PROPST, BRANDY S. Ph.D. "Out Here Fighting For My Life": Exploring the Experiences of Black Women Student Affairs Professionals and Critical Incidents in the Workplace Relationships with White Women at Historically White Institutions. (2024)
Directed by Dr. Jesse R. Ford, Jr.. 195 pp.

Using sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015), this critical qualitative study explores the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and the critical incidents that occur in workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at historically White institutions (HWIs). The research questions explored how Black women student affairs professionals perceived, described, or navigated critical incidents with white women and how structural violence and racialized harm associated with these experiences influenced their careers. The study used Black feminist theory (Collins, 2009) and critical race feminism (Wing, 2003) as the theoretical frameworks to situate this study.

Seven Black women student affairs professionals with multiple intersectional identities from various institutional types and across various student affairs functional areas completed a participant journal (Hatch, 2002) and participated in two sista circles. Findings suggest participants experienced mostly negative critical incidents with white women supervisors and colleagues due to white women's alignment with whiteness and white supremacist patriarchy. Findings also illuminate how critical incidents with white women contribute to Black women student affairs professionals being placed into outsider-within locations (Collins, 1998) at HWIs and the tools, strategies, and support systems Black women use to survive and thrive in higher education. This study concludes with implications for research and practice as well as recommendations and considerations for HWIs and white women higher education professionals to listen to, support, and protect Black women student affairs professionals.

Keywords: Black women, student affairs, critical incidents, sista circles, white women

"OUT HERE FIGHTING FOR MY LIFE": EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK

WOMEN STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS AND CRITICAL INCIDENTS IN

WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS WITH WHITE WOMEN

AT HISTORICALLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

by

Brandy S. Propst

A Dissertation
Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro

2024

Approved by

_____
Dr. Jesse R. Ford, Jr.
Committee Chair

DEDICATION

To my beautiful, brilliant, and bold mother, Sandra Ann Propst Ellerbe.

I miss you more than words can ever express.

This is for you.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by Brandy S. Propst has been approved by the following

committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at

Greensboro.

Committee Chair

_____
Dr. Jesse R. Ford, Jr.

Committee Members

_____
Dr. Cherrel Miller Dyce

_____
Dr. Robert Bradley Johnson

April 16, 2024
_____
Date of Acceptance by Committee

April 29, 2024
_____
Date of Final Oral Examination

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I give all thanks to God for blessing me with the opportunity to pursue my doctoral degree and guiding me through my 7-year journey. This plan was written from the beginning. To everything there is a season.

To my mother and guardian angel, Sandra Ann Propst Ellerbe, thank you for every affirmation, every lesson, and every pearl of wisdom that you instilled in me. Your positive outlook on life, your strong work ethic, your resilient mindset, and your perseverance have motivated me my entire life. You showed me the example of what it means to be a virtuous Black woman. You taught me that I could accomplish anything that I put my mind to and that no one can take my education away from me. It is because of you that I am Dr. Brandy S. Propst, and I know you are proud. I love you and miss you dearly.

To my partner, John, there are not enough words to thank you for everything that you have done for me and the ways that you have supported me. You have been my rock the last 25 years, and I am blessed to have you in my life. Thank you for your patience and support throughout this journey. Teamwork makes the dream work! Love you, always!

To my son, John IV, being your mom has been my biggest accomplishment and the most challenging yet rewarding job I have ever had! You have witnessed me be a student for more than half of your life. I hope I serve as a proud example of how you can do anything that you put your mind to and that you can be anything that you want to be in life. Thank you for your support and encouragement throughout this journey. Love you buddy!

To Dr. Jesse Ford, thank you for stepping up in the 11th hour to serve as my chair. Your guidance and feedback were invaluable throughout the last 4 years of my PhD journey. I appreciate you supporting my vision of writing a nontraditional dissertation with nontraditional

methods and creating a study that was authentically me. To Dr. Cherrel Miller Dyce, thank you for serving on my committee and for being my mentor over the last 13 years. I am grateful for your perspectives and thoughts throughout this journey. To Dr. Brad Johnson, thank you for being a member of my committee and your willingness to jump in to get me to the finish line.

To my participants, thank you for helping me shake up the academy! Words cannot express how appreciative I am for your participation in my study! I hope our sista circles served as a safe, healing space full of joy, love, and encouragement for you. I thank you for your vulnerability and willingness to tell your stories. Despite all you have endured as Black women student affairs professionals at HWIs, you are powerful beyond measure. Keep fighting!

To my sista scholars – Dr. Coretta Walker, Dr. J'nai Adams, Dr. Carla Fullwood, and Dr. Shakima Clency, thank you for your tips, strategies, insights, zoom writing sessions, text messages, and words of encouragement. You all set an example of how to finish while staying true to yourselves. Thank you for being a part of my village!

To the Mahoghany Eggheads – Dr. Detric Robinson, Dr. Keisha Williams, future Dr. Pam Adkins, future Dr. Whitley Grant-Goodman, future Dr. Brandi Kennedy, future Dr. Demarcus Merritt, and future Dr. Sabrina Mack, thank you for all the nuggets of support, check-ins, words of encouragement, and vent sessions. Our Black doc student group chat is unmatched! To Dr. Emily Krechel, thank you for being my partner in crime at work and for being my accountability partner throughout the last 5 months of this journey. To Dr. Scott Wojciechowski and Dr. Cathryn Bennett, thank you for your support, suggestions, and insight from near and far throughout my coursework and the writing process.

To my BFFs—Tiffany, you are my person! Lisa and Crystal, you are my ride or dies! Thank you for your support, encouragement, laughter, and fun times throughout this journey. Love ya'll deep!

Last but definitely not least, I want to thank me. I want to thank me for putting in the work. I want to thank me for never giving up. I want to thank me for being an unapologetic and unbothered Black woman. I want to thank me for being a force to be reckoned with!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This dismissal stands as a real block to communication between us. This block makes it far easier to turn away from you completely than to attempt to understand the thinking behind your choices. Should the next step be war between us, or separation? Assimilation within a solely western European herstory is not acceptable.

-Audre Lorde, An Open Letter to Mary Daly, Sister Outsider

In the classic text, *Sister Outsider*, Audre Lorde (2007) penned an open letter to Mary Daly, author of *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism,* to express her insights on Daly's white feminist views of patriarchy. Lorde was concerned with Daly's failure to appropriately acknowledge the myth and images of Black women and other Women of Color beyond victimization and co-opting their words in support of her views on how men oppress women. Lorde wrote this letter to Daly 4 months earlier but received no response. Thus, she decided to pen an open letter discussing Daly's dismissal of Black women's experiences and to illuminate the dangers and challenges of white women and white feminism.

Lorde's letter to Daly was written in 1979, yet the dismissal of Black women's experiences by white women and blocks to communication between Black women and white women still exist (Accapadi, 2007; Ajayi Jones, 2018; Dace, 2012; Hamad, 2018, 2020; hooks, 1981; Lorde, 2007; Stewart-Bouley, 2018). As Lorde (2007) foreshadowed in the opening quote, there has been an ongoing tension and separation among and between Black women and white women which is often unspoken of due to white women's performance of hegemonic (white) femininities (Collins, 2004; Hamilton et al., 2019; Holvino, 2008), white tears (Accapadi, 2007; Ajayi Jones, 2018; Hamad, 2018, 2020; Stewart-Bouley, 2018) and white fragility (DiAngelo,

2016). This unspoken tension (Ramey, 1995) and dismissal occurs in every corner of the U.S. landscape, including higher education. As such, using a Black feminist lens, my scholarship centered the experiences of Black women, specifically Black women student affairs professionals, and provides a culturally relevant safe space, through sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015), to be heard, affirmed, and empowered through sharing perspectives and insights on working relationships with white women higher education professionals. This safe space centered Black women student affairs professionals through counterspaces (Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; West, 2015, 2017, 2020a; West & Bertrand Jones, 2019; West & Greer, 2020) and counterstories (Delgado, 2000; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) by offering the opportunity to share experiences in community with other Black women and not be considered a pet or threat (Hamad, 2020; Thomas et al., 2013), not be accused of "attacking" a white woman colleague, and not be labeled the "angry Black woman."

Additionally, like Lorde (2007), my dissertation was penned as an open letter to white women higher education professionals. My intentions with this study were to challenge power dynamics, illuminate oppressive practices, and call the higher education community, specifically white women higher education professionals, to do better with respect to their treatment and support of Black women student affairs professionals. Lorde (2007) professed "the history of white women who are unable to hear Black women's words, or to maintain dialogue with us, is long and discouraging" (p. 66). This is an opportunity for white women to listen to Black women, support Black women, and protect Black women, while keeping in mind the words of public academic, Rachel Cargle (n.d.), to "please take note that this is not a service to you nor is it a gift. It is, most simply, a heavy load I must set down, right here, right now in order to make room for something more" (p. 2).

Also, in establishing Black feminist thought (BFT) as an epistemological framework, Collins (2009) argued, "Black women intellectuals best contribute to a Black women group standpoint by using their experiences as situated knowers" (p. 22). Therefore, I do not use the pronouns "they" and "their" when referring to Black women or Black women student affairs professionals as traditionally used in academic writing and instead used the terms "we," "us," and "our" (Collins, 2009) as resistance and oppositional language, as an epistemological stance from my experiences as a situated knower, and in reference to my role as a researcher participant within my dissertation because "they" are me and I am "them."

Literature/Background of Study

Extant research on the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals who work at historically white institutions (HWIs) is limited and has focused primarily on leadership and networking (Alexander, 2010; Burke & Carter, 2015; Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Townsend, 2021), mentoring/mentorship (Bertrand Jones et al., 2020; Burke & Carter, 2015; Henry, 2010; Jackson & Flowers, 2003), and career advancement (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Lewis, 2016; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Ramey, 1995). Much of this literature also has discussed obstacles/challenges of Black women in the academy (Bertrand Jones et al., 2020; Breeden, 2021; Briscoe, 2022; Gardner et al., 2014; Henry, 2010; Mena, 2016; Miller Dyce et al., 2022; Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Ramey, 1995; Wallace et al., 2020; B. M. Williams, 2019, 2023; B. M. Williams et al., 2023), counterspaces (Bertrand Jones et al., 2020; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; West, 2015, 2017, 2020a; West & Bertrand Jones, 2019; West & Greer, 2020) and supporting Black students/othermothering (Burke & Carter, 2015; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; McCloud, 2019; Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003) as factors that impact the experiences and careers of Black women student affairs professionals.

Scholars also have also researched the marginalized experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and the oppressive nature of our status as the "outsider" (Collins, 1986, 2009; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; West, 2017, 2020a; J. Wilder et al., 2013). Patitu and Hinton (2003) defined marginalization "as any issue, situation, or circumstance that has placed these women outside of the flow of power and influence within their institutions" (p. 82). A further review of the literature demonstrates that Black women student affairs professionals experience marginalization and isolation (Mena, 2016; Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; West, 2015, 2017; J. Wilder et al., 2013) primarily at HWIs in various ways through microaggressions (Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Mena, 2016), promotion/advancement practices rooted in gendered racism (Jackson & Flowers, 2003; Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003), lack of institutional support (Henry, 2010; Patitu & Hinton, 2003), and being overworked and underpaid because of tokenism (Henry, 2010; Jackson & Flowers, 2003; Lewis, 2016; Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003).

Furthermore, according to Taub and McEwen (2006), professionals entering the field of student affairs overwhelmingly identify as white and women. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2022) also reported white women are the largest population of faculty and student/academic affairs professionals combined compared to white men, Black women, and Black men, respectively, in degree-granting postsecondary institutions within the United States. As of Fall 2021, white women held 590,658 faculty and student/academic affairs positions combined compared to 532,260 white men, 82,935 Black women, and 48,545 Black men (NCES, 2022). White women ($N = 75,830$) more than double the number of white men ($N = 35,233$) employed in student/academic affairs positions and are represented over 5 times more than Black women ($N = 15,988$) and a little over 12 times more than Black men (N = 6,389)

employed in these same positions (NCES, 2022). Moreover, NASPA – Student Affairs
Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA, 2014) also reported in their 2014 chief student
affairs officers (CSAOs) census that, of 868 respondents, 37% of respondents identified as white
men ($n = 317$) and 37% identified as white women ($n = 317$) serving as vice presidents of
student affairs (VPSAs), and .07% identified as Black men ($n = 59$) and .06% identified as Black
women ($n = 54$) serving as VPSAs. Although Black women are the largest racially minoritized
population represented in student/academic affairs positions (NCES, 2022), we are
disproportionately underrepresented within leadership roles among CSAOs compared to our
white women colleagues. Thus, it is nearly impossible to avoid working or collaborating with a
white woman higher education professional at HWIs. Due to their overwhelming presence on
college campuses and the power and privilege they possess, white women have substantial
amounts of social and cultural capital needed to assist with dismantling the structural violence
(Hamer & Lang, 2015), racialized harm (Hamer & Lang, 2015), and marginalization Black
women student affairs professionals experience at HWIs.

Although many of the aforementioned factors impact the career trajectories of Black
women student affairs professionals due to the gendered racism that we endure in higher
education (Belk, 2006; Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007), there is a dearth of research explicitly
focused on experiences of Black women student affairs professionals. Specifically, extant work
lacks emphasis on the working relationships of Black women student affairs professionals with
white women higher education professionals, and how white women's positionality, power, and
privilege influence these relationships and the careers of Black women. My dissertation focuses
on this gap in the literature, and I provide a more extensive review of the literature in Chapter 2.

Problem Statement

As represented in the literature, the voices of Black women student affairs professionals in higher education often go unheard due to our status as the *outsider-within* (Collins, 1986, 2009). Black women student affairs professionals often find ourselves in roles that deem us as the *outsider-within* on college campuses (Collins, 1986; Wallace et al., 2020; West, 2017, 2020a; J. Wilder et al., 2013), giving Black women an insider perspective while maintaining our outsider status. Despite our insider perspective, with the overwhelming presence of white women within the field of higher education, especially those in supervisory or leadership roles, there is a need to research the intersectional oppressions of Black women and the unspoken tensions between us and our white women colleagues in higher education. These unspoken tensions, also referred to by Ramey (1995) as the "Queen Bee Syndrome," are based upon marginalized interactions with white women higher education professionals that contribute to sustained and supported practices of white supremacist patriarchy within the academy (Hamilton et al., 2019). This research is essential in centering the voices and experiences of Black women student affairs professionals as the largest racially minoritized population (NCES, 2022) represented in higher education. Although centering Black women, my dissertation provides a space for research and dialogue on how white women professionals can use their privileged identities and positions within the academy to prevent structural violence and racialized harm (Hamer & Lang, 2015), improve awareness of their role in the perpetuation of white supremacist patriarchy in the academy (Accapadi, 2007; P. M. Palmer, 1983; Robbins & Jones, 2016; Tevis & Pifer, 2021), and advocate for and support Black women student affairs professionals in higher education.

Historically, conversations about privilege, power, and white supremacist patriarchy within higher education have centered around white men (C. S. Wilder, 2013) and the harm

caused to minoritized populations, such as Black women. But there is a need to bring to the forefront conversations about the critical incidents (Flanagan, 1954; Lampley, 2023; Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988; Snijders et al., 2021; Vianden, 2012) that occur within workplace relationships between Black women student affairs professionals and white women higher education professionals. For this study, critical incidents (Flanagan, 1954; Lampley, 2023; Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988; Snijders et al., 2021; Vianden, 2012) are defined as the significant, lived experiences, impactful interactions or events, either positive or negative, that occur from the perspectives of Black women student affairs professionals while working with white women higher education professionals. These critical incidents, the harm that is caused, and how we are influenced by these experiences are often discussed in our within-group communities and settings. However, this is generally a taboo topic that is often not discussed at large within the field of higher education and student affairs. It is the quintessential elephant in the room. There also has been limited but growing research on the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals (Adams, 2021; Bertrand Jones et al., 2020; Breeden, 2021; Briscoe, 2022; Fullwood, 2023; Henry, 2010; Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; C. R. Walker, 2020; Wallace et al., 2020; West, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2020b; West & Greer, 2020; West & Porter, 2023; J. Wilder et al., 2013; B. M. Williams, 2019, 2023; B. M. Williams et al., 2023) and even less research (Accapadi, 2007; Dace, 2012; West et al., 2024) focused on our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals and how power and privilege influence these relationships.

Purpose

The purpose of this critical qualitative study was to examine the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and the critical incidents (Flanagan, 1954; Lampley, 2023;

Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988; Snijders et al., 2021; Vianden, 2012) that occur within our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs. Examining critical incidents from the perspectives of Black women and our interactions with white women higher education professionals is an important factor in discussions regarding the current climate of higher education. The outcomes of these interactions are typically based on white societal norms because of the white privilege that white women possess (Accapadi, 2007; DiAngelo, 2016; Holvino, 2008) and their complicity with white supremacist patriarchy.

Furthermore, this study was theoretically grounded in Black feminist theory (BFT; Collins, 1986, 2009) and incorporated sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) as a Black feminist methodology and participant journaling (Hatch, 2002) to research the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals. My choices in methods also added to the culturally relevant options and critical methodologies used to study Black women in higher education and challenged the white Euro-centric narrative. Thus, this study fills a gap in the literature by examining and amplifying the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals, identifying the critical incidents that occur within our working relationships with white women higher education professionals, and exploring how structural violence and racialized harm (Hamer & Lang, 2015) may impact these experiences.

Definitions

This section highlights key terms used in this study. These terms provide understanding for the participants and scholars who read my dissertation.

Black women student affairs professionals – defined as women who identify as Black or African American and who work in functional areas traditionally associated with student affairs and higher education administration at HWIs.

White women higher education professionals – defined as women who identify as white and who are employed as faculty, staff, or administrators at HWIs.

Critical incidents – defined as the significant, lived experiences, impactful interactions or events, either positive or negative, that occur from the perspective of Black women student affairs professionals while working with white women higher education professionals at HWIs (Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988).

Sista Circle – defined as a support group created for Black women, by Black women, built on existing communities, friendships, and kinships (Neal-Barnett, Stadulis, Murray, et al., 2011).

Historically White Institutions (HWIs) – defined as enrollment with 50% or more of white students or considered historically white due to "binarism and exclusion supported by the US prior to 1964" (M. C. Brown & Dancy, 2010, p. 523).

Structural violence – defined "as the conditions and arrangements, embedded in the political and economic organization of social life, that cause injury to individuals and populations, or put them in harm's way" (Hamer & Lang, 2015, p. 899).

Racialized harm – defined as a form of structural violence that often manifests in marginalization, isolation, microaggressions, lack of resources or attention to needs, and overall, alienating and unsafe environments for people of color on college campuses (Hamer & Lang, 2015).

Research Questions

How do Black women student affairs professionals perceive, describe, and navigate critical incidents within our workplace relationships with white women higher education

professionals at HWIs? How does this lead to structural violence and racialized harm, if any, that may be associated with these incidents?

1. From the perspective of Black women student affairs professionals, what are the critical incidents that occur within our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs?

2. How have critical incidents, structural violence, and racialized harm influenced the careers of Black women student affairs professionals at HWIs?

3. What tools, strategies, or support systems have assisted Black women student affairs professionals with navigating or coping with the critical incidents, structural violence, and racialized harm that may have occurred within our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs?

Conceptual Framework

Grounded in Black feminist theory/epistemology (Collins, 1986, 2009) and drawing from components of critical race feminism (Wing, 2003), my conceptual framework highlights the concepts and conditions within HWIs that Black women student affairs professionals must navigate and cope with daily (see Figure 1). As demonstrated in my conceptual framework, BFT (Collins, 2009) was used to make sense of Black women student affairs professionals' lived experiences and to determine how we deal with the conditions created within the academy by whiteness, white privilege, white supremacist patriarchy, and hegemonic (white) femininities (Collins, 2004; Hamilton et al., 2019; Holvino, 2008), which supports the notion that HWIs are continued sites of structural violence and racialized harm for people of color (Hamer & Lang, 2015). The following sections describes Figure 1, my conceptual framework, from right to left, which illustrates my perception of the interconnectedness of whiteness, white supremacist

patriarchy, hegemonic femininities, white privilege, structural violence, and racialized harm at HWIs, and how white women higher education professionals support and perpetuate these ideas.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for Examining the Experiences of Black Women Student Affairs Professionals and the Critical Incidents That Occur Within Our Workplace Relationships With White Women Higher Education Professionals at HWIs

Historically White Institutions

Black Feminist Theory & Black Feminist Epistemology (Collins, 1986, 2009)

Critical Race Feminism (Wing, 2003)

COUNTERSPACE SISTA CIRCLE METHODOLOGY (Johnson, 2015)

Counterstories

Critical incidents w/ white women

Participant Journaling

Black Women Student Affairs Professionals

White Supremacist Patriarchy

Whiteness

Hegemonic White Femininity

White Privilege

Structural Violence
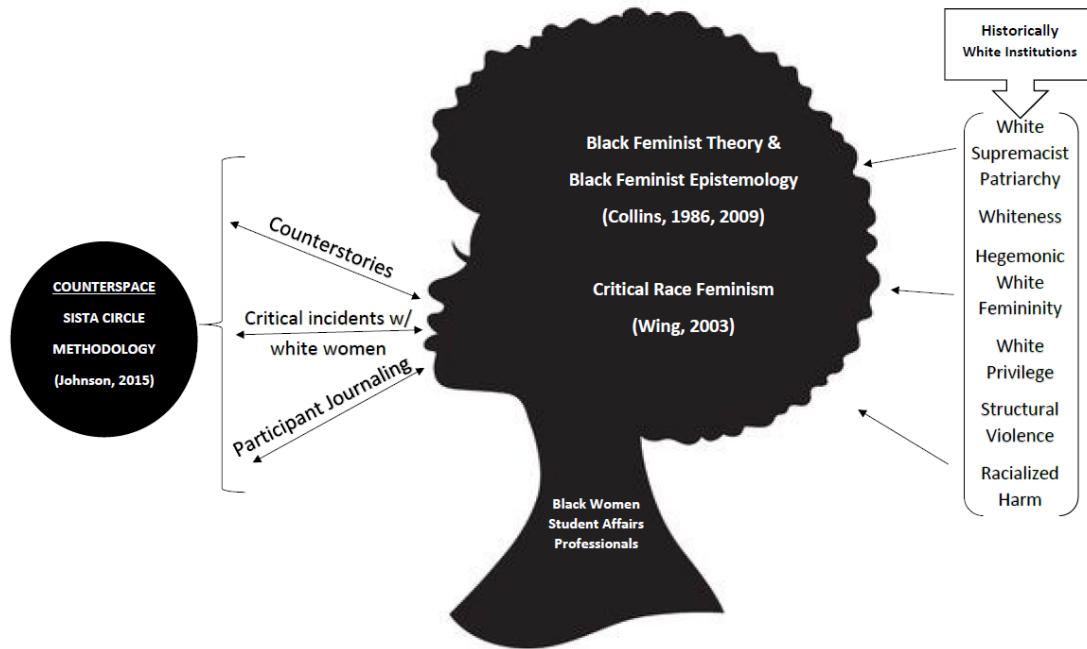
Racialized Harm

HWIs, Structural Violence, and Racialized Harm

Structural violence is defined "as the conditions and arrangements, embedded in the political and economic organization of social life, that cause injury to individuals and populations, or put them in harm's way" (Hamer & Lang, 2015, p. 899). Furthermore, structural violence is the result of institutional, economically driven, and systemically oppressive processes, primarily impacting groups "whose social status denies them full access to legal and political protections" (Hamer & Lang, 2015, p. 899). Among other examples, forms of structural violence on college campuses can be "collective inequalities perpetrated and experienced on the

basis of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, gender, or sexuality" (Hamer & Lang, 2015, p. 899) that many Black women student affairs professionals experience at HWIs. Although structural violence is not "the result of individual actions or interpersonal interactions, though both are involved" (Hamer & Lang, 2015, p. 899), it is supported and perpetuated through institutional policies, practices, and decision making and those who have the power and privilege to create and uphold these policies, practices and decisions. As sites of structural violence, universities then become breeding grounds for racialized harm. Racialized harm is a form of structural violence that often manifests in marginalization, isolation, microaggressions, lack of resources or attention to needs, and overall, alienating and unsafe environments for people of color on college campuses (Hamer & Lang, 2015), which is supported by the literature on the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals at HWIs (Adams, 2021; Bertrand Jones et al., 2020; Breeden, 2021; Briscoe, 2022; Fullwood, 2023; Henry, 2010; Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; C. R. Walker, 2020; Wallace et al., 2020; West, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2020a, 2020b; West & Greer, 2020; J. Wilder et al., 2013; B. M. Williams, 2019, 2023; B. M. Williams et al., 2023). For white women higher education professionals, "whiteness brings a form of privilege to their identities and roles within organizations" (Tevis & Pifer, 2021, p. 72), and their large presence on college campuses affords them the opportunity to be in roles that contribute to and uphold institutional policies, practices, and decision making that facilitate structural violence. This power and privilege dynamic, sustained through hegemonic femininities (Collins, 2004; Hamilton et al., 2019; Holvino, 2008), leads to racialized harm for people of color, specifically for the purposes of this study, Black women student affairs professionals.

Through the lens of BFT (Collins, 2009), I conducted a critical qualitative study to create space for Black women student affairs professionals and to discuss/research the workplace

relationships between Black women and white women higher education professionals. Using counterspaces and counter-storytelling, I centered the voices and experiences of Black women student affairs professionals by examining the critical incidents that occur within our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals through participant journaling (Hatch, 2002) and sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015). The following sections discuss the theories and methodology in my conceptual framework and how I used them to study and center the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals at HWIs.

Black Feminist Theory and Black Feminist Epistemology

Black feminism is a critical theory that examines the experiences of Black women through the interlocking oppressions of race, class, and gender (Evans-Winters, 2019). Examining the perceptions of Black women student affairs professionals through a Black feminist lens illuminates "certain critical nuances of experiences" (West, 2015, p. 110). First and second wave developmental theories in student affairs do not account for or fail to legitimately explain the interlocking oppressions of race, class, and gender for Black women in the academy (Abes et al., 2019; West, 2015). For this study, I incorporated three assumptions, three key themes, and the concept of the *outsider within* (Collins, 1986, 2009) as components of BFT to frame this study.

Collins (1986) defined BFT as "ideas produced by Black women that clarify a standpoint of and for Black women" (p. S16). Collins (1986) supported this definition with three assumptions: (a) BFT can only be produced by Black women, (b) this standpoint represents commonalities and differences in experiences among Black women, and (c) the nuances of BFT may not be obvious to all Black women therefore it is the responsibility of Black women intellectuals to produce knowledge about Black women's experiences. Collins (1986) further

theorized three key themes of BFT: self-definition and self-valuation, the interlocking nature of oppression, and the importance of Black women's culture. These themes frame BFT and centers the lived experiences and oppositional knowledge production of Black women. Applying these assumptions and themes to this study, establishes that the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals are not monolithic and are nuanced across the diaspora, which forms a collective Black women's culture, or sisterhood, across higher education (Collins, 1986, 2009). Furthermore, the ability of Black women student affairs professionals to self-define and self-evaluate ourselves and our experiences illuminates the power and privilege dynamics prevalent in the critical incidents that occur with white women higher education professionals.

Using the concept of the "*outsider-within*" (Collins, 1986, 2009) from BFT, informs this study by focusing on the unique standpoint that Black women student affairs professionals possess within HWIs. Collins (1986, 2009) referred to the *outsider-within* as a status assigned to Black women in predominantly white spaces. Applying this marginalized status to the academy, Collins (1986) asserted Black women have always occupied marginal positions within academic settings, thus Black women find creative ways to use their marginality as the outsider-within, which creates a special standpoint for Black women. This concept within BFT supports the assertion that Black women's experiences and special standpoint are deemed as knowledge and create a distinct Black feminist epistemology (BFE; Collins, 2009). Collins (2009) added, "The existence of a self-defined Black women's standpoint using BFE calls into question the content of what currently passes as truth and simultaneously challenges the process of arriving at that truth" (p. 290). Exploring our perspectives as the outsider-within, specifically through the critical incidents that occur with white women higher education professionals at HWIs, establishes a BFE that sheds light on the lived experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and

how we question and challenge the white epistemologies that currently serve as truth regarding our experiences. Lastly, for this study, I also employed a Black feminist methodology through sista circles to examine our lived experiences and share our ways of knowing. Sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) will be discussed later in the methodology section of this chapter and in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3.

Critical Race Feminism: Counterstories and Counterspaces

Delgado (2000) stated counterstories are created by the out-groups, "groups whose marginality defines the boundaries of the mainstream, whose voice and perspective – whose consciousness – has been suppressed, devalued, and abnormalized" (p. 71). Like the *outsider-within* status, Black women are an out-group within higher education, and the use of counterstories assists with creating bonds within the outgroups that serve as a counterreality outside the dominant culture (Delgado, 2000). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) posited "the counterstory is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories on racial privilege" (p. 32). Howard-Hamilton (2003) emphasized that "a safe place and space, known as a counterspace, should be provided when marginalized groups share their counterstories" (p. 23).

As such, critical race feminism (CRF) supports the use of counter-storytelling as a form of resistance to the dominant culture or narrative. An extension of critical legal studies and critical race theory, CRF centers the intersections of race, gender, and class and their relation to power dynamics for Women of Color (Wing, 2003). Like BFT, "critical race feminism . . . acknowledges and identifies the underlying systems of oppression, and interactions between the individual experiences, practices of a social institution, and interactions between the individual and the institution" (Croom, 2017, p. 563). Using CRF as an additional lens, Black women are

the individuals and higher education is the social institution within which I examined the critical incidents between Black women student affairs professionals and white women higher education professionals. Furthermore, CRF allows me as a researcher participant to place Black women student affairs professionals "in the center, rather than the margins, of the discussion, debate, contemplation, reflection, theorizing, research, and praxis as we co-exist in the dominant culture" (Berry, 2010, p. 23) of higher education. Sista circles were used as a methodology (Johnson, 2015) and served as a counterspace to create counterstories as a Black feminist methodology and challenged the dominant discourse around critical incidents between Black and white women while providing Black women student affairs professionals with community and empowerment in centering our experiences within higher education.

Critical Incidents

Derived from behavioral science research, critical incidents research has been used in counselor education to better understand the development of counselors and their personal experiences within the counseling field (Flanagan, 1954; Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988). Throughout this research, critical incidents have been defined as "lived experiences," "developmental turning points," or "those events that stand out as significant markers in an individual's professional development" (Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988, p. 69). These experiences can be positive or negative and can lead to growth or setbacks within one's professional career (Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988). Furthermore, Skovholt and McCarthy (1988) argued "a major criterion for determining whether an event constitutes a critical incident is whether it is perceived by the individual as having had an impact on his or her work" (p. 69). Most studies using critical incidents in higher education have focused on the experiences of students (Curtis et al., 2015; Douglas et al., 2009; Holloway & Schwartz, 2014; Snijders et al., 2021). Few studies have been

conducted on the use of critical incidents in student affairs research and practice related to employee satisfaction and relationships (Lampley, 2023; Vianden, 2012).

In higher education, the voices of Black women student affairs professionals often go unheard (Fullwood, 2023). Therefore, focusing on critical incidents that occur between Black women and white women, from the perspective of Black women student affairs professionals, will provide an opportunity to center the voices of Black women student affairs professionals while creating a counterspace to share our counterstories. Vianden (2012) suggested using critical incidents as a form of data collection can inform campus climate and diversity concerns for minoritized populations. Through sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) and participant journaling (Hatch, 2002), Black women student affairs professionals in this study journaled about, shared, and discussed a recent critical incident that occurred with white women higher education professionals by describing the critical incidents, the outcomes of the incidents, and discussing the influence of critical incidents on our experiences and careers as Black women student affairs professionals.

Sista Circle Methodology

In alignment with the theoretical grounding for the study and in response to Collins's (2009) assertion that new knowledge claims for Black women are developed through dialogue and community, rather than in separation and isolation, this study incorporated sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) and participant journaling (Hatch, 2002). Sista circles serve as a support group for Black women built on existing communities, friendships, and kinships (Neal-Barnett, Stadulis, Murray, et al., 2011). Employing this methodology challenges the dominant discourse around the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals while providing Black women with counterspaces to create counterstories about our experiences. Johnson (2015)

defined sista circle methodology as "a qualitative research methodology and support group for examining the lived experiences of Black women" (p. 43). Johnson (2015) also argued sista circle methodology goes beyond traditional, westernized research methodologies and pulls from the wisdom and interactions of Black women. Although westernized methodologies continue to serve as the norm, "the history of Western educational research is disfigured by a near complete dismissal of the social and cultural relations of Black women" (Johnson, 2015, p. 44). Using traditional research methods in this study would not be culturally relevant or could be harmful to Black women because they do not consider the importance of Black women's culture and the trust that is necessary to unpack critical incidents and discuss our lived experiences.

Accordingly, this study employed sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) and participant journaling (Hatch, 2002) for data collection to truly understand the lived experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and our working relationships with white women higher education professionals. In researching the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals, using sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) and participant journaling (Hatch, 2002) as methods of data collection was instrumental in seeking information related to the purpose of this study, while also honoring the Black women participants and BFE within this study. I will provide a more in-depth analysis and description of my methods and protocols of my research design in Chapter 3.

Researcher Positionality/Paradigm

I come to this research with my personal lens as a Black woman, student affairs professional with 17 years of experience working in various functional areas in higher education. Despite my multiple identities, my identity as a Black woman has been the most salient identity that has shaped my experiences as I have moved through the world. I am not Black and a

woman, I am a Black woman. These two identities are one in the same for me. I also identify as a Black feminist, which guides my praxis as a Black woman, student affairs professional, researcher, and educator. Throughout my career, I have experienced strong and supportive relationships with other Black women higher education professionals as well as experiences of gendered racism as a Black woman, student affairs professional. Through mentoring relationships and sista circles, I have been supported by Black women and have supported other Black women with navigating white spaces within higher education.

Early in my career, I had the rare honor of working in a division with five other Black women. We organically formed a sista circle and named it "The Caucus," as we would occasionally gather for lunch to discuss/vent about our daily experiences working at an HWI. Many of these conversations led to discussions about interactions and relationships that we had with white women colleagues. Specifically, we discussed the negative interactions and nonsupportive relationships we were all experiencing in various ways with white women who worked in our division or at the university. Some of these discussions also acknowledged the white privilege that white women carried in the division as they were allowed to behave and speak in ways that we as Black women were not allowed to do without being labeled as hostile, aggressive, angry, or difficult to work with. It was evident that their positionality and privilege as white superseded their identity as women, which was a privilege and luxury that we, as Black women, did not have. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore if these are the experiences and perceptions of other Black women student affairs professionals at HWIs and share the voices of Black women student affairs professionals related to these experiences with the hope that eventually white women higher education professionals could learn from listening to their Black women colleagues.

I also come to this research with the privileges of being a college-educated Black woman pursuing a doctoral degree at a historically white, minority-serving public institution while serving in a director role at a historically white, competitive private institution. I realize these privileges have shaped my experiences and interactions with white women colleagues because of the visibility of my role at my institution of employment as well as the social capital that has been afforded to me through pursuing a doctoral degree. As a professional, I have worked in higher education for 17 years and have had 11 supervisors. All my supervisors, except for two, have identified as white women. The two exceptions have been white men. In addition to being supervised by mostly white women, most of the women who ushered me into the field of higher education were white women, including my early career mentors. It is through my research that I hope to shed light on these varied relationships within higher education while centering the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals. My role as a researcher participant in this study was influenced by participation in conducting sista circles and my lived experiences and assumptions as a Black woman, student affairs professional.

Furthermore, my perspective and worldview as a Black woman and my research interests are very much influenced by critical theory paradigms. Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) stated, "The critical theory paradigm, which also is referred to as an advocacy, liberatory, or participatory framework, has a clear focus on social justice and includes feminist perspectives, racialized discourses, queer theory, trans theory, and disability inquiry" (p. 45). As a critical theorist, my research interests in examining the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals are centered around a critical theoretical framework, Black feminist theory/epistemology, and a critical methodology, sista circle methodology, that honor and center the lived experiences and knowledge claims of Black women. Evans-Winters (2019) stated:

Black women as researchers, and the researched, bring our lived realities into the research process. The charge of the qualitative researcher, then is to add to the body of evidence that already exists about different groups of women and the genders; to descriptively capture and illustrate the nuanced differences between groups of women's social and material conditions, and, to bring forth alternative analyses for referencing gender and racial oppression. Inevitably, Black feminist thought transforms the purpose and discourse of qualitative inquiry. (pp. 17–18)

Thus, my lived experiences and knowledge as a Black woman and Black feminist, which provides me a way to think about the world, set the stage for this critical qualitative research study and helped me in my role as a Black feminist scholar-practitioner in the cocreation of knowledge through sista circles with other Black women student affairs professionals.

Significance of Study

This research expands upon scarce scholarship on the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and our working relationships with white women higher education professionals. The experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and our working relationships with white women higher education professionals usually go unseen and are seldom discussed. Furthermore, approaching this study with a critical qualitative methodology such as sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) through the lens of BFT, provided a significant opportunity to listen to Black women student affairs professionals and created knowledge about our experiences in higher education while using methodology created for Black women, by Black women. This study also poses significant relevance to the field of higher education by unsettling the power and privilege of white women higher education professionals as it provides insight, intervention, and critiques from the perspectives of Black women student affairs

professionals about the interlocking oppressions of race, class, and gender that we experience within higher education and how those experiences influence our lives and careers.

Organization of the Study

This chapter introduced the study. The remainder of the study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature and focuses on the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals in higher education, white women higher education professionals, the role of BFT (Collins, 1986, 2009) in the development and survival of Black women student affairs professionals, and the use of sista circles as a methodology. Chapter 3 is an overview of sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015), BFE (Collins, 2009), and the research design. Chapter 4 provides participant profiles and narratives as well as connections among participants related to community, friendship, and kinship. Chapter 5 includes a summary of the findings, analysis of the data, and discussion of the findings. This study concludes with implications for practice and recommendations in Chapter 6 with appendixes to follow.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Black feminists see research as being for Black women, rather than simply about Black women
(Few et al., 2003, p. 206).

Due to the use of a nontraditional methodology, sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015), created for Black women by a Black woman, I do not use "they" and "their" in reference to my participants as traditionally used in academic writing. I use the terms "we," "us," and "our" (Collins, 2009) as resistance, oppositional language, and as a situated knower in my role as a researcher participant within this study.

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and the critical incidents that occur within our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs using the following research questions:

How do Black women student affairs professionals perceive, describe, and navigate critical incidents within our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs? How does this lead to structural violence and racialized harm, if any, that may be associated with these incidents?

1. From the perspective of Black women student affairs professionals, what are the critical incidents that occur within our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs?

2. How have critical incidents, structural violence, and racialized harm influenced the careers of Black women student affairs professionals at HWIs?

3. What tools, strategies, or support systems have assisted Black women student affairs professionals with navigating or coping with the critical incidents, structural violence,

and racialized harm that may have occurred within our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs?

Organization of Chapter

This chapter provides an overview of the existing literature that situates this study and BFT (Collins, 1986, 2009) as the theoretical framework for studying the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals. First, I discuss the limited literature on Black women student affairs professionals and our experiences in higher education. Then, only for the purpose of providing context to the critical incidents that occur, I provide a review of the limited literature on white women higher education professionals. Next, I examine the use of BFT as a theoretical framework in studying the experiences, development, and survival of Black women student affairs professionals. I also review relevant studies that have used *sister/sista* circles as counterspaces or sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) to study the experiences of Black women but describe the methodology in detail in Chapter 3. Lastly, I conclude with gaps in the literature that informed this study and a summary of the chapter.

Overview of the Literature

To conduct this literature review, I reviewed scholarship that was a mixture of books, scholarly articles, and empirical studies in computerized databases including Google Scholar, Education Source (EBSCO), ProQuest Education Journals, and ERIC (Education, EBSCO). The specific aims of this literature review were to highlight the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals, the disproportionate presence, power, and privilege of white women higher education professionals, and the use of BFT (Collins, 1986, 2009) and sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) as a lens and methodology for examining Black women's experiences in higher education. I researched the aforementioned databases and created Google Scholar alerts using

terms and keywords such as "Black women in student affairs," "Black women student affairs professionals," "Black women administrators," "Black women in higher education," "African American women in higher education," "Black feminist theory," "Black feminist thought," "Black feminism," "white women in student affairs," "white women in higher education," "white women higher education professionals," "sister circles," "sista circles," and "sista circle methodology." Lastly, I use the term "higher education professionals" to refer to staff and faculty within higher education regardless of the terminology used in specific articles referenced in this review. I also use the terms "academy" and "higher education" interchangeably and Black feminist "theory" and "thought" interchangeably depending on context and sentence flow within this review.

Upon conducting my review, much of the literature focused on the experiences of Black women faculty (Croom, 2017; Croom & Patton, 2011; Fries-Britt & Kelly, 2005; Kelly & Winkle-Wagner, 2017; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Patton & Catchings, 2009; Porter et al., 2020) and Black women undergraduates (L. C. Brown et al., 2021; Croom et al., 2017; Henry et al., 2011; Patton & Croom, 2017; Patton et al., 2017; Patton & Ward, 2016; Porter, 2017; Winkle-Wagner, 2008, 2009, 2015). This supports the purpose of this study in filling a gap in the literature specifically related to the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals in higher education. Early literature (Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Ramey, 1995) related to Black women student affairs professionals focused on challenges and barriers related to gendered racism and our double bind status as Black women working at HWIs. More recent literature (Adams, 2021; Bartman, 2015; Bertrand Jones et al., 2020; Burke & Carter, 2015; Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Henry, 2010; Wallace et al., 2020; West, 2015, 2017, 2020a) has focused on strategies and resources Black women student affairs professionals have used to overcome

25

challenges and barriers to survive and thrive at HWIs. This chapter provides a review of early and recent literature.

It is also important to highlight that despite the large presence of white women higher education professionals, as outlined in Chapter 1, I discovered very little literature (Accapadi, 2007; Feenstra, 2017; Mata, 2018; Robbins, 2016; Robbins & Jones, 2016; Tevis & Pifer, 2021) on the presence or influences of white women higher education professionals. Could this speak to white fragility and the historical protection of white women and the notion that they are unavoidable but must be "handled with care" within higher education and U.S. society? Or does this relate to white women scholars not recognizing the importance in doing me-search like other scholars who research experiences related to their gendered racial identities? There could be a multitude of reasons for this void in the literature related to white women higher education professionals, but it begs the question of how the largest population within higher education has very limited research and scholarship despite the presence, power, and privilege they possess on college campuses.

As introduced in Chapter 1, extant research on the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals has focused heavily on barriers, obstacles, challenges and strategies that influence the experiences and careers of Black women student affairs professionals (Adams, 2021; Bertrand Jones et al., 2020; Breeden, 2021; Briscoe, 2022; Burke & Carter, 2015; Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Fullwood, 2023; Henry, 2010; Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Ramey, 1995; C. R. Walker, 2020; Wallace et al., 2020; West, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2020a, 2020b; West & Greer, 2020; J. Wilder et al., 2013; B. M. Williams, 2019, 2023; B. M. Williams et al., 2023). Historically, Black women student affairs professionals have had challenging experiences throughout the evolution of higher education (Burke & Carter, 2015; Clayborne &

Hamrick, 2007; Henry, 2010; Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Ramey, 1995; Wallace et al., 2020; West, 2015, 2017, 2020a, 2020b; B. M. Williams, 2019, 2023; B. M. Williams et al., 2023). As Black women entered the field of higher education, gendered racism, structural violence, and racialized harm (Acker, 2006; Hamer & Lang, 2015; Holvino, 2008; Patton & Njoku, 2019) have always been factors in how we navigate systems of oppression within higher education. The following section provides an overview of the history of Black women student affairs professionals, the challenges we experience, and the survival strategies we employ as we continue to navigate interlocking systems of oppression.

Black Women Student Affairs Professionals

Lucy Diggs Slowe and Black Deans of Women

As women entered higher education as students, the need grew for women administrators (Herdlein et al., 2008; Nidiffer, 2002). These women administrators carried the title of deans of women and contributed to the development of what we know as the field of student affairs today. Nidiffer (2000, 2002) is one of few scholars to research the history of the role and influence of deans of women in the field of student affairs. Nidiffer (2002) forwarded that,

Around the beginning of the twentieth century, the position of dean of women was occupied by intelligent, well-qualified, and well-educated women who exercised administrative skill and professional leadership to help women on campus. The first professional deans of women accomplished two major goals. First, the deans . . . forged a new professional identity for themselves as the first senior women administrators on coeducational university campuses. Second, and perhaps more important, these well-qualified, well-educated deans improved the material lot and the educational experience of women students. (p. 11)

Although Nidiffer's (2000, 2002) research focused primarily on white women who served as deans of women, scholars such as Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2022), Evans (2007), and Herdlein et al. (2008) researched the contributions of Black deans of women at HBCUs. West (2020b) forwarded that "while the advent of HBCUs led to the emergence of Black women scholars, these women were precluded from participating in mainstream American higher education" (p. 74).

Thus, in 1922, Lucy Diggs Slowe became the first dean of women at Howard University, "was the first African American with professional training to serve as a dean of women" (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2022, p. 3), and subsequently became the trailblazer for Black women to enter the profession of student affairs (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2022; Evans, 2007; Herdlein et al., 2008; West, 2020b). Slowe took "coursework in the profession of deaning" (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2022, p. 3), was one of the first Black women to be formally educated in college student personnel, and used her knowledge to advance the education of Black women (Herdlein et al., 2008). Hayden Glover (2012) argued that "the dean of women position was attractive to Black women who wanted to offer guidance to female students outside of the classroom and serve in an administrative capacity within the university" (p. 11). Despite Slowe's historical impact on Howard's campus and within higher education, while advocating for the equal treatment of Black college women, Slowe was confronted with racism by white deans of women across the country and with structural violence imparted by Black male faculty and senior leadership at Howard (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2022). Like many current Black women student affairs professionals, throughout her tenure as dean of women, Slowe experienced several critical incidents with white deans of women (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2022). These critical incidents centered on racial discrimination and the marginalization and isolation of Black women on

college campuses and throughout the profession. This demonstrated white deans of women alignment with their whiteness and white supremacist patriarchy, despite the women's suffrage movement occurring at the time and the nature of their work in the profession being solely focused on the equality of women on college campuses.

In addition to Slowe, other notable Black deans of women such as Willa B. Player (Bennett College), Owena Hunter Davis (Johnson C. Smith), and Jewel B. Long (Hampton University) worked to dismantle gendered racism within higher education, and gender discrimination specifically at HBCUs, for Black women students and professionals on college campuses (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2022; Evans, 2007; Herdlein et al., 2008). Their presence and roles on college campuses served as early possibility models (Patton & Haynes, 2018; Patton & Njoku, 2019) for Black women to consider student affairs as a career option.

Endangered Species

Despite the advances made by Slowe and other Black women student affairs professionals at HBCUs, as more Black women began working at HWIs, the gendered racism experienced by Black women was amplified. Mosley (1980) conducted one of the earliest qualitative studies on the experiences of Black women administrators at HWIs. Mosley found much of the literature at that time focused on Black men administrators and was nearly nonexistent for Black women. Findings of her study supported that,

> Black female administrators in white academe *are* an endangered species. They are still tokens in higher education. Black women, where they are represented, are most often in positions peripheral to the policy-and decision-making core of higher education. They feel overworked, underpaid, alienated, isolated, uncertain, and powerless. (Mosley, 1980, p. 296)

Mosley (1980) also noted the relationships between white women and Black women student affairs professionals, which were heavily influenced by the women's/feminist movement at the time of the study, which took place in the fall of 1975. Participants in the study felt the movement focused on gaining power for white women and not on combating systems of oppression for all women, especially Black women. As a result, Mosley (1980) recommended as implications for the field "that white females recognize the hypocrisy of their actions as they preach sisterhood and yet ignore the plight of Black women" (p. 308). Ramey (1995) later supported this finding with a study of African American women administrators using a survey sent to 129 institutions in California. Ramey (1995) found "European American women present barriers to the professional growth of African American women. This barrier is sometimes referred to as the 'Queen Bee Syndrome' because it implies that in higher educational administration . . . there can only be one queen" (p. 116). The vulnerability of being a Black woman makes racism still a factor when white women "build coalitions with white men" (Ramey, 1995, p. 116) and fail to understand the gendered racism that Black women experience. Although these findings are dated, they support the current climate of higher education and the purpose of this study to interrogate the critical incidents that occur within the working relationships with Black women student affairs professionals and white women higher professionals at HWIs.

Since earlier studies by Mosley (1980) and Ramey (1995), more recent scholars have focused on the survival of Black women student affairs professionals as we navigate gendered racism, structural violence, and racialized harm (Acker, 2006; Hamer & Lang, 2015; Holvino, 2008; Patton & Njoku, 2019) in higher education. Patitu and Hinton (2003) examined data from two qualitative studies to explore the experiences and concerns of Black women faculty and

student affairs professionals. Findings showed the five Black women student affairs professionals in the study experienced racism, sexism, and homophobia. Patitu and Hinton (2003) identified "marginalization, lack of support, survival and coping skills, and transition and growth" (p. 82) as effects and processes of Black women administrators' experiences at PWIs. Like Mosley's (1980) study, due to the interlocking oppressions of their identities, participants in Patitu and Hinton's (2003) study felt marginalized and "were placed at the periphery of the decision-making process, access to resources, and participation in their organizations" (p. 82), were "ignored, isolated, and alienated" (p. 83), and were "ineffective in their positions" (p. 83) due to the lack of professional and personal support they received from their institutions. As a result, participants reported developing survival techniques and coping strategies such as prayer, faith, retreating/moving on, laughter, support networks, family/friends, and "pearls of wisdom" from other Black women (Patitu & Hinton, 2003).

In contrast to the findings in Mosley (1980), Ramey (1995), and Patitu and Hinton's (2003) studies, Henry's (2010) participants noted positive experiences working at a PWI. Henry conducted a qualitative study with three Black women student affairs professionals at different levels (entry level, midlevel, and senior level) exploring workplace factors and challenges. Henry found a positive factor contributing to the work-place climate was supportive relationships with mentors, supervisors, and colleagues. Participants felt supported by their supervisors and staff and felt that strong interpersonal relationships across campus contributed to the level of success in their roles. This finding was surprising as much of the research on Black women student affairs professionals illuminates the negative experiences that we endure at HWIs. However, despite the support and strong relationships the participants experienced, Henry also found workplace challenges revolved around perceptions of racism related to discrimination and

31

stereotypes. Although participants did not mention blatant instances of racism by white colleagues, there were microaggressive incidents that occurred such as curiosity around one participant's hair by white colleagues. Like Patitu and Hinton's (2003) study, participants in Henry's study also shared strategies for survival and success. Understanding the culture and environment, support from family members, close friends, and mentors, and knowing oneself were survival strategies shared by participants that were vital to their success as student affairs professionals at PWIs.

West (2015) had similar findings to these studies related to marginalized experiences while employed at PWIs. West interviewed 10 Black women attendees of the African American Women's Summit held annually at the NASPA Annual Conference. The purpose of West's study was to give voice to Black women student affairs professionals and provide a space to define our unique experiences of marginalization, isolation, professional success, and personal well-being for ourselves. Participants shared similar experiences of marginalization, underrepresentation, and isolation as the aforementioned studies such as being on the periphery within the work setting, lacking support within the institution, being the only Black staff member, and lacking understanding from colleagues. Strategies for professional success and survival also resembled findings from earlier studies. West found her participants also relied on family and friends for personal support systems, used prayer and faith as a coping mechanism, and emphasized the importance of being in the presence of and building relationships with other Black women. The most distinct difference in West's findings from other studies were the trauma and psychological stress that participants described because of their experiences. West (2015) stated, "Underrepresentation is both a description of physical reality—which is usually immediately visible—and a psychological consequence of that physical reality, which is typically invisible

especially to individuals who are members of groups that are overrepresented" (p. 115). This trauma and stress alongside the other experiences of Black women student affairs professionals articulated in the literature are examples of how gendered racism, structural violence, and racialized harm manifest and influence the careers of Black women at HWIs.

As implications for the field, the researchers in these studies all recommended that institutions should increase the critical mass of Black women within departments and offices through implementing more equitable hiring practices and providing supportive networks and safe spaces on campuses to assist Black women with coping with and resisting marginalization and isolation. My dissertation argues that the "institutions" include white women higher education professionals, who are the overrepresented critical mass in the flow of power and influence, who can implement policies and institutional practices so Black women student affairs professionals can not only survive but thrive in higher education.

From Surviving to Thriving

As demonstrated in the literature, studies on Black women student affairs professionals center heavily on negative experiences and strategies for survival. However, there is a gap in the literature related to how Black women move from surviving to thriving in higher education, which begs the question on how, and when, will Black women receive our flowers for our work and contributions in higher education? A recent dissertation study by Adams (2021) supported the need for more research on Black women student affairs professionals and thriving at HWIs, as "thriving is also not synonymous with surviving" (Adams, 2021, p. 145). Adams (2021) conducted a phenomenological qualitative study that explored thriving for midlevel Black women student affairs professionals at southern HWIs through examining community, onboarding, and identity. Alongside her participants, Adams developed a definition of thriving

that encompassed the gendered racist experiences of Black women student affairs professionals

at HWIs. Adams (2021) forwarded that, for midlevel Black women student affairs professionals,

> thriving is the ability to bring one's unapologetically whole self into any space without
>
> constant fear of discrimination. An individual who is thriving is working within their
>
> purpose, achieving their self-definition of success, appropriately compensated for their
>
> labor, and is able to have a positive impact on others while also growing professionally
>
> and personally. To thrive is to have one's identities and experiences affirmed and valued.
>
> Individuals are mentally and physically well and have a strong community support on
>
> and off campus. To thrive also includes leaving the spaces one occupies better for those
>
> coming behind them. Finally, to thrive is the ability to work in spaces where White
>
> colleagues and HWIs take ownership of their past and present ties to systems of
>
> oppression while creating and implementing an actionable plan to address the ways that
>
> they perpetuate these systems. (p. 146)

This definition, as Adams (2021) and her participants coconstructed, illuminated the role of

white higher education professionals at HWIs and their ownership in the gendered racist

experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and our ability to thrive in higher

education. Ultimately, for Black women student affairs professionals to thrive, HWIs and white

colleagues, overwhelmingly white women, must create actionable plans that result in

institutional policies and practices that do not perpetuate white supremacist patriarchy and lead

to structural violence and racialized harm. This reiterates Mosley (1980) and Ramey's (1995)

early findings related to the relationships between Black women student affairs professionals and

white women higher education professionals and the motivation for this study. As such, to

provide context to the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and the critical

incidents that occur, the following section reviews the limited research on white women higher education professionals and how they navigate identity, race, and their roles in higher education.

White Women Higher Education Professionals

As demonstrated in Chapter 1, the field of student affairs is dominated by white women (NCES, 2022) and white women are vastly overrepresented in senior-level student affairs positions (NASPA, 2014). Despite this data, there is very little research and scholarship on the experiences of white women higher education professionals. Of the literature that exists, topics researched are primarily about the experiences related to racial identity development of white women graduate students within higher education and student affairs graduate programs (Feenstra, 2017; Robbins, 2016; Robbins & Jones, 2016; Woods, 2020). In addition to these studies, Accapadi (2007) has an early study of white women student affairs professionals and their racialized and gendered interactions with Women of Color within the field. More recently, Tevis and Pifer (2021) conducted a study on white women administrators and the role their identities play in their leadership decisions related to Students of Color. Mata (2018) also conducted a dissertation study examining the methods white women student affairs professionals use to navigate race on college campuses. These scholars highlighted the role of racial identity formation, racial dissonance, benefits of white privilege, the use of emotion, the intersection of oppressed and privileged identities and how these factors influence the work of white women higher education professionals.

Racial Dissonance and Resistance to White Privilege

Feenstra (2017) and Woods (2020) conducted similar studies examining the development of their racial identity as white women and how their privilege, whiteness, and white womanhood influenced their experiences and development as student affairs graduate students.

Feenstra's study explored the racial identity development of white feminist women using scholarly personal narrative. Using models of white racial identity development as a lens, Feenstra reflected on her white feminist identity and her lack of awareness of race and the experiences she encountered throughout her life and educational journey that made her aware of race and her racial privilege. Many of the experiences she reflected on centered on her resistance to discussions of white privilege during undergraduate and graduate studies. Feenstra (2017) defined resistance as "the tendency for White people to reject or dismiss the presence of racism due to discomfort with the subject or fear" (p. 71). Feenstra's resistance to understanding white privilege was undergirded by white guilt and shame. Much of Feenstra's realization of racial oppression stemmed from the lens of gender oppression which led her to acknowledge her white privilege. Feenstra (2017) stated, "Through my white identity development, I observed the ways in which my identity as a woman and the development of my feminist identity were both a hindrance and an aid in the process of understanding my own White privilege" (p. 74).

Similarly, Woods (2020) conducted an autoethnographic study while enrolled in a student affairs graduate program that examined her white womanhood and the effects on her work and role as a student affairs professional. Woods's (2020) study resulted in three themes: (a) she found that, as a white woman, she had been socialized to support white supremacist culture; (b) she realized the "relationship between being "good" and being a white woman" (p. 45) guided her ideas of what it meant to be a socially just student affairs professional; and (c) she used silence as a resistance mechanism to avoid discussions about race. Woods concluded the socialization of white women to support white supremacist culture and their use of silence as resistance further perpetuates systems of oppression, specifically related to white women student affairs professionals and their roles in higher education. Feenstra (2017) and Woods (2020) had

these realizations because of the studies, or "me-search," they conducted, not because of the experiences and coursework they engaged in during their graduate programs.

Robbins (2016) and Robbins and Jones (2016) also highlighted forms of resistance in a grounded theory study conducted on racial identity development of white women graduate students in higher education and student affairs graduate programs. Using resistance and the privileged identity exploration (PIE) model (Watt, 2007) as a framework, they discussed the different types of racial dissonance generated by white women graduate students as they learned about racism and white privilege throughout their graduate programs. Robbins and Jones also found participants in these studies experienced varying levels of racial dissonance that began with resistance and, for some, led to engagement and transformative action. Like Feenstra (2017) and Woods (2020), Robbins (2016) and Robbins and Jones (2016) also noted that many of the realizations around these experiences only occurred when participants participated in interviews related to the study and that these realizations or "eye-opening" moments were not occurring because of coursework or pre-professional experiences related to their graduate programs.

Feenstra (2017), Robbins (2016), Robbins and Jones (2016), and Woods (2020) demonstrated the need for white women graduate students and higher education professionals to self-reflect on their racial and gender identities in relation to their support of white supremacy and whiteness that perpetuate structural violence and racialized harm in higher education. If these discussions and learning opportunities are not being included in the experiences and coursework of graduate preparation programs, which are developing white women as the largest population of higher education professionals in the field, how might this lack of awareness and development influence the critical incidents that occur, specifically within the workplace relationships between Black women and white women higher education professionals? The

following studies conducted by Accapadi (2007), Mata (2018), and Tevis and Pifer (2021) provided examples of how lack of self-reflection and awareness as well as lack of research on white women student affairs professionals can cause harm to those they lead and supervise and support the motivation for this study.

"One Up/One Down Identities"

Using the PIE model (Watt, 2007), Accapadi (2007) studied the tensions that arise for white women student/academic affairs professionals because of the intersection of their two identities. Accapadi (2007) stated, "This dual oppressor/oppressed identity often becomes a root of tension when white women are challenged to consider their white privilege by Women of Color" (p. 208). Accapadi examined through case study how difficult dialogue plays out among white women and Women of Color within student affairs. As a result, Accapadi highlighted the role of tears as a form of resistance to difficult dialogue centered on race and gender and how white women use tears to oppress Women of Color when faced with this dialogue. Accapadi then demonstrated how white women within student affairs use their privileged identity of being white and their "white tears" to perpetuate white supremacy and power within the academy. Accapadi (2007) referred to this as "one up/one down identities" (p. 210), meaning possessing one identity that is privileged (white) and another that is oppressed (woman). Accapadi (2007) argued "white women, having 'one up/one down' identities as white and as woman, must recognize the power that comes with their whiteness" (p. 210).

Similarly, Tevis and Pifer (2021) used narrative analysis to study the paradoxical identities of white women administrators rooted in privilege and oppression and the role their identities play in their leadership decisions related to working with Students of Color. The six white women administrators in this study were director level or higher and discussed using their

white privilege to have discussions about race with other white colleagues or during diversity and inclusion committees to support Students of Color (Tevis & Pifer, 2021). Although the participants did not have difficulties discussing race and their racial privilege, like Feenstra (2017), they used gender as a proxy to understand and acknowledge oppression and racial bias. However, Tevis and Pifer's findings showed participants failed to acknowledge the intersectional relationship between race and gender and the power dynamics of this relationship. Tevis and Pifer (2021) stated, "Throughout the focus group, there was no account of the intersectional relationship between race and gender, particularly for Women of Color," such as Black women student affairs professionals, and that white women administrators "may be dismissing the challenges that their Women of Color colleagues may be facing" (p. 95). These findings also aligned with Mosley's (1980) and Ramey's (1995) earlier studies of the experiences of Black women administrators and their relationships with white women colleagues. Because of this lack of awareness, Tevis and Pifer forwarded that although the participants acknowledged race and that higher education is a white male dominated system, their leadership, and good intentions of using their white privilege were wrought with blind spots and unconscious bias which needs further interrogation and research.

Mata's (2018) dissertation study also focused on the ways in which white women experience whiteness and leadership within student affairs. In this qualitative case study, Mata conducted semistructured interviews with 23 white women student affairs professionals who had supervision experience. Mata's study yielded similar findings to Accapadi's (2007), Robbins's (2016) and Robbins and Jones's (2016) studies, wherein white women student affairs professionals experienced colorblindness, racial dissonance, and used mechanisms such as emotions/tears, anger, and self-victimization to avoid and resist conversations related to race.

Similar to Tevis and Pifer (2021), Mata's study also emphasized the role of supervision and leadership for white women student affairs professionals in supporting white supremacist patriarchal policies and practices within higher education. Mata's and Tevis and Pifer's studies also spoke to what hooks (2015) discussed about the nature of Black women and white women's relationships related to hegemonic (white) femininities (Collins, 2004; Hamilton et al., 2019) and white supremacy. hooks (2015) professed:

> This has been especially true of black and white female relationships. Historically, many black women experienced white women as the white supremacist group who most directly exercised power over them, often in a manner far more brutal and dehumanizing than that of racist white men. Today, despite predominant rule by white supremacist patriarchs, black women often work in situations where their immediate supervisor, boss, or authority figure is a white woman. (p. 50)

This literature supports the findings of this dissertation and the role of white women supervisors in the critical incidents experienced by Black women student affairs professionals and further supports the purpose of this study. The findings of this study are discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Although my dissertation study does not center the experiences of white women, it is important to provide context and note their role in the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals, specifically related to consciously or unconsciously upholding white supremacist patriarchy within higher education. As reflected in the literature, their support of white supremacy has historical connections to hegemonic white femininities (Collins, 2004; Hamilton et al., 2019) and the lack of acknowledgment of intersecting systems of oppression experienced by Black women, and other Women of Color, during the feminist movement (Collins, 2009; hooks, 1981, 2015; Lorde, 2007) and moving into the 21st century.

Current practices in higher education align with and support the blind spots of hegemonic white feminism as demonstrated in the literature—specifically, the ways in which white women are overrepresented in higher education but are understudied. Moreso, their lack of acknowledgment of the interlocking systems of oppression experienced by Black women and the ways white women resist discussions related to race and white privilege, but their white privilege affords them power at HWIs. Therefore, in naming these practices and blind spots, how might this show up in the critical incidents that occur within the workplace relationships of Black women student affairs professionals and white women higher education professionals?

This history related to white women in higher education and continued blind spots further speaks to the need to use Black feminism to study the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals as framed in this study. The following section provides an overview of BFT (Collins, 1986, 2009) and a review of the literature on the role it plays in the development and survival of Black women student affairs professionals employed at HWIs.

Black Feminist Theory/Thought

Davis and Brown (2017) forwarded that "Black feminists engaged in specific feminism rhetoric in the mid-19th century, but it was not until the 1970s the term Black feminism was coined" (p. 1). The term disrupted the underlying racism that presented feminism as a white woman only ideology and political movement (Collins, 1998). Collins (1998) argued, "Inserting the adjective *Black* challenges the assumed Whiteness of feminism and disrupts the false universal of this term for both White and Black American women" (p. 67). Thus, BFT is a critical theory that examines the experiences of Black women through the interlocking oppressions of race, class, and gender (Collins, 2009; Evans-Winters, 2019). Although Collins (1986, 2009) conceptualized BFT through standpoints and themes, many early Black women

scholars and pedagogues discussed BFT within their writings and literature before Collins. Early Black women intellectuals and scholars such as Sojourner Truth, Anna Julia Cooper, Zora Neale Hurston, Barbara Smith, The Combahee River Collective, Pauli Murray, Barbara Christian, Hortense J. Spiller, bell hooks, and Audre Lorde, among others, discussed Black feminism throughout their writings, teachings, and public statements (Guy-Sheftall, 1995). Many of these Black women scholars discussed the experiences of Black women in academia and the legitimacy of Black feminist standpoints in knowledge production compared to mainstream white male epistemologies and white feminism (Guy-Sheftall, 1995). J. Wilder et al. (2013) stated, "Through the vehicle of Black Feminist Scholarship, Black women have been able to express their voices within the marginal spaces crafted for them inside the academy" (p. 28). Although some early Black feminist scholars highlighted the experiences of Black women in the academy, much of this literature was focused on the experiences of Black women faculty; very little focused on the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals, displaying the long-standing gap in the literature in relation to the purpose of this study.

As stated in Chapter 1, Collins (1986) defined BFT as "ideas produced by Black women that clarify a standpoint of and for Black women" (p. S16). Collins (1986) supported this definition with three assumptions: (a) BFT can only be produced by Black women, (b) this standpoint represents commonalities and differences in experiences among Black women, and (c) the nuances of BFT may not be obvious to all Black women therefore it is the responsibility of Black women intellectuals to produce knowledge about Black women's experiences. Collins further theorized three key themes of BFT: self-definition and self-valuation, the interlocking nature of oppression, and the importance of Black women's culture. These themes frame BFT and center Black women's lived experiences and oppositional knowledge production.

Using Collins's (1986, 2009) concept of the *outsider-within*, theoretical assumptions, and three key themes, the following section explores how BFT anchors the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals as we use our marginalized status to develop and to survive and thrive within the academy.

The "Outsider Within"

In *Learning From the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought*, Collins (1986) introduced the term *outsider within* as a status assigned to Black women domestic workers by whites who allowed Black women to enter their homes to take care of their children, clean their houses, and cook their food while maintaining second-class citizenship. This status allowed Black women to be in and around white spaces interacting with white people as an insider while simultaneously forming perspectives as an outsider that our white counterparts and Black men were not privy to (Collins, 1986, 2009). Black women also understood that despite our insider status, white society would always render us hypervisible *and* invisible while considering us outsiders due to our racial identity (Collins, 2009). Applying this marginalized status to the academy, Collins (1986) asserted:

> Black women have long occupied marginal positions in academic settings . . . and that
> Black female intellectuals have made creative use of their marginality – their "outsider-
> within" status – to produce Black Feminist Thought that reflects a special standpoint on
> self, family, and society. (p. S14)

In *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice*, Collins (1998) later defined *outsider-within* locations as "social locations or border spaces marking boundaries between groups of unequal power. Individuals acquire identities as "outsider within" by their placement in these social locations" (p. 279). In her seminal text, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge,*

Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment, Collins (2009) theorized that Black women create oppositional knowledge due to their *outsider within* status within power relations, thus developing a special standpoint that legitimizes Black women's intellectual production.

In support of this special standpoint created by Black women intellectuals, Harris (2007) also stated, "providing intellectual space for their voices to be heard in the community will aid African American women in advancing knowledge about their marginalized experiences in the academy" (p. 56). Howard-Hamilton (2003) also discussed the ou*tsider within* status among Black women within academic settings. Howard-Hamilton (2003) stated, "Black women have been invited into spaces where the dominant group has assembled, but they remain outsiders because they are still invisible and have no voice when dialogue commences" (p. 21). Similarly, hooks (1992) also discussed Black women from the perspective of the "other" when describing the commodification of otherness through the ways in which society exploits the Black female body and persona. duCille (1994) later referred to the "other" when describing the experiences of Black women in the academy. duCille (1994) argued because of our race and gender, "black women are not only the 'second sex' – *the Other*, in postmodern parlance, – but we are also the last race, the most oppressed, the most marginalized, the most deviant, the quintessential site of difference" (p. 592).

With Black women serving as the largest racially minoritized population within faculty and student/academic affairs positions (NCES, 2022), we have been hired and invited into the academy by the dominant group, primarily white women, within higher education. Our double bind status of being Black and a woman checks two boxes for diversity at institutions and gives us insider knowledge. However, many Black women student affairs professionals report that despite our success in being hired and invited in for these positions, our voices are not heard, we

are still treated as outsiders, and are only there to fulfill the status quo from the margins (Croom & Patton, 2011; Fullwood, 2023; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Wallace et al., 2020). This speaks to the hypervisibility and invisibility of being an *outsider within* which Collins (1986) referred to as surveillance that "highlights individuality by making the individual hypervisible and on display" (p. 20). Like the Black women domestic workers Collins (1986, 1998, 2009) referred to, Black women student affairs professionals are essentially hired by white women who use techniques of surveillance that cause structural violence and racialized harm. Although Black women and white women "share the same gender, race and class create significant power differences" (Collins, 1998, p. 21), and white women's racial privilege allows them to use surveillance to control this power differential (Collins, 1998). As outsiders within, Black women are invisible as outsiders but are hypervisible as insiders as surveillance is used to make sure that Black women "stay in their designated, subordinated places in white-controlled public and private spheres" (Collins, 1998, p. 20) such as HWIs. Thus, Collins (2009) emphasized that "ironically just as organizations may keep Black women under surveillance, these same Black women have the capacity to keep organizations themselves under surveillance" (p. 300).

Although the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals are not monolithic, Collins's (1986, 2009) articulation of BFT provided a lens for a deeper understanding of our experiences as Black women in the academy. This deeper understanding provides insight on the interlocking oppressions of race and gender and how Black women student affairs professionals use BFT, our *outsider within* status, and surveillance to "work the cracks" of a "well-oiled bureaucracy" (Collins, 2009, p. 300) that is resistant to change and to survive and thrive within the academy. Collins (2009) theorized the "university as an egg" and that "from a distance, each egg appears to be smooth and seamless, but upon closer inspection,

each egg's distinctive patterns of almost invisible cracks become visible" (p. 300). Black women student affairs professionals use our insider knowledge of our "outsider within" status to continuously "work the cracks" and expose the cracks to create change at our institutions (Collins, 2009). As a result, Black women student affairs professionals' hypervisibility and invisibility as the *outsider within* puts us in positions to make visible change while advancing our ability to survive and thrive within the academy. Through these changes "as more Black women enter the academy in pursuit of higher education, hopefully, fewer will be forced into the 'outsider within' category" (J. Wilder et al., 2013, p. 33). Thus, as supported in the literature, Black feminist theory/thought is critical, not only in navigating the intersectional experiences of Black women student affairs professionals, but also in dismantling institutional policies and practices built on white supremacist patriarchy and supported by white women who continue to position Black women as the *outsiders within*. The following section discusses how Black women student affairs professionals use Black feminist theory, their status as the *outsider within*, and surveillance to develop and survive and thrive within higher education.

Self-Definition, Self-Valuation, and Creativity

To combat interlocking systems of oppression, our marginalized status, and surveillance of the "other" or "outsider-within," Black women student affairs professionals have used the standpoint and themes of BFT to further our development and to survive and thrive in the academy. Collins (1995) argued "rather than being restrained by their 'both/and' status of marginality, these women make creative use of their outsider-within status and produce innovative Black feminist thought" (p. 350). hooks (2015) also professed "it is essential . . . that black women recognize the special vantage point our marginality gives us and make use of this perspective to criticize the dominant racist, classist, sexist hegemony as well as to envision and

create a counter-hegemony" (p. 16). Black women student affairs professionals have not only produced BFT but have used BFT in our development as practitioners, scholars, and pedagogues (Adams, 2021; Gilliam & Toliver, 2021; Harris, 2007; Porter et al., 2020; Wallace et al., 2020; West, 2015, 2017, 2020a, 2020b). BFT has shed light on the complexities of our marginalized status while also empowering Black women student affairs professionals to make use of our marginality in creative ways within the academy.

Throughout our daily lived experiences as Black women student affairs professionals, we have specifically relied on Collins' (1986, 2009) theme of self-definition and self-valuation in producing and using BFT to survive and thrive in higher education. As Collins (1986) wrote that self-definition

> involves challenging the political knowledge-validation process that has resulted in
> externally defined, stereotypical images of Afro-American womanhood. In contrast, self-
> valuation stressed the content of Black women's self-definitions—namely, replacing
> externally-derived images with authentic Black female images. (pp. S16–S17)

Self-definition and self-valuation assist Black women with redefining and reclaiming controlling images and the power dynamics related to those images (Collins, 1986, 2009). In addition, as a key theme of understanding the importance of Black women's culture, Collins (1986) discussed the "role of creative expression in shaping and sustaining Black women's self-definition and self-valuation" and refers to "creativity as sphere of freedom" as a means for Black women to "cope with and transcend daily life" (p. S23).

Through a collective Black feminist autoethnography (BFA; Griffin, 2012), Wallace et al. (2020) used self-definition and self-valuation to discuss our existence as Black women within, against, and beyond the academy from a Black feminist standpoint. Through the creative

compilation of a literary Black feminist mixtape, we discuss how we leverage our marginality as Black women to resist controlling images, use voice and silence as a means of resistance, and self-advocacy as a form of authenticity (Wallace et al., 2020). Similarly, through the lens of Black feminism, Gilliam and Toliver (2021) centered Janelle Monae's album, *Dirty Computers*, to conceptualize the experiences of Black women in higher education. The authors used the album as a metaphor to forward that "Black women in higher education are often positioned as dirty computers, viruses infiltrating the university system and causing it to malfunction" (Gilliam & Toliver, 2021, p. 84). Thus, they developed "Black Feminist Wondaland" as a critical theory used to center "how Black women reckon with oppression, celebrate themselves, and reclaim joy" (Gilliam & Toliver, 2021, p. 87). Mirroring Monae's poetic style, Gilliam and Toliver (2021) used Black Feminist Wondaland as a framework and Black feminist-womanist storytelling as a methodology to self-define, self-valuate, and share their experiences of reckoning, celebration, and reclamation as Black women in higher education. West (2020a) also examined her journey as a "Black feminist scholar-pracademic in higher education" (p. 382) and how she enacts a Black feminist consciousness as praxis pedagogically and through her research agenda and disciplinary creativity. West illustrated her praxis by creating a visual conceptual model using a three-legged step stool to demonstrate the role BFT plays within her professorial identity.

Okello and White (2019) also discussed the use of creativity in their essay on a Black feminist conceptualization of embodied agency. The authors theorized that the meaning-making process of navigating the interlocking oppressions of race, class, and gender gives way to creativity and "that the genius of embodied agency is in this creative impulse" (Okello & White, 2019, p. 153). Okello and White (2019) further stated, "At times, minimal amounts of creativity

will be necessary to achieve freedom; that is, the authority to move and act upon the world uninterrupted. In other situations, extensive amounts of creativity will be required to resolve movement forward" (p. 154). White, the Black woman co-author of Okello and White's (2019) chapter, shared her gendered racist experiences as a student affairs graduate student. White discussed how she used her Black feminist reconstruction of agency to achieve freedom and "also thrive in my Black Woman body without any interruptions" (Okello & White, 2019, p. 152). This embodied agency inspired White's entrepreneurial spirit to create Black and Bold, a t-shirt line to "empower Black folks to live their lives unapologetically" (Okello & White, 2019, p 152).

Collins (1986) asserted Black women should examine the "creative potential of their outsider within status and use it wisely. In doing so, they move themselves and their disciplines closer to the humanist vision in their work—namely, the freedom both to be different and part of the solidarity of humanity" (p. S30). Gilliam and Toliver (2021), Okello and White (2019), Wallace et al. (2020), and West (2020a) exemplified this wise, but critical, use of creativity through sharing personal narratives of surviving and thriving as Black women in higher education, moving closer to the freedom that we desire to simply exist within the academy.

Counterspaces

Another method Black women student affairs professionals have used creativity to move further in our development and survival is through the creation of safe spaces. Although limited, a few Black women scholars have highlighted similar safe spaces (Croom et al., 2017; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; West, 2015, 2017, 2019; West & Bertrand Jones, 2019; West & Greer, 2020), known as counterspaces (Howard-Hamilton, 2003), to assist Black women with navigating and existing in higher education from the margins. Howard-Hamilton (2003) stated, "Survival of

black women is contingent on the ability to find a place to describe their experiences among persons like themselves" (p. 25). Howard-Hamilton's use of counterspaces supports Collins (1986) theme in the importance of emphasizing Black women's culture. In explaining the importance of Black women's culture, Collins (1986) argued:

> Black feminists have not only uncovered previously unexplored areas of the Black female experience, but they have also identified concrete areas of social relations where Afro-American women create and pass on self-definitions and self-valuations essential to coping with the simultaneity of oppression they experience. (p. S21)

> Black women have created counterspaces to emphasize the importance of Black women's culture and center the voices of Black women in higher education while creating networks to strategize and share resources to combat marginalization and isolation in the academy through self-definition and self-valuation. As an example, Patitu and Hinton (2003) highlighted the Women of Color Academy Project at the University of Michigan's Center for the Education of Women. Although this was created by Women of Color, this program was supported by the Office of the Provost with the purpose of highlighting the contributions of Women of Color to the university and building a support system for research, career development, and career satisfaction to support the retention of Women of Color (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). In conducting a study of the African American Women's Summit at the NASPA Annual Conference, West (2019) developed the definition of a "professional counterspace" as

> an intentionally designed, culturally affirming professional development experience that directly contributes to the personal well-being and professional success of individuals from underrepresented cultural groups; by virtue of their purpose, professional

counterspaces should be conceived of and facilitated by and for members of the groups

they intend to support. (p. 4)

West (2015, 2017, 2019; West & Greer, 2020) has several studies examining the African

American Women's Summit. West's (2017) study consisted of individual in-person interviews

with seven Black women student affairs professionals who attended The Summit at least three

times between 2006 and 2011. West (2017) found that The Summit served as a professional

counterspace for Black women student affairs professionals to identify and validate oppressive

experiences, share strategies to resist oppressions, and served as a platform to understand and

withstand the oppressive experiences associated with our *outsider within* status. Croom et al.

(2017) also conducted a critical qualitative study seeking to understand undergraduate Black

women's motivations for engaging in *sister* circle organizations, such as Black Greek letter

sororities, as a counterspace. The researchers found the six Black women participants engaged in

sister circle organizations because they wanted to observe how Black women interacted with one

another, were interested in identifying role models to support them while in college, and wanted

to participate in "spaces where they could be more of their whole selves" (Croom et al., 2017, p.

221).

Black women have long histories of creating community and kinship with other Black

women, through campus organizations, community organizations, and church groups, which

serve as counterspaces to support moving from surviving to thriving. Collins (2009) posited

"These safe spaces are not only safe—they form prime locations for resisting objectification as

the Other" (p. 111). In doing so, counterspaces serve as sites of resistance that empower Black

women to be in community with one another while creating a collective voice about our

experiences that only we can understand. Collins (2009) asserted:

51

For African-American women the listener most able to pierce the invisibility created by

Black women's objectification is another Black woman. This process of trusting one

another can seem dangerous because only Black women know what it means to be Black

women. But if we will not listen to one another, then who will? (p. 114)

The literature reflects the positives and negatives of counterspaces at HWIs, as it demonstrates

the responsibility of creating these safe spaces and supporting Black women student affairs

professionals is typically on the backs of Black women. In doing so, these spaces require more

work and emotional labor by Black women due to the proximity to white supremacist patriarchy

and white women who support these practices through their leadership and positionality within

higher education. In contrast, the literature also supports the use of counterspaces as a support

system and as a method of data collection to study the experiences of Black women student

affairs professionals while creating and providing a safe space for us to be in dialogue and

community with one another. My dissertation uses *sista* circles as a counterspace to study and

share the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals. The following section

discusses the origin of *sister/sista* circles and a review of the studies that have used *sister/sista*

circles as a Black feminist methodology to study the experiences of Black women.

Sister Circles

Sister circles have been cultural staples in the lives of Black women for over 150 years

(Giddings, 1985; Neal-Barnett, Stadulis, Murray, et al., 2011). Derived from the Black club

movement of the late 1800s, Black women created *sister* circles in response to being excluded

from white women's and Black men's social clubs (Dunmeyer, 2020; Giddings, 1985; Johnson,

2015). *Sister* circles were especially important for Black women during the women's suffrage

movement as the movement was centered on equal rights for white women. They provided safe

spaces for Black women to organize and participate in social action in response to the gendered racism and classism that we experienced (Dunmeyer, 2020; Giddings, 1985; Johnson, 2015).

Historically, within education, religion, beauty, and civic organizations, *sister* circles have served as counterspaces for Black women to survive and thrive, where "a natural occurrence in these spaces is the sharing of personal stories, the giving of advice and encouragement, and the bond that develops among those with shared culture and life experiences" (Matthews, 2020, p. 61). Using *sister* circles in research, Neal-Barnett, Stadulis, Murray, et al. (2011) defined *sister* circles as "support groups that build upon existing friendships, fictive kin networks, and the sense of community found among African American females" (p. 2). Neal-Barnett, Stadulis, Murray, et al. (2011) also posited "women within the sister circle have a preexisting relationship and a commitment individually and collectively" (p. 3) and a critical component to be effective is that the *sister* circle must be "facilitated by women who are both part of the existing organization and part of the subset" (p. 3) of women embedded in the organization.

Earlier studies using *sister* circles have been centered around physical and mental health interventions for Black women (Gaston et al., 2007; Gilbert & Goddard, 2007; Neal-Barnett, Stadulis, Murray, et al., 2011; Neal-Barnett, Stadulis, Payne, et al., 2011). Gaston et al. (2007) conducted a quasi-experimental study to evaluate the effectiveness of *sister* circles in assisting midlife Black women with decreasing major health risk factors such as stress and physical inactivity. There were 106 participants in 10 *sister* circles serving as intervention groups with 8 to 13 women per group led by a group facilitator (Gaston et al., 2007). Researchers found *sister* circles "demonstrated the effectiveness of a culture and gender-specific support group intervention . . . to modify certain high-risk behaviors in mid-life African American women"

(Gaston et al., 2007, p. 436). Gilbert and Goddard (2007) also conducted a similar quasi-experimental study examining an HIV prevention program for 45 African American women over 2 years. Outcomes for this study also emphasized the importance of "cultural and gender appropriate materials" (Gilbert & Goddard, 2007, p. S110) and infusion of African American values in the *sister* circle intervention model assisted with behavior change. Similarly, Neal-Barnett, Stadulis, Murray, et al. (2011) and Neal-Barnett, Stadulis, Payne, et al. (2011) used *sister* circles as a culturally relevant intervention treatment for professional African American women with anxiety. Through a mixed methods study, Neal-Barnett, Stadulis, Murray, et al. and Neal-Barnett, Stadulis, Payne, et al. taught techniques for managing anxiety and fear using *sister* circles and found they were a positive intervention for African American professional women with anxiety due to the confidentiality and supportive atmosphere that came naturally to being in community with other Black women. Neal-Barnett, Stadulis, Payne, et al. (2011) also found "participants viewed sister circles as an outgrowth of existing relationships with other professional women at work or church" (p. 217).

These studies serve as examples of the effectiveness of *sister* circles in creating culturally relevant safe spaces for Black women facilitated by Black women to share, learn, and grow without the objectification of the other. Although these are mostly quantitative studies and the term *sister* is used, they laid the foundation for a number of Black women scholars (Broom, 2022; L. C. Brown et al., 2021; Collier, 2017; Dunmeyer, 2020; Ford-Thomas, 2023; Fullwood, 2023; Green, 2017; Johnson, 2015; Karikari, 2022; Lacy, 2017; Matthews, 2020; Nathan, 2021; D. Palmer, 2021; Q. S. Williams, 2020) to use *sista* circles as a methodology to conduct qualitative research on the experiences of Black women.

Sista Circle Methodology

The terms *sister* and *sista* have often been used interchangeably throughout the literature. According to Dorsey (2000), the term *sista* is an

> in-group term used mainly among African American women to refer to the camaraderie and connection they feel towards each other. It can sometimes be used interchangeably with the term "sister," but often does not refer to a biological relationship. (p. 71)

Johnson (2015) used Dorsey's definition of *sista* and the term to develop a new culturally relevant, gender specific methodology known as *sista* circle methodology. Furthering Johnson's use of the term *sista*, Dunmeyer (2020) also used *sista* circle methodology and acknowledged that using "the term *sista* instead of sister is my way of decolonizing the mind (Evans-Winters, 2019) and talking back in research spaces that have previously omitted the voices of Black women's experiences" (p. 49). Dunmeyer (2020) emphasized her intentional use of the term *sista* to signify the shared gendered racism experienced by Black women teachers. Dorsey's, Dunmeyer's, and Johnson's use of *sista* stresses the innate and historical relationships that we, as Black women, have cultivated to survive and thrive within a white supremacist patriarchal society. Thus, in her dissertation, Johnson (2015) developed *sista* circle methodology from the notion of *sista* mentoring as methodology and professed "*sista* circles are group discussions or conversations among Black women arranged by a researcher to examine a specific set of topics and/or experiences" (p. 46).

Johnson (2015) conceptualized *sista* circle methodology through the lens of Black feminist theory (Collins, 2009) to qualitatively study the professional experiences of Black women teachers and the mentoring and support they received inside and outside of schools. The *sista* circle consisted of six Black women elementary school teachers who were members of the

same sorority of which Johnson is also a member. Johnson used their sorority membership to build rapport and establish trust which aligns with Neal-Barnett, Stadulis, Murray, et al. (2011) and Neal-Barnett, Stadulis, Payne, et al. (2011) concept of *sister* circles being an outgrowth of existing relationships and having an individual and collective commitment to be effective. Through *sista* circles, Johnson (2015) found Black women teachers felt pressured to reform regarding appearance and choice of pedagogy, resisted negative stereotypes, and experienced invisibility and being overlooked. Findings also showed that Black women teachers in the study experienced a lack of support from school mentoring programs and that veteran Black women teachers and spirituality were the primary sources of support (Johnson, 2015). Dunmeyer (2020) also used *sista* circle methodology to understand the experiences of six Black women teachers and how they experienced and deconstructed stereotypes related to Black womanhood and oppression. Employing Black feminist theory (Collins, 2009), and Womanism (A. Walker, 1972), as frameworks for her study, Dunmeyer bounded sista circles in narrative inquiry to provide participants with the opportunity to retell their stories in a way that only they have experienced.

Inspired by Johnson's method, Collier (2017) and Lacy (2017) also used *sista* circle methodology to conduct qualitative studies on the experiences of Black graduate women. Collier explored the sense of belonging of 15 Black women doctoral students at an HWI and found belonging manifested as connectedness through community with Black women and supportive relationships with faculty. Collier also found Black women doctoral students experienced disconnection through unproductive faculty and indifferent relationships with peers. Another important finding in Collier's study was the use of *sista* circles as a method of inquiry and support group for studying the experiences of Black women at an HWI. Collier (2017) stated, for

participants, "participation in sista circle methodology was personally affirming, intellectually stimulating, reflective in nature, and an experience that informed their own approaches to research and facilitation" (p. 58).

Lacy (2017) conducted a similar study on how Black women graduate students make sense of the meaning making process related to the media presentations of themselves and how that meaning impacts how they define themselves. Like findings in the aforementioned studies of Black women student affairs professionals, among other findings, Lacy (2017) found "Black women self-sacrifice and create space for themselves where that space has not previously existed" (p. 105). Participants had similar experiences of being the only Black woman in their graduate programs, thus connecting with other Black women and creating supportive networks through spaces such as *sista* circles fostered a sense of community and belonging within the institution. Additionally, like Johnson, participants in Collier (2017) and Lacy's studies also had prior connections, interactions or existing relationships before participating in the studies, aligning with Neal-Barnett's earlier concept of *sister* circles (Neal-Barnett, Stadulis, Murray et al., 2011; Neal-Barnett, Stadulis, Payne, et al., 2011).

In my earlier research of the use of sista circle methodology, I located one study (Q. S. Williams, 2020) that used *sista* circles to study the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals. However, I learned of a few more recent dissertation studies (Broom, 2022; Ford-Thomas, 2023; Fullwood, 2023; Karikari, 2022; Nathan, 2021) that had used *sista* circles to study the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals.

Karikari (2022) conducted a qualitative study to examine how midlevel Black women approached and practiced leadership at HWIs. Through four in-person *sista* circles with six participants identified from her professional network, Karikari found role-modeling/mentorship

of and by other Black women, community with other Black women, and the barriers Black women face as leaders were the primary themes of her research. In contrast to earlier studies about Black women student affairs professionals but in alignment with Mata's (2018) and Tevis and Pifer's (2021) findings on white women higher education professionals, one barrier that participants shared in Karikari's study was their contentious relationships with white women colleagues/supervisors and the realization of how these experiences may have impacted their careers. Participants discussed the "feelings of competitiveness" they experienced from working with white women colleagues, "posing a threat" and "feelings of walking around on eggshells in the work environment" (Karikari, 2022, pp. 86–90) which align with my findings discussed in Chapter 5.

Similarly, Broom (2022) used sista circle methodology to understand the gendered racist experiences of Black women student affairs professionals who specifically work in housing and residence life at HWIs. Broom conducted two *sista* circles with eight participants and had similar findings to Mata (2018), Tevis and Pifer (2021), and Karikari (2022) related to workplace relationships with white women colleagues/supervisors. Participants stated their relationships with white women colleagues/supervisors were drastically different than relationships with Black men and women and white men and that relationships with white women were "often strained and lacked emotional depth" and "sometimes felt tokenizing" (Broom, 2022, p. 89). Karikari's and Broom's use of sista circle methodology and findings on Black women student affairs professionals' workplace relationships with white women colleagues/supervisors support the purpose and significance of my dissertation study.

Similar to earlier studies of Black women student affairs professionals, community, mentorship, marginalization, isolation, and lack of institutional support were salient to

participants in Broom's (2022) and Karikari's (2022) studies. Though there is limited use of sista circle methodology to study the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals, the few studies that do exist (Broom, 2022; Ford-Thomas, 2023; Fullwood, 2023; Karikari, 2022; Nathan, 2021; Q. S. Williams, 2020), created a sense of empowerment, community, and self-valuation and self-definition through *sista* circles. Like Johnson (2015), Collier (2017), and Lacy (2017), these studies establish an ethics of care used in the development and facilitation of this approach and demonstrate that *sista* circles provide a culturally relevant counterspace that is beneficial, necessary, and timely in studying the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals.

Summary/Gaps in The Literature

In conclusion, this chapter reviewed the current literature about the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals at HWIs. I began with an historical overview of how Black women entered the field of higher education as student affairs professionals, paying homage to the trailblazing efforts of Lucy Diggs Slowe while highlighting her relationships with white deans of women. Early literature on the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals focused on the challenges and barriers we have experienced with recent literature focusing on survival strategies and methods we have employed to navigate higher education. As the literature has moved from challenges to survival, more research needs to be conducted on how Black women student affairs professionals move from surviving to thriving and the contributions Black women student affairs professionals have made to higher education. Furthermore, the scant literature on the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals are largely qualitative studies. There are very few quantitative (Miles, 2012; C. R. Walker, 2020) or mixed method studies (West, 2019) on the experiences of Black women student affairs

59

professionals. Using different approaches could provide a more holistic view of the nuanced and unique experiences of Black women student affairs professionals.

In addition to a review of the literature on the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals, I discussed the limited research that currently exists on the experiences and influences of white women higher education professionals in relation to their gender and racial identities and their complacency with whiteness. Despite the overwhelming number of white women in higher education, very little research has been conducted on their presence, power, and positionality in higher education. Current research explores the racial dissonance and identity development among white women higher education professionals and the strategies they employ to avoid difficult dialogue and situations related to race and how these actions support white supremacist patriarchy on college campuses. More research needs to be conducted on the influences of these behaviors on students and professionals of color, which emphasizes the need for this study.

Lastly, I provided an in-depth explanation of BFT and how Black women student affairs professionals use BFT to survive and thrive in the academy through creativity and leveraging our status as the outsider within. Black feminist theory provides Black women student affairs professionals with a lens to navigate our experiences in higher education and frames this study. I also employed a Black feminist lens to discuss the use of counterspaces, *sister/sista* circles, and sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) in studying the experiences of Black women. Thus, in Chapter 3, I further discuss the Black feminist methodology, sista circle methodology, its distinguishing features and the research approach and design used for this study.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Sista circles are a way to give back to participants and not just take from them.

(Johnson, 2015, p. 48)

In this chapter, I restated the purpose of this study and restated the research questions that framed this study. This formed the foundation to discuss the rationale and approach for the research design and methodology used to answer the research questions for this study through a Black feminist lens. I then conclude with a detailed description of participant recruitment and selection, data collection and instruments used, data analysis, trustworthiness, boundaries of the study, and a chapter summary.

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework for Examining the Experiences of Black Women Student Affairs Professionals and the Critical Incidents That Occur Within Our Working Relationships With White Women Higher Education Professionals at HWIs
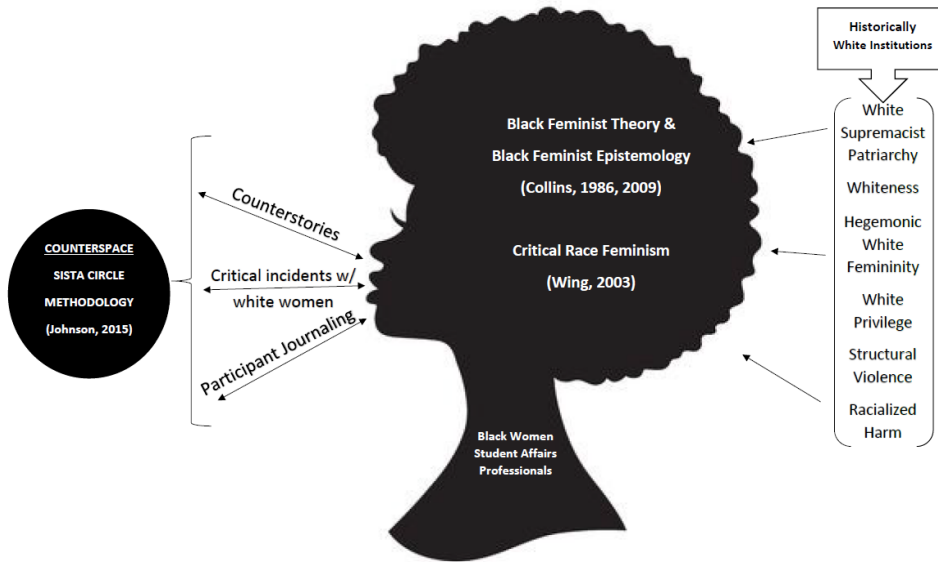
Emphasizing my conceptual framework (see Figure 2), as described in Chapter 1, the purpose of this critical qualitative study was to examine the experiences of Black women student

affairs professionals and the critical incidents that occur within our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs. As a result, the research questions for this study were as follows:

How do Black women student affairs professionals perceive, describe, and navigate critical incidents within our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs? How does this lead to structural violence and racialized harm, if any, that may be associated with these incidents?

1. From the perspective of Black women student affairs professionals, what are the critical incidents that occur within our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs?

2. How have critical incidents, structural violence, and racialized harm influenced the careers of Black women student affairs professionals at HWIs?

3. What tools, strategies, or support systems have assisted Black women student affairs professionals with navigating or coping with the critical incidents, structural violence, and racialized harm that may have occurred within our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs?

As a critical qualitative study, these questions aligned with sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) as a Black feminist methodology in centering the experiences of Black women and in emphasizing the importance of Black women's knowledge production through dialogue.

Research Approach and Design

Qualitative research assumes people are studied in social-cultural settings and make meaning of their experiences. Qualitative researchers center participants' perspectives with the intent of examining social situations, experiences, and interactions and the researcher is also

immersed in the meaning making process as the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Bhattacharya, 2017; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) stated, "Qualitative research is suited to promoting a deep understanding of a social setting or activity as viewed from the perspective of the research participants. This approach implies an emphasis on exploration, discovery, and description" (pp. 38–39). Using a traditional qualitative approach, such as phenomenology, where the focus is on the development of the lived experiences being studied rather than the explanation or analyses of the experience does not allow for the critique of oppressive social structures and does not account for the "direct advocacy or action taken by the researcher, often in collaboration with the participants in the study" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 109). Therefore, using a critical qualitative approach such as sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) through the lens of Black feminism was an appropriate approach for my study of the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and the critical incidents that occur within our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals.

Black Feminist Theory

Employing a Black feminist methodology in this critical qualitative study, examined the complex relationships Black women have with Black culture and the dominant culture, which requires continuous exploration, negotiation, and meaning making of our daily interactions (Collins, 2009); Few et al., 2003; hooks, 2015). Evans-Winters (2019) stated, "Black feminism in qualitative inquiry provides a mosaic for synchronously reconstructing and co-constructing the values, ethos, and worldviews that have helped to sustain our cultural knowledge, rituals, and traditions" (p. 20). Black feminist theory (Collins, 1986, 2009) framed this study and informed the research design, methodology, instruments, interview protocols, and methods for data

analysis. "Black women's (as the researcher and researched) experiences are at the center of analysis in the qualitative research process informed by Black feminist thought" (Evans-Winters, 2019, p. 20). Furthermore, in understanding Black women as qualitative researchers while researching Black women, Generett and Jeffries (2003) theorized that, for Black women, "qualitative inquiry is an appropriate outlet for understanding a self that is characterized by the fierce intersection of race, class, and gender" (p. 7).

Approaching this study with a critical qualitative methodology such as sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) through the lens of BFT, provided an opportunity to listen to Black women and create knowledge about Black women's experiences while using a method created for Black women, by Black women. Few et al. (2003) argued "Black feminists see research as being for Black women, rather than simply about Black women" (p. 206). Black feminist scholars (Bell-Scott, 1994; Collins, 2009; Few et al., 2003; Wallace et al., 2020) also have emphasized the use of nontraditional methods in qualitative research, such as sista circles, personal journals, photos, music, poems, and spoken word, to understand the experiences of Black women. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, there is a dearth of research on the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals, specifically examining our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals. To address this gap in the literature through a Black feminist lens while centering the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals, I conducted this critical qualitative study using two nontraditional methods: sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) and participant journaling (Hatch, 2002).

Sista Circle Methodology

Few et al. (2003) forwarded that,

For Black women, their opinions, values, and resources (e.g., journals, writings, music, and other cultural expressive materials) become the framework of analysis. Sharing these resources of knowledge within a safe, informant-defined space is empowering and useful in providing Black women a space to process their experience in a systemic manner. (p. 207)

Within this study, sista circles served as a counterspace and the framework for analysis. Black women student affairs professionals had a safe, participant-defined space to share their experiences and stories through participant journals and counterstories about the critical incidents that have occurred within our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals. For the purposes of this study, sista circles are defined as a support group for Black women built on existing communities, friendships, and kinships (Neal-Barnett, Stadulis, Murray, et al., 2011). Through the use of sista circles, Johnson (2015) stated, "the primary aim of sista circle methodology is to assist in the development of 'culturally relevant, gender-specific' (Neal-Barnett et al., 2011) research methodologies appropriate for studying Black women" (p. 44). Although Neal-Barnett, Stadulis, Murray, et al. (2011) used sista circles as a health intervention for Black women, "as a method, sista circles are designed to provide a reciprocal relationship between members of the sista circle and the researcher, as the researcher is a participant observer" (Collier, 2017, p. 29). As such, there are three distinct features of sista circles: (a) communication dynamics, (b) centrality of empowerment, and (c) researcher as participant (Johnson, 2015). These three features influence how data is collected and analyzed while using sista circles as a research methodology.

Distinguishing Features of Sista Circles. Communication dynamics refers to the unique ways that Black women communicate with one another, verbally and nonverbally. Our tone,

expressions, dialect, body language, style, and culture communicated through language create and share meaning within sista circles. Centrality of empowerment refers to "the process of stimulating Black women to access our personal or collective power to strengthen one another" (Johnson, 2015, p. 48). Through sista circles, the experiences and knowledge of Black women are centered as power while simultaneously creating space for Black women to empower one another through shared wisdom and experiences (Johnson, 2015). Lastly, the researcher as a participant within sista circles is more than facilitating a focus group. The researcher as a participant plays an active role in sharing their experiences and wisdom when necessary (Johnson, 2015). The researcher as participant also provides an avenue for the researcher to self-disclose personal experiences to dismantle power dynamics that the researcher may hold, while simultaneously empowering the participants to share their experiences and wisdom. Johnson (2015) posited "Methodology of this sort values reciprocity. The researcher both obtains knowledge from the participants and contributes knowledge when appropriate. Sista circles are a way to give back to participants and not just take from them" (p. 48). Using a Black feminist methodology such as sista circles to study the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and the critical incidents that occur within our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs provides "rich descriptions of the experiences of Black women" (J. Wilder et al., 2013, p. 32).

Participant Journaling

Participant journaling is a strategic data collection method in which participants are asked to document their experiences and keep a record of their perspectives (Hatch, 2002). This method is typically not the sole method of data collection and is used in conjunction with other methods of data collection. Therefore, I used participant journaling in conjunction with sista

circles so participants can capture our experiences and reflect on our insights and perspectives individually as we make sense of the critical incident(s) that occurred. Hatch (2002) argued this type of data has "a slightly different nature because they are not processed through the researcher; they come directly from the participant" and creates "powerful data that reveal how they are understanding the phenomena under investigation" (p. 141). This approach "can equally be useful for teasing out the ordinary, making visible that which usually goes unseen" (Breheny et al., 2020, p. 4). The experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals often go unseen and are seldom discussed. Using participant journals as a method of data collection for critical incidents allowed me, as a researcher participant, to learn about the feelings, nuances, and experiences that occur during and after critical incidents and served as a starting point for dialogue and data collection during sista circles, so we were able to illuminate the unseen.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

The criteria for inclusion in the study was (a) self-identify as a Black woman, (b) have at least 5 years of experience in and currently working in a functional area within student affairs, (c) currently be employed at a 4-year HWI in the United States, and (d) experience working with white women higher education professionals, to include faculty and staff. Definitions of the terms used in the criteria were provided to the participants in the recruitment email (Appendix A) and are also specified in Chapter 1.

Participants were identified using purposeful snowball sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 97) through my professional network and social contacts within higher education. Snowball sampling involves requesting participants who meet the criteria for the study to suggest other participants who may be interested in the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Sample sizes

for qualitative research are often single- or double-digit numbers due to the depth and breadth of data collected (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). Therefore, the target number of participants for this study was seven Black women student affairs professionals from 4-year HWIs, including the researcher as a participant. Seven participants were the target sample size to also ensure a safe and close-knit community for participants in alignment with sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015). Each participant was from 1 of 5 different institutions to ensure this was a multi-institutional study, and not a single institution or a single white woman issue.

I have 17 years of experience as a Black woman, student affairs professional and have established a large network consisting of Black women student affairs professionals through my work as a Black feminist, scholar-practitioner on college campuses, in professional associations, and during my graduate studies. In keeping with the features of sista circles and to ensure community, friendship, and kinship exists, I sent an email inviting three Black women within my network, who met the criteria for the study, to join the study as participants. Once confirmed, I then asked each invited participant to share or forward the email to two to three additional Black women student affairs professionals with whom they had a personal or professional relationship with, whom they thought may be interested in the study, and fit the criteria for the study. To foster trustworthiness, build rapport, and encourage participation for this study, the recruitment email directed all participants to an informed consent form (see Appendix B) and an online background questionnaire (see Appendix C) to ensure participants meet the criteria for the study and to collect profile information for each participant. The consent form also included a link for participants to indicate their availability for two 120-minute sista circles. Upon completion of the consent form and questionnaire, I sent participants the date and time of both sista circles and the

instructions (see Appendix D) and link to the prompt (see Appendix E) for the participant journal via Qualtrics.

Lastly, it is of importance to note that due to the mass exodus of many student affairs professionals from higher education, particularly Black women, after the COVID-19 pandemic, it was difficult to identify seven Black women participants who met the criteria for the study. My initial recruitment email to many of the Black women in my professional networks received responses related to having left higher education for higher education adjacent positions or to work in the nonprofit sector. This was also the response from a few participants as they reached out to other Black women in their networks to recommend for the study. This realization required a longer amount of time than initially planned to identify the target number of participants for my study. I discuss this implication for Black women student affairs professionals and higher education in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

Data Collection/Analysis

After participants were identified for the study, each participant was provided instructions for their participant journal to reflect on and write about a recent critical incident that had occurred within our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals in preparation for the sista circle. The instructions included definitions of key terms to include sista circle, critical incidents, structural violence, racialized harm, Black women student affairs professionals, and white woman higher education professionals and a prompt to guide participant journals. Prior to participating in the sista circle, participants were asked to submit their participant journal via an electronic form in Qualtrics.

Participants then participated in two 120-minute virtual sista circles recorded and transcribed via Zoom. At the beginning of the sista circles, I discussed the importance of

confidentiality and provided an overview and purpose of the study. To establish trust and

rapport, the sista circle began with an introduction to the concept of sista circles, brief

introductions of each participant, and a discussion of how each participant within the sista circle

came into community, friendship, or kinship with other Black women within the sista circle. This

activity then led to an organic conversation about the critical incidents each participant was

asked to journal about prior to the sista circle. After discussing the participant journals, I guided

the sista circle through dialogue and questions according to my research protocols (Appendix F).

Due to the organic nature of sista circles, some questions were answered by the participants

through dialogue without being prompted, which I anticipated as the researcher. Protocols for the

participant recruitment/selection, participant journals, and sista circles can be found in the

appendices.

To guarantee confidentiality of participant identities and experiences, participants were

asked to provide a pseudonym on the background questionnaire used to create participant

narratives and demographics shared in Chapter 4 and to report the findings of this study. In

addition, participants received all emails individually or blindly copied. The informed consent

form, background questionnaire, and participant journal submission form was created via

Qualtrics, a password-protected survey tool where surveys were completed confidentially. Once

participants completed all forms, I uploaded responses to a secure, password-protected,

university-supported, online storage service.

Black Feminist Epistemology/Researcher Reflexivity

This section outlines the methods used to code and analyze data transcribed during the

sista circle. Sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) manifests a Black feminist epistemology

(BFE), which was illustrated in my conceptual framework. As the researcher, my BFE (Collins,

2009) was applied as a critical lens throughout the coding and analysis process. BFE consists of four dimensions: (a) lived experience as a criterion of meaning, (b) use of dialogue to assess knowledge claims, (c) ethic of care, and (d) ethic of personal accountability (Collins, 2009).

The first dimension, lived experience as a criterion of meaning, asserts that Black women's lived experiences are seen as knowledge, wisdom, and truth and that our lived experiences are valid data. The second dimension, use of dialogue to assess knowledge claims, speaks to the culture and connectedness of the Black community. Specifically, "for Black women new knowledge claims are rarely worked out in isolation from other individuals and are usually developed in dialogue with other members of the community" (Collins, 2009, p. 279). The use of call and response in the Black community (Collins, 2009) is an important element that aligns with the call and response discourse that takes place throughout the research process, especially within sista circle methodology when the researcher is a participant.

Third, an ethic of caring emphasizes "expressiveness, emotions, and empathy" (Collins, 2009, p. 282) and the individual uniqueness of Black women's lives. This dimension speaks to the importance of me, as a researcher participant, in identifying the emotions, expressions, and unique experiences of the participants within the sista circle while coding and analyzing data. This supports the communication dynamics that are central to sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) and connectedness between the participants. Last, an ethic of personal accountability requires that individuals share their knowledge claims through dialogue and be held accountable for their knowledge claims in their beliefs and actions. As a researcher participant, I shared my perspectives and lived experiences as a Black women student affairs professional within the sista circles and used my BFE as a critical lens throughout the coding and analysis process to value

71

the knowledge claims of the Black women participants, which were constructed while in community and dialogue with other Black women.

There were advantages to using a critical approach such as Black feminism as opposed to a traditional analytical approach for coding and data analysis. Applying critical perspectives, such as BFT, throughout the data analysis process, considers the reflexivity of the researcher as well as the historical and cultural oppressions that may impact the population and experiences being studied. In doing so, power and privilege were considered, and the meaning constructed by the researcher (me) and researched (Black women participants) became interwoven (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

This study centered the lived experiences, dialogue, and communication dynamics of Black women student affairs professionals. BFE situates Black women's ways of knowing and provided the foundation for the new knowledge claims shared through this study. The four dimensions of BFE applied a critical lens and provided context for the use of BFT (Collins, 1986, 2009) and sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) as the conceptual framework for this study and throughout the data analysis and coding procedures for this study.

Coding Procedures

Data collected from the sista circles were analyzed using constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) through a BFE. Although constant comparative analysis was originally developed for grounded theory, the method is inductive and comparative and has been widely used for different types of qualitative research to generate findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Before coding, I reviewed the transcripts while listening to the audio recording to ensure accuracy of participant responses. I edited the transcripts for any errors recorded in the transcripts. Then, I open coded the reflections shared from the phrases, comments, sentences, and nonverbal communication shared during the sista circles. While watching the recording, I also

transcribed corresponding nonverbal body language displayed by the participants to capture

communication dynamics and maintain an ethic of care. For example, I captured laughter,

gestures, facial expressions, and movements in brackets within the dialogue.

To begin first cycle coding, I used in vivo coding to capture the actual language of the

participants (Saldaña, 2021). After rereading the transcript, listening to the audio recording, and

watching the Zoom recording while applying a BFE lens, I began open coding by numbering the

lines of the Zoom transcript, reading the updated transcript again, and highlighted phrases,

comments, sentences, and nonverbal communication in different colors according to the

associated research question and in relation to the degree of consensus generated by the

participants. As I highlighted, I also used descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2021) to make comments,

notes, and observations in the margins of the transcripts and in my researcher journal to identify

possible relationships and patterns.

The next step was analytical coding, which is the process of grouping my in vivo and

descriptive codes into categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After highlighting and making

comments throughout both transcripts, I reviewed the comments, notes, and observations noted

in the margins and grouped those together to form categories. Then, I added the categories to an

open code chart with the corresponding data, line number, and participant pseudonym and

research question. I also reviewed the participant journals to ensure the accuracy of the critical

incidents that were shared by each participant during the sista circles. Then, I used the open code

chart to combine the list of categories and reviewed multiple times for possible relationships and

recurring patterns to identify broader themes while keeping my research questions in mind.

Lastly, I named the broad themes accordingly based on the words of my participants, conceptual

framework, or the literature related to my topic. These broad themes are the valid knowledge

claims of Black women's lived experiences that I discuss as my findings in Chapter 5.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) coined the criteria for trustworthiness to establish the validity

of qualitative research. These criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability, and

confirmability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Credibility ensures the research accurately represents participants' responses/perceptions.

Transferability refers to the responsibility of the researcher to provide rich descriptions about the

study that make it possible for other researchers to employ similar techniques across other

studies. Dependability focuses on the process of the researcher and ensures that the process is

logical and appropriately documented. Lastly, confirmability establishes that the findings and

interpretations are linked to the data collected (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Lincoln & Guba,

1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The strategies I used to ensure accuracy and credibility of the findings were triangulation

of methods through multiple forms of data collection to ensure dependability and conducting

member checks with participants to ensure credibility (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Lincoln &

Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Comparing the background questionnaire and critical

incidents shared through participant journals to the dialogue within the sista circles during data

analysis ensured accuracy and credibility in answering this study's research questions. The

written participant journals provided details and insight that participants may have forgotten to

share during the sista circles that addressed my research questions about critical incidents. After

completing the coding process, shared the categories and themes created from findings with the

participants for dependability. Each participant also reviewed and provided feedback on their

individual participant profile which was created from the background questionnaire completed by each participant. To ensure transferability and credibility of my data collection, I provided extensive descriptions of the setting, methodology, and data analysis, and provided detailed descriptions of the participants' responses in my findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Lastly, I kept a researcher journal to reflect on my biases, assumptions, observations, and experiences throughout the study as a researcher participant to ensure confirmability and reflexivity (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In Chapter 1, I acknowledged my positionality as a Black woman student affairs professional and my experiences working with white women higher education professionals. Although I shared some identities and similar experiences with the Black women participants in this study, our experiences are not monolithic. In the role of researcher participant, it was imperative that I acknowledged my biases and blind spots throughout this study and constantly reflected on the knowledge and views that were being shared by participants through a researcher journal.

Boundaries of Study

To honor the stories and knowledge of Black women student affairs professionals in this study, this section is referred to as boundaries to the study, as opposed to limitations (Lacy, 2017). Limitations stem from a deficit lens and this study does not have limitations, but specific boundaries (Lacy, 2017) related to the context of this study due to the methodology used. Historically, Eurocentric paradigms and methodologies have tried to limit the stories and experiences of Black women within scholarship and research and using a culturally relevant methodology as sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) is an act of resistance and form of *talking back* (hooks, 1989) to the academy.

This study focused on the experiences of seven Black women student affairs professionals and therefore is bound by race, gender, and profession in capturing the breadth of experience across all Black women student affairs professionals. As previously mentioned, our experiences are not monolithic therefore participants did not represent the full population and our experiences should not be generalized beyond this study. Due to the methodology employed, this study is specific to Black women who were in community, friendship, and kinship with one another and with the researcher participant; therefore, participant responses may have been influenced or affected by preexisting relationships, the campuses where participants were employed, or the culture/climate of higher education and student affairs at the time this study was conducted.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this critical qualitative study was to examine the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and the critical incidents that occur within our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs. As outlined in this chapter, BFT/BFE (Collins, 1986, 2009), sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015), and participant journaling (Hatch, 2002) aligned with the purpose of this study through research design, participant recruitment and selection, data collection, and data analysis. Trustworthiness and boundaries of the study were also determined. Participant profiles collected from the background questionnaire and the findings from data collection and analysis are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, respectively.

CHAPTER IV: PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES

Participant Profile Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and the critical incidents that occur within our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at historically white institutions (HWIs). Through sista circles as a Black feminist methodology, seven Black women participants shared our lived experiences of structural violence and racialized harm as student affairs professionals at HWIs. In this chapter, I share important connections of community, friendship, and kinship of participants within the sista circles. I also share participant narratives using pseudonyms to provide background and demographic information as shared by each participant.

Community, Friendship, and Kinship

Two 120-minute sista circles were conducted. To build rapport and trust among participants, during the first sista circle each participant was asked to share how they were in community, friendship, or kinship with other participants in the study. Two participants worked at the same institution. Two other participants also worked at the same institution. Four participants worked at a prior institution together. Four participants also attended the same institution for their doctorate program. Six participants have either earned their PhD or are current PhD candidates. Six participants identified as mothers. Six participants also identified as members of Divine 9 sororities and five participants are members of the same Divine 9 sorority. Three participants also attended a national women's leadership institute for student affairs professionals together. Among these connections and others, participants had varying forms of community, friendship, and kinship which set the stage for authentic and genuine dialogue during both sista circles.

Participant Narratives

Although participants shared various community, friendships, and kinships as Black women student affairs professionals, there were similarities and differences across our salient identities. Participant narratives demonstrate the interconnectedness of participant identities but also show the differences and similarities among participants' experiences that may inform perceptions and findings of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Sharing participants' salient, intersecting identities is also important in employing a Black feminist methodology as it honors the lived experiences of Black women and supports a Black feminist epistemology (Clemons, 2019; Matthews, 2020).

Participant narratives were created based upon the responses participants submitted via the participant background questionnaire (Appendix C) and information that participants shared via sista circles about their experiences working with white women at HWIs. Participants completed the questionnaire after consenting to participate in this study. The narratives include salient identities as specified by each participant and their perspectives and insights about working with white women higher education professionals at HWIs.

Jackson

At the time of this study, Jackson served in a director role within housing and residence life at a midsized, Jesuit institution in the Midwest and recently earned her PhD. Throughout her 25-year career in student affairs she has worked in housing and residence life and has also worked in diversity, equity, and inclusion. In these spaces she has worked with white women higher education professionals in many capacities at HWIs and shared "relationships with white women have been difficult." Jackson discussed "the juxtaposition" of her relationships with white women as being elevated by white women in spaces but having also been removed or left

out of spaces by the same white women. She discussed the vulnerability of being a Black woman student affairs professional who is also a mother and wife and thoughts of being able to take care of her family while working in positions at HWIs that did not support her. Thus, family and community are important aspects of her career as a Black woman student affairs professional and in her decisions to take positions to be progressive in her career. Within less than a year of this study, Jackson left her institution to work at an HBCU.

Toni

Like Jackson, family and community are also important aspects of Toni's life. Toni is a single mother who is a special needs and Black parent advocate. Toni works in Residence Life at a large, public institution in the South and has worked in student affairs for 10 years. Toni shared that, throughout her career she has had several critical incidents occur with white women supervisors and colleagues who have turned against her or who have pitted other colleagues against her. While experiencing these critical incidents with her white women supervisor, Toni did not feel supported by Human Resources (HR) or Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) offices on her campus throughout the process of filing a complaint. Toni proclaimed, "HR is not for you . . . the DEI office isn't there for you as well. All of those systems are in place to protect the institution, unfortunately, and not the employees." Toni believes in the power of Black women using their voice and was very vocal about the critical incidents that occurred with her supervisor. Because of these experiences and her direct approach at calling out her treatment by her white woman supervisor, Toni was subsequently labeled as the "problem woman of color in the workplace."

Fortified

Fortified identified as a mother, wife, sister-in-law and friend and family and faith also play a very important role in her life. She currently serves as the assistant vice chancellor of student affairs at a large, public institution in the South. She has 14 years of experience in student affairs and is currently a PhD candidate. As an undergraduate and graduate student at an HWI, Fortified had a white woman in senior leadership as her mentor who engaged her on campus and connected her to a sista circle for support. This relationship helped Fortified decide not to transfer back home to an HBCU. Fortified has also worked at a HWI for about half of her career but also has experience working at an HBCU. Unlike other participants, Fortified did not have the best experience working at an HBCU and finding her current position at a HWI "felt like heaven just opened up." Fortified's early career experiences working with white women were more positive than other participants. It was not until her current role as a senior leader where she has encountered critical incidents with white women in senior leadership.

Sandy

Sandy identified as a mother, partner, sister, friend, and first-generation college student raised in the rural South. She has 17 years of experience in student affairs and is currently a PhD candidate. She currently serves in a director role in first-year experience at a midsize, private institution in the South. Having worked only at HWIs during her career, Sandy has had a multitude of relationships and critical incidents with white women supervisors and colleagues. Her introduction and entry to student affairs was through positive mentorship by prominent white women senior leaders in the field. However, during her first position she experienced her first negative critical incident involving one of her mentors. She was told by her white woman mentor, "don't take it personal, it's all business." This taught Sandy a lesson about the politics

that she needed to learn to navigate and the power of white women in senior leadership roles. Throughout her 17-year career she has experienced several critical incidents, such as being passed over for a promotion, with white women supervisors and colleagues. Sandy has also been highly supported by a white woman supervisor. She feels strongly that her work relationships with white women have significantly impacted her ability to advance or not advance in her student affairs career.

Brook

Brook identified as a mother and wife and described herself as a first generation American and first-generation college student who is Catholic and raised in the Northeast. She currently serves in a director role in a DEI office at a private, liberal arts institution in the South. She has 22 years of experience in student affairs and recently earned her PhD. Like Sandy, Brook's entry into student affairs was also through the positive mentorship of white women. She was shoulder tapped by her white women mentors as a student leader which guided her into the field. Early in her career white women supervisors, some of whom she keeps in touch with today, helped shape her as a student affairs professional. She has been fortunate enough in her career and the decisions she has made professionally that she has not worked with a lot of white people in her day-to-day work. Although she has worked at HWIs, with her career being heavily focused on DEI work, almost everyone who works in her office identifies as Black or a person of color. Many of the critical incidents that she has experienced with white women have been white women faculty or colleagues who are at her same level.

Ty (Short for Tired)

Ty (short for Tired) identified as a mother and wife. She served as an assistant director of career services at a small, private institution in the South and is a licensed counselor. She has 15

years of experience in student affairs and is a PhD candidate. Like Sandy and Brook, Ty shared

that early in her career white women typically sponsored her and that "those are the people that

gave me a shot." Ty's first two positions in student affairs were at HBCUs. She felt that the

culture at HBCUs was more blunt and forward. But her experience working at HWIs left her

unsure of what her colleagues thought about her. Now that Ty has gained 15 years of experience,

she shared in the first sista circle that she "realized they [white women] weren't giving me a shot,

they were using the crap out of me." Ty has experienced several critical incidents with her white

woman supervisor related to being micromanaged, lack of trust in her role, minimizing her skills

and credentials, and being told she needs to "work on her customer service skills." Ty shared she

is over the game and politics of working with white women at HWIs and from a career

counseling perspective she plans to "let Black women know that higher ed is not for them." Due

to Ty's negative experiences at HWIs and working with white women, she eagerly shared during

her introduction in the first sista circle that this will be her "15th and final year" working in

higher education. She submitted her resignation letter the day after our sista circle.

Giselle

Giselle served as a coordinator in counseling services at a large, public institution in the

South and is also a licensed mental health therapist and substance abuse counselor. She has six

and a half years of experience in student affairs and is currently a PhD candidate. Giselle's first

role in higher education was also at an HBCU and she felt she was "spoiled there." Although

there was a lack of resources, she felt it was very communal and her Black woman supervisor put

her name in spaces that she was not in, which led to a great relationship. However, Giselle's

transition to working at HWIs was riddled with negative experiences, unlike her experiences

working at an HBCU. While working at HWIs, Giselle felt unsupported, experienced issues with

pay inequity, and witnessed other white women within her office and at the institution be groomed for leadership positions. Similar to Toni and Ty, she had multiple critical incidents occur with white woman supervisors and colleagues which sometimes resulted in complaints made to human resources. Working with mental health professionals, Giselle confessed that she

> just expected them not to be racist, but I was completely wrong. We just completely learn different things in our graduate studies. I think that was the most surprising thing . . . these are mental health professionals who are oppressing me. So, how can I trust that when a Black student shows up in your office that you're not oppressing them as well.

Because of her negative experiences, Giselle also shared during our first sista circle that this would be her "last full-time role in student affairs." Within 6 months of this study, Giselle left higher education.

Participant Background Demographics

Additionally, the following participant demographic chart (see Table 1) further provides information related to age, educational background, number of years in student affairs, job title, functional area, and the number of white women higher education professionals that each participant works with including the number of white women supervisors, white women direct reports, and white women colleagues within the participants respective office or department.

All participants ranged between the ages of 35–45 working at varying institution types with 6–25 years of experience in student affairs. One participant holds a senior level position, four participants have director level positions, and two participants have assistant director and coordinator level positions. All participants reported that they worked with white women higher education professionals in different capacities. Six participants worked with white women colleagues within their office or department. Four participants had direct reports who were white

women. Two participants had white women supervisors and all seven participants' supervisor's

supervisor was a white woman. All participants reported working with white women faculty and

staff with various titles and rankings outside of their respective offices/departments.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Pronouns	Race/ Ethnicity	Sexual Orientation	Age	# of Years in Student Affairs	Institution Type	Title/Functional Area	White Women Supervisors	White Women Direct Reports	White Women Colleagues W/I Office
Jackson	She/her	Black	Cisgender, Heterosexual	40-50	25	Mid-size, Private, Midwest	Director, Residence Life	Supervisor's Supervisor	4	8
Toni	She/her	Black	Heterosexual	30-40	10	Large, Public, South	Director, Residence Life	Supervisor's Supervisor	2	6
Fortified	She/her	Black	Heterosexual	30-40	14	Large, Public, South	Assistant Vice Chancellor, Student Affairs	Supervisor's Supervisor	2	3
Sandy	She/her	Black	Cisgender, Heterosexual	40-50	17	Midsize, Private South	Director, FYE	Supervisor's Supervisor	0	3
Brook	She/her	Black/ Haitian American	Cisgender, Heterosexual	40-50	22	Midsize, Private, South	Director, Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion	Supervisor's Supervisor	0	0
Ty (Tired)	She/her	Black	Heterosexual	30-40	15	Small, Private, South	Assistant Director, Career Services	Supervisor and Supervisor's Supervisor	3	4.5
Giselle	She/her	Black	Cisgender, Heterosexual	30-40	6.5	Large, Public, South	Coordinator, Counseling Services	Supervisor and Supervisor's Supervisor	0	6

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS

Black women stay in bad relationships too long. Higher ed is a bad relationship. – Ty

Introduction

This chapter begins with a brief overview of data collection and analysis for this study. Then, findings are discussed and organized in response to the research questions used in this study. Findings are expressed through four major themes using concepts of BFT (Collins, 2009) and are supported by direct quotes from each participant in this study. I conclude this chapter with a brief chapter summary and introduction to Chapter 6, which focuses on implications for research, policy, and practice.

As stated in Chapter 1, I share my findings, while using a nontraditional, non-Eurocentric methodology such as sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) where the researcher is a participant, and I do not use "they" and "their" in reference to my participants as traditionally used in academic writing. Collins (2009) theorized that Black women intellectuals develop a group standpoint through their experiences as the situated knower. Therefore, I instead use the terms "we," "us," and "our" (Collins, 2009) as resistance, oppositional language, and as a situated knower in my role as a researcher participant.

The experiences of Black women student affairs professionals at historically white institutions (HWIs) and our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals is not researched extensively in the current literature. Many studies allude to the relationships between Black women and white women within higher education but have not specifically examined the phenomenon and how these experiences influence the careers of Black women student affairs professionals, specifically at HWIs. Framed through BFT (Collins, 2009), this study explored the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and the critical

incidents that occur within our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs.

Using sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) and participant journals (Hatch, 2002), I recruited seven Black women participants from five different HWIs. I conducted two sista circles for this study, and each sista circle lasted for approximately 120 minutes. For this study, sista circles are defined as a support group created for Black women, by Black women, built on existing communities, friendships, and kinships. The first sista circle focused on community, kinship, friendship, and critical incidents that each participant wrote about in their participant journals. The second sista circle focused on the structural violence and racialized harm participants may have experienced because of these critical incidents. The second sista circle also focused on tools, strategies, and support systems participants have used to survive and thrive as well as collective insight for white women higher education professionals and HWIs.

Data were analyzed and coded using constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) through a Black feminist epistemological (Collins, 2009) approach. After reviewing the transcripts and listening to the audio recordings for accuracy, I used open coding based on the data shared during the sista circles. Additionally, I used analytical coding by grouping my in vivo and descriptive codes into categories and added the categories to an open code chart. I then used the open code chart to review the categories for recurring patterns and themes. After identifying recurring patterns and themes, I created broader themes and subthemes according to data and components of my conceptual and theoretical framework. The purpose of this chapter is to share the findings and themes of this study based on the following overarching research question and subquestions:

How do Black women student affairs professionals perceive, describe, and navigate critical incidents within their workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs? How does this lead to structural violence and racialized harm, if any, that may be associated with these incidents?

1. From the perspective of Black women student affairs professionals, what are the critical incidents that occur within their workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs?

2. How have critical incidents, structural violence, and racialized harm influenced the careers of Black women student affairs professionals at HWIs?

3. What tools, strategies, or support systems have assisted Black women student affairs professionals with navigating or coping with the critical incidents, structural violence, and racialized harm that may have occurred within their workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs?

Using the lens and concepts of BFT discussed in Chapter 2, I identified four themes about the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs: (a) Critical Incidents, (b) The Outsider Within, (c) Surveillance Techniques, and (d) Working the Cracks. These themes reflect the knowledge production, or the knowledge gained during the sista circles that challenge the dominant narrative and form a Black woman's standpoint (Collins, 2009) of Black women student affairs participants in this study as we shared our lived experiences working with white women at HWIs. Each theme includes direct quotes from participants using pseudonyms to ensure anonymity of participants, colleagues, institutions, and locations.

Critical Incidents

As defined for this study in Chapter 1, critical incidents (Flanagan, 1954; Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988) are the significant, lived experiences, impactful interactions or events, either positive or negative, that occur from the perspective of Black women student affairs professionals while working with white women higher education professionals at HWIs. Critical incidents are shared as the first finding to share narratives of the participants based on how they were discussed in conversations during the sista circles.

Prior to the first sista circle, each participant was provided a prompt (Appendix E) and asked to complete a one-page participant journal to share and reflect on a critical incident that had occurred with a white woman higher education professional within the last week, month, or year. Participant journaling is a strategic data collection method in which participants are asked to document their experiences and keep a record of their perspectives (Hatch, 2002). My goal for the participant journals was to have participants share individual perspectives regarding critical incidents and experiences working with white women higher education professionals at HWIs prior to discussing our participant journals as a collective during our virtual sista circles. Six of seven participants completed a participant journal. In reviewing the critical incidents shared in participant journals and during the sista circles, I identified three subthemes: (a) critical incidents with white women supervisors, (b) critical incidents with white women colleagues, and (c) humanizing Black women. These themes will be described in the following section in response to Research Question 1.

Critical Incidents With White Women Supervisors

Six of seven participants shared negative critical incidents involving white women supervisors at HWIs. Overall, there was a lack of positive critical incidents shared by

participants. Participants shared how white women supervisors used their power and privilege as supervisors to cause structural violence and racialized harm. In discussing their supervisory relationships, three participants shared insights on their experiences working at historically Black college and universities (HBCUs) then transitioned to working with white women at HWIs.

Giselle's first role within higher education was at an HBCU. She described the differences in her supervisor relationship at an HBCU as being communal and having a great relationship with her Black woman supervisor. Following this experience, she transitioned to working at HWIs, which was very different. Giselle discussed with the sista circle how her relationship started well with her white woman supervisor and later progressed due to critical incidents related to her position and pay at an HWI. She shared:

> I switched over to a predominantly white institution with a white female boss. And it was cool at first . . . but I think my first negative experience with [white woman supervisor] was when it was like a pay issue or a position issue. She wanted another colleague of mine to be in a certain role, and she wouldn't allow me to be in it. But we just had discord back and forth for my entire tenure within that role, and I stayed there for a year and a half. . . . But I think the main thing that happened with that role was, I found out that she was paying a white male who started after me, had less experience than me, and only had one licensure . . . she was paying him like $8,000 more than I was making.

Ty also shared similar differences in her experiences working at HBCUs and then transitioning to an HWI. Ty worked at two HBCUs before working at an HWI. She noted the differences in culture and relationships with colleagues. She felt, at HBCUs, coworkers were more straightforward and blunter. But at HWIs because of "more mixed race" populations, "you're not

sure what people think about you." Ty continued to share the critical incidents that have occurred with her current white woman supervisor and her frustration with these experiences. She noted:

> I'm blessed because I talk to Giselle every week . . . and I've been to her every single week about something new. My boss has done petty, how she wants me to copy her on every email, how she wants to look over my work, and how she doesn't trust me. And again, like ma'am, "I can run circles around you [white woman supervisor] and your job. You just want to make sure that I make you look good for the Executive Board. You don't care about student development" and because of that, that's what makes me kind of over it, because it's really a game. It's a lot of politics. They [white women] minimize you. They choose you like you're uneducated, like you're inexperienced.

Giselle and Ty's experiences at HBCUs versus HWIs speak to the differences in culture, communication, and supervisor relationships within institutional types due to the presence of majority-white spaces. Transitioning to working at HWIs brought about nuanced relationships with supervisors that resulted in discord and distrust, which ultimately impacted how they were perceived in their roles as Black women student affairs professionals. As Giselle noted, she was unable to be promoted into a position and was also paid less than another colleague who had less credentials and experience. Ty also highlighted the politics and demoralizing feelings that existed within her relationship with her supervisor. She later shared she had been in an assistant director role for over 10 years and had also not been promoted.

Similar to Ty, Toni also discussed critical incidents with white woman supervisors and the demoralizing and demeaning nature of their relationships. Toni described a critical incident from her participant journal when her white woman supervisor cursed at her during a staff meeting in front of other colleagues. This critical incident required Toni to not respond in the

91

moment because she did not want to be labeled as the "angry Black woman," but she later filed an HR complaint which went unresolved. Toni shared:

I had a white woman supervisor who was horrible. I mean, people had proof . . . it got to the point one time . . . we were literally in a meeting, and she started cursing at me, and I just had to be quiet, because . . . it was a group of people and I was like if I say something, I know it's gonna be "Oh, here's this Black woman that was the aggressor. It's gonna be turned around all on me." And so, after that meeting I literally left, and I was so upset, and it was probably . . . it was passive aggressive . . . because we had, like a little pod on campus that you could go and buy snacks and stuff. So, I went, and I bought a Snickers [sista circle laughs] and I walked in her [white woman supervisor] office, and I put it on her desk, and she was like "what's this for" and I said "oh, for when you're not feeling like yourself, 'cause whatever happened back there, you can't do that again."

Sandy also noted the dynamics within the relationships with her white woman supervisors throughout the years. Having only had white women supervisors until recently, she also noted the power they held in decisions related to promotion and advancement. She explained to the sista circle her recent experience with applying to an internal position within her division at her current institution. This was not her first time being an internal candidate, as she had gone through a similar experience at her previous institution and was successfully hired. Sandy shared a similar critical incident with a white woman supervisor regarding her status as an internal candidate for a higher level position at her current institution. She stated:

My current/past supervisor who, well she's not my supervisor anymore because I was passed over for an internal promotion at my current institution. I knew I was gonna get passed over because I knew what she [white woman supervisor] was doing, I knew it

from the very beginning . . . but I still walked in there and I killed that presentation. I killed my interview. Everybody was like, this is your job . . . and of course she hired a white man . . . I'm cool with him . . . so we had conversations throughout the process . . . I didn't get asked the same questions in my interview that he did . . . and part of the language that she used while giving feedback as to why I wasn't selected was . . . she kept saying, "I think you have a lot of really good potential," and I kept asking her, what does that mean? Because typically when I say someone has potential, to me that means they lack something. . . . And she just never gave me a direct answer. And then at some point, she made a comment about being an "agent of the university" and at that moment I was like, oh, I see what you're trying to say . . . she was telling me to drink the punch. That's what she meant, and if you all know me, I don't drink the punch.

Sandy also shared she had positive experiences with white women supervisors. One of her supervisors had been at her institution for over 30 years and "had street cred" which gave her [Sandy] access to social capital across campus because she reported to her. These nuances in relationships with white women supervisors are what Jackson referred to as the "juxtaposition." During the sista circle, Jackson shared she had difficulty answering the prompt to the journal, because "there's that juxtaposition of the folks who gave me opportunity, and then others who tried to take it away."

Although some participants had positive experiences and relationships with white women supervisors, it is clear that participants are fully aware of their inequitable treatment as Black women by white women supervisors compared to their counterparts, especially related to supervisory and personnel decisions. Negative workplace relationships with white women supervisors at HWIs were repeatedly referred to throughout the sista circles. The influence of

power and privilege within supervisory relationships with white women during critical incidents were prevalent and provided the backdrop for which participants experienced structural violence and racialized harm while in their positions.

Critical Incidents With White Women Colleagues

Fortified and Brooke shared negative critical incidents that involved white women colleagues and brought to their attention biases or blind spots within their work regarding Black students and staff. Both emphasized the need for effective communication throughout their interactions.

Fortified also began her career in student affairs working at an HBCU but unlike Giselle and Ty, she had a negative experience working at an HBCU. She was afforded the opportunity to work at an HWI and had not experienced any negative critical incidents with white women colleagues until she was in her current senior level position. Fortified shared a critical incident where a white woman colleague "poorly explained a project she was developing . . . in relation to monkeypox" and the use of "black monkeys as a graphic, whereas she attempted to make light of the situation, her narrative began to be less engaging as she explained the population she was targeting." In her participant journal and during the sista circle, she discussed addressing the critical incident with her colleague, who was also in a senior level position. Fortified emphasized the importance of effective communication, not reacting negatively to the incident, and how often as Black women it becomes our job to enlighten and educate well-intended others from majority populations on the harm they may cause:

> Often, as Black women, we must continue to enlighten those within certain ethnicities and be willing to learn. Because I have been a minority for most of my career journey, I understood not to react negatively, but first to introduce the problem and learn to resolve

94

it through effective communication. These are everyday experiences that may affect work–life balance but are essential in everyday opportunities to engage and share. If the offense is taken, attempting to communicate with one another is crucial before proceeding with different actions.

The critical incidents that Brook shared working with white women colleagues were heavily influenced by the nature of her work in student affairs. As a DEI professional, Brook has worked in offices that are primarily staffed with people of color, like in her current role. She shared many of the critical incidents she encounters are with white women faculty or white women colleagues who are at her level. Like Fortified, she shared a similar critical incident with a white woman colleague. In her participant journal, Brook shared a critical incident with a white woman colleague who expressed concerns of three white colleagues' complaints about another Black woman colleague that she [white woman colleague] supervises.

> Karen [pseudonym used by participant] consulted with me because of my role with DEI on campus. However, Karen proceeds to share that she also wanted to address Keisha [pseudonym used by participant] about concerns expressed by three other white colleagues who had approached her about Keisha's tone and behavior and how they felt marginalized by Keisha. Karen continues to talk about all the ways in which she recognized institutions of higher education are racist and sexist and perpetuate harm toward Black women. I asked if she knows all these things, why is the request about confronting Keisha and not confronting these three white colleagues about how they are exercising their privilege and bias by going directly to her as Keisha's supervisor and not talking to Keisha directly. Karen was silent then expressed she realized she needed to do perspective taking.

Like Fortified, during the sista circle, Brooke emphasized the importance and role of effective communication in workplace relationships with white women colleagues. She felt she could help with the situation because she was "able to be straightforward with Karen and call her out on some of her bullshit disguised as supporting Keisha where she was actually policing Keisha." Having direct and effective communication was key to participants navigating critical incidents with white women colleagues at HWIs to assist with not being labeled aggressive or the "angry Black woman."

Humanizing Black Women

Humanizing Black women describes the acknowledgment of Black women's humanity in how we experience structural violence and racialized harm perpetuated by white women higher education professionals at HWIs. In discussing the various critical incidents that participants shared, I thought it was important to humanize Black women's experiences by having a conversation about the feelings and emotions that arise during and after critical incidents occur. After discussing critical incidents during the sista circle and validating each other's experiences, participants were asked, if they were comfortable, to discuss the feelings, and the emotions that were evoked, in the moment or after a critical incident occurs, or when sharing critical incidents during the sista circle. Three participants, Brooke, Fortified, and Jackson, discussed the importance and necessity of asking Black women, "How do you feel?" Brooke discussed how this question impacted her emotionally and the realization that no one has ever asked her how she feels. She shared:

> But you asking that question, like I almost got emotional because I realized throughout
> my years, even though I think I read the question in your prompt, but I'm like I don't
> think anybody's ever really asked me how I felt. And just to hear you ask the question, I

was like shit, like it got me to my core cause I'm like, how do I feel? Like I know how I

feel, but then, when you actually ask, I'm like whoa, like how do I feel?

In response to Brook, Fortified also shared the importance of learning about the feelings and

emotions of Black women who encounter critical incidents at HWIs. She emphasized the need

for Black women to find safe spaces and support systems for us to share our feelings and vent.

She stated:

Brook mentioned no one has ever asked me how I feel and I think as Black women,

especially at a [HWI] in higher education that's needed and I don't know about you all,

but oftentimes, especially at HWIs, especially coming back here . . . I look at safe spaces

and try to identify or see if I have someone I can identify with or someone I can go to and

vent . . . but you know that's needed. We carry so much weight on us as Black women.

Similarly, Jackson discussed the importance of the presence of an ethic of care in understanding

the feelings and emotions of Black women student affairs professionals. She expressed that

asking this question allowed participants to feel heard, seen, and respected and expressed her

appreciation for the question to humanize their experiences as Black women. She stated:

Your question, how do you feel . . . I often think about the importance of respect and its

origin is about the opportunity to look back and be able to say, I see you, I observe you, I

understand you. And so, your question really allows for Black women to be respected in

a way that's very different than I think many of us have been able to experience before . .

. being able to have a prompt that will allow not only for us to give you some great data,

but also for us to be respected through the process for this experience we're having, so

thank you.

The acknowledgment and humanity participants felt was important as they proceeded to share their unsettling emotions and feelings with the sista circle. Emotions related to critical incidents with white women higher education professionals at HWIs were stated by participants as "frustration," "anger," "confusion," "disheartened," "sad," "crying," "pissed off," and participants also shared feeling "conflicted," "insecure," "disrespected," "in isolation," "helpless with no support," "powerless," "imposter syndrome," "like trying to make fetch happen," "like a lone wolf," "from a somatic standpoint," and "like superwoman."

Toni shared that, at first, she "felt frustration" and that these feelings typically presented as "anger while crying." She explained that throughout the few times she has cried in front of someone at work "it's more so like I'm crying because I probably can't do what I want to do, because I'll probably be escorted off this campus in handcuffs, so don't take it as a weakness." Throughout these experiences she's learned to "channel my anger into communication . . . kind of like conflict resolution or conflict management." Overall, every participant expressed high levels of frustration, confusion, and anger that resulted from our relationships with white women, our institutions, and the field of higher education. Like Toni, many Black women student affairs professionals must overregulate their emotions and be very aware of showing emotion or vulnerability at HWIs to avoid controlling images (Collins, 2009), which can impact our emotional and psychological wellbeing.

These emotions and feelings also influenced how participants choose to navigate and cope with critical incidents and subsequently how to manage their careers in higher education. Interestingly, many of these emotions also led to participants feeling a level of resolve which influenced their outlooks and future decisions to stay in the field or to leave the field of higher

education. Jackson discussed the resolve she felt about deciding to "no longer play the game" and learning how to "navigate it differently." She stated:

> But that word of confusion really resonates with me, confusion, because I made a special effort to fit into the system, to be calm, to make you [white women] comfortable. And then for whatever reason you have, you still don't accept me, right? So, it took me a long time to figure out that I didn't need the validation and I think that was a little bit even through the dissertation process, because I studied Black women, I gained language for who I am, for what I love, for what I support, right. And so now I, instead of trying to lose myself in helping them to understand me, I use the power of the position that I'm in.

In the chat during this conversation, Ty shared she was preparing to "put in her 30-day notice next week" and directly told her white woman supervisor she "was over higher ed and this would be my last role." Brook and Giselle also spoke about their feelings and how it has impacted the future of their careers as student affairs professionals. Similar to Jackson, Brook expressed her confusion with the critical incidents she's experienced with white women and the differences between how she felt earlier in her career versus in this current stage of her career as a director with 22 years of experience. She stated:

> The feeling that immediately came to mind is like confused . . . I don't know why I'm confused. But it's confusing. Because you know, if I'm with, especially with other white women, right, if you can like, so called, have my back, or see these things . . . especially to some of the women that, and hearing other people's stories, there were white women who helped me get to where I'm at, but then also, just enough that it wasn't past them, like why? Especially too when most of them and this is again not trying to make assumptions, but most will be the first ones to say that they are described as like feminist, and they are

99

all pro whatever. And it's just like, really. I'm just confused. There's another part of me, and I appreciate it, Ty how you brought up like I had to think how I felt back then versus how I feel now, and I'm at a point where I feel now, and . . . this isn't a feeling word, but I'm just like faith over everything. I'm at a point that fuck it, fire me like I'll be good. I'll be good . . . I don't know, I'll go work at Target. Hopefully they will see that I'm overqualified. I'll be good. I'll find something. I'll cook up some meals and do something like that, because that's the other thing about us, as women like, especially Black women, we gone make it work, we've shown that we will make it work, and even to the points . . . I'm like, we've demonstrated through the years, we're gonna make it work right. We're going to make it work or even find ways.

Like Toni and Brook, Giselle opened up about her feelings of frustration, specifically dealing with the "covert racism" that she has experienced with her white woman supervisor. She references the "sneaky" and "passive aggressive" practices and policies that her supervisor has implemented that are "hard to navigate" and "to deal with." She noted the lack of support she received from the institution throughout these critical incidents and the toll it has taken on her mentally and physically. Like Brook, she discussed her resolve with eventually leaving the field of higher education. She expressed to the sista circle:

I think for me, I echo everything you all said. I definitely feel frustration . . . it's just something that's hard to navigate and to deal with. I definitely had my sleep impacted. I definitely just felt it from a somatic standpoint, and I think it's just like what Brooke said. . . . It's like at this point in my career when I have folks reaching out to me to speak and do all these different things, it's like, I'm okay now if I lose my job . . . like when me and my boss had a negative incident . . . it was really last year . . . I was like, you know, if I

100

had the means I would quit right now and that was the most awkward meeting for her. But I meant it. And now guess what, almost a year later I got the means, and I'm fittin' to bounce, and I just think that it is very frustrating because it's almost like you feel a little helpless. . . . It's just very frustrating to be in a role and it's sad, and it makes me feel angry. It makes me feel like . . . I'm powerless. There's nothing I can really do. But it's just like . . . if you' ever seen the mean girls, she kept on saying, "you trying to make fetch happen," that's what I feel like I'm trying to do when I keep trying to interview for these different roles, and the salary is low, or, oh, sorry we needed somebody with more administrative experience and all these different things. It's like I'm trying to make fetch happen by trying to continue to navigate this system that just feels like it's not for me so definitely, very frustrating.

The critical incidents, emotions, and feelings shared by participants speak to the structural violence and racialized harm Black women deal with in their workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs. Participants exemplified high levels of emotional labor and as a result, some are willing to leave higher education or HWIs to better their work environment and their lives, like many other Black women student affairs professionals have decided within the last few years. Within 2 months of this study, Ty and Giselle left higher education and within 8 months, Jackson left her HWI to work at an HBCU. Providing examples of critical incidents and the feelings and emotions evoked demonstrate the nuances of being a Black women student affairs professional and the dynamics that occur in our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs. These findings also value and appreciate the humanity of Black women student affairs professionals

and our experiences that Black women are often not afforded. Furthermore, because of these critical incidents participants also shared they were often treated as the outsider-within.

The Outsider Within

Collins (1998) discussed the concept of the *outsider-within* where Black women are brought into spaces because of their double bind identities as Black and a woman but are treated as outsiders because of these same identities. Collins (1998) further stated "outsider-within spaces are riddled with contradictions" (p. 5), which explains the frustration and confusion felt by participants in this study. Collins (1998) also explained, "from the perspectives of members of dominant groups" (p. 5) such as white women higher education professionals, individuals like Black women student affairs professionals who occupy *outsider-within* locations such as HWIs, "appear to belong, because we possess the credentials for admittance and the rights of formal membership" (p. 5). However, Black women in these *outsider-within* locations do not gain the full power afforded to the dominant group, which in this case is white women higher education professionals (Collins, 1998).

Participants in this study experienced the outsider-within concept daily within their roles and interactions with white women higher education professionals. Through discussing our experiences as the outsider-within at HWIs, I identified three subthemes of (a) ushered into the field, (b) pet-to-threat, and (c) grooming white women colleagues. In response to Research Question 2, each subtheme illustrates how critical incidents that occur in our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs influence the careers of Black women student affairs professionals.

Ushered Into the Field

The concept of being ushered into the field by white women higher education professionals was an integral part of participants' student affairs journey in this study. Being ushered into the field was described by participants as being introduced to student affairs by a white woman student affairs professional, being mentored or sponsored by a white woman higher education professional, or being hired and supervised by a white woman student affairs professional.

Five of seven participants expressed that they were ushered into the field by white women. Fortified specifically stated she "had a white female in leadership as a mentor . . . she engaged me in opportunities . . . on campus and connected me to a similar sister circle, and I really enjoyed staying there [HWI]. But you know my experience, it's just quite different." In contrast, Brook, Sandy, Jackson, and Ty all shared similar experiences with being mentored or sponsored by various white women higher education professionals throughout their careers but then evolving into contentious relationships with some of those same white women or with other white women that were trusted.

Brook told the sista circle that it was white women mentors and supervisors who ushered her into the field as a student leader. They "shoulder tapped" her and "shaped" her as an early career student affairs professional. She spoke about the positive mentorship and supervision she's received by white women supervisors but referred to her relationships with white women colleagues or faculty as the "okie doke." She shared:

My entry into student affairs . . . has been through the mentorship of white women and positive mentorship, like folks who were like, oh, let's bring you in and you're a student leader, like people who shoulder tapped me. And so, it was kind of like the okie doke,

right. Several of my white women supervisors I still keep in touch with because they

shaped me. I think for me, it's those colleagues. . . . It's been [white] women at the same

level or like faculty.

Sandy also shared a similar experience with being ushered into the field and mentored and

sponsored by a white woman in a senior-level role as a student leader. Like Brook, she was also

mentored and sponsored by white women supervisors and senior leaders, which shaped her early

in her career. She quickly realized the dynamics of these relationships during a critical incident

with a white woman mentor in her first full-time position. She shared with the sista circle how

she was "thrown under the bus" as a new professional by a white woman mentor and how this

incident impacted her trust moving forward:

> I was ushered into this field by white women, like white women who had been president
>
> of [a professional association] and white women that were highly involved nationally in
>
> the field introduced me to [program name]. . . . That's how I came into this field. I feel
>
> like those women were my mentors, and then one of them threw me under the bus when I
>
> became a new professional, and I literally, like I had to rethink life for a minute, because
>
> I was like what is going on here? This woman has known me since I was 19 . . . and she
>
> decided to throw me under the bus over a battle for some resources, and I was just like I
>
> didn't even understand. But she knew what she did because she came back and she said,
>
> "don't take it personal, it was all business." This is what she told me, and I remember
>
> thinking, okay, this must be part of the game. . . . She was very aware of what she did to
>
> me . . . that was years ago . . . you know, but these are the white women that I still talk to
>
> and am still connected to within the field so it's a weird relationship to have because my
>
> trust level was different after that experience.

All of Sandy's early career mentors were white women. But after experiencing a few critical incidents with white women mentors and colleagues she felt it was necessary to identify Black women mentors who may have had similar experiences and who could help her navigate what she was experiencing. Like Brook and Sandy, Ty also noted that she was mentored and sponsored by white women early in her career. She also shared she has "had the opportunity to work with many, many white women supervisors" as well. During the sista circle, she discussed her realization regarding the relationships she's developed with white women in the field:

> I thought about it because I had the same thought that you know white women typically sponsor me. Those are the people that give me a shot. Right? That was my thought. But now that I'm where I am, now that I'm 15 years in the game and I look back, I realized they weren't giving me a shot. They were using the crap out of me.

Because of the relationships formed with white women higher education professionals through mentorship or sponsorship, most participants assumed a certain level of trust and camaraderie with white women in the field as they began their careers but then gained a level of distrust as they moved throughout their careers. The overall sentiment of participants was that mentorship or sponsorship by white women merely served as a smoke screen to bring Black women into the field as "the help," as referred to by Ty, with no intention of continued support for our growth, development, or advancement as student affairs professionals.

Pet-to-Threat

After sharing stories of how we were ushered into the field by white women higher education professionals, several participants discussed how they quickly became the *outsider-within* in our departments and institutions from experiencing what Brook called the "okie doke" and what Thomas et al. (2013) called the pet-to-threat phenomenon. The pet-to-threat

phenomenon describes how Black women are brought into spaces by mentors or sponsors (white women higher education professionals) as likable, moldable, less experienced, newer professionals (pets) but are then perceived as threats when they become more competent and confident in their roles (Thomas et al., 2013), particularly in relation to advancement within their organizations (HWIs).

Five participants discussed how their relationships with white women changed as they progressed and developed in their roles or careers and surprisingly transitioned from pet to threat. Participants felt confident in their abilities and sought out other opportunities to learn and advance only to be met with resistance and pushback. Ty and Brook specifically discussed being underused within their roles and the lack of opportunity they received from white women supervisors to grow or advance by suggesting additional skills or by refusing to teach new skills.

Out of 15 years of experience in student affairs, Ty has served in an assistant director role for 10 of those years at various universities. Throughout this time, she has applied for director roles, she has earned several certifications, became a licensed counselor, and is currently a PhD candidate. Ty described the lack of progression in her career despite the professional development opportunities she has accomplished to advance to the next level. She stated:

> I have been assistant director for 10 years . . . and I am a great assistant director, and I'm making chics [white women supervisors] look amazing, and I have been qualified to be a director for at least 10 years. . . . They'll give me a list of things I need to do to become a director, and I'll knock that list out in like 6 months. I'll get certifications. I'll do all this stuff. I'm bout to have a PhD and have all the years of experience, all the extra, you know, bells and whistles. And the only thing people are telling me now is that I need to work on that customer service aspect when it comes to dealing with Executive Board

106

members, aka kissing white men's butts therefore I'm never going to be a director, and

I'm good with it. And so, what I've pretty much learned is white women . . . have the

power to give or to take? They have the power to promote or to completely drop you

down. If they go in and tell something about you to HR, you're done, you know.

Moving from pet-to-threat as she progressed in her career, among other experiences, has made

Ty no longer interested in seeking out director roles and advancing in student affairs. As

mentioned in the previous section, she has since left higher education. Brook also shared a

similar critical incident with a white woman supervisor at her former institution and the

resistance she received when she asked to learn more about the grant-related work within her

office. She stated:

> I was working with her [white woman supervisor] and very similarly, I've been in this
>
> game for more than 10 years. I could do your job. I probably just don't know the grant
>
> aspect of your job, but I could do your job. But she resisted me tooth and nail for me to
>
> learn some basic stuff about my role like understanding the budget around things like
>
> grants. I'm asking these critical questions. I'm good enough to do this. Why aren't I good
>
> enough to do these other pieces? And if I were to, you know, if I want to elevate, if you
>
> were to leave your job tomorrow like what's going to prepare me to get into that role, and
>
> there was such resistance of equipping me with the knowledge for me to do more. And I .
>
> . . think that's a positive aspect but there may be days that it's maybe to a fault that we
>
> [Black women] want to do more. We want to know more. We're going to get the
>
> credentials. We're going to get the trainings. We're going to do the list and knock it out in
>
> 6 months, and maybe they know that. But then still won't give us the opportunity beyond

where they feel like where they need us. And I experienced that firsthand with that

mutual colleague [at prior institution] that Ty and I had.

Likewise, in accordance with Ty and Brook, Jackson expressed the "juxtaposition" of

relationships with white women in reference to her status as an *outsider within* and experiencing

pet-to-threat. During the sista circle, she shared:

> I have been in positions where white women have elevated me and believed in me and
>
> given me the skill sets to be able to sit in some of the spaces. And then I've also sat in the
>
> room where they did everything that they could to help me be relocated into other areas .
>
> . . and so these relationships with white women have been difficult.

Jackson continued to share negative critical incidents with white women who have impacted her

career and experiences of moving from pet to threat. She explained:

> I think about how, when these women [white women supervisors] will complain that you
>
> are soft spoken, and you don't seem like you are a leader. Or here are the concerns of the
>
> skill sets that you displayed thus far. There's no one in the room that checks that, and so it
>
> becomes whatever is said, is the value center for everyone else, instead of being able to
>
> say but the work gets done, the finances are in order, the staff is being moved in a
>
> direction. And so that challenge of trying to normalize whiteness is something that I just
>
> can't accept because I know who I am.

The subtle changes of going from pet to threat is another example of how Black women student

affairs professionals experience structural violence and racialized harm while having a negative

impact on the trajectory of our careers. These intentional decisions and actions by white women

supervisors stifle the careers of Black women and deny us access to leadership roles and

advancement within the institution which opens the door to greater social capital and diversity of

thought within senior level positions at HWIs. As Ty expressed during the first sista circle, "they [white women] don't want us at the top with them with suits on." As Jackson mentioned, this paves the way for "normalizing whiteness" and grooming or hiring a disproportionate number of white women for higher level positions over well-qualified and experienced Black women student affairs professionals.

Grooming and Hiring White Women

Participants also discussed how in moving from pet-to-threat, as Black women we are hired to do work but not to advance and lead. As a result, participants witnessed other less qualified white women within their office, department, or institutions be groomed or hired for positions by other white women which assisted with keeping Black women in outsider-within locations. This form of structural violence through hiring and promotion practices can be a detriment to Black women student affairs professionals and adversely impact the trajectory of our careers in higher education.

Ty, Jackson, and Giselle all referenced critical incidents where they witnessed less qualified white women being groomed or hired for positions over more qualified Black women. Sandy chimed in and discussed the prevalence of this happening at HWIs due to bias and gendered racism performed by white women supervisors and hiring managers. Ty, Jackson, Sandy, and Giselle had a conversation about this phenomenon during the sista circle:

> Ty: So, I've had colleagues, some of Brook and I, colleagues that we've had [at a prior institution] where they had interviews, and I watched the interviews. The most qualified person is a Black woman. They will want to hire the one white girl who just graduated undergrad with two days of experience working in middle school. And I'm like, how is

she the best candidate? And this other Black woman has two master's and 10 years of experience, and with her it was said she was a little bit aggressive.

Jackson: So, I hear you Ty when you talk about they hire people [white women] who don't have lots of experience, and being one of the oldest people in the room now like, how did you get this person with 10 years less experience than me and I now have a terminal degree like help me understand? Because I don't right.

Sandy: Uhh huhh, yes, this is why there are so many more white women in higher ed . . . and they just move around campus and do this, and no one says anything about it! And it impacts our [Black women] careers because they are in the positions to hire and promote, because they are the hiring managers, and no one questions the bias and gendered racism that is being used in their decision making.

Giselle: I think what you were saying Sandy about the impact on our careers is so important because I can name at least five white women, and I haven't been there for all their journeys, but I know they started as graduate assistants in my current institution and just worked their way up even in DEI roles . . . and I think some of our folks have been in the career a little bit longer. I've heard us say, "I've moved from this institution to that institution." We don't have the ability to stay in one institution and just continue to move up because we don't align with whiteness, or that passive aggressiveness that white women align themselves with. And that's the whole thing about even in my office . . . I feel like two of my colleagues are being groomed into a position of leadership, one was promoted over a Black woman before I got there and then now, they're trying to do the same thing because these people are just like you [white women], and it's so crazy . . . because the main problem in our department is racism. So, you know it is very

unfortunate, because I definitely had aspirations of being a VP of student affairs and Dean of Students and all those things. But I just cannot . . . I just can't anymore. I can't keep on doing the mental gymnastics with white women in order to succeed.

Brook also shared during the first sista circle, "That's the problem, the dominance that comes with their whiteness, that white women would align with their whiteness more than their femaleness anytime. But they'll use that femaleness in a manipulative way." Denying Black women advancement opportunities while grooming or hiring less qualified white women helps to maintain the status quo and continues to normalize whiteness. These examples demonstrate how white women align with their whiteness over their womanhood at the expense of Black women student affairs professionals. This theme supports Tevis and Pifer's (2021) findings shared in Chapter 2 regarding the paradoxical identities, or one up/one down identities (Accapadi, 2007), of white women and their ability to align with whiteness while also not acknowledging the intersectional relationship between their race and gender and the power dynamics of this relationship within the leadership roles that they occupy. While being treated as the outsider within, participants also shared the use of surveillance techniques that were used as mechanisms of control at HWIs.

Surveillance Techniques

As discussed in Chapter 2, Collins (1998) described the role of hypervisibility and invisibility of being an outsider within through the concept of surveillance, which she defined as "a strategy of control where [Black women's] actions and words are constantly watched and recorded" (p. 281). Findings in this study show surveillance at HWIs have become a mechanism of control for white women higher education professionals to keep Black women student affairs professionals in our place, professionally and figuratively, and operates as a strategy hidden in

plain sight to perpetuate structural violence and racialized harm. Collins (1998) stated "surveillance seems designed to produce a particular effect—Black women remain visible yet silenced; their bodies become written by other texts, yet they remain powerless to speak for themselves" (p. 38). Participants described the ways surveillance techniques were used in a covert manner to silence their experiences and were built into the infrastructure of their offices and institutions (HWIs). In response to Research Question 2, three subthemes were identified as surveillance techniques: (a) Human Resources (HR) is not for us, (b) Coded Language, and (c) The Plantation & the Overseer.

HR Is Not for Us!

Four participants discussed the role of HR in critical incidents and shared several interactions that involved the use of HR as a surveillance technique to specifically perpetuate structural violence. Three of those four participants shared multiple occurrences where they were reported to HR by a white woman colleague or supervisor or reached out to HR for support with a critical incident with a white supervisor or colleague and was subsequently not supported or provided a resolution.

As a DEI professional who does bias work in collaboration with HR, Brook acknowledged that "HR is not for us" and "we're [HR & DEI] supposed to be about equity-mindedness. I can use all the right rhetoric. But we're not doing the things that's promoting equity." Ty also shared she has filed numerous EEOC complaints and has had many HR meetings throughout her career regarding traumatizing events she experienced while she worked in student affairs at HWIs. She spoke directly to the covert, dangerous nature of white women and their use of HR as a surveillance technique:

I think the problem is the dangerous part with white women are that they can hide and be

sneaky. That's what's hard. Everybody else is a little more just blunt, like I've had a Black

male kind of drop my confidence level down before . . . I guess, but white women they

will act like they are your best friend, show up to your wedding, show up to your baby

shower, your housewarming party and stab you in the back with HR, so that's what makes

them dangerous.

Giselle and Toni discussed the lack of support they felt and received from HR regarding critical

incidents that occurred with white women colleagues or supervisors. Giselle discussed the

critical incident regarding her white woman supervisor hiring a white man with less experience

and paying him $8,000 more and what happened when she reached out to HR:

She [white woman supervisor] was paying him like $8,000 more than I was making, and

when I tried to take it to a more legal standpoint and tried to figure out what I could do

about that, she just wrote up all this data saying that this person did more and had more

experience doing crisis work than me, which was just lies. This just really taught me that

if a person is in a position, I didn't know that human resources will support the person in

the higher role. So, it's like, you don't need a representative, you don't need a lawyer, but

yet the institution automatically assumes the role of the person in the supervisor role. And

then you're over here leaving me for dead and I'm supposed to be just fighting for my

life by myself.

In agreement with Giselle and in reference to the critical incident Toni shared about her white

woman supervisor cursing at her, Toni shared with the sista circle that she had also filed a

complaint with HR about this incident. She discussed the outcome of filing a complaint with HR:

113

HR isn't for you. I 100% agree! And then I would almost take it a step further to say, the DEI office isn't there for you as well. All of those systems are in place to protect the institution, unfortunately, and not the employees. It shows because I actually had to file a case . . . no action was taken, and I was marked as a problem women of color in the workplace.

After receiving no support from HR, she proceeded to submit her 2-week notice to remove herself from a toxic and biased work environment, which was created by her white woman supervisor. Upon submitting her notice, Toni informed senior-level administrators of her treatment, and there was no recourse or help offered to her in addressing the situation with her supervisor.

As Brook mentioned, the purpose of HR and DEI offices for employees is supposed to provide equitable support for the personnel of the institution which leads to higher levels of recruitment and retention of talented employees. However, participants overwhelmingly agreed HR serves as a more sophisticated surveillance technique that is covertly built into the daily operations of HWIs to help maintain the status quo and to normalize whiteness. Therefore, it is not unreasonable for participants to feel powerless and like we are "fighting for our lives" as Giselle stated, when our livelihood is being threatened and they have no person or office to turn to for support within the institution or to speak for themselves to combat this type of structural violence and racialized harm.

Coded Language

The next subtheme I identified under surveillance techniques was the use of coded language to police Black women and keep us within our roles and away from pathways to advancement. Participants shared the use of language such as "a little too aggressive," "too soft

spoken," "don't seem like a leader," "customer service skills," "agent of the university," and "fit" as examples of coded language used by white women supervisors in suggesting additional skills Black women need to develop to advance. This is yet another surveillance technique used by white women supervisors to normalize whiteness at HWIs.

Ty and Brook both shared examples of being told they needed to work on their customer service skills. Ty shared earlier with sista circle her frustration with being an assistant director for 10 years and not being promoted because of needing to "work on her customer service skills." In response to Ty, Brook also shared her annoyance with the term "customer service" as coded language used as a surveillance technique in making Black women complicit and palatable. Brook noted:

That whole customer service also got to me . . . around this ideal voice where that's loaded language for, they just don't want us. They [white women] just don't want to hear us, and they'll use things like "you just need to work with your customer service." No, you want me to be complicit. You want me to be silent, or you want me to use your words or your language in ways that's palatable to your ears. That's not going to be effective for me. It's going to be more effective for you and for you to be comfortable, and then they'll disguise it, right? It'll be like I'm doing my job. I'm doing all my expectations. But just because I didn't do it with my neck straight or the way you talk bland, you're going to be like, "oh, you're not warm enough" or "you're not assertive enough," or maybe "you're too assertive." Either way, it's almost like we're assed out that you are not assertive enough because you're too soft spoken, or you're too assertive, blah, blah, blah! You're expressing yourself in ways that may not be aligned with leadership, but like what the fuck does that mean? But you just want to quote how I express myself,

because you all know how to play that game that gets y'all where to go and that's not how

we roll.

In addition to Ty and Brook's conversation about the use of customer service as coded language.

Ty also brought up the concept of code switching and how during her lunch hour she tries to only

be around other Black people she can be authentic around. Ty stated, "I'm over here because I

have to code switch around, y'all [white people], which is problematic . . . I want to be around

people who I could be my authentic self." This prompted Toni to discuss her frustrations with the

term "fit" to normalize whiteness. Ty also included terms such as "tradition" and "environment"

in the chat. Toni responded in the chat and said, "judge me on my work and not my likeability."

She continued in the sista circle sharing similar sentiments about the term "fit" that Brook shared

about the use of the term customer service and what it really means in reference to coded

language as a surveillance technique. She stated:

> Brook, to the point you made with the voice, another word that I'm beginning to hate is
>
> fit, because then what is that? What does fit really mean . . . I am not hired here to make
>
> friends and to be friends. I am hired here to do a job. People are like, "She never really
>
> wants to have lunch with us." I'm sorry but talk about when you wanted to collaborate on
>
> a partnership and work, and I wasn't available, or I told you no, or talk about if there was
>
> some thing or task that you needed me to do, and I was difficult about it. Don't talk to me
>
> about my personal time, or the things that I don't have to do. I'm not hired to like you. I'm
>
> not hired to be your friend. Those are things that sometimes may happen, but that's also
>
> only if I want it to be and that's a byproduct.

The covert nature of white women's use of coded language is further exasperated when white

women use DEI language to support these words and language. Participants discussed how white

116

women higher education professionals used DEI language to justify their actions and the use of coded language. Jackson shared earlier with the sista circle that she was told she was "too soft spoken" and "doesn't seem like a leader" despite the strides she was making in her office and with her staff. She specifically shared:

> The last thing that I'll say to that is that there are so many [white women] who have the correct language to be able to talk about their understanding of diversity and inclusion and belonging. So, you're looking at them hurt you, and then tell you the language for why they haven't [everyone in sista circle nods in agreement], and that has been really difficult to be able to explain an experience that you're having in the moment with them, with language that they can't put the right words to understand…

Because of the elusive nature of this language and justifications with DEI language, participants acknowledged the difficulty in naming and making sense of their experiences. Coded language is yet another mechanism of control used by white women supervisors to police Black women student affairs professionals and to stifle our careers while covertly normalizing whiteness at HWIs.

The Plantation and the Overseer: Using Black Women to Surveil Black Women

The last subtheme for surveillance techniques brought about a lengthy conversation among participants during the second sista circle regarding the plantation and the overseer. Scholars (Squire et al., 2018) have discussed plantation politics and provided contemporary higher education parallels to college campuses, mainly through processes and structures and the exploitation of Black bodies and labor. Similarly in this study, participants compared HWIs to plantations and discussed the concept of "the overseer" regarding adverse relationships with other Black women within our offices or across campus. On some plantations, slave owners used

other enslaved Africans as overseers to monitor and surveil other enslaved Africans. Oftentimes this caused competitive relationships among enslaved Africans on plantations. Participants specifically used the overseer comparison to discuss how negative relationships with other Black women were fueled by white women colleagues or supervisors weaponizing Black women against each other and using Black women's bodies and labor for surveillance and mechanisms of control for other Black women.

Brook shared two critical incidents at two different institutions that involved adverse relationships with Black women centered around the actions of white women colleagues or supervisors. In one critical incident the other Black woman was her mentor and Soror. In the other critical incident, the other Black woman was a highly respected tenured faculty member on campus. Both critical incidents involved a white women supervisor or colleague who weaponized Brook's position and relationship with each Black woman on campus to meet their personal agenda. While sharing these critical incidents and trying to make sense of her experiences, Brook asked the sista circle:

> When these critical incidents happen and we recognize more times than not that it could be impacted by racialized harm, my question is as a Black woman, how have you, or how can we seek to address and repair the relationship with another Black woman, when we have both been harmed or like weaponized against each other by nature of this? That's where I feel I have been stuck. I don't know why or how other Black women have effectively aligned or have broken relationships because of these relationships, because of these types of experiences.

While Brook posed her question to the sista circle, Ty stated in the chat that "Black people carry oppressive traits too . . . the overseers." In the sista circle, Ty shared she "had issues with Black

women who sought out to be on the level of white women." She later described a similar critical incident with a Black woman whom she saw as a mentor and who was also her Soror. Ty noted the other Black woman "felt threatened by me and set me up to get fired from my job." In response to Brook's questions and her personal experiences, Ty reminded the sista circle:

> The thing is, you have to remember that nothing is accidental from the beginning of time when the structure was created, and I'm talking from when our ancestors got put on these boats, people knew you had to use Black people against Black people in order to get them on that boat right and once you got here to the Americas. Nothing has changed even today. You have to keep that drama going. . . . That's how you keep certain people or certain populations in power because you constantly have people in competition. You constantly have people competing. You think that person who was your mentor felt as though you were a threat . . . you know, I think people when they're trying to get ahead, they do things, and that's why I put in the chat about the overseer. It's real, the overseer and getting ahead hasn't changed. People still think it can only be one Black person in that role of power. And honestly, the overseer isn't any better than the people working on the plantation. They are not the master. You are still not in charge. You still don't own anything, and I feel like in higher ed, it is still the same. You're still not going to be the president of the school. Right. You're still not going to be that top person. . . . You're just going to be maybe a VP or something like that. So, I think it's the real answer to your point, Brook, is you would have to completely stop playing the game in order to win. Really, as long as you're playing the game, that's what's always gonna happen.

Sandy and Toni also shared critical incidents that had occurred with Black women that stemmed from a white women supervisor. Sandy shared how she "requested a meeting with her white

woman supervisor and Black women colleague" and "went to lunch with the other Black woman," who was also her Soror, to address and resolve the issues they were having. In response to Brook's questions during the second sista circle, Toni agreed with Sandy that addressing the situation is the key to repairing relationships with other Black women and naming the root of the issue, which ultimately is structural violence and racialized harm fueled by white supremacist patriarchy perpetuated by white women higher education professionals at HWIs. Toni stated:

> Sneaky, dangerous, yeah. . . . But I think like you said Sandy, that the biggest key is kind of like addressing it . . . I think it sometimes helps, but definitely like Ty said, it's the overseer, because sometimes you want to have those candid conversations. But you also got to know your audience, because some people, you know, "all skinfolk, not kinfolk," and it's really some people that want to continue to be the only one. So, they're going to try to sabotage anything that they may see as competition when it's like . . . I tell people all the time, I'm in competition with nobody. I'm running my own race. So, if you are trying to compete with me, you are essentially already in a losing battle, because what's for me is not going to miss me. So, in this race I'm not pitting myself against you. I'm going to keep trying to be my best self all the time versus who I was last year, or 10 years ago. That's who I'm racing with, and nobody else. So, it's kind of like if there are issues, because a lot of the stuff sometimes goes on when you realize, like a simple conversation could have handled this. But you know, sometimes they try to say, let me say this to you in confidence, you know, let me gain your trust, so you think that the other person really has your back when they don't to where it's like this could have been handled if we had just had a simple conversation about it.

120

Adverse relationships with other Black women are frequently discussed in studies about the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and proximity to whiteness. But seldom are these discussions about their use as surveillance or how to repair the broken and weaponized relationships between some Black women that stem from white women higher education professionals in support of white supremacist patriarchy at HWIs. As participants discussed, addressing the issue no longer silences Black women and allows us to realize the root of the issue and what it is stemming from. It requires us to ask what or who has made a Black woman see another Black woman as competition that needs to be weakened or removed? Asking these difficult questions and having these difficult conversations not only mends relationships but empowers Black women to use our outsider-within status to also surveil the institution and their white women colleagues and supervisors at HWIs. Resisting surveillance techniques and using our outsider-within status to surveil the institution provided participants with opportunities to work the cracks to create change.

Working The Cracks

Collins (2009) discussed how Black women use their *outsider-within* status and surveillance to "work the cracks" of HWIs. Collins' use of the term "work the cracks" refers to how Black women use our insider knowledge to expose the cracks of the institution and then work the cracks to create change. Although Collins discussed working the cracks in reference to managing the politics and bureaucracy of our institutions, this study further displayed how Black women student affairs professionals work the cracks to survive and thrive at HWIs related to critical incidents that occur with white women higher education professionals. During sista circle two, participants were asked to share and discuss strategies, tools, and support systems that assisted us with working the cracks or navigating and coping with the structural violence and

121

racialized harm they experienced within their workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals. In response to Research Question 3, three themes were identified among participant responses: (a) Critical Community, (b) Strategic Social Capital, and (c) Self-Care as Resistance.

Critical Community

Participants discussed the importance of community as critical support systems integral to their success and longevity in higher education, particularly at HWIs. Among the critical communities participants named were "sista circles," "my village," "peer mentorship," "peer support groups," "sponsorship," "safe spaces to vent to colleagues," "connecting with others outside of the institution," and "friendships/groups outside of student affairs." Several participants specifically discussed the importance of sista circles as spaces for critical community, support, validation, and spaces for healing. Jackson shared with the sista circle that she purposely seeks out opportunities to mentor Black women new professionals and connects with them with sista circles. She affirmed:

> These sister circles and other spaces, some sororities, churches, etc., are places that we
> send them [Black women] to be able to say this is beyond trying to fight with. Whether or
> not a white woman understands you but opening up spaces for us to be able to support
> one another and ignore it, because we can work around a lot of the things like the vice
> president can't get mad if I hit my numbers. The vice president can't get mad if I've done
> all that I'm supposed to do with my colleagues across campus. So, I've learned, because
> it's taken me a little bit of time, not to worry about some of the stuff that they find
> important because there is space for me. But I have to create it, and I have to cultivate it,

and I have to figure out how to continue to support that space so that it will give back what I need from it as well.

Brook also agreed with Jackson about the necessity of sista circles to help Black women find healing, problem solve, and understand how to navigate critical incidents with white women colleagues and supervisors. In emphasizing the importance of creating these types of critical communities and the role they play in providing safe spaces for Black women, Brook shared:

We are trying to find healing in a space that was not designed for us. We are trying to seek healing. . . . Where can I go to find that space? So, we need to resist and be like bump it, let's go. Let's go find our community, especially because we're dwindling down and potentially . . . I'm prepared to tell these young women . . . this may not be the field for you. So, creating the sista circles to be like, do what you need to do to, you know, get those student loans forgiven, let's be real . . . do what you need to do to save, you know. Do the housing gig and save your coins, so you can get your house. Let's be strategic about it . . . that's what the sista circles have been about. It's been about problem solving. Let's have these spaces with those of us who have been in this and understand what you're going to experience in the dynamics. You're going to probably experience the confusion, the frustration, the hypocrisy, whatever, because you're in the field. That says a lot of things that's not happening, or you're working with white women who probably will sponsor you and elevate you. But they will knock you down the first chance that they get if you're getting too much recognition. If you're being liked more than they are, so pay attention. How might these spaces be that space to have these real types of conversations?

Four participants (Sandy, Giselle, Ty, and Jackson) also discussed how Black-identified peer support groups and peer mentorship through their doctorate program, work, and group chats served as a form of critical community. Sandy expressed that community with other Black women has helped her with surviving and thriving as a student affairs professional. She stated,

> I know for me that is one of the main reasons why I have been able to survive in this field for 17 years. If I was not in community with other Black women, I would not be in this field. It just wouldn't be possible.

Giselle declared, "Peer mentorship has been a big thing for me and my graduate program." Ty also described how her network of Black peer groups, or her "village," has helped her be successful throughout her career in student affairs and while in her doctorate program at an HWI. She affectionately shared:

> My village, my peers of the same race, like I even think about this PhD program, I would never have gotten through it if it wasn't for all my peers who shared the same identity as me. I'm in group chats with them. I've been in higher ed for 15 years, and I've always kept circles with different groups of other Black people because I started in an HBCU in higher ed and so I've always had my group of Black people when we've been tight and if it wasn't for those different pockets of people I wouldn't have made it, because at some point sometimes you can enjoy yourself, but almost tune out the noise, especially if you start young in higher education. But you know the older you get; you have a family and that's when the noise gets too loud, and you can't tune it out. But I'd say up until this point in my life . . . the noise is yelling at me at this point. But prior to this everything was fun and games because I love being on a campus. But up to this point, though, I would say my village is what got me through.

Jackson also discussed the importance of connecting with others in her doctoral program and the loyalty and privacy that she appreciated with this type of support from likeminded colleagues from outside of her institution. She shared:

> I think that there's that sponsorship that happens specifically with people who you just never would know that we were talking with each other, supporting each other, and being able to be loyal in those ways, because there's a privacy attached to being just supportive of each other through our careers and some of that came from courses so like being able to be in a doctoral program that doesn't have anything to do with work. But it's closely connected to the work that we do, because those were folks that were invested in you. . . .
>
> So, those were some of the people in the places that I would look to find support.

Jackson further acknowledged the need to find support outside of the institution because it allowed her "time to process" and they "could be objective so that I could be radical in my approach to support whatever direction I needed to go in." Toni also shared having friendships and groups outside of student affairs as a critical community "provided support, different perspectives, and counsel."

Participants overwhelmingly agreed finding community within and outside the institution and cultivating safe spaces was needed in navigating and coping with critical incidents and the structural violence and racialized harm that accompanied these experiences at HWIs. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, these critical communities serve as counterspaces for Black women student affairs professionals to share their counterstories as a form of resistance, a means of survival, and to learn ways to heal and thrive in spaces that are void of surveillance while working with white women higher education professionals at HWIs.

Strategic Social Capital

Entering majority-white spaces within and outside of HWIs was integral in participants' pursuit to earning social capital as a strategy to navigate and cope with critical incidents with white women higher education professionals. Five of seven participants had been involved in specific organizations or leadership programs on and off campus to strategically build social capital in response to their workplace relationships with white women at HWIs. For Brook, inserting herself into majority-white women spaces was a strategic move to learn their secrets to be successful while being mindful to not harm others. During the sista circle, she discussed a leadership program in her state that is heavily attended by white women and how she plans to insert herself into this space by applying to the program. She stated:

> I'm watching you [white women]. I'm gonna watch how you move and figure out how you're moving. What allows you to be successful and can I do it in the same way? But not in a way that's gonna harm me or another person of color. So, the example that I'll give is for those of you who are in [name of state] there is [name of women's leadership program], like these leadership opportunities, these things that I'm gonna go and insert myself in these white women's spaces. So let me go see what you're talking about because there's something that y'all are learning from each other and you're going to share your secrets. Let me go listen! But again, take from it what's gonna help me, but not take from it what's gonna hurt other folks. . . . So, let me just start looking at all these different institutes, all these different things that y'all are obviously finding ways to be in sisterhood to help promote your agenda. Let me go in and maybe y'all think I'm going in there to cosign with you. Nah, I'm just gonna take whatever secrets you're giving out for free and then figure out how I could flip it back on y'all.

Like Brook, Giselle discussed using a similar strategy to build social capital and gain important knowledge for navigating and coping at her HWI. She mentioned in the chat her distrust for her white woman supervisor because she "says different things to different people." Her strategy was to build social capital centered around joining an on-campus organization, meeting new people, and using her power, position, and newly formed relationships to create safe spaces for other Black faculty, staff, and students. She stated:

> Another strategy I used was to join multiple different organizations on campus. I knew my boss was a liar, I could tell. I was like, well, let me join the Staff Senate so I can get first-hand information. Let me convince other people to vote for me so I could be a part of the steps in this. Then let me get the first-hand information about what's really going on here, because I know she'd be lying. Then another thing I did was to meet people. One thing I noticed, and I don't know if this is a white woman thing or what? But what I've seen is white women can get afraid of people in higher positions so it's like, do this thing because that's what the executive director, our bosses' boss said and I'm like who are they? So, you know, you develop relationships to people in higher positions, so that when something comes down to it, maybe there's some person that you could reach out to or use as a mentor . . . then using whatever power you have to create your own spaces, to be able to help, whether it be create spaces for students, creating spaces for other faculty and staff who have the same identities, that has been helpful for me for coping/resistance in my current role, just trying to navigate a predominantly white space.

Jackson and Sandy shared their experiences with learning in spaces with other Black women and the sponsorship from those spaces that assisted them with building social capital within and outside of those spaces. Sandy stated:

I think about other Black women that I've been in community with whether it was at

[name of national women's leadership institute], you know, and in other ways, such the

sorority, that I know some of y'all in this sista circle are a part of, but just the energy that

it gives and the information you have access to, to learn how to navigate on campus.

Jackson is a member of the same sorority as Sandy and Fortified. All three attended the same

national women's leadership institute as well and met other Black women student affairs

professionals who were also members of the same sorority. Jackson discussed the use of

sponsorship in these spaces that put her name in other spaces to strategically build social capital:

The [Divine 9] sorority has been a really strong place to find women who are doing it. . . .

They were helpful to me to be able to think I could do this because they did it. And

they're gonna talk about the [name of national women's leadership institute] and suggest

that you are in some of those spaces that I would not have known to even put myself in

contention to go to or to be a part of.

The examples above shared by participants to gain social capital within and outside the

institution demonstrate the strategies Black women use to expose the cracks at HWIs. By

employing these strategies Black women put themselves in positions to work the cracks to

survive and thrive at HWIs, to surveil white women and expose techniques used to oppress Black

women, and to make change at our institutions.

Self-Care as Resistance

In exposing and working the cracks participants reported various forms of self-care in

resistance to the critical incidents they were experiencing with white women higher education

professionals at HWIs. The concept of self-care was used as an intentional tool and strategy by

all participants to survive and thrive as Black women student affairs professionals. To navigate

and cope with the feelings and emotions that were evoked by critical incidents, participants provided multiple ways they practiced self-care on and off campus, during and after critical incidents. Examples of self-care shared by participants were the simple act of "closing or shutting my door" in the office, "taking walks," "freeing anxiety," "taking mental health days," "using vacation days," "working from home," "taking a day off," "taking time for myself," "not being on campus," "saying no," and "get somebody else to do it." In addition, four out of seven participants named therapy as an important aspect of their self-care.

As licensed counselors, Giselle and Ty agreed therapy was helpful in navigating critical incidents with white women and HWIs. Jackson chimed in and said, "I also need to cosign on the therapy, because the counselor is what gets me through on the days that I should not be leaning on people in my household to support the foolishness that goes on." Brook re-emphasized the need for therapy and having someone outside of higher education to help reframe and expand our lens to think beyond what we have been socialized in the field. She stated:

I co-sign the therapy. [It] has definitely been helpful in multiple ways, not just for the self-care component of it. But I found just . . . having conversations with my therapist and talking to them about the student affairs, student life bubble within the higher ed bubble, and to have somebody that's outside kind of like poke a hole and say none of what you said makes sense and ask how are you doing this . . . but why am I trying to make illogical things logical, in structures that weren't made for me? So, I remember sharing some examples of just some dynamics at work, and how some of that shit was coming home with me and affecting my family, and having a therapist to just talk about this work structure like how is this even a thing? . . . like it just doesn't make sense, you're doing more . . . you're staying late and yeah, I guess these things can be a part of your job

129

responsibilities, but at some point, when do you create boundaries like it was just certain things somebody could poke a hole into the inequities . . . but just like the fucked up nature of the bubble within student affairs. . . . And yes, I'm still working in higher education but it's just expanding our lens so that there's more to it than we've been socialized to accept for ourselves. So that's the part of therapy for me that was talking to somebody else that is hearing me that's outside of the academy. That's kind of pointing out this should not be your lived reality, or this should not be what you're accepting as a part of your lived reality.

Sandy and Fortified highlighted the importance of saying no for coping mechanisms as acts of self-care and resistance. Sandy emphasized the need to say no due to less pay and recognition. After being passed over for a promotion and learning that she is the lowest paid director in her division, she refused to do extra work or take on extra projects while being treated inequitably. She declared:

It's crazy the number of times I've told people "Get somebody else to do it" like I'm not doing it. I'm not doing it. I proclaimed that in a staff meeting a couple of weeks ago, and I was like, no, I'm serious, I'm not doing it, get somebody else to do it. Write me up, I don't care, but I'm not doing it. And I think that made them realize, oh she's really not doing it! So being comfortable with saying that because I'm not doing more work for less pay and resources and no recognition just to be treated differently. But I also recognize my privilege and being able to say that because of the role that I have in the position that I have . . . but for me, I definitely embrace those things as my way of coping and navigating these situations.

Fortified agreed with Sandy that no was an entire answer. She acknowledged the value of saying no and how she has encouraged new Black women professionals to have this same mindset, despite the pressure of the student affairs culture to be a workaholic and a "yes person." In response to Sandy, she further described how she made the decision to begin taking time for herself at work and away from campus:

> You said it, no is an answer, no is definitely an answer and finding somebody else to do it, you know. I was always that person, that workaholic and was always letting my time build up and also letting my time carry over. And I just said . . . you gotta do what's best for you, even if that's closing the door, having time to yourself, even at work, or even if you don't feel like you're up to it today, girl, take off! So, I've been starting to do that.

All participants agreed with Fortified that taking time for yourself at work and away from campus by "shutting or closing doors" or incorporating brief walks throughout the workday were beneficial. Interestingly, most participants also shared the importance and need for time away from campus by taking sick/mental health/vacation days or working from home. Ty exclaimed, "Working virtually during COVID, changed the game, right? Working virtually, is a Black woman's Godsend, mainly that gives you a mental break just being home." Brook shared her experience with being away from campus during the pandemic and how it eased her anxiety from being in white spaces surrounded by whiteness. She stated:

> I found that when I was in the pandemic, like being home, working remotely, I was going for walks. I was able to clear my mind. I was not in the space seeing those folks and sometimes it's like walking into buildings would cause me a sense of anxiety, and so, not having to do that, like this freed me.

Chapter Summary

Through sista circles and participant journals, participants in this study provided their lived experiences as Black women student affairs professionals and the critical incidents that occur within our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs. The chapter outlined the four major findings of this study: (a) Critical Incidents, (b) The Outsider Within, (c) Surveillance Techniques, and (d) Working the Cracks. Findings were organized by research questions and were further supported by my conceptual framework, the significance of this study, and the literature. Although participant experiences varied by years of experience in student affairs, institution type, region, and functional area as well as age and intersecting identities, there were similarities in their experiences. These similarities shed light on the structural violence and racialized harm at HWIs that Black women student affairs professionals experience, how these concepts are perpetuated by white women higher education professionals, and how these experiences influence our careers.

In Chapter 6, I provide discussion and implications related to the findings of this study and provide recommendations for research and practice for HWIs, white women higher education professionals, and Black women student affairs professionals.

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

I'm shaking a room. – Toni

Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the study to include review of the problem statement, the purpose of the study, research questions, methodology, and limitations, or bounds of the study. Findings are also discussed in reference to my conceptual framework and the literature. I conclude this chapter with a discussion on implications for policy and practice specific to the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals, and recommendations for future research.

As a reminder, due to the use of a nontraditional methodology, sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) created for Black women by a Black woman, I do not use "they" and "their" in reference to my participants as traditionally used in academic writing. I instead use the terms "we," "us," and "our" (Collins, 2009) as resistance, oppositional language, and as a situated knower in my role as a researcher participant.

Summary of the Study

Overview of Problem

The focus of this study stemmed from my personal experiences as a Black woman student affairs professional working with white women higher education professionals at historically white institutions (HWIs). There have been several critical incidents with white women throughout my career that have occurred and have left an impression in my memory that I am unable to erase. These experiences have undoubtedly influenced my career in positive and negative ways, and I was curious if other Black women student affairs professionals had similar experiences, how these experiences have impacted our careers, and how we have navigated the

critical incidents and our careers at HWIs as a result. After finding no answers in the literature, it was apparent that this topic was not being researched, but these conversations were taking place in our within-group communities.

In Chapters 1 and 2, I discussed the dearth of literature on the experiences of the Black women student affairs professionals, specifically regarding the critical incidents that occur in our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs. Typically, discussions of structural violence and racialized harm caused by white supremacist patriarchy on college campuses are centered on the actions and identities of white men. Very little literature has discussed the role of white women in perpetuating this harm (Accapadi, 2007; Mata, 2018; Tevis & Pifer, 2021). This study helps to dive deeper and understand the role white women higher education professionals also play in the gendered racist experiences of Black women student affairs professionals. Focusing on the critical incidents that occur in the workplace relationships with Black women and white women allow higher education professionals, researchers, and institutions to understand the dynamics of the relationships between Black women and white women and how these relationships positively or negatively influence the careers of Black women student affairs professionals. Identifying this gap in the literature informed the purpose and research questions of this study as discussed in the next section.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and the critical incidents that occur within our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs. The overarching research question and subquestions were:

How do Black women student affairs professionals perceive, describe, and navigate critical incidents within our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs? How does this lead to structural violence and racialized harm, if any, that may be associated with these incidents?

1. From the perspective of Black women student affairs professionals, what are the critical incidents that occur within our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs?

2. How have critical incidents, structural violence, and racialized harm influenced the careers of Black women student affairs professionals at HWIs?

3. What tools, strategies, or support systems have assisted Black women student affairs professionals with navigating or coping with the critical incidents, structural violence, and racialized harm that may have occurred within our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs?

Review of Methodology

Centering the voices and lived experiences of Black women student affairs professionals through a Black Feminist Methodology was central to the purpose of this study. I conducted a critical qualitative study using sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) to examine the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and the critical incidents that occur within our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs. I chose sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) as the approach to my research in an intentional effort to center Black women, to honor our experiences and voices, and to disrupt and unsettle the oppressive structures of academia that have historically uplifted Eurocentric approaches to academic research. Sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) is a Black feminist methodology

created by a Black woman, for Black women, that uses sista circles as a culturally relevant and gender-specific approach to studying Black women. This methodological approach has three distinct features of sista circles, communication dynamics, centrality of empowerment, and researcher as participant which influence how data is collected and analyzed. These distinct features eliminate power dynamics and focus on the communication dynamics that are prevalent within Black women's culture and the empowerment created by Black women being in community with one another.

Data were collected through an online background questionnaire, participant journals, and two 120-minute sista circles via Zoom. Participants completed the online background questionnaire after consenting to participating in this study. Prior to participating in the first sista circle, six participants completed a one-page participant journal via Qualtrics about a critical incident with a white woman higher education professional that occurred within the last week, month, or year. During the first sista circle participants were asked to discuss the critical incident they shared in their participant journal as well as other critical incidents that may have occurred throughout their careers. Data was analyzed using constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) through a Black feminist epistemology.

As the researcher, I applied my BFE (Collins, 2009) as a critical lens throughout the coding and analysis process through four dimensions: (a) lived experience as a criterion of meaning, (b) use of dialogue to assess knowledge claims, (c) ethic of care, and (d) ethic of personal accountability (Collins, 2009). Through this analysis and coding process, I identified four broad themes with subthemes: (a) Critical Incidents, (b) Outsider Within, (c) Surveillance Techniques, and (d) Working the Cracks. I will discuss these findings in connection to my conceptual framework and the literature, but first I will discuss the bounds of this study.

Bounds of the Study

Historically, Eurocentric paradigms and methodologies have tried to limit the stories and experiences of Black women within scholarship and research. Using sista circles to empower Black women is a strength of the study, an act of resistance, and a form of *talking back* (hooks, 1989) to the academy. To honor the stories and knowledge of Black women student affairs professionals in this study, this section is referred to as boundaries to the study, as opposed to limitations (Lacy, 2017). Limitations stem from a deficit lens and, like Black women, this study has no limitations, but specific boundaries (Lacy, 2017) related to the context of this study due to the use of sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) as the approach to this study.

This study focused on the experiences of seven Black women student affairs professionals and therefore is bound by race, gender, and profession in capturing the breadth of experience across all Black women student affairs professionals. An interesting boundary of this study occurred throughout the participant recruitment and selection process. In Chapter 3, I highlighted the impact of COVID-19 and the mass exodus of student affairs professionals from higher education. This large number included Black women therefore many of the Black women whom I initially contacted to recruit for my study no longer met the criteria for the study. This impacted the length of time that it took to recruit participants. But required a more direct recruitment approach by informally reaching out to participants who I knew were still in higher education which supports the informal nature and importance of community, friendship, and kinship within sista circles.

As previously mentioned in Chapter 3, our experiences are not monolithic therefore participants did not represent the full population and our experiences should not be generalized beyond this study. Although participants do not represent all Black women student affairs

professionals, conducting virtual sista circles via Zoom allowed me to recruit participants from different regions of the country, different states, different institution types, and different functional areas. Conversely, virtual sista circles also presented boundaries to communication and distractions for participants due to the lack of physical proximity to one another and personal obligations. This impacted the attentiveness of a participant during the first sista circle which led to less contribution of her perspectives and the same participant attending half of the second sista circle due to a family obligation. Other boundaries present were specific to issues with communication such as unstable internet connections. During the second sista circle, I was disconnected from Zoom but luckily it maintained connection for participants and continued recording their responses while I reconnected. It also presented a boundary to capture and document nonverbal communication among participants appropriately, which is an important factor in communication dynamics as a distinct feature of sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015).

Lastly, sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) requires prior relationships among participants (Neal-Barnett, Stadulis, Murray, et al., 2011) and as demonstrated in Chapter 4, each participant was connected through various forms of community, friendship, and kinship. Therefore, participant responses may have been influenced by preexisting relationships, overlapping institutions where some participants were currently or previously employed or earned degrees, or the culture/climate of higher education specific to the wellbeing and mental health of Black women student affairs professionals at the time this study was conducted. In the next section, I will discuss my findings in connection to my conceptual framework and to the literature.

Connections to Conceptual Framework

My conceptual framework theorized that Black women student affairs professionals at HWIs are subjected to white supremacist patriarchy and hegemonic white femininities (Collins, 2004; Hamilton et al., 2019). This leads to structural violence and racialized harm (Hamer & Lang, 2015) influenced by white women's proximity to whiteness and white privilege through the critical incidents that occur within our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals. Participants of my study made meaning of these experiences through the lens of BFT (Collins, 1986, 2009) and components of critical race feminism (Wing, 2003) by sharing our counterstories through participant journaling and sista circles as a counterspace. In the following sections, I discuss the findings of this study in connection to my conceptual framework.

Figure 3. Conceptual Framework for Examining the Experiences of Black Women Student Affairs Professionals and the Critical Incidents That Occur Within Our Working Relationships With White Women Higher Education Professionals at HWIs
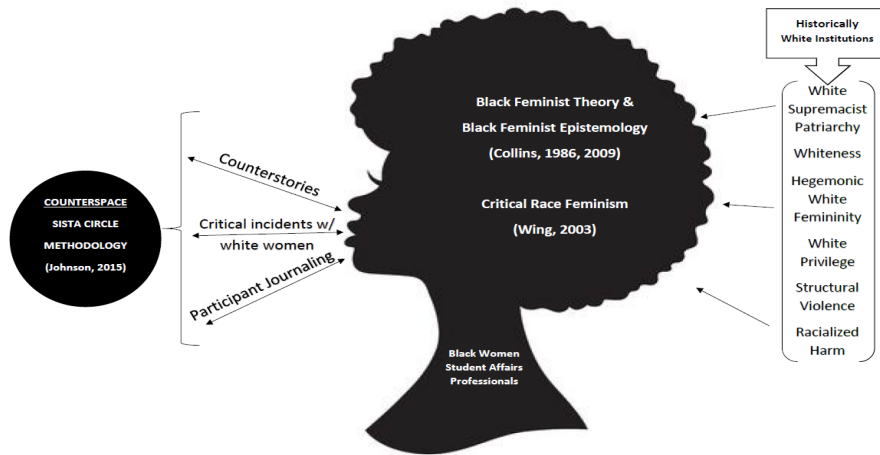
Critical Incidents With White Women at HWIs

For this study, critical incidents (Flanagan, 1954; Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988) were defined as the significant, lived experiences, impactful interactions or events, either positive or negative, that occur from the perspective of Black women student affairs professionals while working with white women higher education professionals at HWIs. All participants shared critical incidents that occurred with either white women supervisors or colleagues. Like most participants in this study, Black women often serve in roles where their supervisor is a white woman or their supervisor's supervisor is a white woman (hooks, 2015). Most participants shared critical incidents that occurred with a white women supervisor; therefore, the role of supervision by white women (Mata, 2018; Tevis & Pifer, 2021) is an important factor in the workplace relationships between Black women and white women higher education professionals at HWIs. Throughout these critical incidents participants explained how white supremacist patriarchy, hegemonic femininities, whiteness, and white privilege played a role in the structural violence and racialized harm experienced from white women and at HWIs.

Another theme identified in my findings was the use of surveillance techniques in the critical incidents that occurred within the workplace relationships between Black women student affairs professionals and white women higher education professionals at HWIs. Many participants discussed the role of HR after critical incidents had occurred and how this office was used at HWIs as a surveillance technique to perpetuate structural violence. Ty, Toni, and Giselle all shared experiences with filing HR complaints after a critical incident occurred with their white women supervisors and the lack of support received from the office and the institution. All participants agreed with Toni that "HR is not for us" and that HRs role at the institution is to

normalize whiteness and help maintain the status quo. Participants' experiences with HR demonstrated the use of HR as a surveillance technique used at HWIs to oppress and marginalize Black women student affairs professionals.

Black Feminist Theory/Thought

Using BFT (Collins, 1986, 2009) to study the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals, allows the voices and experiences of Black women to be centered and provides safe spaces for us to express our voices within marginalized, white spaces of the academy. Examples of the outsider-within status and the ways in which self-definition and self-valuation (Collins, 1986, 2009) were present in the knowledge production that occurred with and between participants as we shared how we navigate our experiences and critical incidents with white women higher education professionals at HWIs. Each participant discussed the contradictory nature of our outsider-within status beginning with entry points into the profession. Participants shared specific experiences of being ushered into the field and being sponsored by white women but also experiencing critical incidents that changed the nature of these relationships as well as the status within our offices and on our campuses. Several participants also discussed the notion of pet-to-threat (Thomas et al., 2013) as an example of their outsider-within status. The concept of pet-to-threat became prevalent for many participants while we simultaneously witnessed white women colleagues being hired, groomed or promoted for positions. Several participants recognized the realizations of being the outsider-within in our roles and offices and acknowledged the influence of this status on our careers. Owning this realization and using it to define our experiences and how we navigate our careers speaks to the importance of the knowledge production of Black women and our ability to use this knowledge to survive and thrive at HWIs.

For Black women student affairs professionals at HWIs, "the marginality that accompanies outsider-within status can be the source of both frustration and creativity" (Collins, 2009, p. 287). All participants shared high levels of frustration regarding marginalized and isolating treatment as the outsider-within. However, many participants discussed how we creatively "work the cracks" at our institutions in opposition of our status as the outsider within. Toni specifically shared how she "channels frustration and anger into communication" and "sees it as an opportunity for correction and dialogue" with white women colleagues. In moving from pet-to-threat, participants also shared how we used this status to "work the cracks" of the university by joining organizations on campus to gain knowledge that they otherwise did not have access to, building relationships outside their offices and beyond white women supervisors and colleagues, and to advance their skills through strategic professional development opportunities. Brooke discussed a specific strategy of working the cracks by inserting herself in spaces and leadership programs heavily attended by white women to learn their secrets to being successful so she could apply these same methods without causing harm. Essentially using her outsider within locations to surveil white women and the institution, which Collins (2009) argued advances Black women's ability to create change.

Another component of BFT is the importance of Black women's culture with an emphasis on Black women's relationships with one another. Collins (2009) spoke of these relationships as safe spaces for self-definition and self-valuation to occur for Black women. All participants discussed the importance of our relationships with other Black women, specifically regarding the importance of sista circles as a healing space and being in community with other Black women to make meaning of our marginalized experiences at HWIs. Interestingly, some participants also discussed strained relationships with Black women colleagues or Black women

in leadership roles as a source of harm at HWIs. Participants shared many of these strained relationships with other Black women were weaponized by white women supervisors or colleagues to put Black women in competition with one another. Ty connected these relationships to plantation politics and the notion of Black women in leadership roles being made the overseer to surveil and oppress other Black women. Toni offered that Black women must "know your audience" because "all skinfolk ain't kinfolk." But Brooke shared a personal experience about an important relationship with another Black woman colleague who was her Soror and whom she saw as a mentor. The termination of the relationship stemmed from her white woman supervisor pitting the two against one another. After sharing her story and realizing the root of the issue, Brooke specifically asked "how do Black women address and repair" these relationships?

Collins (2009) professed that in dealing with the frustration and creativity caused by our marginality within the academy, that some Black women "dichotomize their behavior and become two different people. Over time the strain of doing this can be enormous" (p. 287). Accordingly, some Black women in leadership positions use their power to suppress other Black women but Black women must understand the importance of resisting oppressive conditions and not imparting these conditions on one another (Collins, 2009). Some participants also shared their thoughts on how to address and repair weaponized relationships with other Black women. Toni and Sandy both emphasized the need to address these critical incidents head on and communicate about what occurred to combat relationships with other Black women being weaponized and as a means to repair these relationships.

Lastly, Collins (2009) theorized that despite differences in multiple intersecting identities, Black women encounter oppressive societal practices that lead to common challenges and

similarities in experiences. When these common challenges are discussed and shared in community with other Black women, Black women's knowledge production clarifies a standpoint about our experiences. Sista circles provided participants in this study with a safe space in community with other Black women to discuss the complexities of the structural violence and racialized harm we have experienced at HWIs. The findings in this study, such as naming critical incidents with white women supervisors, calling out the covert ways that Black women student affairs professionals are kept in outsider within locations, and the importance of repairing relationships with other Black women to dismantle surveillance, establish a group standpoint on the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals. In doing so, we create new knowledge that empowered Black women within the sista circle, and hopefully other Black women who engage with this study, which illuminates the importance of centering the lived experiences of Black women and the importance of Black women's culture. Despite our varying marginalized and isolating experiences as Black women student affairs professionals, our group standpoint provided tools, strategies, and support systems for us to "work the cracks" and find creative avenues to change the oppressive practices and policies that contribute to Black women student surviving and thriving at HWIs.

Critical Race Feminism: Counterstories and Counterspaces

Using components of CRF (Wing, 2003) centers the intersections of race, gender, and class and their relation to power dynamics for Women of Color and supports the use of counterspaces (Howard-Hamilton, 2003) and counterstories (Delgado, 2000; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) as a form of resistance to the dominant narrative and Black women student affairs professionals' status as the outsider within. As stated earlier, the contradiction of frustration and creativity that the outsider within status created for participants

144

called for safe spaces to self-define and self-valuate these experiences. In theorizing the outsider within locations of Black women, Collins (2009) stated "resolving contradictions of this magnitude takes considerable inner strength" (p. 110). This is an inner strength that is developed through the knowledge production of Black women, typically in counterspaces with other Black women, which reiterates the importance of Black women's culture in BFT and supports centrality of empowerment as a tenet of sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015). Several participants discussed the importance of sista circles in their validation and healing.

All participants discussed the importance of these counterspaces in establishing critical communities through "sista circles," "peer mentorship," "their village," "peer support groups," and "safe spaces to vent to colleagues." Safe spaces with other Black women, such as the sista circles conducted in this study, served as counterspaces for participants to share their feelings of working with white women at HWIs. Ty recalled feelings of insecurity and imposter syndrome early in her career and shared how she rejected the ideas as part of the narrative of her career. During the first sista circle she exclaimed, "I'm not an imposter. People [white women] are treating me as an imposter . . . so, being in those imposter environments [HWIs] now I'm pissed off, and I'm feeling disrespected." Ty felt safe to share her feelings with other Black women as well as provide a counterstory to reject the dominant narrative of imposter syndrome which is often experienced by Black women student affairs professionals as a white supremacist patriarchal ideology used at HWIs.

Sista circles also served as spaces void of surveillance where participants were free to be themselves without stigmas or the presence of whiteness. These counterspaces foster the conditions for Black women to empower one another through self-definition and self-valuation without the white gaze (Collins, 2009). However, these counterspaces also become threatening to

majority groups, such as white women higher education professionals, who feel excluded as they cannot use these spaces as surveillance techniques for mechanisms of control. Thus, as supported by the findings of this study, these spaces are central to the self-definition, self-valuation, and knowledge production that has contributed to each participant's ability to survive and thrive at HWIs.

<center>**Connections to Literature**</center>

Black Women Student Affairs Professionals

In Chapter 2, I completed a literature review about the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals beginning with the history of trailblazer Lucy Diggs Slowe and other Black deans of women (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2022; Evans, 2007; Hayden Glover, 2012; Herdlein et al., 2008; Nidiffer, 2002) who served as early possibility models (Patton & Haynes, 2018; Patton & Njoku, 2019) for Black women to consider student affairs as a career in higher education. Further research of early literature (Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Ramey, 1995) on Black women student affairs professionals focused on the gendered racism Black women experienced and the challenges and barriers this presented at HWIs such as marginalization, isolation, and tokenization. More recent literature (Adams, 2021; Burke & Carter, 2015; Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Fullwood, 2023; Henry, 2010; C. R. Walker, 2020; Wallace et al., 2020; West, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2020a, 2020b; West & Greer, 2020; J. Wilder et al., 2013) discussed the strategies and resources that Black women have used to survive and thrive as student affairs professionals.

Mosley's (1980) and Ramey's (1995) early studies of Black women student affairs professionals discussed findings and implications regarding the influence of white women's privilege and proximity to whiteness on the careers of Black women. This study supports their

<center>146</center>

early findings but fills a gap in more recent and limited literature about the impact of these concepts on the workplace relationships of Black women and white women higher education professionals. This study also underpins the literature (Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Ramey, 1995) on Black women student affairs professionals experiences of gendered racism, marginalization, and isolation as participants shared examples of being the outsider-within, moving from pet-to-threat, and witnessing the grooming and hiring of less qualified white women.

Similar to more recent literature (Adams, 2021; Burke & Carter, 2015; Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Fullwood, 2023; Henry, 2010; Miller Dyce et al., 2022; C. R. Walker, 2020; Wallace et al., 2020; West, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2020a, 2020b; West & Greer, 2020; J. Wilder et al., 2013) participants in this study also discussed the strategies used to survive and thrive at HWIs. Participants shared how "working the cracks" of the institution through establishing critical community such as sista circles, peer support groups, and other counterspaces through doctorate programs, work, and group chats with other Black women. As evidenced in the literature, this study supports that informal and professional counterspaces play a significant role in establishing critical community for Black women student affairs professionals.

Other examples of strategies participants shared in this study which supported current literature was building strategic social capital specifically in learning spaces with other Black women and inserting ourselves into majority-white spaces to access avenues for building relationships, establishing sponsorships, and seeking advancement. Although current literature also discusses the importance of sponsorship and mentorship for Black women student affairs professionals by other Black women, there is a gap in the literature on the strained relationships of Black women in higher education. This study underscores the importance of positive

relationships with Black women through being in community but furthers the literature on why negative relationships may occur and how to address and repair these relationships for Black women student affairs professionals.

Lastly, filling a larger gap in the literature, this study illuminated the need for discussions around self-care for Black women student affairs professionals, how we feel about our experiences, and how we cope with gendered racism due to experiences of structural violence and racialized harm as the outsider-within at HWIs. With the recent deaths of Dr. JoAnne Epps, late President of Temple University, Dr. Orinthia T. Montague, late President of Volunteer State Community College, and Dr. Antoinette Bonnie Candia-Bailey, late Vice President of Student Affairs at Lincoln University of Missouri, there is much needed research on the physical and mental health of Black women student affairs professionals. As discussed in the literature, researchers (Henry, 2010; Jackson & Flowers, 2003; Mena, 2016; Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; West, 2015, 2017; J. Wilder et al., 2013) have shown that Black women student affairs professionals are tokenized, isolated, and marginalized at HWIs. But seldom are Black women asked how we feel about this treatment or how these gendered racist experiences impact our physical, emotional, and psychological well-being.

Participants in this study shared emotions related to critical incidents that have occurred with white women higher education professionals at HWIs. Feelings of "frustration," "anger," "sadness," and "confusion" were prevalent among all participants. Furthermore, participants used self-care as a form of radical resistance (Miller Dyce et al., 2021) to critical incidents but also as intentional tools and strategies to survive and thrive as Black women student affairs professionals. Four participants discussed the value of therapy in navigating critical incidents. All participants agreed that practicing self-care in the moment or throughout the workday was

also valuable. Some examples shared were "closing or shutting my office door," "taking mental health days," "working from home," and simply "saying no." These findings fill an important gap in the literature as the aforementioned deaths of three Black women administrators have heightened necessary discussions of the physical and mental health of Black women professionals and the lack of support and resources that has been provided throughout student affairs and higher education.

White Women Higher Education Professionals

In addition to Black women student affairs professionals, I also reviewed literature on white women higher education professionals to provide context to their roles in the experiences of Black women at HWIs. Very little literature exists regarding white women's overrepresented presence in the field. These few studies discuss racial identity formation (Feenstra, 2017; Robbins, 2016; Robbins & Jones, 2016; Woods, 2020), racial dissonance (Feenstra, 2017; Mata, 2018; Robbins, 2016; Robbins & Jones, 2016), benefits of white privilege (Accapadi, 2007; Tevis & Pifer, 2021), the use of white women's tears (Accapadi, 2007; Mata, 2018), hegemonic (white) femininities (Collins, 2004; Hamilton et al., 2019), and how these factors influence the work of white women higher education professionals.

Like Tevis and Pifer (2021) and Mata's (2018) studies, findings of this study support that white women supervisors use white privilege and hegemonic (white) femininities (Collins, 2004; Hamilton et al., 2019) throughout and after critical incidents occurred with Black women student affairs professionals in support of white supremacist patriarchy to further perpetuate oppressive structures, policies, and practices at HWIs. Participants shared the ways in which white women supervisors imparted intersectional dominance in their roles to "normalize whiteness," "perform wokeness," "use white tears," and "use DEI language to justify their actions" which "create

psychologically unsafe spaces" for Black women student affairs professionals. These actions are further detailed in Chapter 5 through the themes of the outsider within and surveillance techniques and the respective subthemes of grooming and hiring white women and coded language.

It is important to acknowledge how hegemonic (white) femininities and the white privilege that white women supervisors possess impacts decisions related to hiring practices such as grooming and hiring other white women, hiring less qualified applicants overqualified Black women, or paying less qualified professionals higher salaries than Black women as voiced by participants. This study's findings show decisions made by white women supervisors ultimately influence the careers of Black women student affairs professionals working at HWIs which serves as sites of structural violence and breeding grounds for racialized harm. These findings add to the existing literature on white women higher education professionals and provide specific nuances to their influences on the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals at HWIs. The next section will discuss implications for policy and practice as well as recommendations for future research related to the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The purpose, significance, and findings of this study contribute to the literature specifically regarding the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals at HWIs. As such, my findings also suggest implications for policy and practice and recommendations for future research. Initially upon proposing my study, to fully center my research on the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals, I did not plan to provide implications for HWIs or for white women higher education professionals. This study was simply not for them. However,

what other opportunities would Black women student affairs professionals have to share their insights and perspectives on institutional policies and practices without experiencing structural violence, racialized harm, or gendered racism from white women higher education professionals and HWIs? It is the responsibility of white women higher education professionals and HWIs to create psychologically safe campuses for Black women student affairs professionals void of gendered racism, structural violence, and racialized harm as a step towards dismantling white supremacist patriarchy in higher education.

Our sista circles provided a safe, affirming, and empowering space for participants to unapologetically speak their minds and share specific actions and practices that white women supervisors/colleagues and HWIs could and should do differently to improve and support the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals on college campuses. During our second sista circle, I specifically asked participants what recommendations they would like to offer to HWIs and white women higher education professionals. What would you like them to know? In the following sections, I share our collective implications for policy and practice for HWIs and white women and conclude with our collective recommendations for Black women student affairs professionals and recommendations for future research.

Implications for Historically White Institutions

The first recommendation is for HWIs to use the research on the experiences of Students of Color and the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals to find ways to support the success and advancement of Black women on college campuses. As discussed in the bounds of this study, large numbers of Black women student affairs professionals have left higher education or are planning to leave higher education. Retaining Staff of Color has direct connections to retention and persistence, particularly for Students of Color. Additionally, HWIs

should examine the cost to the institution of losing large numbers of Black women staff. Giselle learned from her campus's Staff Senate that it costs an institution more money when a staff member leaves the institution than it does to retain them. Institutions should ultimately consider investing in the retention of Students of Color and Staff of Color, such as Black women student affairs professionals, as opposed to losing money due to Students and Staff of Color leaving the institution because of discriminatory policies, practices, and experiences.

As such, HWIs need to also move from words to actions. Simply having diversity statements or mentioning diversity, equity, and inclusion in mission statements is not enough. HWIs should show a commitment to these statements by requiring all faculty and staff to participate in trainings focused on multicultural competency or white supremacy culture. Toni recommends that these trainings should be required for everyone offered through new employee orientations and employees should be held accountable for implementing and practicing these competencies throughout their work with not only students but also other staff members, such as Black women student affairs professionals. Mission and the actions behind the mission matter when Black women are making decisions to work at HWIs.

In aligning actions of the institution with the mission and DEI goals, HWIs should be intentional about diversifying hiring pools and consider hiring qualified Black women instead of unqualified or less qualified white women or men. HWIs should establish equitable hiring practices through Human Resources to ensure that Candidates of Color, including Black women student affairs professionals, have a fair and equitable hiring process. Requiring training on equitable hiring practices and conducting equity audits on all hiring decisions should become a practice for all hiring managers, search committees, and HR offices at institutions. Also, consider hiring Black women for positions outside of Housing and DEI-related/focused positions, and for

senior-level positions. Similarly, to retain Black women student affairs professionals consider paying us equitable and comparable salaries and promoting Black women from within our offices or divisions in similar ways that our white women colleagues are groomed and promoted.

HWIs should also invest in the success and development of Black women student affairs professionals through creating institution supported and funded sista circles and counterspaces such as employee resource groups (ERGs), committees, events, and professional development opportunities specifically for Black women, that support Black women's survival and thriving at HWIs. An example of a successful institution funded and supported program is the University of Michigan's Woman of Color Task Force (WCTF) which was created in 1979 specifically for the purposes of empowering and supporting African American women in their careers at the institution. WCTF serves as a possibility model for other HWIs to create similar programs for Black women student affairs professionals on their campuses.

Finally, this study illuminated the ways in which HR and DEI offices are used as surveillance techniques in perpetuating structural violence and racialized harm at HWIs. Institutions should examine the purpose and role of HR and DEI offices and how policies and practices related to complaints filed by employees are investigated and resolved as well as how employees, especially Black women student affairs professionals, are supported or lack thereof. Experiencing structural violence and racialized harm at HWIs can lead to racial trauma and race-related stress for Black women student affairs professionals. HWIs should rethink HR personnel and support systems for minoritized and underrepresented populations, like Black women student affairs professionals, such as implementing trauma-informed approaches to human resource management and supervision practices.

Considerations for White Women Working With Black Women

In exploring the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and the critical incidents that occur in our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs, findings in Chapter 5 supported that critical personal reflection, interrogation, and development around the intersections of race and gender and their alignment with white supremacist patriarchy should be the foundation of professional development for white women. This study calls in and calls out white women higher education professionals at HWIs and propels them to humanize Black women in their work as supervisors and colleagues by creating supportive, equitable, and psychologically safe environments for Black women. Below are critical collective implications and recommendations shared by participants that white women higher education professionals should adopt and adapt as they work towards improving critical incidents and their workplace relationships with Black women student affairs professionals.

First and foremost, listen to Black women. Period. Do not make assumptions. Be open to talking with and learning from Black women, especially when we are sharing the ways in which you cause harm. Think about the intent versus the impact of your actions and decisions, especially when making leadership decisions or creating policies or practices that align with whiteness and white supremacist patriarchy. Findings showed that white women have done a good job with sponsorship, mentorship, and shoulder tapping Black women to enter the field or as early career professionals. Additionally, learn what it really means to be an ally or an accomplice to Black women student affairs professionals. Use your privilege and historical protection as white women to protect Black women. Do the work. Unpack your privilege. Sit in your discomfort and stop weaponizing your tears. Discomfort leads to growth. Check yourself

and stop being performative. Stop aligning yourself with whiteness and white supremacy while using DEI language to justify your actions and perpetuate harm. Interrogate why you put your whiteness before your womanhood. When you act in ways that align with your whiteness and privilege you are perpetuating racialized harm and systemic institutionalized, structural violence against Black women.

For those who are supervisors, hiring managers, or members of search committees, stop grooming and hiring unqualified white women because of "fit" or "likeability" to normalize whiteness which supports hegemonic (white) femininities and white supremacist patriarchy. Understand that difference does not mean a copy. Think about the criteria that you are using to make hiring and leadership decisions. Who do your decisions center and benefit? Who are your decisions serving? White women supervisors should also consider professional development opportunities centered on the four tenets of the inclusive supervision model (Wilson et al., 2019) to become more socially just and multiculturally competent supervisors. Use the skills and talents Black women bring to HWIs. If you do not ask for our opinions, if you do not treat us like the professionals that we are, or respect our contributions when we speak, we will leave. Use us or lose us. This is a disservice to Black women but also to the students who we work with. Stop feeling threatened by Black women who have the talent and acumen to do our jobs. Pay us appropriately. Continue to center students rather than centering your feelings of intimidation and insecurity related to your work. Do what is best for students to fulfill the mission and goals of the institution. Focus on collaboration instead of competition. We are not your competition.

Lastly, refrain from weaponizing Black women against each other because of our differences. Understand that Black women are not monolithic, we are all different. Respect, honor, and value that we all work, perform, and present in different ways. Recognize that our

differences should not determine how one Black woman is treated over another. Recognize that we all bring value. But give Black women our space. Our personal life is our personal life, and we are not required to include our personal life in our workplace relationships, especially when you have not earned access to intimate details of our personal life. Do not come to work to make friends. We do not come to work to make friends and it is appropriate for us to have boundaries at work. Black women are not at institutions to share our personal lives. We are here to improve the lives of students.

Recommendations for Black Women Student Affairs Professionals

Sista circles present a unique opportunity for Black women to be in community with one another and to empower one another to be our best selves through knowledge production and shared wisdom and experiences. To conclude our last sista circle and this study, I asked participants what recommendations or insight they would like to offer to Black women student affairs professionals. To honor the words of participants and to empower Black women, I invite other Black women student affairs professionals into our sista circle to access the collective knowledge and advice from participants as we reflect on our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals. Through the final conversation during our sista circle, we offer you the following recommendations, tips, and strategies to survive and thrive at HWIs.

All participants felt that it was imperative for Black women student affairs professionals, especially at HWIs, to identify mentors, someone you can talk to, and find ways to support, uplift and empower each other. Find your people. Find your group of likeminded folks. Establish your critical community and village on or off campus to help make sense of the mental gymnastics.

Fortified also recommends, especially to new Black women student affairs professionals, to be intentional. Be yourself. Be quick to listen and slow to speak. Because being quick to speak

fast can get you in trouble. Fortified wants Black women to be able to observe the situation and be able to analyze the whole environment. Additionally, Jackson encourages Black women new professionals to use the benefits of the institution, all of them. There are cost saving measures for how you can think about your health, how you think about your life insurance. How can you retire early? In what ways can you take courses that perhaps become your retirement plan versus having to stay in one role and progress through the field? Build your skills and use the institution for all its benefits so you can pivot into being an entrepreneur if this is your goal. Think about taking courses that are going to help you build and grow, especially if the coursework is free or at a low cost to you.

Pulling from her own personal experiences that she shared during the sista circle, Brooke recommended that if incidents happen that causes Black women to be pitted against each other, or be weaponized against each other, find ways to repair, restore, or communicate with another Black woman. Realize in those moments that you may be frustrated but think about what you can do to highlight why you should not listen to what is being said or think about how the relationship can be repaired versus white women weaponizing our relationships and succeeding at dividing us as Black women.

From Giselle's perspective, Black women should not get too tied to the institution. In other words, do not be afraid to move around. Giselle advises that one of the quickest ways to advance your title, and your salary is not being afraid to move around to different institutions. She also suggests identifying transferable skills and thinking about other ways to get to the same path. Explore areas such as social work or mental health, areas that could help you gain some additional transferable skills if you want to transition out of working in the field of higher education or move to a higher ed-adjacent position. As a career advisor, Ty also recommends

identifying your transferable skills while also knowing your why and understanding your purpose. If you know your purpose and you know your why, you will understand that higher education may not be the only place you can accomplish your purpose and your why. You can still have a positive impact and work with students, but you may have to find that space somewhere else.

Furthermore, Toni encourages Black women student affairs professionals to find their voice. Be your strongest and biggest advocate. Find your voice and do not let anyone take that from you. But also, be smart about how you use your voice. Do not be loud, strong, and wrong. Make sure you know what you are talking about. If you do not know, do not be afraid to pause, say I'm not sure, do your research, learn the information, and then come back. Never allow anyone to take your voice or make you feel small. Do not sit in a corner and play small. Shake a room!

Lastly, Sandy advises Black women to be intentional and strategic about your development. Know your craft, be a student of the field, and have a professional development plan that helps you move up or move out when you need to remove yourself from unsafe environments. Since most white women supervisors seem to be problematic, do not wait for them or any supervisor to develop you or to offer you opportunities to grow. Be creative with your professional development funds, use them to pay for online trainings, purchase books, or request to go to a leadership institute. Also, become involved with professional associations outside of your campus to build relationships, to seek mentorship from other Black women, and to advance your skills. Use those funds to put yourself in spaces with other Black women. But most importantly, take care of yourself and know when to walk away. Too many of us have sacrificed areas of our life for a field we love that does not always love us back.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study specifically focused on the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and the critical incidents that occur within our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs. The literature on the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals is limited but is supported and advanced by this study. While this study fills several gaps in the literature as previously discussed, there are a plethora of opportunities to expand on the research related to the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals.

First, while this study focused on critical incidents in our workplace relationships with white women, future research should be conducted on relationships with other minoritized and underrepresented populations to include other Black women, Black men, white-passing minorities, or white women in LGBTQIAA communities. Do critical incidents with these populations have similar findings as the critical incidents that occurred with white women higher education professionals as evidenced in this study? Also, are these critical incidents fueled by alignment with white supremacist patriarchy and proximity to whiteness as exemplified by white women supervisors mentioned in this study? The role of supervision by other identities and their influence on Black women student affairs professionals' careers should also be studied. As this study also focused on Black women's experiences at HWIs, two participants mentioned working at HBCUs and having very different experiences than working at an HWI. Future research could be conducted on the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals at HBCUs.

Furthermore, participants shared various ways they navigated and coped with critical incidents to survive and thrive at HWIs; however, examples did not fully encompass Adams' (2021) full definition of thriving as highlighted in Chapter 2. More research should be conducted

specifically on how Black women student affairs professionals move beyond surviving to thriving and the specific contributions of Black women at HWIs and within higher education. Simply stated, give us our flowers! Researchers should invest in studying the role that Black women play in the success and growth of HWIs and other college campuses. In contrast, like two participants in this study and as stated in the study bounds, there are many Black women who have left or are planning to leave higher education which impacted recruitment for this study. Scholars should conduct studies to examine the phenomenon of Black women leaving higher education. Why are Black women student affairs professionals leaving higher education? What industries are we using our transferable skills in? Are we having similar experiences with gendered racism, marginalization, and isolation in those industries/fields? Are the critical incidents like the critical incidents that occur with white women at HWIs?

Finally, this study used a cultural staple and the special, historical connections between Black women as sistas to tell our stories and share our experiences of working with white women at HWIs. At the end of our second sista circle, Jackson proclaimed "these circles are so important." Scholars should explore additional research on the use of sista circles in the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and the affirmation and empowerment that the methodology provides for Black women and our careers in higher education. Traditional methodological approaches do not account for the ways in which Black women communicate, verbally and nonverbally. Further research on this distinct feature should be conducted to advance the methodology as a widely used culturally relevant methodology created by a Black woman to study Black women.

Beyond the use of sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) in several dissertations written by Black women doctoral students and educators, there are very few published articles in

peer-reviewed journals that use sista circles as an approach to data collection and understanding the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals. Those of us who have used sista circle methodology should consider submitting our research for publication to increase visibility, recognition, and credibility of this culturally relevant approach for studying the experiences of Black women in higher education. It is a necessary contribution to the academy in our efforts to write ourselves into existence as we continue to work to dismantle white supremacist patriarchy in higher education. As Toni stated, let's shake some rooms!

Conclusion

The experiences of Black women student affairs professionals are riddled with gendered racism, structural violence, and racialized harm. Yet, we have still found various ways to survive and thrive at HWIs, despite the systems that are built against us and the policies and practices that are enacted to stifle our success. This study added to the literature and research on Black women student affairs professionals by illuminating the critical incidents that occur within our workplace relationships with white women higher education professionals at HWIs. Through sista circles, the critical incidents, and our status as the outsider-within exposed the surveillance techniques that white women supervisors and colleagues use to align with whiteness and white supremacist patriarchy. These mechanisms of control require Black women to work the cracks of the institution to survive and thrive. This study unsettles power dynamics and oppressive practices and calls white women higher education professionals and HWIs to listen to Black women, support Black women, and protect Black women. We are asking you to see the humanity in Black women and to simply do better. To conclude, to my participants, I leave you with the words of educator, writer, and poet Lucille Clifton (2020, p. 139):

won't you celebrate with me

what I have shaped into

161

a kind of life? i had no model.

born in babylon

both nonwhite and woman

what did I see to be except myself?

i made it up

here on this bridge between

starshine and clay,

my one hand holding tight

my other hand; come celebrate

with me that everyday

something has tried to kill me

and has failed.

REFERENCES

Abes, E. S., Jones, S. R., & Stewart, D-L. (Eds.). (2019). *Rethinking college student development theory using critical frameworks*. Stylus Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003446835

Accapadi, M. M. (2007). When white women cry: How white women's tears oppress women of color. *College Student Affairs Journal, 26*(2), 208–215. http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ899418.pdf

Acker, J. (2006). Inequality regimes: Gender, class and race in organizations. *Gender & Society 20*(4), 441–464. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243206289499

Adams, J. (2021). *Making our own way: Exploring experiences of mid-level Black womxn student affairs professionals thriving at southern historically white institutions* [Doctoral dissertation, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Ajayi Jones, L. (2018, April 17). About the weary weaponizing of white women tears. *Awesomely Luvvie*. https://awesomelyluvvie.com/2018/04/weaponizing-white-women-tears.html

Alexander, T. (2010). Roots of leadership: Analysis of the narratives from African American women leaders in higher education. *The International Journal of Learning: Annual Review, 17*(4), 193–204. https://doi.org/10.18848/1447-9494/CGP/v17i04/46973

Bartman, C. C. (2015). African American women in higher education: Issues and support strategies. *College Student Affairs Leadership*, *2*(2). https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/csal/

Beauboeuf-Lafontant, T. (2022). *To live more abundantly: Black collegiate women, Howard University, and the audacity of dean Lucy Diggs Slowe*. University of Georgia Press.

Belk, A. (2006). *Perceptions of career advancement factors held by Black student affairs administrators: A gender comparison* [Doctoral dissertation, Florida State University]. Diginole. https://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/islandora/object/fsu:175845

Bell-Scott, P. (1994). *Life notes: Personal writings by contemporary Black women*. W.W. Norton.

Berry, T. R. (2010). Engaged pedagogy and critical race feminism. *Educational Foundations*, *24*(3/4), 19–26. https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/afam_pub/9/

Bertrand Jones, T., Ford, J. R., Pierre, D. F., & Davis-Maye, D. (2020). Thriving in the academy: Culturally responsive mentoring for Black women's early career success. In G. Crimmins (Ed.), *Strategies for supporting inclusion and diversity in the academy: Higher education, aspiration and inequality* (pp. 123–140). Palgrave Macmillan.

Bhattacharya, K. (2017). *Fundamentals of qualitative research: A practical guide*. Routledge.

Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. (2019). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A road map from beginning to end* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Breeden, R. L. (2021). Our presence is resistance: Stories of Black women in senior-level student affairs positions at predominantly white institutions. *Journal of Women and Gender in Higher Education*, *14*(2), 166–186. https://doi.org/10.1080/26379112.2021.1948860

Breheny, M., Horrell, B., & Stephens, C. (2020). A participatory journal/dialogue approach to narrative research illustrated using a study of informal caregiving. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1716423

Briscoe, K. L. (2022). Student affairs professionals experiences with campus racial climate at predominantly white institutions. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *15*(5), 560–571. https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000311

Broom, S. J. (2022). *"Damned if ya do, damned if ya don't": A critical narrative inquiry exploring the gendered racism experienced by Black women housing professionals in higher education* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Denver]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Brown, L. C., Williams, B. M., & Williams, Q. S. (2021). Melanin messages: Black college women's experiences and reflections on navigating colorism. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *16*(4), 457–470. https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000347

Brown, M. C., II, & Dancy, T. E., II. (2010). Predominantly white institutions. In K. Lomotey (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of African American education* (Vol. 1, pp. 523–526). SAGE Publications.

Burke, M. G., & Carter, J. D. (2015). Examining perceptions of networking among African American women in student affairs. *NASPA Journal About Women in Higher Education, 8*(2), 140–155. https://doi.org/10.1080/19407882.2015.1057165

Cargle, R. (n.d.). *Dear white women, a letter reminding modern white feminist of their relationship with Black women throughout history.* https://072bc434-41d6-41ab-b249-9180c67fb60f.filesusr.com/ugd/5be363_f5d9bdf09e2d4f6eaba09a8c193f5199.pdf

Clayborne, H. L., & Hamrick, F. (2007). Rearticulating the leadership experiences of African American women in midlevel student affairs administration. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 44*(1). https://doi.org/10.2202/1949-6605.1758

Clemons, K. M. (2019). Black feminist thought and qualitative research in education. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education.* DOI:10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.1194

Clifton, L. (2020). *How to carry water: Selected poems of Lucille Clifton*. BOA Editions.

Collier, J. N. (2017). *Using sista circles to examine sense of belonging of Black women in doctoral programs at a historically white institution* [Doctoral dissertation, The University of Georgia]. University of Georgia Library. https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/collier_joan_n_201705_phd.pdf

Collins, P. H. (1986). Learning from the outsider within: The sociological significance of Black feminist thought. *Social Problems*, *33*(6), 14–32. https://doi.org/10.2307/800672

Collins, P. H. (1995). The social construction of Black feminist thought. In B. Guy-Sheftall (Ed.), *Words of fire: An anthology of African-American feminist thought* (pp. 338–357). The New Press. (Original work published 1989)

Collins, P. H. (1998). *Fighting words: Black women and the search for justice*. University of Minnesota Press.

Collins, P. H. (2004). *Black sexual politics: African Americans, gender, & the new racism.* Routledge.

Collins, P. H. (2009). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment.* Routledge Classics.

Croom, N. N. (2017). Promotion beyond tenure: Unpacking racism and sexism in the experiences of Black womyn professors. *Review of Higher Education*, *40*(4), 557–583. https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2017.0022

Croom, N. N., Beatty, C. C., Acker, L. D., & Butler, M. (2017). Exploring undergraduate Black womyn's motivations for engaging in "sister circle" organizations. *NASPA Journal About Women in Higher Education*, *10*(2), 216–228. https://doi.org/10.1080/19407882.2017.1328694

166

Croom, N. N., & Patton, L. D. (2011). The miner's canary: A critical race perspective on the

representation of Black women full professors. *The Negro Educational Review*, *62/63*(1–

4), 13–39.

Curtis, E., Wikaire, E., Kool, B., Honey, M., Kelly, F., Poole, P., Barrow, M., Airini, S. E., &

Papaarangi, R. (2015). What helps and hinders indigenous student success in higher

education health programmes: A qualitative study using critical incident technique.

Higher Education Research & Development, 34(3), 486–500.

https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2014.973378

Dace, K. L. (2012). *Unlikely allies in the academy: Women of color and white women in

conversation*. Routledge.

Davis, S., & Brown, K. (2017). Automatically discounted: Using Black feminist theory to

critically analyze the experiences of Black female faculty. *International Journal of

Educational Leadership Preparation, 12*(1). https://www.icpel.org/ijelp.html

Delgado, R. (2000). Storytelling for oppositionists and others: A plea for narrative. In R.

Delgado & J. Stefancic (Eds.), *Critical race theory: The cutting edge* (2nd ed.). Temple

University Press.

DiAngelo, R. (2016). White fragility. *Counterpoints*, *497*, 245–253.

https://www.jstor.org/stable/45157307

Dorsey, L. K. (2000). *Sister circles: An exploration of small group communication among

African American women* [Doctoral dissertation, Howard University], ProQuest

Dissertations and Theses Global.

Douglas, J. A., McClelland, R., Davies, J., & Sudbury, L. (2009). Using critical incident

    technique (CIT) to capture the voice of the student. *The TQM Journal, 21*(4), 305–318.

    https://doi.org/10.1108/17542730910965038

duCille, A. (1994). The occult of true Black womanhood: Critical demeanor and Black feminist

    studies. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 19*(3), 591–629.

    https://doi.org/10.1086/494914

Dunmeyer, A. (2020). *Sista-to-sista: Black women (re)examining their experiences as teachers*

    with stereotypes and oppression in secondary schools [Doctoral dissertation, Georgia

    State University]. ScholarWorks. https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/mse_diss/90/

Evans, S. Y. (2007). *Black women in the ivory tower, 1850-1954: An intellectual history*.

    University of Florida Press.

Evans-Winters, V. E. (2019). *Black feminism in qualitative inquiry: A mosaic for writing our*

    daughter's body. Routledge.

Feenstra, A. E. (2017). From White feminism to intersectional advocacy: The development of a

    White antiracist identity. *The Vermont Connection*, *38*(1), 67–76.

    https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/

Few, A. L., Stephens, D. P., & Rouse-Arnett, M. (2003). Sister-to-sister talk: Transcending

    boundaries and challenges in qualitative research with Black women. *Family Relations*,

    52(3), 205–215. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2003.00205.x

Flanagan, J. C. (1954). The critical incident technique. *Psychological Bulletin*, *51,* 327–358.

    https://doi.org/10.1037/h0061470

Ford-Thomas, M. N. (2023). *Ascertaining the workplace wealth of Black womxn student affairs practitioners at Jesuit colleges and universities* [Doctoral dissertation, Saint Louis University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Fries-Britt, S., & Kelly, B. T. (2005). Retaining each other: Narratives of two African American women in the academy. *The Urban Review, 37*, 221–242. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-005-0006-2

Fullwood, C. (2023). *DOPE voices: Understanding the experiences of Black womxn mid-level student affairs administrators navigating power* [Doctoral dissertation, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Gardner, L., Barrett, T. G., & Pearson, L. C. (2014). African-American administrators as PWI: Enablers of and barriers to career success. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 7*(4), 235–251. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038317

Gaston, M. H., Porter, G. K., & Thomas, V. G. (2007). Prime time sister circles: Evaluating a gender-specific, culturally relevant health intervention to decrease major risk factors in mid-life African-American women, *Journal of the National Medical Association, 99*(4), 428–438. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2569659/

Generett, G. G., & Jeffries, R. B. (2003). *Black women in the field: Experiences understanding ourselves and others through qualitative research*. Hampton Press.

Giddings, P. (1985). *When and where I enter: The impact of Black women on race and sex in America*. Bantam.

Gilbert, D. J., & Goddard, L. (2007). HIV prevention targeting African American women:

    Theory, objectives, and outcomes from an African-centered behavior change perspective.

    Family & Community Health: The Journal of Health Promotion & Maintenance, 30(1),

    S109–S111. https://doi.org/10.1097/00003727-200701001-00015

Gilliam, E., & Toliver, S. R. (2021). Black feminist wondaland: Reckoning, celebrating, and

    reclaiming joy in higher education. *Journal of Effective Teaching in Higher Education,*

    4(2), 84–98. https://doi.org/10.36021/jethe.v4i2.167

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for*

    qualitative research. Aldine.

Green, Q. (2017). *Feeling to see: Black graduate student women (re)membering Black*

    womanhood through study abroad [Doctoral dissertation, Michigan State University].

    ProQuest Dissertations and These Global.

Griffin, R. A. (2012). I am an angry Black woman: Black feminist autoethnography, voice, and

    resistance. *Women's Studies in Communication*, *35*(2), 138–157.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2012.724524

Guy-Sheftall, B. (Ed.). (1995). *Words of fire: An anthology of African-American feminist*

    thought. The New Press.

Hamad, R. (2018). How white women use strategic tears to women of colour. *The Guardian*.

    https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/may/08/how-white-women-use-

    strategic-tears-to-avoid-accountability

Hamad, R. (2020). *White tears/brown scars: How white feminism betrays women of color.*

    Catapult.

Hamer, J. F., & Lang, C. (2015). Race, structural violence, and the neoliberal university: The

challenges of inhabitation. *Critical Sociology, 41*(6), 897–912.

https://doi.org/10.1177/089692051559476

Hamilton, L. T., Armstrong, E. A., Lotus Seeley, J., & Armstrong, E. M. (2019). Hegemonic

femininities and intersectional domination. *Sociological Theory, 37*(4), 315–424.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0735275119888248

Harris, T. M. (2007). Black feminist thought and cultural contracts: Understanding the

intersection and negotiation of racial, gendered, and professional identities in the

academy. *New Directions for Teaching & Learning, 2007*(110), 55–64.

https://doi.org/10.1002/tl.274

Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings.* State University of New

York Press.

Hayden Glover, M. (2012). A historical overview of Black women in higher education. In T.

Bertrand Jones, L. Scott Dawkins, M. M. McClinton, & M. Hayden Glover (Eds.),

Pathways to higher education administration for African American women (pp. 7–14).

Taylor & Francis.

Henry, W. J. (2010). African American women in student affairs: Best practices for winning the

game. *Advancing Women in Leadership Journal*, *30*(24).

http://advancingwomen.com/awl/awl_wordpress/

Henry, W. J., Butler, D. M., & West, N. M. (2011). Things are not as rosy as they seem:

Psychosocial issues of contemporary Black college women. *Journal of College Student

Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 4*(2), 84–98. https://doi.org/10.2190/CS.13.2.a

Herdlein, R., Cali, C. F., & Dina, J. (2008). Deans of women at historically Black colleges and universities: A story left untold. *The Journal of Negro Education, 77*(4), 291–305.

Holloway, E. L., & Schwartz, H. L. (2014). *Critical incident technique: Exploring meaningful interactions between students and professors.* SAGE Publications.

Holvino, E. (2008). Intersections: The simultaneity of race, gender, and class in organization studies. *Gender, Work, & Organization*, *17*(3), 248–277. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0432.2008.00400.x

hooks, b. (1981). *Ain't I a woman: Black women and feminism.* South End Press.

hooks, b. (1989). *Talking back, thinking feminist, thinking Black*. South End Press.

hooks, b. (1992). *Black looks: Race and representation.* South End Press.

hooks, b. (2015). *Feminist theory: From margin to center* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Howard-Hamilton, M. F. (2003, Winter). Theoretical frameworks for African American women. In M. F. Howard-Hamilton (Ed.), *New Directions for Student Services, Meeting the Needs of African American Women, 104*, 19–28. https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.104

Jackson, J. F. L., & Flowers, L. A. (2003). Retaining African American student affairs administrators: Voices from the field. *College Student Affairs Journal, 22*(2), 125–136.

Johnson, L. S. (2015). *Using sista circles to examine the professional experience of contemporary Black women teachers in schools: A collective story about school culture and support* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Georgia]. University of Georgia Library. https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/johnson_latoya_s_201505_phd.pdf

Karikari, S. N. (2022). *Unapologetically Black: A sista circle study highlighting the brilliant, bold, and brave leadership approaches of Black women in student affairs* [Doctoral dissertation, Miami University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Kelly, B. T., & Winkle-Wagner, R. (2017). Finding a voice in predominantly white institutions: A longitudinal study of Black women faculty members' journeys toward tenure. *Teachers College Record, 119*(6), 1–36. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811711900604

Lacy, M. C. C. (2017). *Black graduate women's self-defining process using media and sista circle methodology* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Georgia]. University of Georgia Library. https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/lacy_marvette_c_201705_phd.pdf

Lampley, K. P. (2023). *Experiencing workplace inclusion: Critical incidents that create a sense of inclusion for professional staff in higher education* [Doctoral dissertation, Antioch University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Lewis, C. (2016). Gender, race, and career advancement: When do we have enough cultural capital? *The Negro Educational Review*, *67*(1–4), 106–169.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE Publications.

Lorde, A. (2007). *Sister outsider*. Crossing Press.

Mata, C. J. (2018). *White women in student affairs: navigating race in a complex work environment* [Doctoral dissertation, University of California Los Angeles]. eScholarship. https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3cm8772x

Matthews, D. Y. (2020). *We're all fighting: Experiences of Black women HBCU graduates enrolled in HWI doctoral programs* [Doctoral dissertation, The Florida State University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

McCloud, L. I. (2019). Standing in the gap: Navigating othermothering as a student affairs professional. In M. G. Burke & U. M. Robinson (Eds.), *No ways tired: The journey for professionals of color in student affairs: By and by: Mid-level professionals* (Vol. 2, pp. 91–98). Information Age Publishing.

Mena, J. (2016). "I love my work, but this is not my life": Women of color in the academy. *NASPA Journal About Women in Higher Education*, *9*(2), 190–207. https://doi.org/10.1080/19407882.2016.1195274

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Miles, S. (2012). *Left behind: The status of Black women in higher education administration* [Doctoral dissertation, The Florida State University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Miller Dyce, C., Ford, J. R., & Propst, B. S. (2022). Detoxing the trauma of academic writing for Black scholars: Vulnerability, authenticity, and healing. *Multicultural Perspectives*. *24*(3), 170–179. https://doi.org/10.1080/15210960.2022.2127401

Miller Dyce, C., Propst, B. S., & Balady, B. (2021). Can I get a witness? A case study of self care practice as an act of radical social justice for social justice and diversity professionals in higher education. In A. Palmadessa (Ed). *Education in America: Perspectives, challenges, and opportunities* (pp. 143–200). Nova Publishers.

Mosley, M. H. (1980). Black women administrators in higher education: An endangered species. *Journal of Black Studies*, *10*(3), 295–310. https://doi.org/10.1177/002193478001000304.

NASPA. (2014). *Who are VPSAs? Chief student affairs officers census.* http://census.naspa.org/who-are-vpsa

Nathan, B. (2021). *"Reclaiming our time, reclaiming our time!" Black women student affairs mid-level administrators talk supervision at predominantly white institutions* [Doctoral dissertation, Colorado State University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2022). *Table 314.40: Employees in degree-granting postsecondary institutions by race/ethnicity, sex, employment status, control and level of institution, and primary occupation: Fall 2021.* U.S. Department of Education, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_314.40.asp

Neal-Barnett, A., Stadulis, R., Murray, M., Payne, M. R., Thomas, A., & Salley, B. B. (2011). Sister circles as a culturally relevant intervention for anxious African American women. *Clinical Psychology, 18*(3), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2850.2011.01258.x

Neal-Barnett, A., Stadulis, R., Payne, M. R., Crosby, L., Mitchell, M., Williams, L., & Williams-Costa, C. (2011). In the company of my sisters: Sister circles as an anxiety intervention for professional African American women. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, *129*(1–3), 213–218. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2010.08.024

Nidiffer, J. (2000). *Pioneering deans of women: More than wise and pious matrons*. Teachers College Press.

Nidiffer, J. (2002). The first deans of women: What we can learn from them. *About Campus*, *6*(6), 10–16. https://doi.org/10.1177/108648220200600603

Okello, W. K., & White, K. D. (2019). A Black feminist reconstruction of agency. In E. S. Abes, S. R. Jones, & D-L. Stewart (Eds.), *Rethinking college student development theory using critical frameworks* (pp. 142–157). Stylus Publishing.

Palmer, D. (2021). *I got a lot to be mad about: Sista circles as a counterspace for Black women doctoral students* [Doctoral dissertation, Indiana University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Palmer, P. M. (1983). White women/Black women: The dualism of female identity and

experience in the United States. *Feminist Studies, 9*(1), 151–170.

https://doi.org/10.2307/3177688

Patitu, C. L., & Hinton, K. G. (2003). The experiences of African American women faculty and

administrators in higher education: Has anything changed? *New Directions for Student

Services*, *104*, 79–93. https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.109

Patton, L. D., & Catchings, C. (2009). Teaching while Black: Narratives of African American

student affairs faculty. *International Studies of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *22*(6),

713–728. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390903333897

Patton, L. D., & Croom, N. N. (Eds.). (2017). *Critical perspectives on Black women and college

success.* Taylor & Francis.

Patton, L. D., & Haynes, C. (2018). Hidden in plain sight: The Black women's blueprint for

institutional transformation in higher education. *Teachers College Record, 120*(14), 1–18.

https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811812001405

Patton, L. D., Haynes, C., & Croom, N. N. (2017). Centering the diverse experiences of Black

women undergraduates. *NASPA Journal of Women and Gender in Higher Education,

10*(2), 141–143. https://doi.org/10.1080/19407882.2017.1331627

Patton, L. D., & Njoku, N. R. (2019). Theorizing Black women's experiences with institution-

sanctioned violence: A #BlackLivesMatter imperative toward Black liberation on

campus. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 32*(9), 1162–1182.

https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2019.1645908

Patton, L. D., & Ward, L. W. (2016). Missing Black undergraduate women and the politics of

 disposability: A critical race feminist perspective. *Journal of Negro Education, 85*(3),

 330–349.

Porter, C. J. (2017). Articulation of identity in Black undergraduate women: Influences,

 interactions, and intersections. In L. D. Patton & N. N. Croom (Eds.), *Critical*

 perspectives on Black women and college success (pp. 102–114). Taylor & Francis.

Porter, C. J., Moore, C. M., Boss, G. J., Davis, T. J., & Louis, D. A. (2020). To be Black women

 and contingent faculty: Four scholarly personal narratives. *Journal of Higher Education,*

 91(5), 674–697. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2019.1700478

Ramey, F. H. (1995). Obstacles faced by African American women administrators in higher

 education: How they cope. *The Western Journal of Black Studies, 19*(2), 113–119.

Robbins, C. K. (2016). White women, racial identity, and learning about racism in graduate

 preparation programs. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 53*(3), 253–268.

 https://doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2016.1143834

Robbins, C. K., & Jones, S. R. (2016). Negotiating racial dissonance: White women's narratives

 of resistance, engagement, and transformative action. *Journal of College Student*

 Development, 57(6), 633–651. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2016.0027

Roberts, C. M., & Hyatt, L. Z. (2019). *The dissertation journey: A practical and comprehensive*

 guide to planning, writing, and defending your dissertation. (3rd ed.) Corwin.

Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers.* (4th ed.) SAGE Publications.

Skovholt, T. M., & McCarthy, P. R. (1988). Critical incidents: Catalysts for counselor

 development. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 67*(2), 69–72.

 https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1988.tb02016.x

Snijders, I., Wijnia, L., Dekker, H. J. J., Rikers, R. M. J. P., & Loyens, S. M. M. (2021). What is
in a student-faculty relationship? A template analysis of students' positive and negative
critical incidents with faculty and staff in higher education. *European Journal of
Psychology of Education, 37*(4), 1115–1139. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-021-00549-x

Solórzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an
analytical framework for education research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *8*(1), 23–44.
https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040200800103

Squire, D., Williams, B. C., & Tuitt, F. (2018). Plantation politics and neoliberal racism in higher
education: A framework for reconstructing anti-racist institutions. *Teachers College
Record, 120*(14), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811812001412

Stewart-Bouley, S. (2018, April 17). Weapon of mass destruction: The tears of a white woman.
Black Girl in Maine. https://blackgirlinmaine.com/racial-and-cultural/weapon-of-lass-
destruction-the-tears-of-a-white-woman/

Taub, D. J., & McEwen, M. K. (2006). Decision to enter the profession of student affairs.
Journal of College Student Development, *47*(2), 206–216.
https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2006.0027

Tevis, T., & Pifer, M. J. (2021). Privilege and oppression: Exploring the paradoxical identity of
white women administrators in higher education. *Journal Committed to Social Change on
Race and Ethnicity,* 7(2), 70–102. https://doi.org/10.15763/issn.2642-2387.2021.7.2.69-
102

Thomas, K. M., Johnson-Bailey, J., Phelps, R. E., Tran, N. M., & Johnson, L. N. (2013). Women of Color at midcareer: Going from pet to threat. In L. Comas-Diaz & B. Greene (Eds.), *Psychological health of women of color: Intersections, challenges, and opportunities* (pp. 275–286). Guilford Press.

Townsend, C. V. (2021). Identity politics: Why African American women are missing in administrative leadership in public higher education. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 49*(4), 584–600. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220935455

Vianden, J. (2012). The critical incident technique in student affairs research and practice. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 49*(3), 333–346. https://doi.org/10.1515/jsarp-2012-6441

Walker, A. (1972). In search of our mothers' garden. In A. Mitchell (Ed.), *Within the circle: Anthology of African American literary criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to present*. Duke University Press.

Walker, C. R. (2020). *Still I rise: The role of social capital on the experiences of African American women senior administrators in higher education* [Doctoral dissertation, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Wallace, E. R., Adams, J. D., Fullwood, C. C., Horhn, E.-B., Loritts, C., Propst, B. S., & Walker, C. R. (2020). The Black feminist mixtape: A collective Black feminist autoethnography of Black women's existence in the academy. *Journal of Critical Scholarship on Higher Education and Student Affairs, 5*(3), 19–32. https://ecommons.luc.edu/jcshesa/vol5/iss3/7/

Watt, S. K. (2007). Difficult dialogues, privilege and social justice: Uses of the privileged

identity exploration (PIE) model in student affairs practice. *College Student Affairs Journal, 26*(2), 114–126. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ899385

West, N. M. (2015). In our own words: African-American women student affairs professionals

define their experiences in the academy. *Advancing Women in Leadership Journal, 35*, 108–119. https://doi.org/10.21423/awlj-v35.a138

West, N. M. (2017). Withstanding our status as outsiders-within: Professional counterspaces for

African American women student affairs administrators. *NASPA Journal About Women in Higher Education, 10*(3), 281–300. https://doi.org/10.1080/19407882.2017.1363785

West, N. M. (2019). By us, for us: The impact of a professional counterspace on African

American women in student affairs. *Journal of Negro Education, 88*(2), 159–180. https://doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.88.2.0159

West, N. M. (2020a). Another lesson from the outsider within: The transcendent relevance of

Black feminist thought. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 57*(4), 371–385. https://doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2019.1662797

West, N. M. (2020b). A contemporary portrait of Black women student affairs administrators in

the United States. *Journal of Women and Gender in Higher Education, 13*(1), 72–92. https://doi.org/10.1080/26379112.2020.1728699

West, N. M., & Bertrand Jones, T. (2019). Architects of change in the ivory tower: Recasting the

role of Black women engaged in higher education professional counterspaces. In U. Thomas (Ed.), *Navigating micro-aggressions toward women in higher education* (pp. 25–52). IGI Global. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-5942-9.ch002

West, N. M., & Greer, A. J. (2020). Forecasting the future success of Black American women in

    student affairs. *Negro Educational Review, 70*(1–4), 131–163.

    https://www.education.pitt.edu/centers-and-engagement/affiliated-journals-

    organizations/negro-educational-review-journal

West, N. M., & Porter, C. J. (Eds.). (2023). The state of Black women in higher education: A

    critical perspective 20 years later. *New Directions for Student Services*, *2023*(182), 9–13.

    https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.20463

West, N. M., Shavers, M. C., Smith, M. D., Namodi, J. A., Gordon, N. A., & Jahnke, T. S.

    (2024). Black women as coxswains: Allyship outcomes for Black and white women in a

    participatory action research counterspace project developed by Black women in higher

    education. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education.* https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000591

Wilder, C. S. (2013). *Ebony and ivy: Race, slavery and the troubled history of America's*

    universities. Bloomsbury Press.

Wilder, J., Bertrand Jones, T., & Osborne-Lampkin, L. (2013). A profile of Black women in the

    21st academy: Still learning from the "outsider-within." *Journal of Research Initiatives*,

    1(1), 27–38. https://digitalcommons.uncfsu.edu/jri/vol1/iss1/5/

Williams, B. M. (2019). "*I did everything I was supposed to": Black women administrative*

    professionals' push out and opt out of higher education workplaces [Doctoral

    dissertation, University of Georgia]. University of Georgia Library.

    https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/williams_brittany_m_201905_phd.pdf

Williams, B. M. (2023). "It's just my face": Workplace policing of Black professional women in

    higher education. *Journal of Women and Gender in Higher Education, 16*(2), 67–89.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/26379112.2023.2172730

Williams, B. M., Wadley, B. A., Brown, L. C., & Williams, Q. (2023). "It's a matter of not

    knowing": Examining Black first-gen women administrators' career socialization and

    preparation. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education.* Advance online

    publication. https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000507

Williams, Q. S. (2020). *Mothering while woke: Exploring the consciousness development of*

    Black mothers engaged in student affairs work [Doctoral dissertation, University of

    Georgia]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Wilson, A. B., McCallum, C. M., & Shupp, M. R. (2019). *Inclusive supervision in student*

    affairs: A model for professional practice. Routledge.

Wing, A. K. (2003). *Critical race feminism: A reader* (2nd ed.). New York University Press.

Winkle-Wagner, R. (2008). Not feminist but strong: Black women's reflections of race and

    gender in college. *Negro Educational Review, 59*(3/4), 181.

    https://www.education.pitt.edu/centers-and-engagement/affiliated-journals-

    organizations/negro-educational-review-journal

Winkle-Wagner, R. (2009). The perpetual homelessness of college experiences: Tensions

    between home and campus for African American women. *The Review of Higher*

    Education, 33(1), 1–36. https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.0.0116

Winkle-Wagner, R. (2015). Having their lives narrowed down? The state of Black women's

    college success. *Review of Educational Research, 85*(2), 171–204.

    https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654314551065

Woods, J. T. (2020). *Shattering the mirror: An autoethnographic study of white womanhood and*

    student affairs [Master's thesis, Oregon State University]. ScholarsArchive@OSU.

    https://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/concern/graduate_thesis_or_dissertations/gf06g9110

APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Subject Line: Seeking Participants for Dissertation Study: Black Women Student Affairs
Professionals Working with White Women Higher Education Professionals

Hello [potential participant name here],

I hope you are doing well! I'm reaching out to request your participation in my dissertation study
(IRB-FY22-477) on the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals. I am
conducting a critical qualitative study utilizing sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) focused
on the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and the critical incidents that
occur within our working relationships with white women higher education professionals at
historically white institutions (HWIs). You are being asked to participate in this study because
you fit the following criteria for inclusion in this study:

1. self-identify as a Black woman (e.g. racial and ethnic origins in the African diaspora,
   African American, Caribbean-American, and/or African immigrant living in the
   United States)
2. have at least five years of experience in and currently working in a functional area
   within student affairs (click here for examples of functional areas),
3. currently employed at a four-year historically white institution (HWI), and
4. have experience working with white women higher education professionals, to
   include faculty and staff.

My study would require you to 1) complete a consent form and participant background
questionnaire, 2) write a one-page reflection journal on your experiences in higher education
(prompt will be provided) and 3) participate in two 120-minute sista circles within the next
month. For this study, sista circles are defined as a support group created for Black women, by
Black women, built on existing communities, friendships, and kinships.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please complete the consent form to agree to
participate in this study at the following link:

[Link included here]

The consent form will also include the participant background questionnaire and a section to
provide your availability for two 120-minute sista circles with 6-10 other Black women
participants. To compensate you for your time, each participant will receive a free personalized
journal and be eligible to win a $50 Visa gift card at the conclusion of this study.

     If you have any questions, please contact Brandy Propst at xxxxxxx@uncg.edu or by
phone at [XXX.XXX.XXXX]. I look forward to your response and participation! Best, Brandy

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO
CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT

Project Title: A Critical Qualitative Study Utilizing Sista Circle Methodology to Examine the Experiences of Black Women Student Affairs Professionals and the Critical Incidents That Occur in Our Working Relationships With White Women Higher Education Professionals

Principal Investigator (PI) and Faculty Advisor (if applicable):
Brandy Propst (PI), xxxxx@uncg.edu, and Dr. Jesse Ford (Faculty Advisor/Chair), jfordjr@uncg.edu

Participant's Name: _____

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. There may not be any direct benefit to you for being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. If you choose not to be in the study or leave the study before it is done, it will not affect your relationship with the researcher or the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Details about this study are discussed in this consent form. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

A copy of this consent form can be provided at the request of the participant. If you have any questions about this study at any time, please contact Brandy Propst, the PI for this study at xxxxx@uncg.edu or 336.430.8103 or Dr. Jesse Ford, faculty advisor, at jfordjr@uncg.edu.

What is the study about?
This is a dissertation research study. Your participation is voluntary. The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and the critical incidents that occur within our working relationships with white women higher education professionals at historically white institutions (HWIs).

Why are you asking me?
You are being asked to participant in this study because you fit the following criteria for inclusion in this study: 1) self-identify as a Black woman, 2) have at least five years of experience in and currently working in a functional area within student affairs (click here for examples of functional areas), 3) currently employed at a four-year historically white institution (HWI), and 4) have experience working with white women higher education professionals, to include faculty and staff.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?
Participation in this study would require participants to 1) complete a background questionnaire to determine eligibility to participate in this study, 2) share/forward the recruitment email with/to 2-3 other Black women student affairs professionals whom you know that may be interested in participating in the study, 3) write a one-page reflection journal on your experiences in higher education (prompt will be provided) and 3) participate in two 120-minute virtual sista circles via Zoom within the next month. For this study, sista circles are defined as a support group created for Black women by Black women built on existing communities, friendships, and kinships. Some participants may be asked to clarify or validate information from the participant journals, background questionnaires, or shared during virtual sista circles by email or phone and/or to assist with member checking to discuss the accuracy of themes and findings from the study. The approximate total of time that participants will participate in the study is about 300-minutes. For questions regarding participation, please contact Brandy S. Propst, principal investigator, at xxxxx@uncg.edu or (XXX) XXX–XXXX.

Is there any audio/video recording?
During the virtual sista circles, video and audio recordings via Zoom will be utilized to capture verbal and nonverbal communication and cues amongst participants. All video and audio recordings will be kept confidential. Only the researcher will have access to the video and audio recordings and transcripts, and all recordings will be stored on a password-protected site. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, your confidentiality for things you say on the recording cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the recording as described below.

What are the risks to me?
The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. Potential risks include emotional or mental stress/distress related to sharing/discussing negative critical incidents that have occurred with white women higher education professionals that have been influenced by structural violence, racialized harm, or racism at HWIs. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, there is a risk of breach of confidentiality although the researcher will try to limit access to the recording as described above.

If you have questions, want more information, or have suggestions, please contact Brandy S. Propst, principal investigator, who can be reached at xxxxx@uncg.edu or (XXX) XXX–XXXX or Dr. Jesse Ford, faculty advisor, who can be reached at jfordjr@uncg.edu.

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study, please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?
Yes, this study will benefit society by filling a gap in the literature and contributing to higher education about the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals, specifically related to their working relationships with white women higher education professionals. This

study provides an opportunity to center the voices of Black women student affairs professionals, provide a space to share their stories, and share strategies and resources that Black women student affairs professionals utilize to navigate and cope with their experiences at HWIs.

Are there any benefits to *me* for taking part in this research study?
Yes, benefits may include being in community with other Black women student affairs professionals, expanding professional networks in higher education, and learning strategies and resources that Black women student affairs professionals can utilize to navigate and cope with their experiences while working at HWIs.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?
Participants will receive a free personalized journal and be eligible to win a $50 visa gift card at the conclusion of this study. There is no cost to participate in this study.

How will you keep my information confidential?
The researcher will emphasize at the beginning of the sista circle the importance of participants maintaining confidentiality and not sharing the information, ideas, and thoughts stated in the group. All participants will provide a pseudonym so that participants are not identified by legal name when the data is disseminated. All electronic responses collected via Qualtrics will be transferred and saved in a folder on a password-protected Dropbox account. Before starting the video recording in Zoom, participants will change their name to their selected pseudonym. All electronic files of Zoom audio and video recordings will be saved in a folder in the password protected UNCG Box account separate from identifying information provided in Qualtrics. All transcripts and typed notes will be saved in the password protected UNCG Box account. All printed materials and notes will be secured in the researcher's home office in a locked file drawer only accessible by the researcher by key. All identifying data will be kept for five years and then destroyed. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. Absolute confidentiality of data provided through the Internet cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access. Please be sure to close your browser when finished so no one will be able to see what you have been doing.

Will my de-identified data be used in future studies?
Your de-identified data will be kept indefinitely and may be used for future research without your additional consent.

What if I want to leave the study?
You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. The investigators also have the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be because you have had an unexpected reaction, or have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.

What about new information/changes in the study?
If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:
By completing this survey, you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this consent form and are openly willing consent to take part in this study as described to you by Brandy S. Propst, principal investigator.

Yes, I consent to participate in this study.

No, I do not consent to participating in this study.

PARTICIPANT BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE

Instructions: Please complete this participant background questionnaire. The questionnaire will be utilized to determine your eligibility based on the criteria for this study. Seven participants are needed for this study, therefore all who complete this questionnaire may not be selected as participants.

1. Please provide a pseudonym that you would like to use for this study.

_____

2. Please provide your preferred pronoun(s).

_____

3. What is your gender?

_____

4. What is your race/ethnicity?

_____

5. What is your age?

_____

6. What are your other identities (ex. mother, spouse/partner, sexual identity, religious identity, Greek affiliations, etc.)?

_____

7. How many years have you identified/worked as a student affairs professional? (Please provide a number.)

_____

8. Please provide your highest degree obtained, the name of the institution where you earned your highest degree, and the area of study/concentration of your highest degree? (The name of the institution will be confidential and will not be shared in this study.)

_____

9. What is the name of the historically white institution (HWI) where you are currently employed? (The name of the institution will be confidential and will not be shared in this study.)

_____

10. What is the institutional type (i.e. small, medium, large, public, private, Southeast, Midwest, etc.) of the HWI that you are currently employed?

_____

11. What is the name of the office where you are currently employed? (The name of the office will be confidential and will not be shared in this study.)

_____

12. What is the official title for your position/role at your current institution? (The name of your position/role will be confidential and will not be shared in this study.)

_____

13. Please provide a summary of the work that you do in your role/position.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

14. How many staff members are white women in the office that you are currently employed? (Please provide a number.)

_____

15. Is your supervisor a white woman?
○   Yes (1)
○   No (2)

16. Is your supervisor's supervisor a white woman?
○   Yes (1)
○   No (2)

17. Do you have direct reports/supervisees?
○ Yes (1)
○ No (2)

18. How many of your direct reports/supervisees are white women? (Please provide a number.)

_____

19. Do you work directly with white women faculty or professional staff outside of your office?
○ Yes (1)
○ No (2)

20. If so, what rank or position do they have in relation to your work?

_____

Q27 VIRTUAL SISTA CIRCLE AVAILABILITY
Below are the possible dates/times for virtual sista circles. Please select all dates/times that you are available. Once all participants have submitted their availability, the PI/researcher (Brandy S. Propst) will notify all participants of the dates/times for the two 120-minute sista circles and provide instructions for the one-page journal reflection prompt.

Q28 Please select all dates/time that you are available for sista circles.
☐ Choice 1
☐ Choice 2
☐ Choice 3

APPENDIX D: INSTRUCTIONS FOR PARTICIPANT PROMPT

Subject Line: Dissertation Study Next Steps: Black Women Student Affairs Professionals Working With White Women Higher Education Professionals

Hello Sistas!

First and foremost, thank you so much for agreeing to participate in my dissertation study. You have been selected as a participant and I appreciate you agreeing to be a part of my journey as I work towards the last stages of finishing my PhD program. I am truly grateful!

As a reminder, the purpose of this critical qualitative study is to examine the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and the critical incidents that occur within our working relationships with white women higher education professionals at historically white institutions (HWIs). For the next phase of this study, you will complete a participant journal reflection using the Qualtrics link provided below.

Participant Journal Qualtrics link: [Link provided here]

The Qualtrics link will include the prompt for the participant journal as well as important key terms that we will utilize during the study. Please submit your participant journal by June 14th, 2023 prior to our first virtual sista circle. Our first virtual sista circle will be Friday, June 16th, 7-9pm EST. I will send the Zoom link for our first virtual sista circle next week.

Also, due to limited participant availability for our second sista circle, please complete the additional Qualtrics form linked below to provide your availability for our second virtual sista circle.

Virtual Sista Circle #2 Availability: [Link provided here]

Thank you for your participation! If you have issues accessing the links or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me by email at xxxxx@uncg.edu or by phone at (XXX) XXX–XXXX.

Best, Brandy

APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANT JOURNAL REFLECTION PROMPT VIA QUALTRICS

Participant Journal Reflection Prompt

Q1 The purpose of this critical qualitative study is to examine the experiences of Black women student affairs professionals and the critical incidents that occur within our working relationships with white women higher education professionals at historically white institutions (HWIs). Participation in this study requires a one-page typed journal reflection via Qualtrics and two 120-minute virtual sista circles via Zoom.

Below are a few key terms and the prompt for the one-page journal reflection in preparation for our virtual sista circles. After reviewing the key terms, please submit your one-page journal reflection below prior to the first sista circle [will add deadline to submit by here]. Please be prepared to discuss/share your response to the prompt during our first virtual sista circle. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact me via email at xxxxx@uncg.edu.

Key Terms:

Black women student affairs professionals – defined as women who identify as Black or African American and who work in functional areas traditionally associated with student affairs and higher education administration at HWIs. White women higher education professionals – defined as women who identify as white and who are employed as faculty and/or staff at HWIs.

Historically white institutions (HWIs) – defined as enrollment with 50% or more of white students or considered historically white due to "binarism and exclusion supported by the US prior to 1964" (M. C. Brown & Dancy, 2010, p. 523).

Critical Incidents – defined as the significant, lived experiences, impactful interactions or events, either positive or negative, that occur from the perspectives of Black women student affairs professionals while working with white women higher education professionals at HWIs (Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988).

Sista Circle – defined as a support group created for Black women by Black women built on existing communities, friendships, and kinships (Neal-Barnett, Stadulis, Murray, et al., 2011).

Structural Violence – defined as "the conditions and arrangements, embedded in the political and economic organization of social life, that cause injury to individuals and populations, or put them in harm's way" (Hamer & Lang, 2015, p. 899). Furthermore, structural violence is the result of institutional, economically driven, and systemically oppressive processes, primarily impacting groups "whose social status denies them full access to legal and political protections" (Hamer & Lang, 2015, p. 899).

Racialized Harm – defined as a form of structural violence that often manifests in isolation, marginalization, microaggressions, lack of resources or attention to needs, and overall, alienating and unsafe environments for people of color on college campuses (Hamer & Lang, 2015).

Q2 Prompt for One-Page (500 Words or 3000 character limit) Journal Reflection:

Reflect on a critical incident that occurred with a white woman higher education professional this week/month/year. Describe the incident, setting, characters/colleagues involved, and provide any other details (context, background information, etc.) that influenced the critical incident. Was the critical incident resolved, and if so, how? What were the outcomes of the incident? Were there examples of structural violence and racialized harm associated (during/following) with this incident? Describe these dynamics in your journal reflection. What were the feelings and emotions that were evoked during, after and/or because of this incident? Describe these feelings/emotions in your journal reflection. What tools, strategies, or support systems did you use, if any, to navigate or cope with the critical incident that you described? Also, please avoid using real names/places to protect identities.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX F: PROTOCOLS FOR SISTA CIRCLE 1 AND 2

Questions/Protocols for First 120-minute Sista Circle:
As participants enter the virtual room, a curated playlist of Black women artists will be playing in the background to invite the participants into a welcoming space. At the beginning of the sista circle, I will introduce myself and thank the participants for agreeing to participate in my study. Then I will review their signed informed consent form with all participants, discuss the importance of confidentiality, reference the consent form, and remind them about the video/audio recording. The sista circle will start with brief introductions and a discussion of how each participant came into community, friendship, or kinship with other participants within the sista circle.

Script: Thank you all for agreeing to participate in my dissertation study. This can't be done without you so I'm beyond grateful. Before we begin, I want to reference the consent form that you signed that everything you share is confidential and your pseudonym will be utilized in my dissertation. Also, this will be audio and video recorded and will be saved on a password protected site.

1. To get us started, please introduce yourself by sharing your pseudonym, gender, race/ethnicity, position title/role, institution/institution type, and number of years working in student affairs?

2. Please identify the Black woman/women within the sista circle with whom you share community, friendship, or kinship? How did you come into community, friendship, or kinship with one another?

3. How have your experiences as a Black woman student affairs professional been impacted by your working relationships with white women higher education professionals?

4. Let's discuss our journal entries regarding the critical incidents that occurred with white woman colleague(s).

    a. Discuss if/how structural violence and racialized harm occurred because of critical incidents.

    b. What feelings/emotions, if any, were evoked during the critical incidents that you documented in your journal entry?

Questions/Protocols for Second 120-minute Sista Circle:
As participants enter the virtual room, a curated playlist of Black women artists will be playing in the background to invite the participants into a welcoming space. At the beginning of the sista circle, I will reacquaint the participants by beginning with welcoming the participants to the space and thanking the participants for agreeing to continue to participate in my study. I will provide a reminder about the importance of confidentiality and remind them about the video/audio recording. Then I will begin this sista circle with a review of key terms by displaying the terms on the screen for participants to read.

1. Before we begin our second sista circle, I have displayed the key terms utilized in this study on the screen. Does anyone need any clarification regarding these terms or definitions before we proceed with the sista circle?
2. Reflecting on the journal entries you shared in our last sista circle, how will/have these critical incidents influence(d) your position or career as a Black woman, student affairs professional?
3. How have critical incidents with white women higher education professionals influenced or amplified structural violence and racialized harm as a Black woman, student affairs professional? In what ways, if any, were these experiences harmful in your experience as a Black woman, student affairs professional?
4. What tools, strategies, or support systems have assisted you as Black women, student affairs professionals with navigating or coping with the critical incidents, structural violence or racialized harm, if any, that has occurred?
5. What would you like white women higher education professionals to know from your perspective and experiences as a Black woman, student affairs professional?
6. What insight or recommendations do you have for other Black women student affairs professionals regarding your experiences as a Black woman, student affairs professional and your working relationships with white women higher education professionals?