challenges for support, encouragement, and advice. These spaces continue to exist in the form of professional practice through group therapy (Boyd, 1993) and preventative health practices (Gaston, Porter, Thomas, 2007; Gilbert & Goddard, 2007). Sista circles have also been utilized for research around anxiety (Neal-Barrett, et al., 2011), sense of belonging for Black doctoral women (Collier, 2017), and the impact of media on Black women's identity development (Lacy, 2017).

Sista Circles as Methodology

As a methodology, sista circles are both a "qualitative research methodology and support group for examining the lived experiences of Black women" (Johnson, 2015, p. 43). Sista circle methodology challenges mainstream Western research methodologies that maintain the status quo and provides a culturally relevant and gender specific methodology more appropriate for inquiry around Black women (Gaston, Porter, Thomas, 2007; Neal-Barrett et al., 2011).

Sista circles are group discussions among Black women organized and hosted by a researcher examining a specific topic or phenomenon. Using sista circle methodology allows the researcher to center the perspectives of Black women while gaining insight and understanding of an issue or experience that impacts Black women. I chose sista circle

methodology because it not only centers Black women in research, but also holds Black women as the creators and holders of unique knowledge informed by their experiences (Johnson, 2015).

On the surface, one might assume that sista circles are essentially focus groups among Black women. The goal of focus groups is to gain information from the participants while the researcher facilitates conversation and uses the stories shared to shed light on a topic through analysis (Patton, 2015). Unlike focus groups, sista circles position the researcher to be actively involved in the process allowing for the knowledge to be created within the circle (Johnson, 2015). Additionally, sista circles are not just spaces for the researcher to gain information as they serve as spaces for support and empowerment. The value of these spaces have been noted by Black women who share how "communicating with African-American women in small groups provides a unique support; one that is unwavering sources of strength for them" (Dorsey, 2001, p.71). Black women have a rich history of creating spaces for support and community through dialogue and sista circle methodology continues the legacy (Collins, 2000a; Dillard, 2006; Dorsey, 2001).

Distinguishing Features of Sista Circles

While there are some shared concepts with focus groups, sista circles differ with the inclusion of communication dynamics, centrality of empowerment, and researcher as participant. The following sections outline the distinguishing features of sista circle methodology which detail the differences from focus group methodology.

Communication dynamics. The first distinguishing feature of sista circles relates to the communication dynamics that occur between and among Black women. These dynamics include verbal and nonverbal communication that were historically created

within Black communities and by Black women. These nonverbals can include facial expressions, hand and body gestures, and pauses, while verbal expressions and word usage are formed by alternating and infusing Mainstream American English (MAE) with Black English Vernacular (BEV). BEV is a "product and reservoir of Black culture" (Nichalle, 2018, p. 5) that requires an understanding of Black culture for comprehension of the language (Johnson, 2015; Stanback, 1985).

When Black women are in community with one another, this unique verbal language and nonverbal exchanges are used to transmit messages and meaning only shared with one another. The informal nature of sista circles mimic everyday social interactions among Black women which influences communication dynamics by creating a space for Black women to fully engage in dialogue that is supportive and validating (Collins, 1986; Lacy 2017).

Centrality of empowerment. The second distinguishing feature of sista circles highlights the intentional design of spaces to be a source of support and empowerment. Empowerment is defined as the "process of stimulating Black women to access their personal or collective power to strengthen one another" (Johnson, 2015, p. 48). Through the participation of sista circles, Black women support each other through the process of sharing their experiences and knowledge to empower one another to see the power of their individual stories and their collective power as Black women.

Researcher as participant. The third distinguishing feature of sista circles refers to the involvement of the researcher as a participant in the process. Unlike focus groups where the researcher just facilitates conversations and takes in information, the role of the researcher in a sista circle extends beyond facilitation to participation in the group

dialogue (Hennink, 2014; Johnson, 2015; Puchta & Potter, 2004). Reciprocity is valued in the space of sista circles, where the researcher and sista scholars engage in dialogue, with the researcher also sharing with the circle. This allows the researcher to also give back to the sista scholars and not just take the knowledge shared (Johnson, 2015).

Recruitment and Selection

Sista scholars were recruited using purposive sampling techniques with the goal of including six to ten sista scholars. The call for participants was shared within my personal networks utilizing social media through pages of affinity groups for Black women, Black student affairs professional, and student affairs mothers. Criteria for inclusion in this study required sista scholars to a) self-identify as a woman, b) self-identify as Black or of African descent, c) self-identify as a mother, d) be employed full-time by an institution of higher education in a student serving capacity, and e) have been socialized in the United States for half of their life.

Recruitment materials included a flyer and accompanying script briefly describing the study, inclusion criteria, and link to a Qualtrics-based survey to gather demographic information and availability for an individual interview and two sista circles. Additionally, the Qualtrics form outlined sista scholars rights and confidentiality, consent for audio recording, demographic information, and incentive information. The dates and times for the sista circles were selected based on the availability submitted via the form. Sista scholars each received a $15 Amazon gift card for their participation.

Data Collection

Multiple methods were used to collect data for this study including initial interviews, sista circles, post sista circle written reflections, and journals allowing for triangulation of data from multiple sources (Creswell, 2014).

Participant Recruitment & Selection

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling techniques with the goal of including six to ten participants. The call for participants was shared within my personal networks utilizing social media through pages of affinity groups for Black women, doctoral moms, and student affairs mothers. After posting the flyer, criteria information, and demographic survey, I received 20 responses in less than 24 hours and closed the survey for additional submissions. I followed up with the interested participants and sent out a poll to gather their availability for an individual interview and to schedule the sista circles. Because more participants expressed interest than needed for the study, I utilized the submitted availability to select eight participants who all had availability for both sista circles. Those not selected received an email thanking them for their interest in the study and acknowledging the limited space in the study. Prior to the initial interview, participants received, signed, and submitted informed consent forms. Participants received a $15 Amazon gift card following the final sista circle. The peer observer received a $20 Amazon gift card following the final sista circle.

Initial Interviews

Although sista circles were the primary source of data collection, initial interviews were conducted individually to build rapport between sista scholars and myself as the researcher (Johnson, 2015). These individual interviews allowed sista scholars and myself

to share background information, relevant experiences, and interest in the research topic. A semi-structured interview approach utilizing an interview guide was used to provide guidance through structured and unstructured questions and allow for flexibility (Seidman, 2013). This approach establishes themes and questions to guide the conversation but also allows for flexibility, as the conversation will vary with each sista scholar (Patton, 2015). Initial interviews took place virtually using the video conference platform Zoom, lasting 30-60 minutes. The initial interview also provided an opportunity for sista scholars to get familiar with the Zoom platform and troubleshoot any issues prior to the sista circles (Green, 2017).

Virtual Sista Circles

Virtual sista circles served as the primary source of data collection. A virtual platform was chosen to provide flexibility for participating sista-scholars as they have full-time job responsibilities and familial obligations. Additional benefits include the ability to incorporate perspectives from a variety of institutions, institutional type, and contexts (Tuttas, 2015). The virtual sista circles were conducted on the platform Zoom, consisted of nine total sista scholars (including myself), and lasted between 90 and 120 minutes. The use of virtual platforms in qualitative research has increased with recent studies (Green, 2017; Tuttas, 2015; Woodyatt, Finneran, & Stephenson, 2016) noting equal opportunity for collecting reach data as in person methods while eliminating barriers for populations "whose participation might otherwise be precluded by time, distance, and even social barriers" (Tuttas, 2015, p. 122). Sista scholars took part in two sista circles with each centering on themes or conversation prompts relevant to the research questions. Sista circles were audio recorded and transcribed by a third party service for analysis.

The first sista circle began with a welcome, overview of Zoom logistics, and introductions.   To initiate dialogue, each sista circle began with a quote, passage, or video as a centering activity and participants were asked to respond with thoughts and reactions (See Appendix B). Each sista circle was focused on a prompt informed by Neville & Cross' (2016) Emerging Racial Awakening Model which outlines the process of consciousness awakening, exploration, and outcomes. As the researcher-participant, I engaged in conversation and served as a facilitator using an unstructured approach with pre-constructed ideas and impromptu questions to stimulate deep conversations around the topics (Seidman, 2013). The second sista circle began with an overview of the previous circle and continued with the same format as the previous circle. Both sista circles were concluded with a quote by a Black woman (See Appendix B).

Journals

Following each sista circle, I used a researcher journal to capture informal thoughts, ideas, and reflections based on the circle discussion. A peer observer was present in each sista circle to assist with facilitation and notetaking. This observer also met the selection criteria and participated in the discussion. This peer observer also utilized a researcher journal after each circle.

Data Analysis

Data for this study was analyzed using a critical Black feminist approach to qualitative analysis to highlight the socio-political implications prevalent in participants' daily lives (Evans-Winters, 2019). Narratives were centered throughout the analysis process with sista scholars own words and stories utilized as codes and ultimately themes and my own narrative as both a researcher and active participant within analytical memos.

The focus on Black women's narratives is a tradition in the writing and analysis of Black feminists to create counterstories that humanize, uplift, and celebrate Black women (Evans-Winter, 2019).

Analytic memos were used throughout the data collection and analysis process to document and synthesize my meaning making process about the data and ensure analysis was an ongoing process (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). I used these memos as a space to process both initial thoughts and ideas around key themes and to document the emotional experience created from being in community with the sista scholars. Within Black feminist data analysis, there is no separation of rationality and emotionality as both are necessary intellectual components (Evans-Winters, 2019).

During analysis, a three step process was used that included: first cycle coding, pattern coding, and drawing and verifying conclusions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Saldana, 2013). Coding is an analysis method that engages "deep reflection about and, thus, deep analysis and interpretation of the data's meanings" (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014, p. 72).

During the first cycle coding process, I assigned codes to chunks of data to assist in identifying themes and patterns (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Saldana, 2013). My approach to coding during this cycle utilized both a descriptive and in vivo technique. In vivo coding is mostly used in studies that prioritize and center the voices of sista scholars. I used this process to assign codes based on the words and phrases from sista scholars. Descriptive coding utilizes labels of words or short phrases created by the researcher that summarize the overall topic of the data chunk. I chose to utilize both approaches by using vivo codes to keep the focus and value on the sista scholars voices while using descriptive

codes to note my interpretations of patterns and themes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Saldana, 2013).

During the second cycle or pattern coding process, initial codes established during the first cycle were condensed into a smaller number of categories. Pattern coding also entails a reorganization of the condensed categories. I used a matrix display to layout these categories for "reflection, verification, conclusion drawing, and other analytics acts" (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014, p. 91). In the final stage, I used the matrix data to draw conclusions and interpretation of the patterns and themes identified that addressed the research questions. In Black feminist data analysis, truth is authenticated within community and as such I verified these conclusions by sharing them with sista scholars for review and feedback.

Validity as Resistance

Traditionally, the concept of validity refers to the accuracy of data and interpretations of that data (Maxwell, 2013). Several qualitative scholars (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Maxwell, 2013; Richardson, 1997) challenged this notion of validity based on its incongruence with constructivist and critical approaches that reject a universal truth and reconceptualized variations to more adequately reflect the approach. Richardson (1994, 1997) proposed the concept of crystallization, an alternate form of validity that is transgressive and deliberately challenges the status quo. This approach is conceptualized by a metaphor for examining a crystal.

Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities *and* refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, arrays, casting off in different directions. What we see depends upon our angle of repose (Richardson, 1997, p. 92). Crystallization

provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic. Ingeniously, we know there is always more to know (Richardson, 2000, p. 934).

Crystallization fits in line with the epistemological framework of this study by resisting the limitations of traditional research guidelines to utilize processes that center on the sista scholars voices and focusing on the rich, complex knowledge received from deep study of a prospective as opposed to surface evaluations of multiple perspectives (Ellingson, 2009). Validity in this sense is more focused on ensuring data is authentically capturing the essence of the study. To ensure that I recorded and interpreted data that is authentic to sista scholars expressions, I utilized a peer observer, member checking, memos, and journals.

A peer observer was present during each sista circle. They assisted by facilitating the conversation, taking notes, and making observations. After each sista circle, the peer observer and I debriefed the circle and discussed general themes from the group discussion. This provided an opportunity for me to discuss my initial thoughts with someone to ensure I heard and understood the sista scholars correctly.

Immediately following the peer observer debrief, I used a researcher journal to document my initial thoughts, feelings, and ideas from the circle discussion. The peer observer also used a researcher journal to gather thoughts and reflections before our second debrief discussion the following day. Journal entries served as an informal way to document initial takeaways and reflections. Following the sista circles, I created analytic memos as a more formalized process to identify themes and patterns that began to emerge throughout the data collection and data analysis process (Saldana, 2013).

After the final sista circle, I provided sista scholars with preliminary themes and findings for their review. Once the first draft of Chapter 4 was completed, sista scholars received a copy to review the findings and provide feedback if they felt it adequately represented the knowledge co-created during the sista circle and to ensure descriptions were edited enough to maintain confidentiality (Maxwell, 2013).

Researcher Positionality

For as long as I can remember, I have been an accomplished rule follower. In school, I excelled in courses with one true answer like math because no matter how you add it up, one plus one always equals two, that is just the rule. I was praised from childhood through young adulthood for my rational behavior, rule following, and ability to code switch instantly. I became such a rational rule follower because I trusted the rule makers, my elders, my teachers, and especially schools. When I was denied admission to my first choice undergraduate institution, I truthfully believed it was because they evaluated my file and determined I would not succeed at their institution. I believed they knew best because they make the admissions rules, so of course they were right. My mother must have thought differently because after a few phone calls, she was in touch with an administrator for an alternate admissions program for first-generation and low-income students. I spoke with this administrator and he was adamant that I reapply for admission to the same institution but through his program. This seemed like a ridiculous idea, why would I re-apply to a school I was already denied? But I did apply, mostly to appease my mother and to my surprise I was accepted. Now, I was confused and headed off to a school that already let me know I would not be successful there, right? Well six years, a Bachelor's, and Master's degree later from that very same institution, I can say the rulemakers were wrong.

My success at an institution that denied my admission because it deemed I would not be successful created an internal conflict which forced me to question, who made these rules and why I was so hellbent on following them. The cognitive dissonance I experienced resulted in a perspective shift. Not only was I successful but so were the other 350 students with backgrounds and stories similar to mine also in the program. I share this story both because it is what brought me to the field of student affairs and because it is reflective of my journey culminating into my approach to this dissertation design.

I spent the early years of my career working with alternate admissions and college access programs proving to institutions year after year that despite their rules of admissions students of color, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, first-generation college students and first generation immigrants could and had excelled at their institutions. Despite this awareness of inequalities in my work, I never named the systemic issues inherently present in this argument. I was taught by well meaning mentors to essentially make white people feel comfortable. Instead of saying these policies are racist and classist, staff pitched to the administration the value of diversity and the institutional bragging rights as a result of our labor. I was socialized to be power conscious but never speak directly about or to power. In my doctorate program, I was encouraged to do just that, use my work and research as a means to challenge rules to make space for those erased by them. While on some level my respect from rules remains, it is now accompanied with a healthy skepticism undergirded by a critical perspective and understanding of invasive systems of oppression.

As such, I situate this dissertation in the transformative or critical paradigm which addresses the political nature of research by challenging social oppression at any level

(Mertens, 2010). Researchers utilizing a transformative paradigm "consciously and explicitly position themselves side-by-side with the less powerful in a joint effort to bring about social transformation" (Mertens, 2010, p. 21). This perspective suggests that knowledge is socially constructed and that this socially constructed knowledge is negotiated based upon power. Research using a transformative paradigm should be actionable and create change for the participant, researcher, and/or institutions (Creswell, 2014).

This study is guided by the belief that Black women are the most authoritative source addressing topics about Black women. I utilized sista circle methodology to center the lived experiences of Black women and acknowledge the knowledge we hold as legitimate. I positioned myself alongside sista scholars to co-create knowledge on the experiences of Black student affairs mothers. Who I am as a researcher, is who I am in the world; a mother, partner, daughter, educator, sista, and friend and I brought all of who I am to this research project. I share many of these commonalities with my sista scholars. My hope for this study was to create space for Black women away from the white gaze to share experiences and co-create knowledge to enhance our communities, personal lives, and field of student affairs.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

For Black women, new knowledge claims are rarely worked out in isolation from other

individuals and are usually developed through dialogues with other members of a

community. A primary epistemological assumption underlying the use of dialogue in

assessing knowledge claims is that connectedness rather than separation is an

essential component of the knowledge-validation process (Collins, 1989, p. 763).

This chapter outlines the findings from across the data. The findings focus on two

topical areas directly related to the research questions: (1) the consciousness development

process of sista scholars and (2) and how parenting, professional practice, and

consciousness development was impacted by a changed perspective brought on by

motherhood. As a note, I use the term sista scholars to refer to participants because their

contributions to this study are invaluable and the knowledge created within the sista

circles belong to us all. I also use terms such as "we" and "our" to speak to my participation

in the study and the collective knowledge being presented.

To center sista scholars' voices, long quotes and full portions of stories are used to

honor sista scholars' experiences without external interpretation. Dialogue from the sista

circles are included to illustrate the conversational nature of the sista circles and honor the

environment in which the knowledge was created. Sista scholar profiles using their own

words from the individual interviews are included to provide additional individual

background information and context for the dialogue that follows. Profiles may differ in

length and depth reflecting the nature of the individual interview as the descriptiveness and length varied based on various factors including sista scholars' time, comfort, and natural conversation nature as concise or elaborate. Table 1 includes the demographic information collected from sista scholars.

Table 1: Sista Scholar Demographic Information

Name	Relationship Status	Salient Identities	Current Functional Area	General Title	Current Institution Type	Ages of Child(ren)
Zoe	Married	Black, female, heterosexual, mid 40s, American	Disability Services	Accessibility & Compliance	Small, private, faith-based 4 year university	7, 10, 16
Nicole Brown	Married	African American, cisgender woman, mid 30s,	Civil Rights & Title IX	Title IX/EEO Investigator	Four year public university	8 & 16 months
Antoinette Hardee	Married	Black, cis-woman, 38, American	Student Life	Director	Community college	4 & 5
Alice	Married	Black female	Student Activities	Director	Large public research state institution	3
Nia	Single but dating	Black, African American, Female, early 30s, Heterosexual, USA	Orientation, transition, and retention	Associate Director	Private, Christian	6
JMac	Married	African American female	Student Conduct	Student Conduct	Private	8

		heterosexual				
Maya	Married	Black, female, late 30s, American	Dean of Students	Assistant Dean of Students	Private	7
Gianna	Married	Christian, Black Woman, Wife and Mother	Fundraising & Alumni Relations	Development and Alumni Relations	Large, public	6 & one on the way

Sista Scholar Introductions

Meet Nia

I'm Nia and I currently oversee orientation programming for about 3,600 students. My background is in parent programs, orientation, and transition programs. I went to undergrad and got my Masters and worked professionally in my home state and recently relocated to a new state, um, so I, yeah, so that was a transition. It was just me and my, at that time he was five year old. We uprooted our lives and moved. I'm a single parent and my son also has autism spectrum disorder and ADHD. And I'm also in a doctoral program. So, um, we, it's just the two of us here doing the things.

I was interested in the study because mmm. So over the last year or two, I have took an active interest in telling my story as a parent. That's not something that I would have done, um, two years ago. And so oftentimes I sit on panels talking about, um, so for two conferences for the past year, I've sat on panels to talk about my experience as a mother. Um, I've done, uh, I've done educational sessions at conferences about parents and, and being a mother and being a mother with a son who has special needs. And so this was different. This, this is different because it addressed me and my identity in addition to, um,

parenting. And so, you know, I always, people are, I always get asked, so how do you do all the things that you do? Because I am a single mother with a son who has special needs in a town with nobody but myself. Um, and so that's really the reason why I started sharing my story because people continue to ask me how do I do the things that I do? Um, people who don't even have kids were asking me questions and, you know, I, you know, I tell them there is no doctrine or no resource manual to tell you how to do this. It's so I don't have it figured out, even though people think I do. Um, I just don't. But I think that's also a part of our identity as black women is that we are, uh, we are the nucleolus, whether you're a single parent or you have a spouse with a nucleus of our, of our family, and we hold it down and do all the things. And not only that, we're everything to everybody else.

As far as what I hope to gain or experience from participating in this study um, I just think that it is really important, especially for you to do research and to publish about something that is passionate, that I'm passionate about and I wanted to be able to assist in any way that I could to help you or to help future women who are wanting to be mothers or who are, who are mothers trying to figure it out because we're all trying to figure it out together. And we oftentimes sit in a silo while we're trying to do that. We suffer in silence and we oftentimes, at least for me, I thought, well, I'm the only one going through this. It's a couple things to obviously to support other women, other mothers, to contribute to literature. Um, because I think that's important, especially when it comes to, you know, a black woman and black women. And speaking about that experience. And also three, you know, this is something that I'll be going through in the next year and so, and I may have to do a qualitative study.

Meet Zoe

I'm Zoe. Um, let's see here. I have been working in the world of student support for, oh my gosh, I actually, I went to, I started all of this I guess in grad school and I was pregnant with my first child. So I've kind of never not been a parent while working in higher ed. I had a career for about eight, nine years in social services and then transitioned back into the higher ed stuff from like, you know, when I was an undergrad and very active student. Um, but it's been, gosh, yeah, about 17 years. Most of that has been, and like academic counseling, student support. But the last, I'd say 12 years I've been working with disability services. Um, so doing all the accommodations and policies and you know, the compliance, it all goes around that. The institution I'm at is very small. We are, Oh gosh, we're about 1400 students right now. So we're, yeah, teeny tiny, which is a whole nother, it's a whole different world. And coming from bigger schools and I've been here for a little over five years. Um, very small, um, suburban, very much predominantly white institution and area. Um, so that's been a unique experience as well. Um, and outside of here, I am a mom. I am wife and mom to three people. They are, um, I have a 16 year old daughter, a 10 year old daughter and a seven year old son. So my kids kind of run the gamut. We're kind of ordering a gazillion for directions.

I was interested in the study... just the fact that there's not a lot of studies out there that capture what we as black females experience as mothers and working in student affairs and student support areas. So that just grabbed me right away. It's like, Oh, this is what I live every day. So I would love to see, you know, what others are experiencing to hear it, you know, where my experience align with this. Is that unique or other people kind

of dealing with some of the same things. So that was what really appealed to me. Hoping to get some things that I can take and apply to my own life.

Meet Alice

So I'm Alice and I am an upper level administrator in student activities at a large public institution. I finished my doctorate about six years ago. Um, and I have a three year old son and motherhood has definitely changed my purview of how I see the world. Um, everything, every decision I make or add, he is my first thought. In terms of like, how does this affect him? So, um, but yeah, so he's three years old and like I said, like you the same concerns in terms of like the experiences that I want to provide for him. The environment that I think would be best for him, um, is at the forefront. Um, most recently he was diagnosed with sensory processing disorder. So, um, having a child with special needs is really thrown us for a loop because first of all, what is that? So trying to explain what it is, trying to adapt our house, our lives, get him to therapy appointments, um, find the right environment for him in terms of school, um, to make sure they understand his needs. Um, so yes that's, that's been our life but he is a true joy. Like everybody that meets him just adores him. He's funny as all get out, like you talk about three-year-olds, but he's just, he's just funny to me and it's like, I look at him, I'm like, this is something that I would do, so I really can't laugh at the same time. I can't get mad. I was like, he's just Alice Jr right now. Um, so yeah, but I mean, as you, as you, as we've said so far, like trying to coincide, being a working mom, driving, you know, hour, hour and a half at any day away from him and making sure that I'm still present its just been a challenge. But it's also rewarding because I do value the times that we do get to spend with each other.

I was interested in the study, I saw this on Facebook and thought oh my gosh, this is phenomenal. Like just because like you said, we don't talk….. and I appreciate the mothers in student affairs Facebook page because we don't talk about like I feel we have to choose between motherhood and being a practitioner, our professional identity, if they don't always intersect or coincide with each other. And so, especially for black women, I mean just the duality that we live in, we always have to choose something. And so when I saw this I'm like, this is awesome.

So, by participating I think I'm just hoping to gain more awareness of community when in regards to black women who are student affairs professionals and mothers and what that looks like for other women and to see if there's any commonalities. Um, and also just another way to build community among black women in the profession.

Meet Sage

I'm Sage and I currently work with Title IX and EEO investigations and I have a background in education and prevention work in Title IX and ADA offices. I started off being a preschool teacher after I had a baby. So I did that for six years and towards the end of my time there I just realized that I wasn't fulfilled. I missed working the work that I did as an undergrad doing diversity recruitment and I missed college. And so I was like, what do I need to do to go back? So I went back to grad school with a three year old and worked full time as a preschool teacher because I could get childcare for free and I had a full time assistantship so then I could get my tuition waiver and get insurance. But, um, it was challenging to say the least. And uh, I also went to school during the protest which received national attention. Yeah. So that also kind of shaped my introduction into higher education. You know, being in class with students who were going through their protests, agreeing,

disagreeing with their methods, knowing kind of behind the scenes, things that people didn't really know that I was privy to as being a student leader at the time while trying to juggle all of that. Also being hyper aware of like, my daughter is seeing me around all these educated black people and coming on a college campus all the time, she had to come with me to student leader meetings.

So when I first saw the study flyer, I was like, Oh they want to hear about black moms? Because I mean you're either the only one by yourself or like there's a lot of single black folks and not very many who have kids and kind of talk about those intersects. And so sometimes I feel like I have to pick and choose like can I talk about being a black woman versus like, can I talk about what it's like to be a black mom? And I feel like I have to pick and choose because so, so much riding on it. So being able to have that space to talk and connect with other women who maybe feel the same way or feel like their identities come up at come up at work more than their counterparts and they're kind of left by themselves to deal with it or their family has to kind of help them work through it cause they don't understand. That's what I hope to gain from participating.

Meet Maya

So my name is Maya and I was a first generation low income student who went to college at a predominantly white small liberal arts college. That experience definitely shaped me as far as not having a large group of minorities and even like the black students, a lot of them came from more privileged backgrounds than I did. So like kind of like that disconnect for me was uncomfortable. Um, and then my journey in higher ed is interesting. My background is in residence life and I have lived on college campuses up until I was like in my thirties even with my daughter. For graduate school, so like I wanted to do like that

counseling perspective, but still work with colleges students so I completed a clinical social work program while working residence life. I learned I didn't want to do one-to one therapy because I was absorbing people emotions like a sponge and it just got to be too much. So I transitioned to case management and I really enjoy the aspect of like still working with students and like a mental health capacity and helping with the services but not necessarily doing one on one therapy.

I wanted to participate, oh, just the fact that it had something to do with like black mothers who were in higher ed. Cause I feel like I haven't personally had much interaction with that many black mothers, like working one, like in my institution, there just aren't a lot of, even just like people of color at my institution working in the area that I'm working in. And in my office, yeah I'm the only black woman working there. So like that kind, that has been difficult. When I was in residence life, I was the only black woman at the time. Um, so just like being able to talk with other black mothers who are like working in higher ed and kind of talk to them about what its like raising a child and like being in an higher ed environment. So like that really interested me and talking to other mothers as well so that community piece.

Meet Antoinette Hardee

I'm Antoinette Hardee. I am a mom of two. I have a five year old son and a four year old daughter. I work in student life at a community college, my first community college but I have been in higher ed for 15 years. I've always been in student affairs for the most part or in a student affairs capacity, working in multicultural student affairs a majority of my career. I am in my second year of my doctoral program, God willing, I will finish my coursework in the summer. And um, but I thought that the topic was pretty interesting

cause you know, we're mothers at the same time so we're going through all the same feelings. So I thought the topic was pretty relevant to my experience as a mom and as a professional.

What I hope to gain from participating, you know, honestly, just like I think that community of it all as moms, a lot of times we feel guilty or alone. And so I think that the idea of doing a sister circle or the group, I think I'm looking forward to that. I've been sort of hearing other folks experiences and their lived experiences, ways of thinking, just sort of all of that sounds pretty cool.

Meet JMac

My name is JMac and I've been in higher ed for about six or seven years. And before that I was in private practice. I currently work in student conduct. I deal with all conduct issues, but I focused on Title IX and bias incident matters that happen on campus. And my little boy is eight. And so I was mothering and parenting with him in school and could rattle off a long list to you about like negative experiences of African American children in school, particularly African American males. And, and really thought that I was well versed in that and that it couldn't happen to me kind of thing. But finally realized that some things are systemic so it doesn't really matter how well versed you are. Um, and so we actually homeschool now and I work.

And so a friend of mine who's a doctoral candidate, passed your flyer onto me. And I said, when I read it, I said, so the answer's yes I want to participate and I have a lot of thoughts and I think that working in, like if I was not working in student affairs, I think I would have kept fighting systems to make them work instead of like making my own... I sit in spaces where I realized I can create restorative systems on my own, which is why I'm

homeschooling and work. And so now I've been pulling on my job to help accommodate me and the only reason I can, I think the only reason I do think about that is because of the accommodations we're making for students you know what I mean? Like I sit in spaces where we think about that.

 I really think that your research is really pivotal because I think that there are movements happening and like there's no term to it or like theme running through why people are doing it. And it's kind of like we all rattle off these lists, but really what I think it is is that we've just started to become a little bit more empowered about, um, creating safe spaces. Oh, I think first and foremost, what the flyer did, it spoke so many volumes for me. And what I hope to gain is that you're not crazy. Um, we're, we're all figuring this out and we can pull on each other to figure it out. But what I really also hope to do is just to actually do the opposite also is to share and say you can figure this out and we can make structures then to allow us to be able to mother consciously, right? So we can fit. I just want to contribute because I think that, um, I tell anybody, I will get on a pedestal about, um, our children and making sure there is space to educate them properly. And so if you're going to do some research that somebody is going to use at some point about this, I want to be in that research.

Meet Gianna

 Hi I'm Gianna! I currently serve as the Annual Giving and Stewardship Coordinator for a small college unit within a large public university. My background in higher education consist of roles in residential life, admissions, athletics, alumni relations, and development. Prior to starting my career in higher education, I had my daughter immediately after I graduated from undergrad. From the time she was born, she began changing the way I

made decisions. I knew it wasn't just about me anymore. I had to stop being selfish and focus on the needs of someone else. My daughter's birth inspired me to pursue my graduate degree in something I was passionate in which was higher education administration. In fact, becoming a mother informed my program of choice. I wanted to attend an institution where I would feel welcomed at home both in the classroom and in my assistantship. Therefore, I applied to my Alma mater since I had seen professional staff members during my undergraduate years that were Black mothers in higher education. I was accepted into my top choice program and I had the opportunity to raise my 3 year old daughter in residential life where she referred to the high rise residence halls as "castles."

Similar to my decision to attend graduate school, my daughter and my soon to be born son also inspired me to participate in this study. Working in higher education as a Black mother is hard. Our stories are often overlooked and many times we are siloed across campus. I thought it would be cool to spend some time engaging with other Black mothers from different institutions and learning about how they manage their daily lives. I'm always looking to learn from the experiences of others. I'm still a young mother so I have a lot to learn. I also wanted to participate in this study because I'm slightly interested in pursuing a doctoral degree. I think it's amazing when a scholar is able to research something they are passionate about. I hope to do that one day.

Consciousness Development

For this study, consciousness development is conceptualized utilizing the Emerging Racial Awakening Model (Neville & Cross, 2016) which focuses on the transformation of consciousness process and outcomes of an increased consciousness. This transformation process includes awakening, an event or experience triggering personal exploration of

one's cultural heritage prompting an increased critical awareness and changes based on this new insight and continued exploration.

Awakening

For sista scholars in this study, it was difficult to pinpoint specific instances of consciousness awakening as we all had a sense of awareness and critical consciousness based on our intersectional experiences as Black women in the US. However, motherhood was the one shared experience that shifted our consciousness creating an awakening of a new perspective. Becoming mothers changed our perspective and outlook on the world enhancing our critical consciousness by becoming more aware of the systemic pitfalls targeting our children and all the children who look like them.

For Antoinette Hardee, she had cultivated her critical consciousness through personal experiences and professional work in diversity, equity, and inclusion.

> I think I was always pretty conscious about most things. But just the perspective shifts when you have the kids. And so, mine are pretty small like a lot of folks. But I think the thing that became different was I've worked the entire time they've been born, so. But when they really started to move up into classes where learning became, I mean learning is always important, but it was more curriculum-based and I could see, at times, how people were treating or maybe their expectations of how my kids were supposed to be developmentally. And so, at the very first school, it was just so much a surprise that my little black kid was smart.

Nia referenced her classed experiences growing up as building her consciousness over time.

So I'll say, just from my perspective, I don't, per se, think I had a moment as a parent because I grew up poor. I grew up in poverty. And so a lot of this was my reality at a very young age. And so I always knew what to be mindful and watch for, and what things differently that I wanted for the upbringing of my children someday. And so I always felt like I prepared myself for those things because I witnessed them growing up as an inner city kid. I just think that, as a parent, I have been more aware. Again, I've felt like I've always been aware, just given that I was a part of the system for a very long time now. But I'm just being able to see it as a parent. It's disheartening. Ultimately, it is and I don't have a solution and I'm one of those, they get frustrated when I can't fix things or if I don't have an immediate fix.

Portrayals of police brutality, violence against Black bodies, and dismissals of justice for victims of Black families in the media were described by several sista scholars as instances that awakened a sense of fear and anxiety. Gianna recalls the impact of these messages while pregnant.

Definitely becoming a mother made me more conscious. I was pregnant during all the Trayvon Martin trials and, at one point in time, my mother had begged me to turn off the TV because my anxiety had become too much. To be pregnant while watching this family just be pretty much told, no, your son isn't going to get justice. And then, just trying to figure out how to be a young mother and how can I protect my child from a world that doesn't want to protect her?

Following the murder of Trayvon Martin, Sage recalled her feelings,

And so, I felt like I don't want to go outside with my kid. I don't want to go to school because no place is really safe. But I also don't want to be afraid to be black either,

because I liked being black and I was trying to figure out, how do I enjoy my

blackness? How do I enjoy my womanhood? But also being in these multiple spaces

that don't really reaffirm that. And then, also getting messages from the TV and the

media that also don't really reaffirm that, either. So it was just a really... just this

moment of what do I do with that? And then, what do I do with that for my daughter

at the time? And it was a big reason why I didn't really want anymore kids because I

just thought, I can't bring any more kids into this world because I don't know if I can

make it.

As the conversation continued, we talked about ways to acknowledge this fear while not

letting it overwhelm us and our parenting decisions. For Sage, community was helpful,

In terms of being a mom and a parent, just asking and talking to other people in my

community, like you said, who were like, what am I doing with what I have and what

am I doing to have these conversations with my kids, to love my kids, to reaffirm my

kids and to reaffirm myself, to love myself, to remind myself that I am good enough?

And that, for me, really was a good anchor to not get carried away and to get lost in

my own thoughts and fears and worries and anxieties, which just happen and they

do. But they really helped to keep me grounded.

For Zoe, constant media coverage of violence against Black men in the media

provided a false sense of safety for her daughters that also brought up the impact of gender

for Gianna.

Zoe: In some ways, I feel like I'm still very much going through that consciousness.

I think for me, at some point, and I don't remember exactly where, perhaps maybe

when Sandra Bland was killed, I don't know. But at some point, for years I felt we're

seeing so many males going through things. I always grew up knowing that a lot of our black men and all of the discrimination that they faced. When we started to see some of our African American females being killed, that's when it hit me like, whoa, this isn't just males. And I have two daughters and a son. My youngest is my son. So I was very much aware of that for him but it was really a shift in my thinking of, oh, I need to prepare my girls on what they might face, as well. You think about other things that they would face, in terms of being... with different things, like Title IX issues and things that can come up, but not in terms of, necessarily, their gun violence and safety in those things. So that was really a big turning point for me.

Gianna: Also to that, Zoe, I had a similar reaction. So with my daughter, I was concerned, of course, because she's black but, I don't know, I had a different gut wrenching feeling when I found out I'm pregnant with this son. I just automatically just was terrified, but with her, it was just joyous and super excited. And I grew up with brothers and I knew that black men experienced these things, but it's different and hits differently when you're about to raise your own son. And so I definitely appreciate that you're sharing those emotions, because I'm looking like, Oh Lord. Everyone was all excited. Oh, you got a girl and a boy. I'm like, oh, yep. I got a girl and boy. Both an adventure, let's do this. And that's not to say that I'm going to ignore her experience as a young, black woman. I don't know. I feel like I can relate more to her because I'm going through it and I've gone through it, but I look at my brothers and their experiences and I was just terrified as a big sister. And so now, as a mother, I'm like, okay, let me not operate out of fear, but what can I do? I don't know.

For most sista scholars, consciousness awakening included a more critical awareness of systemic oppression and the intricacy of systems not designed for our children's benefit. The public school system was a consistent theme across both sista circles as a source of constant conflict. JMac's story vividly describes her struggle with the public education system prompting the awakening of an increased critical view of systems overall.

I think it was a cumulative sequence of events for me, because I had been born in this world and already conscious about my presence and how I appear in spaces. So, had that load and baggage always. When I entered into my professional career, I began by working, doing social justice work. And I think I've shared with you, Qua'Aisa, that I was representing students who were being, particularly black and brown children, suspended and expelled from school and trying to help advocate for their rights in school. And then, moving forward, I continued to do public interest work and, then, segued into higher ed. But when my son entered into school, I will say that I think I went in there with blinders on because I thought I was an exception to the rule. I knew what all the traps look like. I knew how to avoid them. I knew who needed to be engaged. I knew what our rights were, what our constitutional rights were, and I was prepared. This is what I had performed in the past. And so, was very prepared to take down systems and found that I was constantly fighting systems. And I think it was the first time I became aware, even though I was advocating for students before and representing them in those situations. I think when I had my child was the first time that I became aware of the fact that that is the whole point of systemic injustice, right? It doesn't really matter who's moving in

and out of those spaces, in terms of people. The problem is, there's a system set up.

So people join the system and then they continue to perpetuate the system. And it

was really this moment, it was like, oh, I'm not going to defeat the system. And was I

really even defeating it in the past? And so it was becoming a parent and then being

faced with the very systems that I thought that I could avoid for him and navigate

well and realize that, even with my background experience, understanding the lingo,

and understanding what those waters look like, the waters were still very troubled

for me. I felt very prideful, in a sense, that this was not supposed to happen to me.

Right? And so, once it did happen, I said, oh, I get it now. And that's when I pulled

him out of school systems. We were going to do this a whole different way. Because

there's the system, systemic injustice, there that is very difficult for me to override

at the .... difficult for me to fight that system and save my child in the process. And so

I had to make a choice at that point. So, I guess, I knew all of those things were

happening and they were always on the forefront of my mind, which is why I was

trying to avoid those pitfalls. But systemic inequity, it exists. And so I guess that

when it slapped me in the face was my awakening... even though I would probably

have argued that I was conscious before, that I realize now I wasn't really conscious.

For Antoinette Hardee, her awareness of systemic oppression caused her to worry not only

about her own kids but all minoritized kids.

And so now, understanding that, how the pipeline works and they put talented and

gifted kids on a certain track and they put at risk kids on a certain track, and

understanding that now and trying to be a parent that's knowledgeable of those

things, but also recognizing that my money is powerful and where I live is not

helping the communities that don't have access to the resource. So I just find myself asking how do I give my kids the best, but also contribute positively to the communities that don't have access to the resources that I have? Is now where I'm at. There's a whole group of people who are probably labeled at risk, and may have no idea that they're labeled that and what that might mean for the level of care that they're receiving or the level of education that they're receiving. And so I think that's probably my biggest challenge now as an educator. As someone who's in school learning about educational leadership, what my role is in that, but also try to be the best mom and offer the best things for my kids. It's just a challenge to be stuck in the middle of that.

Nia's awareness of systemic inequalities prompted her to learn more about the systems her son would be apart of to find strategies to best navigate the system.

I think as I became an adult and a parent, I have found myself really researching and being more aware of the school-to-prison pipeline, and understanding how do I make sure that my child avoid those things, given our circumstances. And so, understanding that I'm a single parent, I had my son when I was 25 in graduate school. And so they begin to create all of these narratives and trajectories for your children, systematically, at a very young age. I think it's by age, by grade three, it's almost determined if your child will have the potential to go to college. And so just making sure that I am doing my part as a parent to make sure that he's not faced with some of those things, but also wanting him to have a realistic experience.

Continued Exploration

Nia's research of the school to prison pipeline was one way she continued exploration of her critical consciousness. For a majority of sista scholars, graduate school and the community created from graduate school networks served as an environment for continued exploration of an increased critical awareness. Gianna explained, " my consciousness really didn't come to full fruition until I was immersed in it in grad school and I was able to read more content about these topics". Extending beyond the classroom, Sage called her community with other Black graduate women as being a source of comfort and support for her consciousness development.

I just really tried to surround myself with like-minded people who I felt comfortable talking to. So a lot of black moms and who had kids of similar age. I was really involved in graduate school leadership. Being involved in black student government for graduate and professional students. And the year that I was in leadership with them, it was all women. And to be honest, I had never been around that many educated black women before, who had PhDs and working on law school and so, it was just a new experience being around really, really educated people. I think, I kind of I don't know I just growing up very poor and coming from a single parent household and how I did, I just never had been around people like that. So I thought they were untouchable. So being in grad school and being next to those people in there, talking about what they're going through and they're going through their own kind of identity development, I was, Oh, they going through the same stuff I'm going through. We're different, because I was the only one who had kids that I'm trying to

balance and manage that with. But it was still helpful to have other women who

we're going through that process.

Most sista scholars worked and/or attended graduate school in predominantly

white environments and described a struggle navigating these environments in times of

constant media focus on violence against Black bodies. Alice expressed,

It happened like a series of events and at different stages of my development. You

brought up Trayvon Martin and being from Florida, that case very resonated with

me. I was working on my doctorate during that time and so, in the program, we

made space for ourselves to talk about the case, how we were feeling and, being in

the South, it was the talk in several circles that I'm in. So very resonant. It resonated

with me as a scholar, as I was writing my dissertation, at the time. So it was like,

okay, so how do I navigate being a scholar in a white space with all these things

happening? I can't talk to several spaces were not safe to talk about this case around

other students and with family it was safe to have those conversations. Whereas, the

space that I spent a lot of time on the campus and with faculty, you have to be

careful how you navigate, who you can talk about because it affected me, my writing,

when I could write. And so it affected me on several different levels.

Sage experienced similar frustrations prior to finding community with Black graduate

student governance,

I know, for me, I was a preschool teacher at the time of Mike Brown and Tamir Rice,

and here I was teaching these kids all of these things and being around people at

work who didn't really understand why I would come to work really sad or

bothered. And there were very few black kids that went to the preschool, outside of

my daughter. And I remember, one night, this parent, we also go to church together. I asked, oh, how are you doing? Are you okay? And he was like, well, tonight's a really sad night because I'm going to have to finally sit my boys down and have that conversation and love and hug on them a little bit more. And this was after Trayvon Martin. And I just think, for me, just being in this weird space of... I have this privilege to learn and grow, and I was in grad school at the time, and where I was in grad school had its own issues and things that were starting to boil up. But, I think, feeling frustrated and not knowing where to go and know where to think.

Outside of graduate school, community in general with friends and family was a constant sense of support and offered space to talk through difficult issues for all sista scholars. However, several sista scholars described a lack of space to reflect and process issues related to intersectional experiences as Black mothers in student affairs. Most sista scholars were the only parent in their friend group, office, or had friends and colleagues who were parents but not Black. Zoe explained,

I have friends that have children that maybe some of them have children that are close to some of my kids ages, but no one seems to be in my space as other black women that are mothers with kids still in the house. I have some friends who have kids that are out of the house, where I have younger kids and a teenager. Or I have friends who are black but... You all were saying that. Or friends who are mothers but are not black, so like you said, cannot relate to some of those experiences. In some ways, I feel like my community... When I was listening to this and trying to think of how to describe it, what came to mind for me was choppy. I've got bits of community here and there, and pieces of it. But like you said, when that all collides,

then you need someone who truly understands how all of those experiences

connect. I feel like I'm very lacking in that.

Despite the lack of community with other Black moms, Maya felt supported in her

parenting by her friends. She described the value of community and still sought out

opportunities to connect with other Black mothers in higher education.

The comment about friends not having children also resonates with me, because

when it comes to my closer friends who don't live in my state, none of them have

children either. So, it's hard sometimes. I think about the people that I'm really close

to that it's hard to have those conversations and relationships talking about

parenting because they just really... of course, they love my child, they love me, but

they really can't actually relate, because they haven't had that experience, or that

might not be an experience they necessarily want to have for themselves. I think

that that's why I was really excited about this particular project, because it was nice

to be able to connect with other women of color. Especially women of color who are

also working at higher ed, because that's really not something that, in my own

personal life, I've been able to do as much as I would like to. But I think that I need

to work on being more intentional about that because I think that's really important.

Especially, being in higher ed, to be able to connect with others with shared

backgrounds. I also would say with the friends that I have, even though they don't

have children, I also feel very supported in my choices. Being able to talk to them

about some of the things I'm thinking about, and some of the things that I'm worried

about, how they might affect my daughter, how I'm raising her, or different news

stories and things that we might see out in the world and discussing it. I definitely feel supported in my parenting choices in those aspects.

Impact of Consciousness on Parenting

Within the stories of all sista scholars, there was a shared experience of motherhood prompting an awakening to a new perspective and enhanced critical consciousness that was developed through continued exploration academically and in community with others. As a result, this new perspective impacted our approaches to parenting.

Bucking Tradition: Incorporating New Approaches to Parenting

There was a lot of discussion about parenting approaches and decisions that differed significantly from the ones utilized by our parents. Some sista scholars were affirmed and supported in their parenting decisions and others experienced pushback. Maya shared,

> I would say that my mother, who I'm close to, has been supportive of my choices. Which for me, I find really interesting, because I feel like the way that I grew up and the way that I'm parenting my daughter is very different than how she parented me. She's definitely in a different space in her life right now. She's not as judgmental. She's very supportive of the things that I've decided for my daughter and we've had some really good conversation about that and really just understanding that it's a different environment, the different time period as far as how I was raised, and when I was raised, versus how I'm raising my daughter now. So, I've been really lucky in that.

Gianna's story outlined intentional parenting approaches decided on with her partner based on their different upbringings. She shared,

Me and my husband came from different parenting styles, we laugh about that

frequently because it clashes, but in a positive way. Because it's interesting to see

his journey to consciousness and being more aware of certain things that I'll talk to

him about with our daughter. His mother, she was a young mom, teenaged mom, she

was just trying to survive. She didn't have time to think about... For lack of better

words, and she has said this, how he feels or how he's perceived in the world. She

just tried to make sure she raised a wonderful, young man who went to college. That

was her goal, and she's achieved that. My mother on the other hand, who had us a

lot older in life, and she had these conversations with us about race and how that

can show up in school. Similar to JMac, she wanted to put us in the best schools, but

she couldn't find that unicorn. So, then she was like, "How can I supplement the

education you're getting during the day with what I want you to know?" We had

conversations about Martin Luther King versus Malcolm X, and how what you're

learning in school isn't necessarily the truth, and it's okay. She encouraged us to

speak up about our thoughts and how we feel on topics in the news and things like

that. My husband, he didn't grow up in an environment like that, so now we're

coming together with those backgrounds, and he wants to do that for our daughter,

and encourage those conversations. My mother-in-law sometimes feels like that is

inappropriate, because she comes from an era where children should be seen and

not heard. Children don't necessarily have those feelings, it's just, ""Oh, they're being

dramatic."" It's almost like a reeducation for my mother-in-law as well.

Sage and her husband initially approached parenting in a similar manner as their parents

but ultimately changed their approach to meet the specific needs of their daughter.

My husband and I, our daughter was, about two years ago, diagnosed with anxiety and OCD and so just really trying to navigate how try to advocate for her needs. Not only being aware of her blackness, being aware that she, also, we've had to deal with issues of skin color. So colorism, dealing with hurt me, and being able to just sit and listen to what she needs so that we can be her voice, has really been emotionally, physically, mentally draining, and also, then, trying to deal with my family and how they have navigated the world as black people, which hasn't always been very... they've done what they could, right? With what they had, given their circumstances, and us saying, well, actually we don't really agree that that's the best approach, and it's actually not helpful to her. Us deciding early on. At first, everybody spanks and so we're going to spank, because that's the black people way. And then going, actually, we don't think that's the black people way or the way that we want to parents and we're seeing that it's harmful to our child, it's harmful to our relationship with her and we don't agree with that. And we're actually going to ask her, "Hey, it seems you're mad or you're sad about something. Let's talk about why that makes you sad, and telling her it's okay to have those feelings." It's just what we do with them and my family are like she has too much autonomy and you're letting her say, just talk too much. I'd much rather her talk than not at all. And now that we know that a lot of things were overwhelming to her and stressing her out and making it really hard for her to focus and to really enjoy school and all of these other things that she does.

In talking about these new approaches to parenting, there was a lot of discussion and emphasis on listening to our children and allowing their voices to be heard and

included when making decisions. This approach went against the a lot of the messages shared from family and ideals of Black child-rearing practices but was seen as a necessity for sista scholars. Gianna shared an example of this shift to including her daughter in decisions about dance.

> Just making sure you're paying attention to what your child needs and not being ashamed and afraid to speak up for that. I've been trying to be more aware of that. So my daughter has been doing dance for four years now and, typically, it's at a predominantly white studio and it wasn't until last year where she asked me, she said, mommy, where are all the brown dancers? Where are all the dancers that look like me? And, at first, I felt just ashamed because I'm thinking I'm doing what's best for her. I'm trying to make a well-rounded child and whatnot. And once I got over my ego, because that's what that was. I was like, okay, well what do you want? Actually listening to what your child needs because she's telling me what she wants. I said, well let me find a studio in my area that is reflective of what you look like so that you could feel more comfortable. She was like, I also don't want to take ballet anymore. I want to do hip hop. Okay, that's great, because I was taught that ballet is cultural and everything like that. Why am I taking her away from what makes her feel comfortable, instead of really embracing where our culture is? That's a part of who we are, that's in our history, we created that. And so I have to check my ego constantly and making sure I'm truly pausing to listen to what she's saying that she needs and what she wants. So I think that's part of how my development is growing.

Creating the Unicorn

A large theme of conversation across both sista circles was this idea of creating what JMac coined as a "unicorn" for our children. The unicorn is this ideal space and environment where our children have the freedom to define and understand themselves for themselves, without input from oppressive external factors. Sista scholars described searching for these unicorn environments but most often resorted to trying to create this unicorn though very well thought out and intentional selections of schools, extracurricular activities, and community. Alice was prompted to create this space following the election of Trump.

> As a mother, I was on maternity leave the night Trump got elected, and so I could distinctly remember just praying. My child cannot grow up in Trump's America. My child cannot grow up in Trump's America. I was nursing and I was like, this cannot be the world that my child grows up to be. And so that was the turning point, was I have to make sure that to protect my son at all costs, make sure that he is seen as himself before the world tells him who he is. Put him in schools and in environments where he can be nurtured as a black child, but then also be able to get that black excellence that was instilled in me, the whole, you have to work twice as hard to be as good as some people. So putting him and engaging him in those types of environments. And so yeah,those culminating experiences all contributed to how I mother my son and how my husband and I put him in affirming spaces to make sure he's around diverse, well-rounded environments that see him as a child and, like I said, instill in him and give him a foundation before the world tries to tell him who he is.

For JMac, ultimately not finding a unicorn led her to create one through homeschooling.

So the reason that I have made the choices I have, and I think some of you all have hinted on this, is because I'm very conscious about creating a space for him where he is allowed to have freedom. So the one thing that I've noticed, being a student affairs professional, is that the people who get to make these demands and the people who get to have a voice at the table have a freedom that, I think, gets stripped from our children somewhere along the way. And so what I have been doing, the whole reason I create this sort of box, I mean it really is a box that I let my son bounce around in, right? And it's these boundaries that I place around him so that the world is not coming in at him. But the reason I do that, is so that he can learn to develop his identity with freedom, right. And so, because I'm very cognizant of what it means to be a black male American, I've also been very conscious about making sure that he is a global citizen, right? The world. We'll have those conversations, but we'll have them in time, because I'm going to give you the freedom to just be for a little while. And then, when I introduce you back to this world, we're going to introduce you to, right now, I'm only going to introduce you to America, but this world is going to be yours.

Maya shared her attempt to balance creating the unicorn while also allowing her child to just be.

Maya: And I find myself doing that as my daughter's getting older and she's starting to choose her friends, and noticing that the friends that she's chosen, that have been the people that she's very close to, have been people who aren't black. And I think that I have thoughts about that and I didn't know whether or not to address it with

her or find out what that's about. Because I've noticed that well, she goes to a very diverse school and so there's a variety of people with different backgrounds in this school. And, of course, from her perspective, she just gravitates towards who she likes and who she has common interests with. And, in her mind, she's not necessarily looking at whether or not they look exactly like her or if they had the same background as her. But, of course, I'm having thoughts like, well do you not like who you are and what does that mean, that your friends don't necessarily look like you? And then I might go to her class and say, Oh, well there's Latavia. Don't you like Latavia? Have you guys hung out before? And just trying to navigate that, where I'm not trying to choose her friends for her, but just also making sure that she feels good about herself and who she is and who she has in her circle, and she has people who are supportive of who she is and affirming to that. But really trying to not be too controlling of it, but also just being aware of what that looks like and what that experience might be for her.

Sage: I really agree with everything you just said. Yeah. I just want to reaffirm that, that I agree with everything you just said, having had to go through that transitioning in our move to finding a school for my daughter. Looking at how do I give her the best of both worlds, community, and people that look like her. We came from a very diverse school, but how do I find that for her. Being back home, in the big city, that we are in, and all of these conversations about schools and accreditation, and test scores, and access. Also, because we work in higher education. Even though my daughter's eight, I'm always thinking about, "What do I need to do? And who do I need to expose her to so that she's set up for success?" So

that if and when she can go to college, she can do so freely and have choice and options. But oftentimes that led me to be blindsided in terms of listening to what she wants and what she needs, because I think that I know what's best for her. So, I think, in the same way that I want to be heard and listened to and I'm learning to advocate for myself. Just from the talks and conversations, thinking back on what I've done in fear as a parent, but even as a black parent of, "I want to protect you in all these ways and put you around all these people, and what I think is best for you so that you don't have to worry about... You can come to school with beads in your hair, you can come with your hair in your 'fro and not worry about that. Yeah, that's great and fine, but if you're really unhappy and depressed, is that worth it? How can I do both without sacrificing your soul and who you are as a person?" Because I think about our college students, and the ones that we work with where they come and they're doing everything they parents want them to do even though it's not what they want to do, and how unhappy and depressed they are. That starts early, and I don't want that for my daughter.

Across the sista circles, there was a lot of emphasis on finding and creating a unicorn as it relates to schooling environments which can be heard across the stories previous shared. The dialogue below prompted an in-depth discussion regarding schooling options and decisions that was constantly referred to in both sista circles and in sista scholar reflections.

Nia: And so I grew up, obviously, going to the worst schools, but I went to college, got a scholarship to go to college, and I did all the things going to the worst school. And I have to constantly remind myself that I get that times have changed, but that

was the environment that I was in. So it taught me resiliency, it taught me grit, it taught me perseverance, and how to overcome adversity. And I think those things have become lost a little bit, as I work with college students and even college students who maybe come from similar backgrounds as myself. And so I have intentionally made sure that my child can go to, not the worst school, but I want him to go to the diverse school. I want him to go to the schools where people actually look like him because it truly makes a difference when you are in an environment that can relate to you. He was in a school for the most part of his life where there is nobody that looked like him. And I didn't want him to lose his identity because we live in a community, we live in a city where he's just always going to be the minority. So we don't live in a city where he'll be able to see many people like him. So, at least, can he see that in the educational system? And so I've made the conscious choice to make sure that he's in an environment where people can look like him, from the teachers, from the students, to the janitorial staff, because it's all about being able to relate. My child also has a disability. So not only do I need you to understand how to work with my child and his identity, I need you to be able to work with my child and his disability. And that's very key for his academic success. Because I'm going to do my part and I think I need others to do their part.

Zoe: Definitely, one area that has been a big point of struggle is we live in a very suburban, very white area in a city that is, again, like what Nia was just saying. We're in a city where we will always be the minority, no matter what. No matter what part of the city that we're in, overall. But because my children do go to schools where they are the few black children in there, just preparing them for what that

looks like. Keeping, maintaining their identities, getting interaction with other black children that look like them, as well. So facing that and, with my kids and being such a wide age range, from 16 to seven, in all different levels of development. We're having those conversations in very different ways in different levels.

JMac: One of the things that stuck with me was what Nia shared about her school choices for her child and picking a school, basically, where he was going to have representation there. I think what I was doing when I was selecting a school, I was looking for the best school. Because I want my child to have the best access to academics, but also the best school where he had the most exposure. And I'm now rethinking, based on our conversation, that maybe I was looking for a unicorn. When in fact, I should have been just looking for community because the education was always going to come. It seems to me like the very nature of the women that we are and the spaces that we sit in, I was going to make sure he was going to be educated. That was just not... that was going to be a no. That was the only option. I'm wondering how much value, because when Nia shared that she came from a particular sort of school district, I realized I did too. And I know lots of people who've been successful coming from those sorts of school districts. So, why on earth... I was thinking about Malcolm X and he said... Somebody posted something like, "You never let your enemy educate your child." Why on earth did I think that my child needed this thing? When in fact, the very thing... that the resiliency and all the characteristics that Nia brought up, those came from a community that required that from us when there was not those ample resources. So, I've just been thinking a little bit more about... I probably got to homeschool because I didn't like all the

options I was selecting for my child. When really, I was looking at the wrong options

to begin with. Does that make sense? I skipped over the school with the B or the C

minus when in fact, what they were going to do, was affirm my child in a way that

was going to do more than education. Because I was going to make sure he could

read, write, and do math. I have lots of thoughts about that, I'm still thinking about

that.

Nia: It's just, I've just seen, some kids get done wrong, just flat out. And I know

that it's wrong because I, one, work in education. I also am in a doctoral program

with other K-12 of educators. And so I'm seeing things from three different lenses.

One is a parent, one is a higher ed. educator, and then one from K-12 educators. And

I'm just like, this is just flat out wrong. Education is so critical and working in

education. I think we all can agree that higher education is not for everybody, but

man, the difference that it makes. And I just see so many parents who just don't have

the knowledge, don't have the resources, they're working parents, and their

children are getting farther and farther. Left behind at such an early age. And it's so

unfortunate and I feel sometimes so helpless because I just want to intervene. I just

want to come in and just stop it and just say, hey, do you realize what is happening

to your child in this moment? So sometimes, we have to stand bold because people

are unaware. There are so many older educators, they are just simply disconnected

from 2019. They have old teaching habits and practices that have worked for them.

So if it ain't broke, don't fix it. But, we need to be more aware of the evolving times

and the dynamics. Even us in higher ed, we have to constantly evolve and change

and we have to have the same expectation for K through 12, and that's what some of

my classmates who are in administrators have said about their teachers. They are so completely removed and unaware of the fact that, oh, I don't really understand people who are different than me, period. Whether it's gender or racial identity. And so I think we have to, it's very uncomfortable. But I'm at the point where I don't care because we have to sit as minorities. We continue, we have to sit in uncomfortable spaces and so this is going to be uncomfortable for the both of us, but I'm going to have to make sure that you're aware and hold you accountable. Especially at a public school where my tax dollars are paying for my child's education or at a private school where I'm paying college tuition already. So I think it's accountability, transparency and, sometimes, they just don't even know. And so I'm always the one that, I'm going to speak up because it's just down right not, it's just not right.

Advocacy: On Behalf of Kids, Self, and Community

As the conversation continued, this notion of advocacy and having to be advocates for our children especially within systems not created for our children continued.

Maya: Yeah. And that's, that resonates with me a lot, too, because I tend to naturally not be a very confrontational person and I tend to be more passive when it comes to uncomfortable conversations. But the first time that I really felt myself having to speak up for my child was when she was in preschool and I was at a state fair, and I happened to see what her preschool teachers. And this is at the time when we were doing the election and she had a Trump sticker, which is okay, that's fine. But right next to it was the Confederate flag sticker because, at that same booth, they were passing out both Confederate flag stickers and Trump. And before, we got the realization of what an actual Trump presidency looks like, but I made eye contact

with her. Like, really? And then, the next day, I talked to the director of the preschool and I was like, I'm not comfortable with my child being in her class, seeing that these are her viewpoints and this is what she is comfortable wearing out in public. I'm not okay with this. And so having that conversation with the director and then having her removed from that class and the conversation just had to be had. And of course, at the time, the director felt like I was overreacting. Even my husband was uncomfortable with me having the conversation like, well I don't know if we should make a big ruckus about it. Really, she's been fine so far and I don't care. This is completely unacceptable to me.

Antoinette Hardee: Sometimes you just don't, you want to believe the good in most people and you maybe don't want to believe that that's it. And you also don't want to be the one who cried wolf. I don't know. It was just a little bit of a struggle being a mom in that way because, if it were me, I advocate for myself at any sign of discrimination, but not wanting to be the mom. Sometimes, in the beginning, I don't think that's true anymore, but in the beginning, it changed a little bit for me. And then, with everything that was going on at the time, the height of the Black Lives Matter Movement. I did find myself in a place where I feel like I'm just always going to be the one who's like, it's about blackness and I'm feeling a way about that. I think also, at that same time, there was some stuff going at work, in terms of I was always doing diversity ed. I didn't have a lot of support publicly from my institution when there was a whole bunch of things going on, in terms of white supremacy and they're looking up our personal addresses an we were really far away from home. And so, just at that time, I think I was just confused and feeling shut out a little bit.

And so being a new mom and going through all of those things, being afraid to call

racism for what it was, I think because I was out of my element and I didn't feel like I

had the support that I needed. All of that, all in the same time span, was really

challenging as a parent. Like I said, I think if it had just been me, I think there

would've been a completely different story, but trying to navigate parenthood, not

even just for me, but for my husband, as well. Just trying to sit into a place that we

didn't really feel like we belonged. And of course, I'm back home now. So none of

that really matters. But I don't know, I think that that was a really huge challenge for

me. Not understanding my role as a parent and then advocating for that. So being

back home, we moved somewhere, like I heard others say, where our kids can be in

schools, where they see themselves. But the school is, actually, really highly rated.

But even so, just because there's representation, it doesn't necessarily mean it's

inclusive at all you know. And so, having gone through that experience early, I call

everybody on everything because I have seen, whether it be my student, my kid, or

somebody else's child being treated differently because they're black. There may be

other ethnic minorities represented in the school, but black kids do get treated

differently a lot of times. And so those early experiences really did help me to find

my voice as a parent and where my place was and ensuring that they have the best

academic experience that they can possibly have and that they're not shortchanged

because of somebody's expectation.

Nia: So on the first day of class, my child teachers received a info card about my

child, explaining to them, one, my child's disability and how that has an impact on

his learning environment. And, as a teacher, how you can modify, adjust and adapt

to ensure the success in your classroom with my child. And I think that immediately sends a note to the teacher that this mom is, she's going to be involved, she's going to be engaged, and I'm going to have to, if I wasn't doing my job or thought I wasn't going to be able to do my job, then I'm going to have to do my job because she is going to be on it. And so I've requested, we do six weeks here, not nine weeks, which is different from what I'm used to in my previous state. And so I have mid-point checks. I don't want the report card to be a surprise. I want to know what the report card should look out, should shape out to be, before the report card. I want to know about progress. And so I have meetings, I have a meeting tomorrow, so I request three-week meetings with his teachers. He has two, which is interesting for a first grader, but he has two. And I want to know, what is it that I need to be doing at home? What's going on in the classroom? And I have his therapist also, who are meeting with administrators and educators and I don't mind calling people out. I told the principal, I think you need to do a better job at communication. I don't know who you are and you haven't sent any communication home to the school on your behalf. And so, it just makes a difference.

So many stories were shared of sista scholars advocating for their children and other children within schools, especially around cultural appropriation and insensitivity surrounding holidays such as Thanksgiving. Despite this, there was a shared notion of not doing enough and need to do more.

For many sista scholars, being an advocate for ours and other children helped us to be better advocates for ourselves.

JMac: So I was going to share a little bit about how it affected me, personally. And I think the way, for me, I think it affected me in two major ways, and I have not been putting these pieces together, as I told you, until you put this on my radar. But the first way, I think, that it affects me is that we all sit in spaces where we're forced to advocate for students regularly. And we are forced to advocate for our children. And so I think the longer I stay in student affairs, the more I advocate for myself. And so, now, I am frequently coming to the table with what I need to operate in this space, what I want as I navigate new positions. And I think I learned that from people making those same demands of me in these spaces. Right? And I remember, when I first entered into higher ed, I was like, well, I didn't know you could ask that and I didn't know that you were entitled to that. And quickly decided, well, if I'm going to spend my whole day around someone else's wellness and wellbeing and mental health, then why am I not making the same demands for myself? And so I'm now very conscious of that and make those demands for myself.

Alice: I'm very similar to what others have shared, in the fact that I'm very non-confrontational. I'm passive. I feel the need to speak when I feel necessary to say something, but being a parent has made me self-aware of things because my son is three years old. So he can't voice his opinions and advocate for himself. So me and my husband, we have to do that for him, but it's also helped me advocate for myself and identify the things that I need. In my current work situation, I'm glad that have a supervisor who, he's a white male but he's the parent that has to do the pickups and the drop-offs, and if his child gets sick, he's the one that has to go because of the proximity of our school to his children's school. And so I'm in a work environment

where I say, hey, I have to go pick up my son because he's sick or I have a PTO meeting or I have to go meet with this teacher. And him being okay with that. And then, another piece of that is I want him to learn how to advocate for himself. So I feel like I'm in a position to have to role model what that looks like and how to do it in a way where you can advocate for yourself, build relationships with people, and get what you need in return. That has come to the forefront, recently, because my son has been recently diagnosed with Sensory Processing Disorder. And so, while we are currently figuring, wow, what all this means and identify what he needs at home and at school. We're in a conversation with his school and his teachers to say, Hey, he may need a little bit more time to transition from one activity to the next and what that looks like. And how that affects the entire classroom. So yeah. So advocating for him and advocating for myself and then, role modeling what advocating looks like is really important.

Sage: So, I think about my students when I was in grad school who were protesting for immunity for Mike Brown and protesting, and just seeing their strength and what they're going through saying, hey, this is what I need and it's okay to ask for that. Really helped me also see, hey, I have needs, too, and it's okay for me to ask for them, as well, to be met, and to set expectations for people and expect for people to treat me a certain way or to want to be listened to and heard and demand that. I think just from my background and growing up, I'm very sassy and I will tell you how I feel now. But growing up, I wasn't really like that just from various life experiences. And so all of these different moments of my development, of being comfortable advocating for myself and learning how to advocate for my daughter

and what she needs and that it's okay for me to advocate for that, really just happened all within a five year, six year time span. And I really am very grateful for having community to help walk me through that. I think if I didn't have that, but it's been a very isolating experience for me, and I was grateful enough that I had a variety of people in my support group, which I'm fortunate that I did have that. So I was able to get different perspectives and bounce ideas off people and talk with different people. So that was really helpful for me.

Implications on Professional Practice

Just as advocating for our children influenced how we advocate for ourselves it also impacted how we advocate for our students, particularly black students and all students of color. Antoinette Hardee shared, "I have always been apart of the work, working in equity, diversity, and inclusion offices but once I became a parent it became about my kid and every kid that looks like my kid". For JMac, one of the biggest benefits of working in student affairs was the space to talk about diversity and equity and what those things mean. The biggest complaint from all sista scholars was struggling with administrators who leave Black women to deal with the "race" or minority" issue. As Nia proclaimed, "We shouldn't be the only ones doing the work, this is the work of all student affairs professionals these aren't just my students, they are all of ours". For sista scholars, being supportive and present for students, especially students of color was a priority. As a result, we often become othermothers to students of color. For Nia, as an orientation professional she often has Black parents come up to her and ask that she look out for their children. All sista scholars talked about additional job responsibilities both assigned and self-selected on behalf of students of color.

Nia: So, I don't know, none of it is in my job description. I do feel obligated to do

something, so it's also out of obligation. I would say for me it's a little bit of both.

None of it is in my job description, technically. I have been... I don't know, I guess it's

my own fault for being vocal about things in different settings. Where you're vocal,

you feel passionate about this, "Well, we have this coalition, let's invite Nia to be a

part of it." So, I don't know if it's because I've expressed concern in certain areas

that I've been invited to be a part of... We have a Latino Success Initiatives coalition

that has nothing to do with my job whatsoever, but because I was vocal, "Hey, I

think, if we're going to be an emergent HSI, are we equipped to accommodate this

population of students?" Is what I said, And the next thing I know I get a invitation to

be a part of this coalition. And then yes, the institution is very low in minority

representation, both faculty and staff that it's almost like, "Somebody got to do it.

Since I was the one that opened my big mouth, then I might as well be a part of it."

So, a little bit of both, a little bit out of obligation as well as sometimes pressure from

the institution, because I know there is no one else that's in a space to do it.

JMac: One of the questions you asked initially was how this affects... How our

mothering and parenting affects what we do. I think to Nia's point, it's the curse of

not being able to unsee something, and then the need to jump in and take care of it

for somebody else's child. I think that's just the thing that makes us super women,

honestly. We see something happen, we're made aware of a situation and then it's,

"How do we address this in policies and procedures so that it doesn't happen again?

And that if we're not at the table, that it doesn't become worse for another student."

I think that shows up in how we advocate in our own children's lives. It's the same

sort of transition that's happening across the board. So, some of it is built into my job duty, but I think some of it I do take on. Just like Nia said, a case will get me angry about how all the people I had to talk to about something. Then I'm like, "We're changing the policy and practice on this." And then I got myself looped up into something that's making me angrier. But I think that's because that's what black women do. We shoulder... But I am very conscious, I'm becoming more conscious, especially since this conversation started tonight about what my advocacy needs to look like going forward.

Antoinette Hardee: I agree a lot with everything that's been said so far. I've been at institutions, mostly at PWI where I, like Nia too, just said something and ended up on another committee or whatever. Now I'm at a community college, and I think I might have said last time that it is my first time working at a community college. So, the representation is definitely there. It's a very diverse institution, both on a faculty and staff side, and as administrators there, most of us are people of color. However, within our district, and I think that across the country... With community colleges a lot of time, we tend to hire folks who are familiar with community college systems, and in our particular case, hiring folks who are from our district. So, we just promote up. So that we don't promote a lot of high impact practices and professional development. It's just, "We do what we've always done kind of thing." That has been particularly challenging because as an administrator who has come from different institutions and have a variety of experience, I get put on every single committee just to have outside perspective, which is really crazy. Again, it's really baffling sometimes... that has been the biggest struggle for me is that I thought it

would be different working at a community college with so many people of color, but so many of them just are not very conscious about social issues. I feel like I'm always the person advocating for marginalized students. Even like, "Does this even occur to any of you that this is harmful?" The institution began as a pretty much white institution but has since become... It went from predominantly black to predominantly Hispanic, and nothing really changed to accommodate those folks. I don't even think that it occurred to anyone that a lot of our practices were very, very harmful to these communities. So, I end up on every committee. But being on the committee is, just like you said, a really, really tough battle because you find yourself saying the same things over and over again to a group of people who these things have never occurred to. So, it's you. It's just you. That's very tiring and you feel burnt out. I literally do have to rely on my colleagues from other institutions, or even things like this, to just be able to say these things out loud. Like, "How am I the only one in a room full of brown people who worry about brown kids?" Like, "I don't understand it.

For sista scholars, it was important to make sure we were not perpetuating this additional unpaid labor onto our students of color by overworking and always asking them to show up based on their identities. Nia shared, "I used to ask students who spoke Spanish and felt comfortable translating for some of our parents but then I stopped and realized I am asking for additional free labor that is not being asked of my white students".

Burnout: Additional Unpaid Labor

Within our conversations of additional unpaid labor, there was an acknowledgment of the burnout that comes along with it. For sista scholars, the way to manage these

additional responsibilities, process experiences, and combat burnout was community with other Black professionals within our respective institutions and broadly in the higher education field. Some sista scholars had professional communities and those who did not, continued to actively seek this community.

> **JMac**: When I hit the private institution, that organization and community did not exist so I really quickly reached out to the people I thought should have these answers, the cultural centers and things like that. Like, "When do you all get together and break bread?" Kind of thing. Just to find out that they didn't. So, building community was really, really hard. I'm a big proponent... To me, community's communication. You have to have it to breathe, to be successful, to get refreshed, all of those things. What I did was I end up just continually reaching out to people to see who wanted to connect. When I found that small group of individuals, we have lunch regularly. That's the campus community, that's where I get to vent about what's happening in the life of the world of campus.
>
> **Alice**: For myself, we have a black faculty and staff GroupMe. Occasionally, someone will send out messages like "Hey I've had a trying time can somebody meet me for lunch?" Or we'll do... we have a holiday Happy Hour coming up this week. We'll plan occasional gatherings to get together, or we'll see if... There's this meeting, the coalition meeting that's coming up, make sure we can all get together and sit together, that kind of thing. Personally, on a day to day basis, I do have a few people... one specifically, two black women and a black male who I can call on and just say, "Hey. This is happening. Can I run this by you?" If I'm in a meeting and we hear something that's off, I can give a look across the room and they are thinking the

same thing that I'm thinking kind of relationship with people. It's about those

relationships, especially for me because I've only been at my institution just a little

over a year. So, I think because of being a director in Student Affairs, it gives me a

natural connection to some of the other African American directors in the division.

Gianna: I'm pretty close to my coworker who is another black woman. But our

supervisor is a white woman, and we found ourselves getting chastised for leaning

on each other for community. It's been looked at as us being clique-ish, as opposed

to supporting each other. She was in her role a year before me, and she was the only

woman of color in this entire department. It's not a given that two black women are

going to link up and be friends. But it just happened that she's been very supportive,

and I go to her before I go to my supervisor sometimes for suggestions on things. So,

she's definitely been my support system in that. Recently, other black faculty and

staff members have reached out to me. I've been there a year in my role, and they've

invited me to other social gatherings just to let it be known, "You're not alone. We

want to support you." And I definitely appreciate that. But as a general community

at my university, my coworker actually has started a networking group for young

professionals called "Black Excellence." We meet up once a month for Happy Hours

or dinners every third Tuesday of the month, just so people can feel at this PWI that

they have a community across campus.

Several sista scholars shared that this professional community which was so vital to

professional success overall was seen as negative from white supervisors and

colleagues. There were also conflicting messages shared from white supervisors and

upper-level administrators who pushed minoritized student issues onto sista scholars and

also criticised involvement in these activities.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

This study explored the consciousness development process of Black mothers

engaged in student affairs work and the implications of this increased consciousness on

their parenting and student affairs practice. Eight Black mothers from various institution

types, functional areas, and locations across the US participated in this study through one

individual interview and two sista circles. This research utilized sista circle methodolgy

grounded in Endarkened Feminist Epistemology to center sista scholars voices and create

space for support, empowerment, and self-definition. After analysis, I concluded that Black

mother's consciousness development was a continual process that while difficult to

pinpoint initiation, took on a new meaning when becoming a mother. Additionally, I

concluded that an increased critical consciousness led to enhanced advocacy on behalf of

self, one's children, and community and new approaches to parenting and professional

practice.

Motherhood as a Paradigm Shift

The purpose of this study was to explore the consciousness development process of

Black mothers engaged in student affairs work and how this consciousness impacts their

parenting and professional practice. Inherent within my approach to this study was the

underlying assumption that consciousness directly impacts parenting methods and

approaches to student affairs practice. The knowledge created within and gained from the

sista circles suggests a different approach.

Across the data, embedded in the stories of sista scholars was an overarching theme of motherhood as a phenomenon creating a perspective shift resulting in a new worldview. This concept of motherhood differed from parenting and focused more on the mother's experience and perspective of not just parenting but also the world around them.

Upon deeper analysis, I recognized this new perspective was directly related to the concept of motherwork (Collins, 2007) making it a useful as an analytical tool and framework to situate my findings into the broader literature on Black mothering and motherhood (Cooper, 2007). Motherwork shifts thinking and theorizing of motherhood to center mothers of color, extends the notion of mothering to include non-biological mothers, and provides a lens to view motherhood as a social construct informed by one's race, class and gender (Collins, 2007; Cooper, 2007; hooks, 2015). The core themes of motherwork include advocating for the physical survival, empowerment, and self-identification for minoritized communities. For Black mothers, ensuring the physical survival and empowerment of one's children and the Black community is a central maternal responsibility and a defining component of motherwork. Motherwork is an act of both cultural resistance and empowerment. The extension beyond one's biological children to focus on community survival illustrates how mothering for Black mothers is both personal and political work (Collins, 2007; Cooper, 2007).

Findings from this study support the frame of motherwork as sista scholars described experience advocating for the physical survival, empowerment, the opportunity for self-definition independent from oppressive influences and systems for our children and minoritized children broadly (Collins, 2007; Cooper, 2007). For sista scholars, motherwork is an all-encompassing feeling and state of being initiated pre-birth when a

child was still in the womb, while parenting is motherhood put into practice through the actions and decisions towards, and on behalf of, one's child. The impact of motherwork was not a part of my original investigation but over the course of the sista circles its impactfulness was clear. From the sista circles, I learned motherwork changes one's overall perspective and that changed perspective impacts parenting decisions, development of an enhanced critical consciousness, and professional practice.

Findings from the study also suggest the influence is not purely one directional. Within this new perspective, initiated by motherwork, parenting, critical consciousness and professional practice influence one another as depicted in Figure 1. Parenting is influenced by critical consciousness and professional practice; professional practice is influenced by parenting and critical consciousness; and critical consciousness is influenced by parenting and professional practice. For example, JMac described how her professional practice influenced and informed her consciousness development through campus discussions and programs on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Through JMac's professional practice doing social justice work with K-12 students, she gained an awareness of systems, strategies, and tools she utilized when making parenting decisions regarding schooling. As such, JMac's enhanced critical consciousness and awareness of systemic inequalities influenced her parenting decision to remove her son from public school in order to homeschool.
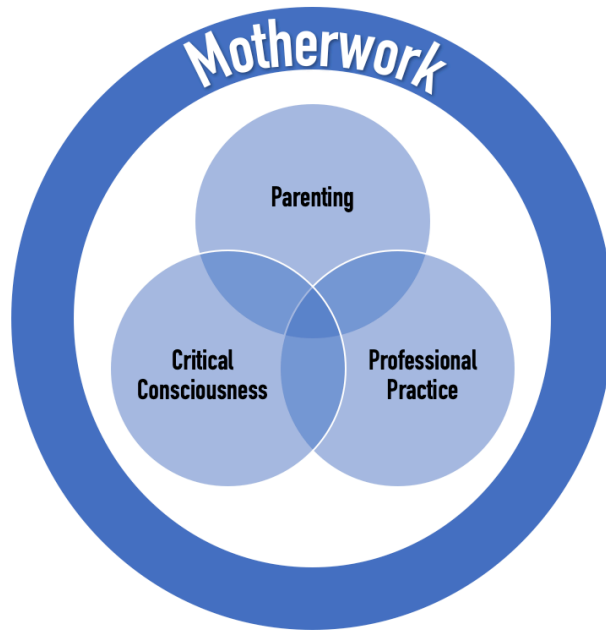
Figure 3: Relationship among motherwork, parenting, consciousness and professional practice.

Motherwork Through Advocacy

One of the major implications of motherwok that arose during the sista circles was on the advocacy of sista scholars which included self-advocacy and advocacy on behalf of one's children and respective community (Collins, 2007; Cooper, 2007). Findings from this study show that this new perspective of motherwork pushed sista scholars to be better and more vocal advocates. By having young children who could not advocate for themselves, sista scholars had to become the voice for our children to ensure their needs were met. For sista scholars who were more reserved and soft spoken, being an advocate for their child forced them to be better self-advocates, particularly in professional settings. As a result, these sista scholars were more vocal about their needs and requirements in the workplace which resulted in flexible schedules, time-off for family obligations, and remote opportunities.

The advocacy described by sista scholars also extended beyond one's self and children to also include the community, specifically Black children and other minoritized

children. Several sista scholars recounted times of addressing school administrators about issues of equity for minoritized students, representation in curriculum, staff, and school decor, and cultural appropriation, often directly related to a disregard for Indigenous communities surrounding thanksgiving celebrations. These findings of advocacy extending outward to the community are reflective of the notion of motherwork, as sista scholars understood that survival and empowerment for their children required group survival and empowerment (Collins, 2007).

Additionally, motherwork involves the fight for control of children's worldview through education and to maintain children's positive identity, sense of self, and community in a culture that denigrates non-white people and culture (Collins, 2007; Cooper, 2007). This concept of motherwork is directly reflective of the struggles and experiences of sista scholars in this study as we grappled with schooling decisions and creating space and supportive environments to allow for self-definition and celebration of one's culture. The findings from this study support the perspective that motherwork is intrinsically tied to Black motherhood as sista scholars worked to equip children with skills to navigate and survive oppressive systems while simultaneously challenging these systems for the benefit of all children (Collins, 2007; Cooper, 2007).

Motherwork to Combat Whiteness

A large part of the sista circle discussions focused on schooling decisions and the closely related concept of creating the unicorn described in Chapter 4 as an aspirational space and environment where our children have the freedom to define and understand themselves for themselves, without input from oppressive external factors. The underlying thread of these two themes of conversations was a sometimes explicit but often implied

strategy to avoid systemic inequality rooted in white supremacy. Even without whiteness and white supremacy as points of discussion, it was constantly present as sista scholars shared fears for our children, children of color broadly, and the constant fight to allow their children the ability to thrive and know themselves outside of the white gaze (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

For sista scholars, the white gaze was constant as most worked and lived in predominantly white areas. Professionally, sista scholars felt a heightened sense of surveillance particularly when in community with other Black staff and students, with criticism and underhanded comments from supervisors. In the wake white supremacist attacks on the Black community, many sista scholars found it overwhelmingly difficult to navigate these white spaces, often feeling conflicted about sharing personal feelings and the lack of spaces to process and share if wanted.

While the intersectional nature of sista scholars experiences was discussed, race was often centered in discussion because of the pervasiveness of race and racism in a US context (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The majority of sista scholars became parents during the Movement for Black Lives with constant media coverage of violence against Black bodies, protests, and increased messages of Black pride and celebration. Historically, in times of heightened sense of racial climate and race related social change, parenting approaches and socialization focused on messages of racial pride and discrimination (Brown & Lesane-Brown, 2006; Thomas & Blackmon, 2015; Threlfall, 2018). For sista scholars, there was a spotlight on pride and celebration but there was less of a focus on communication with our children about racism and other oppressions and more of a focus on creating space for our children to have the freedom of self-definition, be affirmed, and

supported for who they are. This could be due to the fact that the majority of sista scholars had relatively young children and were not yet having those explicit discussions of race and oppression.

The fears expressed by sista scholars and strategies utilized to actively combat racism illuminates self-identification, the core theme of motherwork in action (Collins, 2007). The stories shared by sista scholars highlights the ways Black mothers socialize their children to survive and thrive in systems designed to oppress them while simultaneously ensuring this survival does not come at the expense of self-esteem, personal identity, and sense of cultural group belonging (Collins, 2007; Cooper, 2007).

Consciousness Development

For this study, Neville & Cross' (2016) Emerging Racial Awakening Model was utilized to conceptualize the transformation of the consciousness process and the perceived outcomes of this process. This developmental process includes awakening, an event or experience triggering personal exploration of one's cultural heritage prompting an increased critical awareness and changes resulting from continued exploration and this new critical insight. For sista scholars, it was difficult to recount a moment of awakening related to class, racial, and gender identity as being Black women in a US context, messages were constant from family, society, media, and lived experiences. All sista scholars felt pretty aware of societal inequities and possessed a critical consciousness. Despite an already established critical awareness, sista scholars were able to identify moments of awakening as mothers which prompted a more in-depth analysis of systemic pitfalls to avoid for our children.

Most of these instances of awakening came in the wake of violence against Black children, such as Trayvon Martin and Tamir Rice. Sista scholars referenced the constant media coverage of this violence and the subsequent lack of justice for the victim's families as moments awakening a sense of fear and anxiety that always existed for self and community but was deepened by motherhood. Racial climate and race-related social change have long influenced Black parent's approach to parenting and socialization (Brown & Brown-Lesane, 2006; Thomas & Blackmon, 2015; Threlfall, 2018). The manifestation of these parenting and socialization approaches has often been gendered, with much of the focus on the safety of Black boys and men, while Black girls are often just as at-risk (Brown et al., 2017; Thomas & King, 2007; Thomas & Speight, 1999). For sista scholars with both Black boys and girls, there was a heightened sense of fear and concern for our sons that differed from our daughters; a fear that our sons could be targets of police brutality, violence, and death while our daughters could be victims of sexual assault and domestic violence. The media and general contemporary focus on Black men and boys created a false sense of "safety" for Black women and girls (Brown et al, 2017; Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015; Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011). The false sense of safety was decimated with the murder of Sandra Bland causing sista scholars to fear for our daughters in the same ways we feared for our sons.

These fears, combined with the desire to find supportive and affirming environments, initiated the continued exploration of systemic structures (Neville & Cross, 2016). Many of the sista scholars shared stories of researching societal inequalities that could impact our children such as the school to prison pipeline. This exploration led to a more critical awareness of the intricacy of systemic oppression and strategizing to best

navigate these systems for our children and those from similar communities (Cooper, 2007). Community served as another space for continued exploration where sista scholars were able to talk through difficult issues, process, and be supported. Overall, findings from this study support Neville and Cross' (2016) Emerging Racial Awakening Model, extends the application beyond the scope of racial awakening, and supports the notion of consciousness development as an ongoing process.

Case Study: Nia

To further illustrate the use of motherwork (Collins, 2007) and the Emerging Racial Awakening Model (Neville & Cross, 2016) as the analytical tools and frameworks utilized to illuminate the findings from this study, I present the following case study of Nia. I utilize both of these frameworks because I believe they are complementary and when paired together provide a deeper understanding of how motherwork is informed by the development of one's consciousness. Nia was a major contributor during the sista circles and other sista scholars referenced points she brought up during discussions and in written reflections.

Nia describes herself as a single parent of a five-year-old son who has autism spectrum disorder and ADHD. Her professional background is in orientation, transition, and parent programs and she currently works at a private, emerging Hispanic serving institution (HSI) in the south. In terms of her consciousness awakening, Nia found it difficult to pinpoint specific moments of awakening. Growing up in poverty in the inner city, the reality of oppressive systems and practices was apparent to her at an early age. Because she witnessed injustice and systemic inequality first-hand, she was mindful of navigating oppressive systems and identified things she wanted to do differently as a

parent. Nia's early awakenings and awareness of systemic inequalities prompted her to learn more about systemic oppression in order to develop strategies to avoid pitfalls for her son. Her exploration continued though enrollment in a doctoral program where she was in community with, and learned from, faculty and students with K-12 and higher education experience. The outcome of Nia's consciousness development was increasing advocacy on behalf of herself, son, and minoritized students. Such advocacy is central to motherwork (Collins, 2007).

Motherwork is advocacy centering on three core themes: physical survival, power, and identity. Nia and many other sista scholars became mothers in the era of the Movement for Black Lives and increased media portrayals of violence against Black bodies. Fear for the physical survival of their children and the Black community was common and often prompted moments of re-awakening. This fear for physical survival often prompted sista scholars to focus on what was in their locus of control to change, and frequently centered on the other core aspects of power and identity. For Nia, issues of power and identity were very important to her and as such she made intentional decisions in her parenting approaches and professional practice to support and empower her son, students, and minoritized students broadly. Nia had an approach to selecting educational environments for her son that differed from the majority of sista scholars. She described her process as:

> I have intentionally made sure that my child can go to, not the worst school, but I want him to go to the diverse school. I want him to go to the schools where people actually look like him because it truly makes a difference when you are in an environment that can relate to you. He was in a school for the most part of his life where there is nobody that looked like him. And I didn't want him to lose his

identity because we live in a community, we live in a city where he's just always going to be the minority. So we don't live in a city where he'll be able to see many people like him. So, at least, can he see that in the educational system? And so I've made the conscious choice to make sure that he's in an environment where people can look like him, from the teachers, from the students, to the janitorial staff, because it's all about being able to relate. My child also has a disability. So not only do I need you to understand how to work with my child and his identity, I need you to be able to work with my child and his disability. And that's very key for his academic success. Because I'm going to do my part and I think I need others to do their part.

Nia recognized how an educational environment influences her son's worldview and worked to retain the power to ensure his identity and perspective was validated (Collins, 2007).

Nia described feeling helpless when seeing other children in her son's school getting further behind or ignored with their parents and guardians either not being aware or not having the resources to do anything about it. As such, Nia often addresses school administration about policies and procedures that may or may not have direct impact on her son but benefit the children being disadvantaged. Her motherwork through advocacy extends to her professional practice working for minoritized students.

For Nia, being present and supportive for minoritized student was a priority and obligation she took seriously. Because she was vocal about this priority, she was frequently invited to be a part of coalitions, initiatives, and committees regarding minoritized students which she always accepted to ensure there was physical representation and someone there

to advocate for these students. Her practice of working directly with students also shifted

based on her motherwork. Working at an emergent HSI, Nia's common practice was to ask

students if they would translate during orientation for parents who were more comfortable

speaking in Spanish. Nia changed this practice after realizing she was asking for additional

unpaid labor that often fell to her Latinx students that was not being asked of their white

counterparts. She advocated that these students be compensated for their additional labor.

I present Nia's case individually to better illustrate the continuous nature of

consciousness development and the impact this development has on her motherwork

practices for her son, community, and students at her institution. It also provides an

additional example of how parenting, professional practice, and consciousness

development influence one another under the new perspective of motherwork as depicted

in Figure 3. Nia's consciousness development was described through various moments of

awakening and re-awakening starting as early as childhood which led to an increased

critical consciousness through her continued exploration of personal research and formal

graduate education. Becoming a mother prompted moments of re-awakening which

deepened her critical consciousness and awareness, influencing her motherwork. Her

motherwork on behalf of her son and minoritized communities centered on issues of

physical survival, empowerment, and self-identification was repeatedly shown through her

approach to parenting and professional practice (Collins, 2007).

Power of Dialogue and Community

The findings of this study support sista circle methodology as a culturally relevant

mode of inquiry for centering the voices of Black women and creating space for

empowerment and support (Dorsey, 2001; Johnson, 2015; Neal-Barnett, et. al,

2011). Initially, sista circles was the methodology utilized but not explicitly a part of inquiry throughout this study as questions and discussion about the methodology were not included. This shifted as conversations arose about the lack of and need for community with other Black mothers. Whether the question was on processing one's consciousness development, deciding on parenting approaches, or managing professional burnout, the answer was consistently community. Despite this value of community, none of the sista scholars had a strong community of Black mothers to share with and process. All of the sista scholars indicated that they wanted to participate in this study because there are so few spaces that recognize the intersectional nature of Black motherhood while providing space to be in community with other Black mothers (Crenshaw, 1989).

Dialogue among Black women has historically been a space for challenge, resistance, and transformation (Dillard, 2006). This dialogue is a meaning-making process for Black women that creates personal understanding through communal support. As Sage described,

Even though it's only been a couple of sessions, it has been very refreshing just to talk, and unpack, and understand that connection is not just geographical. That you can be connected with people for a lot of different ways, and it's just always a reminder that you're never alone with what you're feeling, or what you're going through, or questions that you're asking as we're just trying to navigate life. Yeah. I just think that it's nice to know that questions that I've had, or thoughts, or wonders, or curiosities, they're not random. They are real and they're there.

As the researcher-participant, there is so much that I have learned and questioned from the time with my fellow sista scholars (Johnson, 2015). Before starting the data

collection process, I, along with my partner, had decided to transfer my daughter to an independent school following some philosophical differences and lack of cultural awareness at her current public school. I had created a list of schools throughout the metropolitan area based on reputation, recommendations, and research. Following the final sista circle, I had to re-evaluate my entire process and list. Nia's approach to finding a school by focusing less on the academics and more on the cultural and emotional support of her child stuck with me and other sista scholars as reflected in the sista circle conversations and written reflections. My list was not focused solely on academics, excluded most of the big name "prestigious" schools, and strongly took into consideration cultural relevance and representation , but who or what was missing from this list? After reflecting, I realized there were no Black or Afrocentric schools on the list despite my focus on cultural competence. So I made a change, solely based on my experiences in the sista circles.

The power of the sista circles was that it allowed nine strangers to share their experiences and be affirmed by others who have and are experiencing similar situations. There was space to process and make meaning of the experiences together and extend this process externally, outside of the circle. At the end of the final sista circle, several sista scholars described how the conversations from the circles prompted dialogue within our respective communities. The knowledge created within the circle does not just stop when the sista circle ends as indicated in JMac's reflection following the first sista circle,

> I indicated that I chose to homeschool because I wanted to create a space where my son could have the potential to develop his identity. However, something Nia

mentioned really resonated and stuck with me. She described how she intentionally chose a school that may not be the highest achieving in regard to academics and not the lowest, but had adequate representation. This statement made me reflect on my own choice to create an environment where my son could reach his fullest potential academically and consciously, but I am now thinking if I may have disregarded the education a student receives from just being in the environment with "your people." I also came from a low-performing school and have been able to be "successful" like many others I have known. I am now wondering if I excluded schools that would have been good for my son's "identity education" or "consciousness awakening" because the report card for the school was not an "A." I have further been reflecting on the characteristics she described of resiliency, determination, etc. and how much my own environment helped me develop some of those same character traits. I wonder further if I have been trying to reinvent the wheel in regard to my son's education - when in fact - the same education that was good enough for me, Nia, and others, has always existed in the schools in our community and maybe what changed was me (i.e., upwardly mobile black folks). I have a lot of thoughts that have been marinating with me today. The truth is the women that are participating in this conversation are of the mindframe that we are going to make sure that our kids are ok no matter what environment they are in. I am now debating whether there is more educational benefit (not only academics, but social, identity, culture, etc.) for my son at a school with black and brown children that he is able to interact with regularly versus me trying to create the same in a homeschool environment. As you can tell, lots and lots of thoughts!

Recommendations for Future Research

Within the Black community, mothers are often glorified for their self-sacrifice, resilience, and strength, creating the narrative of the "strong Black mother" who consistently places their own needs behind the needs of their children, family, and larger community. Conversely, Black mothers are also blamed for the deterioration of Black families, emasculation of sons, and lack of academic achievement across the bulk of analysis of Black motherhood conducted by men and white feminists (Collins, 2000a; Collins, 2007). Black feminist authors have challenged these notions and yet there is still a true need for Black women and mothers to define and interrogate a standpoint on Black motherhood for ourselves as clearly shown by this study. Black womanhood and motherhood is not a monolith, which calls for multiple ways to interrogate and understand Black motherhood.

As such, there are myriad ways Black motherhood can be expounded on through research. Some of the sista scholars in this study were also doctoral students. Future research could explore the experiences of Black mothers in doctoral programs. Additionally, all sista scholars in this study self-identified as biological mothers with living children. While this is one notion of Black motherhood, there are many others. Future research on Black motherhood could investigate non-biological mothers, mothers who have lost children, and othermothers.

Schooling and extracurricular activities choices was a consistent theme across both sista circles. An in-depth analysis of this was beyond the scope of this study. Future research could focus on the schooling and/or extracurricular choices, impact of those choices, and the reasons Black parents are opting out of "good" (code word for white)

schools. Also utilizing a critical race framework, future scholars could investigate the explicit and implicit ways white supremacy and other forms of systemic oppression influence student experiences and parents' schooling choices.

Specifically, as it relates to student affairs research, there is a current rise of empirical studies on mothers within the field, which is much needed. There is also a need for scholarship that addresses the intersectional identities and experiences of mothers of color. These multiple perspectives of motherhood in student affairs work together to address contemporary challenges in higher education.

Personally, I see my future research building upon the topics, findings, and frameworks utilized and discovered throughout this study. Some early ideas include a case study on a sista scholar to delve deeper into the specifics of consciousness development and its place within motherwork, conceptual analysis of the utility of motherwork as a framework, and further exploring sista circle methodology. As I re-enter the field as a practitioner, I also foresee my future work building from this study to create spaces for Black mothers to be in community with one another through sista circles, conference meet-ups, and virtual events.

Recommendations for Higher Education Practice

What I learned from my fellow sista scholars was that student affairs was both a place of great love and dedication and a place of animosity. So many sista scholars loved what they do and the students they do it for but were often overburdened by administrators who paid only superficial attention to both students and staff of color. Both ACPA and NASPA, the leading associations for student affairs professionals, have identified "building supportive and inclusive communities" as a principle of good practice for student

affairs (ACPA, 2013; NASPA, n.d.). In order to build inclusive and supportive communities for our students, we must also build inclusive and supportive communities for staff. Community is a value in the field of student affairs yet sista scholars recounted numerous instances of being penalized or reprimanded for being in community with other Black staff. There is hyper-vigilance when Black staff and other staff of color are in community with one another that does not exist when white staff congregate (Tatum, 2017).

For student affairs administrators in supervisory positions and senior level administrators, my recommendation is to evaluate if you respond to Black staff congregating differently, and reflect and research to determine why that is. Learn about the experiences of Black staff which are well-documented in dissertations, empirical research and various media platforms. The ultimate goal of this reflection and learning is improving your supervisory practice. I also recommend a review of current practices related to serving students of color to determine if staff of color are the only ones representing and supporting students of color. If staff of color are holding additional responsibilities and doing additional labor to further the mission and vision of the department and institution, work to identify ways to compensate this monetarily or by other means such as comp time, flexible hours, or other options. For students, I recommend evaluating practices to ensure students of color are not being asked or required to do additional unpaid labor on behalf of the communities they represent, that is not being asked of white students. If so, I recommend identifying monetary and other options of compensation for their labor.

Sense of community was a common thread related to continued exploration of critical awareness and support for both parenting and professional

practice. Professionally, sista scholars were able to manage additional unpaid labor, process experiences, and combat burnout in community with other Black student affairs professionals. Whether sista scholars had this community at their current institutions or not, it was identified as being a necessity. There was a consistent lack of community with Black mothers within the field. I recommend and encourage Black mothers to build community with other Black mothers and create a space for support that honors, sees, and appreciates the intersectional nature of our identity. Whether professionally or personally, community with other Black mothers was shown to be such a necessary experience that despite criticism and hyper-vigilance I empower Black mothers push against the status quo by building that community openly. By doing so, the acts of resistance and advocacy through motherwork are continued by pressing on the environment to make changes to the culture of institutions instead of waiting for institutions and institutional culture to change.

Virtual and in-person spaces for mothers in student affairs are starting to become more common. My recommendation for the organizers of those spaces is to ensure that the voices and intersectional experiences of Black mothers and mothers of color are not ignored or pushed to the side. Acknowledge both that motherhood binds us together and that our various social locations impact how we experience motherhood. Also, ensure the burden of education does not fall solely upon marginalized group members when members from privileged groups ask questions or do not understand issues related to oppression by providing resources, encouraging additional self-exploration, and acknowledging the labor of those minoritized group members who do offer insight.

The recommendations outlined above speak directly to the field of student affairs in response to the lack of literature on administrators but also have implications for the field

of higher education broadly. The experiences and challenges described by sista scholars in this study are echoed in literature on the experiences of Black mothers and Black women in the academy and other career and professional spaces broadly (Nzinga-Johnson, 2013). As such, I believe the recommendations extend beyond student affairs and can have impact in a variety of spaces to improve the working environments for Black women to ultimately create inclusive and supportive environments.

Concluding Thoughts

When I started conceptualizing this study, I was in a place where I was trying to figure out who I wanted to be as a parent and as a student affairs professional. I was going through my own consciousness awakening and grappling with how to put the theory and knowledge I was gaining into practice. On the last day of class for my master's program, our faculty member wrote on the board "With great privilege comes great responsibility." She explained that only a small percentage of the population has a graduate degree and with this privilege we had a responsibility to our communities and the students we would encounter. This moment really stuck with me as I have been the first in my family to get a college degree, graduate degree, and soon a doctorate. I have always felt an enormous amount of responsibility because of my educational privilege to give back and support my family and community. Becoming a mother opened me up to a whole new side of responsibility. The first moment I looked at my first-born, Jordan, I felt an intense sense of responsibility to love her, protect her, value her, and give her the best life possible.

As I have grown in my own consciousness development, I have read, researched, taken courses, and traveled to Ghana, all with the goal of furthering my own knowledge to pass on to future generations. I struggled with trying to determine how I take this

knowledge and apply it to my practice as a mother and a student affairs professional. While I have a strong community of Black women in the field of student affairs, I was not connected to other Black mothers and longed for that community to process these struggles with and for support. I figured if I needed this space to be in community with other Black mothers, maybe there were other Black mothers who did as well. So I designed this study to be able to hold that space through sista circles. While I had hoped for at least a handful of participants, after posting the flyer online I received over 20 responses in less than one day. I received message after message from Black mothers who lacked this community but were looking for community with other Black mothers. I felt seen and validated in my struggles and search for community.

From the sista circles, I learned I was not alone in my experiences or struggles with figuring out my responsibilities for self, children, and community. There was so much support and rich dialogue, one would have never guessed all nine sista scholars were essentially strangers. I was constantly challenged in my thinking, to truly reflect on my decisions and approaches to determine any hidden influences and motivations. Being solely socialized in a US context, there are many ways, despite my constant quest for enlightenment, the explicit and implied messages related to social hierarchies influence my decisions, opinions, and approaches. These challenges from fellow sista scholars serve as a reminder to continuously interrogate and reflect on my decisions.

To my fellow sista scholars, I thank you for your time, willingness to share, and constant support. Our time together continues to inspire me throughout this dissertation process and to create future spaces for Black mothers to connect and create community. For others considering culturally relevant research methodologies and

designs that oppose traditional research, stay true to who you are, the communities you

represent, and know that your research is valid, rigorous, and any other term used to

devalue or dissuade you from your path. You are making space for yourself and others in

an academy that was never designed for us to be in. Stay the course.

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APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

All information on this form will be considered confidential, and the form itself will be stored in a secure location.

- Name:
- Pseudonym (name that will be used to maintain confidentiality):
- Email:
- Do you have access to a web camera?
  - Yes/No
- Relationship Status:
- How do you identify (e.g. race, ethnicity, gender, age, national identity, etc.)?
- What functional area(s) do you currently serve in?
- What is your most current student affairs/ higher education title?
- What is your most current student affairs/ higher education institution type? (E.g. Public, Private, Mid-Sized Liberal Arts, etc.)
- What is your highest degree earned?
- In what field was your highest degree attained?
- Do you identify as a mother?
  - Yes/No
- How many child(ren) do you have under your care?
  - What are their ages?
- You and I will have a brief introductory conversation to get to know one another, briefly discuss the study prior to the sista circle, and test the Zoom video chat platform. Please provide your availability for a 30 minute chat.

APPENDIX B: PROTOCOLS & REFLECTIONS

<u>Individual Interview Protocol</u>

I. Introductions
   a. I will share my personal connection with the topic and purpose of the study.
   b. I will allow the sista scholar to introduce themselves with any pertinent information they would like to share.
II. Overview of the research design
   a. Brief overview of sista circles
      i. Each circle with focus on one topic
      ii. Time frame: 60-120 minutes
III. Questions:
   a. What prompted you to participate in this study?
   b. What, if anything, are you hoping to gain or experience from being apart of this study?
   c. What concerns, if any, do you have involving this study?
   d. Do you have any questions for me?
IV. Updates
   a. Confirm receipt of consent form
   b. Confirm availability for sista circles

<u>Sista Circle #1 Protocol</u>
Topic: Consciousness Awakening and Development

I. Welcome
   a. Brief introductions (name, current functional area, number and age of children)
II. Background
   a. Consciousness awakening consists of both an external event or epiphanic experience that promoted increased critical awareness of what it means to be [oppressed social identity] and also a series of changes (e.g., new insight, different behaviors, etc.) that led to establishing a sense of connection to something broader than the individual self (Neville & Cross, 2016, p. 3)
III. Centering Activity
   a. I will share my personal consciousness awakening and development experience that was prompted based on race/racism and through exploration and research shifted to race+gender.
IV. Prompt
   a. Can you share your moment or collection of moments that prompted your consciousness awakening?
   b. What did you do as a result of this awakening? OR How did you continue to develop this consciousness beyond your awakening?
V. Closing
   a. Explanation of final sista circle topic and confirmation of the date
   b. Thank everyone for participating and conclude the circle.

c. Closing thought: "Individual African-American women have long displayed varying types of consciousness regarding our shared angle of vision. When these individual expressions of consciousness are articulated, argued through, contested, and aggregated in ways that reflect the heterogeneity of Black womanhood, a collective group consciousness dedicated to resisting oppression becomes possible. Black women's ability to forge these individual, often unarticulated, yet potentially powerful expressions of everyday consciousness into an articulated, self-defined, collective standpoint is key to Black women's survival" (Collins, 2000a, p. 36).

Sista Circle #2 Protocol

Topic: Implications of Consciousness on Parenting and Student Affairs Praxis

I. Welcome
   a. Brief overview of emergent themes from first sista circle
II. Centering Activity
   a. Watch Geneva Reed-Veal, the mother of Sandra Bland's speech to the Congressional Caucus on Black Women and Girl (4:34)
   b. https://splinternews.com/read-the-short-devastating-speech-sandra-blands-mother-1793856494
III. Prompt
   a. In the video, Geneva Reed-Veal calls for the audience to wake up, get up, and step up. She describes a time when she too was among the "walking dead" and how her daughter's death was the impetus for her current activist work. Her tragic experience led to an increased consciousness of the violence and inequalities surrounding influencing both her parenting and work in the community.
   b. In our previous sista circle, we discussed how we each came to consciousness and our process for developing an increased sense of self and culture. How has your increased consciousness influenced you as a parent? As a student affairs professional?
IV. Closing
   a. Thank all of the sista scholars and remind them they will receive their Amazon gift card to the email listed on their demographic questionnaire within two weeks.
   b. Closing thought: "When an individual Black woman's consciousness concerning how she understands her everyday life undergoes change, she can become empowered. Such consciousness may stimulate her to embark on a path of personal freedom, even if it exists initially primarily in her own mind. If she is lucky enough to meet others who are undergoing similar journeys, she and they can change the world around them" (Collins, 2000a, p. x).

Reflection Questions

- Name

- How would you describe the experience of participating in this sista circle?
- After having some time to reflect, are there any thoughts or reactions that you want to share from anything discussed in the circle?
- Is there any topic you would like to see discussed or brought back up during the final sista circle?
- Is there anything else that you would like to share?

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM
Mothering while woke: Exploring the consciousness development process of Black mothers
engaged in student affairs work

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this form will help you decide if you want to be in the study. Please ask the researcher(s) below if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

Principal Investigator:
Merrily Dunn
Counseling & Human Development Services
merrily@uga.edu
Co-Investigator:
Qua'Aisa Williams
Counseling & Human Development Services
Qsb50231@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to explore the consciousness development process of Black mothers engaged in student affairs work and how this consciousness impacts their personal and professional practice.

Study Procedures
You are being invited to be in this research study because you meet the following criteria:
·   self-identify as a woman,
·   self-identify as Black or of African descent,
·   self-identify as a mother,
·   employed full-time by an institution of higher education in a student serving capacity
·   socialized in the United States for at least half of your life.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to:
·   Complete a short demographic questionnaire (less than 5 minutes)
·   Participate in a 15-30 minute initial one-on-one interview with the researcher
·   Participate in two audio and video recorded sista circles lasting 90-120 minutes with five to seven other participants

Taking part is voluntary
Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to stop or withdraw from the study, the information/data collected from or about you up to the point of your withdrawal will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed.

Benefits
Participants will receive a $15 Amazon gift card delivered via email within two weeks after the final sista circle. Additionally, the findings from this study will educate and inform higher education administrators about unique experiences of Black mothers engaged in student affairs work. Findings will be used to inform administrative practices, associated norms, and for fostering more inclusive and socially conscious spaces.

Risks and discomforts
I do not anticipate any risks or discomforts from participating in this study.

Audio/Video Recording
Audio recording will be used during sista circles so that interviews can be transcribed afterward. Recordings will be kept in a locked file on my laptop. After transcription, recordings will be kept on file until the final study has been successfully defended (anticipated in May 2020). Upon defense, audio recordings will be erased and only transcriptions will remain.

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview audio recorded or not. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

    _____I do not want to have this interview recorded.
    _____I am willing to have this interview recorded.

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

Focus Groups or Other Group Activities
Even though the investigator will emphasize to all participants that comments made during the focus group session should be kept confidential, it is possible that participants may repeat comments outside of the group at some time in the future.

The main researcher conducting this study is Dr. Merrily Dunn an Associate Professor of College Student Affairs Administration at the University of Georgia. Qua'Aisa Williams, a Doctoral Candidate in the College Student Affairs Administration will also serve as part of this study. Please ask any questions you have now—all questions are good questions. If you have questions later, you may contact Dr. Dunn at merrily@uga.edu or Qua'Aisa Williams at qsb50231@uga.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.
If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below:

_____   _____ _____
Name of Researcher   Signature   Date

_____   _____ _____
Name of Participant   Signature   Date

     Please keep one copy and return the signed copy to the researcher.