CAN I GET A WITNESS?: THE RESILIENCE OF FOUR BLACK WOMEN SENIOR STUDENT AFFAIRS ADMINISTRATORS AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this manuscript to all the Black women who aspire to senior student affairs positions at predominantly White institutions as well as their mentors, supervisors, colleagues, friends, and families. I hope everyone who reads the stories of the four participants will find and share their voice. Silence speaks volumes and it is time to shout!

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Thank you to all those who are a witness to my journey. Thank you to the women on whose shoulders I stand. Just keep swimming.

Can I Get a Witness?: The Resilience of Four Black Women
Senior Student Affairs Administrators at Predominantly White Institution

Abstract

by Shauna Tamara Sobers

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2014

The purpose of this qualitative research guided by resilience theory was to investigate the experiences of four Black women senior student affairs administrators at predominantly White institutions in order to understand the strategies for success that led to their advancement to senior level positions. Participants included four deans of students and/or vice presidents for student affairs (reporting directly to the president of the institution) at four-year small private predominantly White institutions (enrollment under 5,000). The participants' recounted experiences of tokenism, perceptions of the appearance, perceptions of communication styles, and inequitable compensation. They also reported support systems such as mentors, giving back, and spirituality that influence their thoughts, actions, reactions, decisions, and motivation to continue in the field, in their position, and ultimately in higher education. The implications of the study encourages institutions to provide funding, personnel resources, and training for all employees as well as encourages current Black women administrators to discuss their professional experiences to continue to inform scholarship and practice.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPENDICES

LIST OF TABLES

Tables Page

Chapter 1: Introduction

Can I get a witness to the phenomenon that women in the United States are still not equally represented at senior levels of leadership despite great strides in leadership in both public and education sectors? Can I get a witness to the experiences of women of color or intersecting identities within predominantly White institutions? Can I get a witness to the experiences of student affairs professionals within academia? This study explores not only the experiences of Black women within senior leadership for the division of student affairs at four-year small private predominantly White institutions but it also identifies some of the ways they have withstood the factors that threaten to impede their success.

Though this research focuses on experiences within higher education institutions, the concerns are not exclusive to the education sector and are also prevalent in American business, making the need to address the concerns of disparity in women's leadership within senior positions exponentially important. Within the decade, little has changed in the number of women in senior positions within corporate America (Sandberg, 2013). While women are capable leaders, it is still rare to find them in senior management positions in business (Davidson & Burke, 2004). Women are becoming more equally represented at the middle-manager level; however, the senior administration positions are

still currently dominated by men. For example, in 2003, 50.3% of middle management positions were held by a female, yet only 13.6% of them served on the company board (Catalyst, 2003).

The barriers to career advancement from middle management to senior positions for women and specifically women of color needs to be studied in order to understand this divide and how it can be narrowed. "Women of color hold just 4 percent of top corporate jobs, 3 percent of board seats, and 5 percent of congressional seats" (Sandberg, 2013, p. 5). This study adds to the research on women of color (Jain, 2009; Jain, 2010) in senior administration positions (Britton, 2013; Smith Latimore, 2009; Somer, 2007; Stanback Stroud, 2009; Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2010) specifically in the field of student affairs (Dale, 2007) at four-year predominantly White institutions in the United States.

Institutions of Higher Education

Institutions within American higher education can often be described by the population they served such as: Minority-Serving Institutions (MSI), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI), Historically Black Colleges and/or Universities (HBCU), tribal colleges and/or universities (TCU), and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISI). Other classifications are gender-specific institutions, community colleges, deaf and hard of hearing institutions, historically White intuitions (HWI) or predominantly White institutions (PWI) (Baez, Gasman, & Turner, 2008). Lastly, they can be classified by the institutional value: research, religious affiliated, trade, and secular, or how they are funded: for-profit, private, public, or state school (Nuss, 2003).

For an institution to get the HSI designation, 25% of the undergraduate population must identify as Latino/a and at least half of that population must also be low income (Baez, Gasman, & Turner, 2008; Hurtado, 2003; Nelson Laird, Bridges, Morelon-Quainoo, Williams, & Holmes, 2007). For an institution to be a PWI, more than 50% of the undergraduate population must be White; however, because populations have been fluctuating but campus climates have not, new terms are being used, such as historically White institution or HCI (Baez, Gasman, & Turner, 2008) to address the foundation of an institution or the effect that 40+% of the student body being White has on the choices the institution makes and how those affect the rest of the student body.

When examining leadership positions within higher education, other aspects are the type, size, and prestige of the institution in relation to the number of women in leadership positions. Women typically lead in nurturing or caregiving fields or institutions (Hochschild & Machung, 1989) or in nurturing ways (Jones, 2014). In 2006, 26.6% of the women college presidents worked at public institutions, 29.7% worked at institutions with a special focus or at trade schools, 32.6% worked at private institutions that award associate's degrees or at community colleges, and 12.1% worked at four-year private institutions that award bachelor's degrees (ACE, 2007). Based on the statistics one can reasonable determine that within higher education the nurturing institutions are those public institutions that give access to many or those that are specialty focused such as trade schools.

The Field of Student Affairs

The field of student services or student affairs "is for people who help students enter, enjoy, endure, and exit from college" (Delworth, Hanson, & Associates, 1989, p.

xiii). The field of student affairs began in colonial colleges with the introduction of the concept of *in loco parentis*; this Latin phrase indicates that the faculty and administration of colleges and universities take the place of parents for students at school. *In loco parentis* originally occurred within the living quarters or dormitories where curfews, guidelines, restrictions, expectations, and disciplinary consequences for actions were established by the faculty members (Nuss, 2003). After the Civil War, faculty were asked to focus more on scholarship and staff with titles such as deans of women and deans of men were eventually hired to take on the *in loco parentis* role, thus introducing the profession of student affairs (Delworth et al., 1989). From inception, the profession of student affairs has demonstrated a commitment to the student's holistic development while he or she is are in pursuit of their academic degree. In the mid-ninetieth century activities that occurred outside the classroom such as literary associations and student publications which served to challenge students in areas outside of their field of study (Nuss, 2003).

A realization of the growth of the profession and its need within higher education was demonstrated through the development of graduate level curricula. The first Master's degree related to student personnel administration was as an Advisor of Women in 1914; the first doctorate was awarded in 1929 in a program that for the first three years was exclusively for women (Nuss, 2003). Similar to the Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAO) position today, the dean of women in the early 1900s was the highest ranking woman on a college campus, and "there were few other women on campus with whom the dean of women could consult or collaborate" (Nuss, 2003, p 70). Today most student affairs professionals have graduate degrees in counseling and/or administration, and they

study adult development theory in order to manage the "social, physical, moral, and spiritual well-being of students" (Delworth et. al, 1989, p. 6).

In 1910 came the establishment of professional associations with the American Association of University Women or AAUW. Other student affairs professional organizations were started, disbanded, merged, or went through name changes as the titles within higher education changed. Finally, in 1951 after some failed attempts under a different name, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) was founded; it still exists as one of the two primary organizations that represent student affairs professionals (Nuss, 2003). The other core student affairs professional organization is the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), which began in 1924.

"Student affairs was originally founded to support the academic mission of the college" (Nuss, 2003, p. 65), and it is still serving in that capacity today; however, the profession has changed along with the needs of the students. The profession of student affairs has progressed as the populations of students have increased and diversified; in so doing, the importance and the necessity for the field have grown as well. A student affairs leader educates students within higher education alongside academic faculty to d`0evelop life skills and competences that students need for a lifetime (Dungy & Ellis, 2011) "[yet] student services has always been in the peculiar situation of being both indispensable and peripheral" (Delworth et al., 1989, p. 6).

The highest rank within student affairs is that of the Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO) who reports directly to the president or chancellor and sits on their cabinet (Kuk & Banning, 2009). The SSAO often holds titles such as Dean of Students,

or Vice President, Chancellor, or Provost for Student Affairs (Tull & Miller, 2009). By the time a person reaches the position of SSAO he or she has typically earned a masters degree though more often professionals are obtaining a doctorate degree to expedite career advancement (Tull & Miller, 2009). The path to the SSAO position has been documented as taking anywhere from 11-15 years of full time experience in the student affairs, K-12 education, or academic fields (Tull & Miller, 2009). Prior to becoming an SSAO it is expected that they have supervised a number of departments and full-time professionals, have written policy, and overseen a large budgets with multiple line items. Some other competencies of an SSAO detailed by the former Executive Director and former President of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, include "health care; counseling; housing and dining; career services; diversity and multicultural support and programming; transportation and parking systems; police and security services; and technology and information systems" (Dungy & Ellis, 2011, pp.5).

Though each institution is different some examples of others who also sit on the President cabinet and who are referred to as senior administrators are: Provost, Dean of Faculty, or Vice President for Academic Affairs, Vice President for Finance and Administration, Vice President for Advancement, Vice President for Enrollment and Access, Athletic Director, Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion. "The SSAOs and their staffs make significant contributions to enhancing the quality of the overall education experience on campuses" (Moneta & Jackson, 2011, pp. 2-3). The Vice President for Student Affairs is typically responsible for all co-curricular support services to help students succeed, which include the following: multicultural programs, student activities, Greek life, residence life, recreation/ fitness centers, women's centers/

programs, student unions, judicial affairs, student organization advising, student government advising, leadership development, campus museums/art, career services, study abroad, wellness programs, lesbian/gay/bisexual/ transgender programs, support for students with disabilities, veteran's programs, and new student orientation (NASPA, 2012). The SSAO oversees departments that are critical to the involvement and development of students (Tinto, 1993; Weddle-West, & Bingham, 2010). The departments within student affairs can also contribute to the creation of a sense of belonging and therefore the retention rate of minority students (O'Keeffe, 2013; Weddle-West, & Bingham, 2010). This study focuses on the role of the SSAO not only because of the need for more Black women in senior leadership but also because of the impact this position has on the student body and the campus climate at PWIs. "Even when the entire University is not committed to the retention and graduation of minority students one senior level executive can make a difference (Weddle-West & Bingham, 2010, p. 9)"

To provide context of the population of SSAOs discussed in this study I gathered data on the membership of one of the umbrella professional associations that student affairs professionals join to network and gain insights into the vast areas for which they are responsible; the NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (formerly the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators). The other umbrella professional association is American College Personnel Association (ACPA). NASPA has 13,000 members, who work at 2,100 different institutions in all 50 states and 25 countries throughout the world (NASPA, 2012). Of NASPA members, 19% (2,470) are SSAOs and/or Assistant Vice Presidents while 11% (1,466) of those SSAOs and AVPs are women who have been working in the student affairs field for over 11 years

(NASPA, 2013). Of these women only 248 hold the title of Vice President or Dean (Courtney Patterson, personal communication, April 1, 2013).

The profession of student affairs purports to value and teach diversity; hence it is surprising and ironic that the representation of diversity within its leadership is not reflected. The present study sought to better understand how a Black woman on the president's cabinet experiences an organization that was not intended or constructed for her success while serving in a field that is, at times, not recognized as an important partner in the education academia.

Disparities in Gender

Within higher education women are underrepresented in the presidency (Farrington, 2001; Smith Latimore, 2009; Britton, 2013), within senior administrative positions (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002; King & Gomez, 2013) as well as full-time tenured faculty positions (Patitu & Hinton, 2003; NCES, 2012; Menges, & Exum, 1983). In 2011, 26% of college and university presidents in the United States were women, an increase from 10% in 1986 (ACE, 2012). Within senior administration 45% are women (King & Gomez, 2008). In 2009, women made up 53.7% of college and university professional staff members (Almanac of Higher Education, 2012), and 78.9% of those identified as White. The employment of White female professional staff members nearly mirrors the percentage of White females (79.1%) within the US population (US Census Bureau, 2010). Although this seems to be an even distribution between sexes, this category combines executive, administrative, and managerial positions together making it difficult to decipher how many women are in senior-level positions (Chronicle, 2013).

Within the Almanac of Higher Education statistics for senior administrative positions were not disaggregated by position level but were reported as professional staff members which included executive, administrative, and managerial college and university employees (2012). This categorization made it difficult to analyze the progress or quantify the amount of females specifically within senior administrator positions within higher education. The three types of employees has different levels of responsibility within the structure of an organization; the executive employees are positions such as the SSAOs, the managerial employees are the directors of departments that report to the SSAOs, and the administrative employees are the support staff of both the managerial and executive positions. The categorization is also problematic because it is not articulated which area these employees report therefore it could also include those within staff members within academic affairs as well as those within auxiliary departments such as food service and custodial.

The next most recognized and researched position of leadership within higher education is that of the tenured faculty. In 2011, 29.1% of faculty at undergraduate degree-granting institutions were women (NCES, 2012), a 3.1% increase in 31 years (Menges & Exum, 1983). Progress is occurring but obviously it is slow. In 2009, 75.5% of female faculty members (NCES, 2012) identified as White. The percentage of White faculty is only approximately 5% lower than the percentage of Whites within the US female population (US Census Bureau, 2010); therefore, the population of White female faculty again nearly reflects the US White female population. The term *faculty member* includes associate, assistant, and full professors, as well as instructors, lecturers, and other faculty (NCES, 2012). These statistics do not differentiate between tenured and

non-tenured professors; therefore again the category used makes it difficult to discern what percentage of women are in senior-level positions within the faculty.

Disparities in Race

The disparities in representation of leadership are not limited to gender and institution type but include race as well. Higher education in the United States was originally developed for one segment of the population: upper-class, heterosexual, White men (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1994). Since 1986 college and university presidents have typically been White, Protestant males who are married (ACE, 2012). Additionally, senior administrative positions within higher education are largely held by White men and women (ACE, 2008). Despite the increase in women and people of color beginning to attend, work, and lead colleges or universities, some of the organizational systems in place have been slow to change with the growing rate of infusion of differing populations. In a collaborative study between the American Council on Education (ACE) and the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (2013) it was noted that the number of presidents of color excluding those at HBCUs remains unchanged from 2006 at 9% and though the percentage of women in senior academic administrative positions were increased from 2008-2013 (40% - 43%) the percentage of African-American declined (3.7% - 2.3%).

The first time women and Black men and women were allowed to go to college was in 1833 and the first institution to have both White and Black men and women being educated together was Oberlin College in Ohio (Fletcher, 1943). To go from no women in education to women leaders in senior management and presidencies is a feat to be recognized; however, the momentum has slowed in recent years. "The campus climate,

curriculum, and organizational structures were never intended to be inclusive or accommodating" (Caldwell & Stewart, 2001, p. 233).

In 2006, 13.5% of college presidents identified as a minority (ACE, 2007). African-American men and women represent the largest percentage of the minority college presidents at 5.9% (ACE, 2007). Despite this high representation, this number has only increased .9% since 1986. *Minority* is defined by the American Council on Education as African American, Asian American, Hispanic, American Indian, or other (ACE, 2007). Minorities are underrepresented in professional positions of leadership at colleges and universities. Over the course of four years (2007 to 2011), the percentage of Black professional staff members actually decreased from 9% to 8.5% (see table 4).

Meanwhile, the influx of Black female undergraduate students is rapidly increasing. In 2011, 44.9% of total undergraduate enrollment were female students (over 10 million) and 37.1% self-reported as Black (NCES, 2012c) If any student identified as multiracial they were excluded from the Black or White identity categories (NCES, 2012c). From 1980 to 2008, the number of Black college students doubled to 2.5 million, and more than half of the total increase (1,562 million) were Black women (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Overwhelmingly, Black women have been represented more in higher education than their Black male counterparts (Chavous, 2002; NCES, 1996). In 2008, women made up 55.4% of all college students and Black women made up 15% of those college women (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Within the population of Black college students, women are the majority (63%) and Black students make up 13.6% of the total. The majority of Black students (86%) attend predominantly White institutions (PWIs) (NCES, 2001). With this influx of undergraduate Black women, one might expect a

subsequent increase in faculty, staff, and administrators of color as well to assist in the retention of these students (Weddle-West & Bingham, 2010); however, that has not been the case.

In 2009, 11% of college and university female professional staff members (Almanac of Higher Education, 2012) and 6.9% of female faculty members (NCES, 2012) identified as Black. The percentages of Black staff and faculty members were approximately 2% and 6% lower, respectively, than the percentage of all Black women within the US female population (US Census Bureau, 2010). People of color make up 7% of senior administrators positions therefore despite the increases of White women within leadership Black women are still underrepresented (Jones, 2014). The statistics of Black women presidents of institutions of higher education are difficult to disaggregate from the statistics on minorities and women in general; therefore, conclusions about Black women in president positions are unavailable.

Furthermore, with the combined category of executive, administrative, and managerial staff positions, it was not possible to determine the percentage of senior-level administrators disaggregated by ethnicity. However, what the statistics do provide is an indication that there is still progress to be made to reflect the minority US population within the professional staff at colleges and universities. As the Black population in the U.S. continues to grow and Blacks assume more roles within higher education (undergraduate, graduate, faculty, middle management, and senior administration positions), a more comprehensive understanding of their experiences in this academic organization created for White males is needed in order to better support and contribute to their sustained successes. This study explored the experiences of Black women senior

administration within the higher education system, a system which was not originally intended or constructed for their success or those of the increased undergraduates of color relying on them to assist in their retention.

Problem Statement

There is a growing body of research on Black males in higher education (Harper, 2006, 2009; Harper & Nicholas, 2008), on Black males specifically at historically Black colleges or universities (Harper, Carini, Bridges, & Hayek, 2004; Harper & Gasman, 2008; Harper & Kimbrough, 2005), and the academic resilience of Black males (Gayles, 2005). There is research on women of color (Berry & Mizelle, 2006), on women of color who are university presidents (Viernes Turner, 2007), on Black women who are presidents or chancellors at community colleges (Smith Latimore, 2009; Stanback Stroud, 2009), and on women in mid-career in student affairs (Renn & Hughes, 2004); however, there is limited research on Black women at four-year predominantly White institutions who are senior student affairs administrators. The unique experience of the intersection of race and gender within a position of power in an organization within the dominant culture is a voice not frequently researched and one that this study addressed. This study gives voice to the resilience and experiences of Black women in senior administration specifically Student Affairs, a demographic whom intersection has not been extensively explored in the literature.

It is important to explore whether the leadership style of the Black female senior student affairs administrator differs from that of her male or White female counterparts, how her leadership style is perceived, and how those perceptions contribute to or impede her advancement. The support necessary to attract, recruit, and retain Black senior

student affairs administrators in higher education is still needed, especially with the gap between educated Black females and those in senior management positions. As indicated by the increasing number of Black female undergraduate students (NCES, 2012c) and their need to see professionals in power who look like them (Watt, 2006) Black women in senior administrative position is a population that needs to be researched if higher education is to be prepared for the future. Understanding the experiences of the Black female as we have the White female and the Black man will shed light on how the current dominant culture recognizes and supports Black women leaders and will inform scholarship and practice. If there are impediments to the career advancement of Black women that are systemic within higher education, this research may provide insight in hopes that it can change.

Researcher's Perspective

I am a Caribbean-American able-bodied heterosexual cisgender woman working in middle-level management within student affairs. While working on this study, I transitioned from an assistant director residential life position at a four-year small private college to a leadership and student activities director position at a four-year small private Hispanic serving institution. I was an active undergraduate student leader and alumna for the small private predominantly White university I attended. I have also worked at four other small private predominantly White universities. I am a dual citizen of the United States and Barbados, West Indies. My mother graduated high school in Barbados and pasted the General Educational Development (GED) test in addition to taking some college credits in the United States. My father has a doctorate and many certificates. I grew up in a single parent working class home. I started working as a teenager and went

for my undergraduate degree right after high school. I worked two years full time after receiving my bachelor's degree while being an active alumna, then returned to higher education to pursue my Master's. I then worked for three more years full time before returning to school again to pursue a doctorate degree while working full time. I have spent my life trying to deny or ignore the presence of race, class, or gender, trying to fit in, trying to stand out above the rest of the minority, trying to gain cultural capital, to assimilate to the dominate culture, to disprove stereotypes, and to prove a point that I was not going to be the go-to person on diversity by keeping myself ignorant.

I was motivated to pursue this study because I experienced sustained discrimination in the workplace until I could no longer ignore it or excuse it as something else. I wondered if I was alone in these experiences and as I looked around me and saw fewer and fewer administrators at my level or above who looked like me, I wondered why that was. For the few women I saw in those positions, I wondered what sustained them. I decided to do this study to provide me and any other aspiring Black women professionals in student affairs some hope that we can make it and, if possible, provide some thoughts on how to go about doing that. I did not want to focus on the negative experiences as much as I wanted to learn how these women got to where they are and how they thrive in their current position. These desires are reflected in the purpose statement and research questions.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of Black women senior student affairs administrators at predominantly White institutions in order to understand the strategies for success that led to their advancement to senior level positions.

Research Questions

This qualitative case study has three overarching research questions:

1. How do Black women senior student affairs administrators at predominantly White institutions describe their experiences leading to the Vice President for Student Affairs or Dean of Students position?
2. What professional, institutional, or personal issues affect Black women senior student affairs administrators at predominantly White institutions?
3. What strategies do Black women senior student affairs administrators at predominantly White institutions employ in order to be successful in their careers?

Significance

This study is intended to inform scholarship and practice. It serves as a resource for not only aspiring Black women professionals but also for those who mentor, supervise, advise and/or work with them. The stories provide an example of a possible future for the next generation of Black women senior administration positions. Finally, it sheds light on the potential systemic imbalances within higher education that need to be addressed.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses the theory of resilience as a framework. "Resilience is defined as achievement when such achievement is rare for those facing similar circumstances or within a similar socio-cultural context" (Gayles, 2005, p. 250). The framework of resilience is germane to the study as its focus is on the career advancement of Black women to the senior management level, leadership positions that are not frequently held by Black women. For the purpose of this study, a Black woman who is resilient is someone who has become a senior student affairs administrator at a predominantly White college or university.

Resilience is seen as a way of doing or overcoming, a competency developed, or an accomplishment, not an innate characteristic (Cicchetti & Garmezy, 1993: Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990). Resilience is therefore also an appropriate framework for answering the third research question regarding strategies for success as the theory focuses on the "inner resources, social competencies and cultural strategies that permit individuals to not only survive, recover, or even thrive after stressful events, but also to draw from the experience to enhance subsequent functioning" (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000, p. 229). Resilience is not about expectations that are exceeded but about adjusting to the risks on the path to the desired goal (Masten, 2001). This study not only identified the potential risks within the career advancement of the Black women SSAOs but also those assets that assisted in their resilience.

Definition of Terms

The research questions use several terms that can be defined and interpreted in multiple ways. The following are the definitions used in the study.

Black is used synonymously with *African-American*: *Black* is more inclusive of the multitude of cultures of people who have to select the category of "African American" on forms, applications, and surveys. "Black women may identify as African, Caribbean, Spanish, African America, or some combination of those identities" (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010, p. 174). If the term *African-American* is used directly by another researcher or author, however, it is referred to that way.

Predominantly White institutions (PWIs): Refers to American colleges or universities whose student populations self-identifying as White for at least 50%. Though some colleges and institutions that were once considered PWIs no longer have half their student population self-identifying as White due to the increase of a more diverse student population, the campus climate, history, and tradition of the institution that was founded on the bases of White dominance and ideals may still be reflected in the faculty and administration and therefore threaten to impede the career advancement of Black women administrators. The term *predominantly White institutions* is more universally known and understood than *traditionally* or *historically White institutions* and therefore was the term chosen for this study.

Senior Student Affairs Officer **(**SSAO**):** Is used synonymously with senior administration or senior-level position; however, a distinction is specified when necessary. This study further defines an SSAO as a vice president or dean of students who reports directly to the president of the institution.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the disparity of women in senior management positions within the public sector and then within higher education was highlighted using statistics of the percentage of women in middle-level positions versus senior-level positions in relation to men in the corresponding positions. Within academia the senior-level positions were defined as the presidency, president's cabinet or vice president positions, followed by tenured faculty positions. The disparity of women in senior administrator positions was then explored in relation to the type and reputation of the institution noting that women were underrepresented at private four-year institutions. Next, the introduction of Black men and women to higher education was discussed in relation to the institution of academia, which was not established with differing cultures in mind. The discrepancy between college-educated Black women and those Black women who advance to senior leadership positions in the college or university setting is disparate.

This study can contribute to the literature on women in leadership as it focuses on a specific population of women within the senior level of leadership at a particular institution type. Other research has been conducted regarding Black students at PWIs, women leaders, Black women in president and faculty positions at community colleges and PWIs. The chapter articulates the researcher's point of view and motivation for conducting the study, the three research questions, a brief description of the theoretical framework employed for the study, resilience, and a definition of terms used in the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter starts with an introduction to the study's theoretical framework, resilience theory, and how it has been used in research to date. The origins of the theory, how it has been used and defined in research, and how this research addresses a gap in the literature will be shared. An introduction of the intersection of identity follows as the identities of the participants overlap both racial and gender identities. Finally, the experiences of Black students, faculty, staff, and administrators in academia specifically at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) organized based on the experiences of Blacks in Higher Education, Black Students at PWIs, then finally Black Women Professionals in Higher Education. Some of the experiences included campus climate, microaggressions, the Black box, double consciousness, linguistic codes and code switching, glass ceiling labyrinths, and cliffs and mentoring.

The Theory of Resilience

The concept of resilience originated in the 1800s and has been predominantly used in psychology research to study high-risk children (poverty, orphan, adoption, dysfunctional parenting, illness, child abuse, neglect, incarceration, homelessness, or academic difficulty) but has now branched out to include the resilience of adults, families, communities, policies, workplaces, and practice (Jackson, Firtko, & Edenborough, 2007; Luthar et al., 2000). There are many definitions of the term resilience however the common denominator is an individual's persistence of development in spite of some adversity, threat, or obstacle (Jackson, Firtko, &

Edenborough, 2007; Masten, 2001; Benard, 1991; Newman, 2002; APA, 2014). "Resilience is the capacity to maintain competent functioning in the face of major life stressors" (Kaplan, Turner, Norman, & Stillson, 1996, p. 158). The study of resilience draws from positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and introduced another perspective besides the deficit models being perpetuated in research (Masten, 2001) Resilience research focuses on analyzing the development tools of individuals who thrive instead of solely focusing on those who could not (Masten, 2001).

Early in its adoption individuals who demonstrated the ability to withstand vexing occurrences or resilience were portrayed as extraordinary, invulnerable, or special, however it was later realized that people have an innate ability to withstand adversity as long as the abilities of the individual and the resources within their environment align and remain in contact (Fraser, Kirby, and Smokowski, 2004; Masten, 2001). "Resilience has been recognized as "a set of inner resources, social competencies and cultural strategies that permit individuals to not only survive, recover, or even thrive after stressful events, but also to draw from the experience to enhance subsequent functioning" (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000, p. 229). Having resilience does not mean that individuals do not feel the effects of a negative situation but rather that in spite of those experiences a person can continue to strive for and obtain their desired outcomes (APA, 2014). Resilience is not a trait and is not exclusive to certain people. It is something that anyone has the capacity to develop. "It involves behaviors, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone" (APA, 2014, p. 2).

Research on resilience has occurred with six major themes: Individual resilience, family resilience, community resilience, resilience based policy, resilience in social work,

and cross-cultural resilience (VanBreda, 2001) This study focuses on individual resilience as this focus explores the patterns naturally occurring and looks to identify those that correlate (Masten, 2001). Though it is not the focal point of this research it is important to note that an individual's culture can impact how they respond to situations and therefore their resilience through communication styles, how they interact with others in particular family versus community members (APA, 2014). Some factors that lead to resilience in a person are support relationships, the ability to make and execute a plan, self-esteem, the ability to manage emotion, the ability to see beyond the current crisis, the ability to adapt and adjust when the inevitable change occurs, making and achieving realistic goals, and finding ways to cope and restore hope such as writing in a journal, meditating, or believing in a higher power (APA, 2014). These asserts were affirmed through the research of Polk (1997) and Pearlin & Schooler (1982).

Polk (1997) identified four patterns within individual resilience: dispositional, self-autonomy, relational, and situational. The dispositional pattern is related to what an individual projects; outward appearance, standing within society, and self-efficacy. The disposition pattern is tied to a person's ego. The relational pattern is an individual's connection to others and whether those ties and potential support systems are close or board The situational pattern related to an individual's crisis management or problem-solving abilities in the midst of stress induced events. Finally, the philosophical pattern pertained to an individual's perspective in the world, their belief system, and positive thoughts.

An important aspect of an individual's resilience is their ability to cope with stressors. Coping is "the thing that people do to avoid being harmed by life strain"

(Pearlin & Schooler, 1982, p. 109). Pearlin & Schooler (1982) identified three types of coping after conducting 2300 interviews in urban Chicago: change the situation, change the perception, and manage the stress.

Changing the situation was the least used coping mechanism as it required background information, the intuition and ingenuity to devise a plan, and the initiative to act on the plan. The most used coping mechanism was changing the perception. A person could choose to view the situation in context of a similar event or in relation to their entire life thereby reducing the initial panic because they can rely on past experiences or realize that the situation will past. A person could prioritize which aspects of the situation get their full attention and choose to ignore or suppress certain aspects of the event. Finally manage the stress focuses more on the effects of the situation such as pain, emotion, sacrifice rather than the situation itself.

Risk Factors, Protective Factors, and Compensatory Variables

Most resilience research identifies two concepts; risk factors and protective factors (Masten & Reed, 2002). Risk factors often referred to some adversity, challenge, distressing experience that increased the likelihood of a negative outcome (Green & Conrad, 2002; Rutter 1999; Luthar et al. 2000; Tugade & Fredrickson 2004). Examples of risk factors include poverty, parental conflict, and stress (Zimmerman & Arunkuma, 1994). Protective factors often refer to both intrinsic and extrinsic resources that offer individuals a reprieve from the risk, allow them to develop competencies or adaptation techniques, and provide environmental assistance in order withstand the risk factors (Greene and Conrad, 2002; Masten, 1994). Examples of protective factors include intelligence and support at home, school, or neighborhood (Zimmerman & Arunkuma,

1994). The protective factors prevalent in research studies of people who are able to be resilient are "personal, social, familial, and institutional safety nets" (Kaplan, Turner, Norman, & Stillson, 1996, p. 158) and supportive relationships (APA, 2014). "Relationships that create love and trust, provide role models and offer encouragement and reassurance help bolster a person's resilience" (APA, 2014, p. 3).

In Jackson, Firtko, & Edenborough's (2007) study of nursing they analyzed the risk factors with the workplace which could cause some to burn out or quit while other to develop coping mechanisms to persist. "Workplace adversity can be viewed as any negative, stressful, traumatic, or difficult situation or episode of hardship that is encountered in the occupational setting" (Jackson, Firtko, & Edenborough, 2007, p. 3). This study will analyze the workplace adversity of the participants.

There are three models of resilience: protective factor, challenge, and compensatory (Zimmerman & Arunkuma, 1994). In the protective factor model, a person with great risk is headed towards an outcome and is intercepted by a protective factor that is able to change the outcome. There is also a dimension of this model where a person starts with a protective factor and is headed towards an outcome and another protective factor intersects and reinforces what is occurring even more to change the outcome. In the challenge model, one factor in moderation could be considered a benefit; however in excess could be a detriment. Therefore, for each person it is important to identify the right amount of challenge to elicit the desired outcome.

In the compensatory model, a risk factor and a compensating variable interact in a person's life. The outcome of the situation depends on the intensity of each. If risk outweighs the compensatory variable, then the outcome could be riskier; however, if the

compensatory variable outweighs the risk, the outcome could be positive for the individual despite the risk. A compensatory variable is different from a protective factor in that it does not directly protect an individual from the risk however its presence in their life assists them in persisting in spite of the risk. The concept of compensatory effects (Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen,1984; Masten et al., 1988) refers to the idea that enough positive assets could offset the burden in a child's life from one or many risk influences. Asset-building interventions are based on this assumption.

This study is important as education research studies which incorporate resilience theory has been explored in studies related to nursing or medical students (Jackson, Firtko, & Edenborough, 2007; Zander, Hutton, & King, 2010; Dyrbye, Power, Massie, Eacker, Harper, Thomas, & Shanafelt, 2010), first generation students (Clauss-Ehlers & Wibrowski, 2007), LGBT students (Sanlo, 2004) but has not yet been vastly associated with the resilience staff with higher education. This study seeks to not only explore the resilience of staff but senior administration specifically within student affairs therefore adding to the resilience literature and to scholarship. Resilience was an appropriate theoretical framework for this study as it explores the experiences of four women in environments that had the potential to threaten their progress as their race was different from more than 50% of the student population at a PWI and their gender was also in the minority with senior leadership at an undergraduate institution.

Intersection of Identity

Identity is an image a person accepts of one's self regardless of changes in self or circumstances (Erikson, 1968). McEwen (2003) described identity as both a combination of parts pulled together to form one's self as well as categories of identities such

professional, athletic, or leadership. "Identity is defined as the sense of a continuous self" (Erikson, 1968). Each part of a person's identity is intertwined and therefore cannot in isolation (Watt, 2006). Identity is multifaceted therefore so is the development of that identity. How a person defines and chooses to live out his or her identity is in large part based on how he or she is viewed by others and how his or her identity is developed.

In patriarchal society of America, being a woman and being a person of color assumes difficulty because it is implied that these identities are devalued, seen as inferior to others and their experiences are often minimized or overlooked (Watt, 2006). Although theories on race and gender have been developed separately, they are similar in their stages allowing for simultaneous identity development for those with intersecting identities such as Black women. Cross (1971, 1991) identified five stages of racial identity development: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and internalization/commitment. O'Neil and Roberts Carroll (1988) identified five stages of gender identity development: acceptance of traditional gender roles, ambivalence about gender roles, anger, activism, and celebration and integration of gender roles (Blimling, 1998). The stages explore how an individual first fully embraces and identifies with the dominant culture, then questions and explores his or her identity, followed by becoming passionate about learning and voicing injustices based on that identity, and finally coming to a place where both the identity group and the dominant culture can coexist.

The stages identified for race and gender development are also similar to the stages of grieving (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005): denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. The individual goes from unawareness of his or her identity and the affect it has on him or her in the society (denial), to being vocal about the history (anger)

and lack of forward movement (bargaining), to reflecting (depression), to finally coming to an understanding of the situation (acceptance). The similarities in the identity stages to that of the stages of grief suggest that in order to develop our identity and move forward in the dominant culture, we have to give up a piece of self and therefore grieve our own identity. It is important to note that with any stage of development or grieving, we are never fully finished. When a new encounter, traumatic event, or trigger occurs, we may need to re-experience a stage and come to terms with that part of our identity.

Intersectionality is an analytical tool for studying, understanding, and responding to how gender intersects with other identities and how these intersections contribute to the unique experiences of oppression and privileged (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010, p. 176). The term intersectionality was born in 1989 by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "legal scholar and critical race theorist" (Cole, 2009, p. 171). Before that time researchers were already recognizing and bringing attention to the fact that "isolating race or gender as the primary category of identity, difference, or disadvantage" was a limitation within research (Cole, 2009, p. 171).

The concept of intersectionality brought to the foreground the experiences that were not being addressed when discussions of the oppressions of White women or Black men were discussed. What intersectionality does that other theories currently do not is value the intersection between race, gender, class, and other identities that make up an individual's identity instead of trying to identify which social characteristic is being privileged or marginalized (Davis, 2008). "This theory is especially appropriate to examining leadership because intersectionality reveals the connections between multiple identities and personas of social actors; it suggests that the analysis of complex social

situations should not be reduced to singular categories but should include connected roles and situations (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010, p. 176). The unique experiences of this intersection of race and gender within a position of power in an organization within the dominant culture is a voice not frequently researched and one that this study seeks to explore. Black women have to develop multiple identities (gender and race) at once and there are many experiences that Black women encounter based on the perception of certain identity groupings. The next sections explore some experiences that Blacks and then Black women professionals within higher education encounter.

Experiences of Blacks in Higher Education

Some stressors that Black students, staff, faculty, and administration experience within higher education are tokenism, a hostile racial campus climate, and microaggressions (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). Below I will review each of these experiences as they have been discussed in literature as well as three of the techniques for studying and working within predominantly White environments; double-consciousness and code-switching.

Tokenism. In 1977, Rosabeth Moss Kanter introduced the concept of tokenism that unfortunately still exists and is experienced today. Kanter (1977) described a tokenized environment as where there is a large ratio of one group (*dominants*) to a *skewed* group (*tokens)* for example 85:15 or if there is only one person of a particular background within a group (p 966). Kanter's (1977) research was focused on "highly skewed sex ratios" for instance few women in a male dominated work environment therefore this research is relevant for this study as it focuses on race and sex ratios such as Black women in a White male dominated work environment (p. 968). Kanter (1977)

clarifies that the differences between the dominant and the token is not ability but rather their "secondary and informal assumptions" (p. 968). "The term *token* reflect one's status as a symbol of one's kind. It is sufficient to be in a place where others of that category are not usually found, to be the first of one's kind to enter a new group, to represent a very different culture and set of interactional capacities to members of the numerically dominant category" (p. 968).

Kanter (1977) studied a Fortune 500 sales company in which women were entering for the first time; a ratios of 300:20 therefore often the women were the only in their sales group of 10-12. Kanter also noted the difficulty with which these women had to major not only being a token with their colleagues but also the customers who were in a majority group as well. This is relevant for this study as the women are not only working within a dominate culture but also serving a majority population of White students as well.

One of the findings in Kanter's study was that her participant's actions, mistakes, and with whom they interacted were public information. They could not go unnoticed or be anonymous. The second finding was "extension of consequences" or realizing that their actions did not speak for only themselves as individuals but for all women (p. 973). The third finding was the need for her participants to work harder than most to be seen as having equal competence whereas their appearance was easily remembered and acknowledged. The fourth and final finding was "fear of retaliation" which was a double edged sword of doing well because if they did well it either made a dominant look bad and because of their token status it was public information or their good work went unnoticed.

Kanter explains that the token group will repeatedly be asked to represent their group and therefore becomes “symbols rather than individuals” (p. 966). Another type of group that Kanter discussed was a *tilted* group where the ratio is 65:35 where the dominant group is the majority and the tokens are a minority (p. 966). The difference between tokens and minorities is the ability to form an alliance and affect change within the environment. In this study I explore the environment of PWIs with a White undergraduate population of over 50% juxtapose the rare group of Black women senior administrators often the first and only within administration or few within professional staff.

Kanter goes on to establish and explain the three major attributes to tokenism: visibility, polarization, and assimilation. Visibility speaks to the excessive awareness the community have to the tokens which eventually leads to a pressure to prove oneself and go beyond the status quo. Polarization explains how the differences between the two groups are viewed out of proportion and eventually leads to flax boundaries of what is one culture versus another. Assimilation is the act of the tokens changing themselves to fit in to the standards of the dominate culture. The categories identified in Kanter’s (1977) theory of tokenism; heightened visibility, assimilation, and exclusion, were affirmed in the experiences of my participants and led to a poor campus climate.

Campus climate. According to Harvey (1991), "campus climate" is a "term used to describe the culture, habits, decisions, practices, and policies that make up campus life. The degree to which the climate is hospitable determines the 'comfort factor' for African Americans and other nonwhite persons on campus" (p. 128). Campus climate plays a significant role in the adjustment and retention of all college students as well as the

faculty, staff, and administrators. How they are received by the campus community and what structures, programs, and support are in place make a difference in the success and retention of Black women within higher education. In 1992 Sylvia Hurtado added to the literature by specifically studying the campus racial climate. Much of the literature on campus climate pertains to the undergraduate student experience (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; D'Augelli, & Hershberger, 1993; Hurtado, & Ponjuan, 2005; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003; Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998; Harper & Hurtado, 2007). The adjustment to the campus climate is an added stressor for students, faculty, staff, and administrators. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), stress is a relationship between an individual and the environment, and it occurs when what is expected outweighs the capability of the individual.

In a study by Shaun Harper and Sylvia Hurtado (2007) they summarized nine shared experiences with campus climate based on focus groups conducted at five institutions. Harper and Hurtado's focus groups and interview participants described experiences such as the diversity and inclusivity of the school being marketed yet not discussed in formal settings and sufficient orientation and training on how to navigate a diverse environment was not provided. They reported that race and racism were topics not discussed and often avoided and that student engaged in self-selected and accepted racial segregation within living quarters, in the dining hall, and in student organizations without question. The participants went on to describe that there were few spaces on campus that recognized and celebrated their culture and that the activities, speakers, and even classroom text were all from a White perspective. Interestingly enough the White

students interviewed assumed that though they did not see students of color as engaged they were having as good an experience at the institution as they were. Complaints were not expressed so things continue as they have been yet the students pointed out that the questions the researchers asked were also never solicited before either. Though much of the experiences found were stories of students it still has an effect on the staff and faculty of color working at that institution. In fact Harper and Hurtado (2007) added a staff focus group and found that though they were aware of some of the experiences that the students were having though they refrained from bringing it up to the upper administration for fear of losing their job or for being considered a trouble maker.

A few other studies have explored the experiences of staff, faculty, and administrators as it relates to campus climate (Hurtado, & DeAngelo, 2009; Mayhew, Grunwald & Dey, 2006; Cadwell & Stewart, 2001; Somers, Cofer, Austin, Inman, Martin, Rook, & Wilkinson, 1998; Sandler, & Hall, 1986). Sandler and Hall (1986) specifically addressed the campus climate experiences of women administrators and found that women leaders have to contend with doubts of their leadership abilities, they are isolated and therefore it is difficult to determine whether what they are experiencing is part of being an administrator or tied to their race, gender, or their work in student affairs. Sandler and Hall (1986) purport that women administrators are at times treated as tokens, "overly visible, over-extended, sometimes given more responsibility than power, sometimes not really supported by those above them. Like tokens, they are treated at times as representatives of their class and at other times as exceptional performers, both of which work to their disadvantage" (p. 14). This study will add to the literature on the

campus climate of Black women administrators and how they persist in spite of the many obstacles before them.

Microaggressions. Even though one of the first features observed about a person is their race, in the work place it has become common practice in America to not acknowledge this part of a person's identity "because we want to our odds of exhibiting prejudice or engaging in discrimination, or of seeming to do either" Norton, & Apfelbaum, 2013, p. 1). Fries-Britt and Griffin (2007) described microaggressions as "subtle and often unconscious racist acts that cumulatively add stress to the experience of people of color" (p. 511). Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solorzano (2009) described racial microaggressions as subtle, covert, at times unconscious acts of racism that can lead to racial battle fatigue.

Microaggressions present themselves in three main forms; actions, statements, or environmental messages (Constantine & Sue, 2007). An example of an overt action is being followed or heavily watched in a store for no apparent reason other than race (Constantine & Sue, 2007) or not making eye contact (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). Examples of verbal statement are when the deliverer claims to not see or take into consideration race (being color-blind), to be surprised by the qualifications or professional speech of a person of color, to discrediting or undermining work before it is read (Constantine & Sue, 2007; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). "Color-blind is an ideology that believes race to no longer be important in shaping social outcomes and which encourages people to ignore race and racial difference" (Dean, 2013, p. 1)

In a qualitative study at a PWI, Museus, Yee, and Lambe (2011) found that the colorblind approach translated to faculty, staff, and students not engaging in

conversations about race, whether about differences or similarities, in order not to offend. The topic of race seemed taboo and the longer they stayed at their respective institutions the more apathetic they were to changing the culture. Contrary to its intent avoiding the topic of race and difference tends to decrease the efficiency of communication in the work place and instigate mistrust (Dean, 2013). Museus', et. al, (2001) participants expressed feelings of frustration, depression, and disillusionment. The colorblind approach eventually led to the disengagement with the communities as they did not see an outlet to discuss, explore, or develop the multiple identities that made them who they were (Museus, et. Al, 2001). "By ignoring racial difference--or by being colorblind--we help perpetuate and reinforce the system of white privilege" (Bonilla-Silva, 2014).

The third form of microagression is environmental offenses an example of which is the lack of Black leaders within the senior ranks of an organization (Constantine & Sue, 2007). This particular microaggression is something that this study addresses by exploring the experiences of those within senior administration and therefore demystifying its potential for Black women leaders of future generations. The disadvantages based on race and gender are not as overt as they once were (Holvino, 2005). "Rather than encountering blatantly racist acts, Black students [as well as faculty, staff, and administrators] may find themselves facing subtler judgments and expectations by students, faculty, and staff according to broad social stereotypes" (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007, p. 511). These subtle gestures begin to create an environment where a person may begin to question herself, her ability, her impact within the role or at the institution and therefore may choose to leave (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). "The predominantly White worlds [Black women] enter tend to be so unwelcoming. We strive

to arrive at a secure place only to discover a quicksand of subtle exclusion" (Lawence-Lightfoot,1994, p. 10). These experiences of microaggressions and subtle actions, statements, or environmental cues were all a part of the story of my participants.

In Madonna Constantine and Derald Wing Sue's (2007) study of racial microaggressions within supervisory relationships they found that the Black supervisees experiences were invalidated, assumptions were made based on stereotypes, and feedback was withheld for fear of it being perceived as being connected to race and therefore would be labeled racism. The repeated awareness of how they are perceived, the questioning of ability and worth, the fear to speak up about experiences, and the feeling of isolation as they navigated these experiences outside of a community that had shared experiences were common themes in the microaggressions literature. Even though there is more research on student experiences one can reasonably assume that the Black faculty, staff, and administrators are affected by similar interactions within the higher education environments. For instance the idea of the Black box can be coorilated to the experiences of the senior administrators of this study.

Fries-Britt and Griffin (2007) proposed the term *Black box* for the predetermined judgments about the abilities, motivation, and intelligence of Black students by White students. Further, the Black box idea contends that Blacks also cope with the perception of being a "sell-out" and arrogant by other Black students. The Black box idea is that no matter where Black students go or what they do, they perceive themselves as not fitting in. Black students have also reported their perception that their intelligence, abilities, and right to be present both inside and outside the college classroom has been questioned by faculty, staff and students many times due to the lack of understanding of affirmative

action (Solorzano, Allen, & Carroll, 2002). These misunderstandings could lead to actions and reactions by peers and authority figures that could be classified as microaggressions. These feelings, perceptions, doubts, and conflicting realities are all experiences to which Black administrators in the same settings could reasonably be subject. Two strategies for navigating such experiences are double-consciousness and code-switching.

Double-consciousness. One way that people of color cope with the added stressors of their identity in a campus climate of a differing dominant culture (PWI) is by having a double-consciousness. W. E. B. DuBois described the duality of double consciousness as an individual's ability to adjust to having multiple conflicting identities simultaneously (Du Bois, 1897). DuBois (1897) further explains that double consciousness is about understanding one's self, how one is received by others, and deciding to adjust actions accordingly. Black women often project a false sense of normalcy to the outside world while much self-oppression, identity development, and the need for affirmation that they fit and will be accepted for who they are being processed under the surface (Watt, 2006).

In addition to facing leadership challenges brought on as a consequence of race and gender, Black women have to contend with what DuBois (1994) called double consciousness. "[the African American] ever feels his twoness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings…" (DuBois, 1994, p. 9). Johnson-Bailey and Alfred (2006) describe this cultural balancing act as living in opposition of the norm culture while inevitably negotiating between cultures. With this double consciousness that DuBois wrote about, Black people saw the world from the Black and

White perspective and assimilated accordingly. "The concept of double consciousness and psychic duality reflect the perception that the collective psyche of people of African descent has been bifurcated with European culture" (Jones, 2001). Another method of coping is code-switching.

Code-switching. A component of code switching and a person's intersection of identity is socioeconomic class or cultural capital (a concept introduced by Pierre Bourdieu), which influences exposure to experiences, upbringing, and what messages are sent. Based on Bourdieu's work, Bernstein theorized that the working class use "restricted" linguistic codes while the middle class use more "elaborate" linguistic codes (Bernstein, 1977, cited in MacLeod, 2009, p. 11. These codes stem from interactions with families or people within one's class. A restricted code is dependent on the individual being present at the event or having some knowledge of the slang terminology being used in order to comprehend what is being expressed. An elaborate code, however, is language used to describe or speak about a situation in which one would not need to be present or tied to a culture or person to understand the intended meaning of the person speaking.

Heath (1983) further built on the idea of linguistic codes by recognizing the different ways of communication between class as well as race. Heath conducted an ethnography of Black working-class children and of White middle-class children and found that the questions and demands on communication at home for the working class students did not match that which was required and used frequently in schools leaving some students at a disadvantage. Schools use and require elaborate codes and working-class families often use restricted codes. "The mismatch between the language used at

home and the language demanded by the school is a serious stumbling block for working-class and nonwhite pupils" (MacLeod, 2009, p. 18).

From this research, we can hypothesize that Black women who are from a higher socio-economic status (SES) or who have built greater cultural capital can adjust to the campus climate of a PWI more easily than their lower SES counterparts. It may also be that those women who learn early to code switch may be able to hide the pain, frustration, or struggle they may be experiencing from university staff, administration, or faculty making it more difficult to recognize when they need support. Once that ideology changes, then more students, staff, and faculty can be successful. Based on the statistics, more research needs to occur not only on students but also on faculty and staff and how they are experiencing higher education. Doing so could change all levels of support and increase the retention of the Black women who are already enrolling in large numbers, the middle managers who are being passed over for career advancement opportunities, as well as the small number of senior managers who have made it past many of the hurdles and slights to be role models for future Black women leaders. Code-switching was employed by the participants of my study. They were cognizant of the way they communicated with students, with family and Black community, and with their White staff and peers. Whether they were intentionally aware or not they used sophisticated linguistic strategy to succeed in the PWI environment.

Experiences of Blacks at Predominantly White Institutions

Blacks at PWIs have to give particular attention to their race because of their minority status within the campus population (Poindexter-Cameron & Robinson, 1997). Lavant and Terrell (1994) attributed the perpetuation of Black students feeling isolated

and not supported to the non-existence of offices and services to address their needs within the community. These concerns do not dissipate when entering the same institution as a faculty or staff member of color. It is important to uncover what is being experienced and what structures are needed for those who identify as Black in order to begin adding structures of support because this population has been and will continue to increase within the academy.

Black students need the support of university faculty and staff as they develop into adults (Pascarella & Terenzini,1991). Black staff further assist Black students by providing opportunities and venues to explore, process, and hopefully begin to come to terms with their multiple identities and how their identities are perceived by society (Davis, 1994; Jackson, 2003, Watt, 2006;). The Black students also need a space where stereotypes, biases, myths, and projections that are manifested in work, school, and social environments can be discussed and disempowered (Watt, 2006). A senior administrator who shares a racial identity, such as the women in my study, may assist in reaching some of these students.

Although Black students make up 13.6% of all college students, only 9% graduate with a bachelor's degree (Carter, & Wilson, 1996; NCES, 2001). There is a retention concern regarding Black students in higher education. The majority of Black students (86%) attend PWIs (NCES, 2001; Nettles & Perna, 1997). Blacks at PWIs who feel discriminated against, targeted, or as a token are less likely to go to faculty office hours, engage with White peers or faculty outside of the classroom, or get involved on campus

reducing their connection to the campus and their motivation to persist. Those who have those experiences do not do as well academically and do not view their White faculty and peers as supportive (Chavous, 2002).

Many students of minority identity groups establish ways to handle or cope with their devalued status within the environment (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 1994; Watt, 2006). Greer and Chwalisz (2007) defined *coping* as "behavioral and cognitive attempts to manage, reduce, or endure the internal and external demands of stressful situations" (p. 389). Greer and Chwalisz (2007) researched the difference between the stressors and coping mechanisms of Black students at a PWI and at a historically Black college or university (HBCU). They found that the PWI students used mental distraction, avoidance, and spiritual activities while the HBCU students used talking with people and seeking social support to cope. They also found that the students at the PWIs did respectively poorer academically (low GPA) and were not as involved in co-curricular activities as the students at the HBCU (Fleming, 1981, 1984). Greer and Chwalisz (2007) hypothesized that the reason for the differences between the two groups was the differing degrees of racial and discriminatory tension and conflict with which they had to contend in addition to the usual stressors of being a college student. Experiences such as microaggressions, color-blindness, and Black boxes are potential stressors for staff, faculty, and administrators and therefore something that the SSAOs of my study may engage in double consciousness and code-switching

Experiences of Black Women Professionals in Higher Education

Though there is limited research on the population of Black women SSAOs the existing literature can be used to hypothesis what experiences they may be encountering. In the next few paragraphs I will review the literature on Black women professionals in higher education which consists of the obstacles that women leaders experience, the double jeopardy that Black women experience as they identify with both a minority gender and race. I also explore the glass and concrete ceilings as well as the glass cliffs that Black women encounter as they attempt to advance in their careers. I also provides a brief synopsis of the pervasive literature on the experiences of Black students in PWIs as insight into the potential experiences of the Black women SSAOs. Finally, research on mentors and mentoring which was one of the catalyst for the persistence of both students of color as well as Black professionals.

In addition to the experiences described in the previous sections that stem from experiences attributed to race, the participants of this study, Black women, also have to contend with obstacles inherent to the intersection of race and gender. After reviewing the literature I identified a need for this research on Black women Senior Student Affairs Officers at PWIs. There was research regarding Black students (Watt, 2006; (Chavous, 2002), Black women in the work place (Hughes & Dodge, 1997), women of color in higher education (Berry & Mizelle, 2006), Black women in higher education leadership (Bower & Wolverton, 2009), women presidents (Stanback Stroud, 2009; Britton, 2013), Black women faculty (Gregory, 2001; Herbert, 2012), women student affairs administrators (Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2010; Renn and Hughes, 2004), and Black women in student affairs (Henry, 2010) but not specifically Black women Senior Student

Affairs Officers at PWIs. This population is particularly in need of research as there is an influx of students of color but particularly Black female students to higher education in need of role models and mentors in positions of power to advocate for their needs and make changes to policy and procedures. The student affairs profession is an important part of the retention of students as it provides the out of classroom support that has been a contributing factor to retention and the SSAO is the senior level administrator for the student affairs division.

A woman leader frequently has to contend with stereotypes and differences in her style because of her gender. An individual of a marginalized race and gender is sometimes viewed as inferior by not only those of different backgrounds but at times by those who share similar identities. These perceptions of inferiority may lead to insecurities in the woman's self-esteem and her willingness to fight to be respected as a leader (Watt, 2006). Often, if a woman is not affirmed in one aspect of her identity, it leads to a pessimistic view and attitude towards all aspects of her identity (Watt, 2006, p. 329). All of these aspects of identity cause stressors in addition to what the college students are already experiencing.

Women of color have the added identity of gender as well as race with which to contend. It is difficult to determine whether the reactions, interpretations, influences, or outcomes of our actions are attributed to our race, ethnicity, gender identity, or a combination of the two (Watt, 2006). The experience of both racial and gender discrimination, judgment, mistreatment, and stereotyping is referred to as double jeopardy (Cole, 2009) or multiple negatives (Menges & Exum, 1983). In her research, hooks (1981) explored the fact that Black women identify more as Black than they do as

women, the SSAO position (Dungy & Ellis, 2011). She hypothesized that the reason for this trend is that Black women align with Black men in order to fight social and racial injustice. Holvino (2005) termed this phenomenon "gender silence" (p. 4).

Black women leaders have been cited by a number of researchers as an important population in need of further study. Komives, Owen Casper, Longerbeam, Mainella, and Osteen (2005) in their development of a grounded theory on leadership identity suggested that more research be done with students of color to increase the triangulation of diverse experiences. They also suggested that a more diverse team of researchers be involved so the data may be analyzed with an unintentional bias as the five researchers were White women (Komives et al., 2005). Watt (2006) suggested not only the study of Blacks but women in particular at different institution types needs to be further studied.

Hughes & Dodge (1997) did a study on 79 Black women's exposure to racial bias incidents at work. Most of their participants were in clerical or sales positions. Many participants worked in predominantly White environments with a few other women. Though their participants reported being "satisfied" in their jobs they also reported "institutional discrimination and interpersonal prejudice" (p. 589). This study will offer the opportunity to explore the experiences of senior level administrators within a predominantly White work setting.

A number of researchers wrote about the experiences of women of color in higher education (Berry & Mizelle, 2006). Bower & Wolverton (2009) wrote a book about Black women in higher education leadership where they chronicled the stories and life lessons of seven Black women leaders. Some of the themes within the book were the challenges faced as women in a male-dominated field, surrounding yourself with the right

people, seeking advice, staying connected to your upbringing, working hard, and having a sense of spirituality. Again, this told the story of Black women in higher education however not specifically student affairs.

Gregory (2001) wrote about Black women faculty and hypothesizes about their decline in number and its effect on Black students. Gregory agreed with previous scholars that the lack of Black faculty to mentor the Black students has a correlation to those Black students not persisting (Blackwell, 1983; Brown, 1988; Gardiner, Enomoto, & Grogan, 2000). With the absence of Black faculty the increasing number of students will turn to the staff and administrators for guidance therefore their experiences within PWIs are important to understand. Herbert (2012) wrote about Black female faculty going through the tenure process at PWIs. Where Herbert acknowledges the difficulty of all faculty members to balances the expectations of the academy she also voices the added complexity that one's race and sex does add to the journey. Herbert also mentions the need and difficulty for Black Female Faculty (BFF) to be a safe haven for marginalized students while keeping up with the rigor of the expectations of the role of faculty. Herbert calls for a way for the additional service provided the institution to be recognized and evaluated within the tenure process. Though these studies explored Black women in leadership within higher education there is still more to be explored as it relates to an administrative position within the academy.

Britton (2013) studied the experiences of four Black women in the presidency at Community Colleges. What Britton found was that professional relationships such as mentors were integral in the success of the presidents because they were able to strategize a career plan, seek advice in critical times, and capitalize on their network. Leadership

skills, attending leadership workshops and institutes, or engaging in professional networks were vital. Britton's participants did experience racism and sexism in their path to presidency including within the search process. Stanback Stroud (2009) also did a study on four Black women presidents however she choose to look at their experiences at PWIs. Stanback Stroud found that her participants experienced segregation, stereotypes, and were expected to represent their race.

Yakaboski & Donahoo (2010) did a study on women student affairs administrators and specially noted two recommendations that were taken into consideration in this study: (1) research is needed regarding the experiences of student affairs administrators with intersecting race and gender identities and (2) research is needed that does not solely look at the deficiencies of a woman's leaders. This study addresses both recommendations as it focuses on the experiences of Black women and uses resilience as a framework. It also adds another layer by specifically exploring the leadership of senior administrators within a potentially racial charged environment.

Renn and Hughes (2004) edited a book on women in student affairs at mid-career where authors contributed their experiences as it pertained to choices surrounding pursuing the terminal degree, navigating career decisions with a spouse, partner, or significant other, balancing the complexities of being a working mother, as well as making the options available should these women want to advance their careers to senior leadership. Though this book is a resource and gives some insights into the experiences of women in student affairs it does not speak to the specific experiences of Black women in senior level management within student affairs.

So much of the research regarding higher education focuses on the students and recruiting, retaining, and supporting them. Within that research, what is not often acknowledged is that some of the same issues of recruitment, retention, and support are also needed for the staff, faculty, and administration of women and persons of color. What follows are brief descriptions of a few of the terms used to describe the experiences of women in the workplace; class-ceiling, concrete-ceiling, and glass-cliff as well as one of the resources that contribute to the resilience of working women; mentors.

Glass-ceiling. Many terms have been used to describe the road blocks that women face when attempting to navigate the male-dominated work culture in order to advance their careers. The most used term is *glass-ceiling* a metaphor that represents the invisible (glass) barriers for all women not seen as potential candidates by their bosses. Blatant discrimination is not usually used; however, microaggressions such as a subjective rationale to provide an explanation of promotions not occurring are used (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Glass ceilings are not impossible but difficult to break through, meaning a few women have succeeded to levels of higher leadership. Renn and Hughes (2004) noted that sometimes glass ceilings are self-imposed such as the many roles that women feel the need to fulfill for others (i.e., mother, wife, spouse, daughter); therefore, advancements in careers are put on hold or not pursued.

Concrete-ceiling. Another term used to describe career advancement for women of color is a *concrete ceiling*, representing the barriers that are even harder to break through because of race and ethnicity discriminations in addition to gender discriminations (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Concrete ceilings do not offer a way to look through to the other side as a glass ceiling might. A concrete ceiling is a metaphor

for opportunities that present themselves for forward movement but do not occur because of the lack of role models to provide incentive, motivation, and direction (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). The term *labyrinth* (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010) is used to describe the maze or difficult navigation needed to get through the ceilings, whether glass or concrete, at times an individual gets turned in the wrong direction.

Glass-cliff. Once women reach a high level of power such as senior administration, the barriers continue. They are assigned projects or tasks that are already failing, highly visible, or have the most potential for failure. This concept is called a *glass-cliff* representing their making it past the ceiling, then being put out on a cliff with great potential to fall off, seemingly of their own accord, because they are not provided the same levels of support or assistance as their male counterparts (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

Mentors. Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, and Osteen (2006) found that with Black students an adult or peer referring to them as a leader had an immense influence on their leadership identity and confidence. The influence that adult mentors provide to student leaders establishes expectations or standards that are above where the students see themselves, to offer challenge and support, to validate what growth they observe, to encourage the students to try new opportunities and take risks (Komives et al., 2006). "The strongest contributing college resources to students' belief systems regarding leadership…were interactions and experiences with faculty, administrative support staff, and peers" (Thompson, 2006, p. 348). Adults and mentors assist the students to process and make sense of how to integrate their shifting approaches into their leadership style (Komives, et al., 2004). Increasing the number of Black faculty and staff

is thought to have a positive effect on the number of Black students involved in co-curricular activities (Perkins, 2001). Having adults that reflect a student's race is important as is having those that who are of the same gender. Watt (2006) found that students at all-women colleges felt more supported because of the affirmation of peers and mentors who looked like them and perhaps understood what they were going through. With so few women of color, or Black women in particular, to be a peer mentor, this support is lacking and necessary. "On coeducational campuses, more exclusive programming for women could be implemented to provide the support that women need from other women" (Watt, 2006, p. 332). Watt (2006) recommended that university staff be aware of their own identities, biases, and how these might influence their interactions with students so as not to reinforce oppressive behavior, judgments, or myths. With Black women, staff need not perpetuate the "strong Black woman myth" through their reactions and advice because that can be deflating and continue a cycle of depression and self-doubt if the women are not living up to the expected stereotype (Watt, 2006).

Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the identity of Black women and their racial and gender identity. The framework of resilience was used to describe the risk factors with the potential to deter the career mobility of Black women such as campus climate, the Black box, microaggressions, ceilings, labyrinths, and cliffs as well as the compensatory

variables such as code switching and mentoring. The next chapter provides a detailed description of the methodology and research perspective intended to answer the research questions established for this study. The next chapter includes a description of the criteria and recruitment methods that were used to select participants as well as the strategies for data collection and how the data was analyzed.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

The chapter begins with a review of the purpose of the study and research questions. It then provides a detailed description of the methodology used. The chapter explores the recruitment criteria used to identify, narrow down, and ultimately invite participants to be part of the study and the data collection methods, which incorporated interviews, document review, and a research journal. This qualitative research design was influenced by phenomenology and life histories and has a theoretical framework of resilience as a guide; therefore, a brief description of each theory is provided. The chapter concludes with a statement from the researcher and a discussion of the limitations of the study.

Purpose Statement

This study investigated the experiences of Black women senior student affairs administrators at predominantly White institutions in order to understand the strategies for success that led to their advancement to senior-level positions.

Research Questions

This qualitative study had three overarching research questions:

1. How do Black women senior student affairs administrators at predominantly White institutions describe their experiences leading to the Vice President for Student Affairs or Dean of Students position?

2. What professional, institutional, or personal issues affect Black women senior student affairs administrators at predominantly White institutions?
3. What strategies do Black women senior student affairs administrators at predominantly White institutions employ in order to be successful in their careers?

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is the best approach to capture and express the experiences of participants in their own words (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research is appropriate for this study because the research questions are designed to elicit stories from the participants. The topic of women SSAOs needs to be explored because this subsection of women within higher education has not yet been extensively explored in the literature; research has been conducted in the public sector as well as regarding faculty and presidents but not specifically senior student affairs administrators at four-year institutions. In addition, as the researcher, I come to the work as a Black woman leader and acknowledge the role my identity plays in the collection and analysis of the experiences of others. This format allowed me to be an "active learner" who let the stories of the women speak for themselves (Creswell, 1998). "Qualitative researchers often study written communications found in natural situations" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 291). The focus of the research is not that the women are SSAOs; rather, it is an exploration of their journey to their current leadership position and key moments that they perceive as having shaped their journey. It is for these reasons that I chose the theories of phenomenology and life histories to guide the design of this research and influence the research and interview questions.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the study of social experiences and perceptions of people in their own words (Patton, 2002, p 69). van Manen (1990) referred to phenomenology as "the study of human beings and how they exist in the world" (p. 4). As students of lived experiences, phenomenologists acknowledge that everyone's story is unique and cannot be generalized (van Manen, 1990). The aim of phenomenology is to make sense and meaning of experiences. It is less concerned with verifying the facts and accuracy of the experiences and more focused on describing and understanding the nature of the experience. It seeks to understand the uniqueness of a person's experience. It recognizes that the solutions that work for one female may not necessarily work for another. It asks participants to reflect on their past experiences and serves as a means to collect them (van Manen, 1990). This study analyzes the phenomenon of Black women SSAOs at PWIs.

Phenomenology is also appropriate for this study as not only does it focus on individual experiences, but it also explores the structures that make up those experiences. For this study, the structure being analyzed is higher education at PWIs (van Manen, 1990) and is specifically asked through the second research question: What professional and institutional issues affect Black women senior student affairs administrators at predominantly White institutions?

Life Histories

"Life history is the study of the life experiences of individuals from the perspective of how these individuals interpret and understand the world around them" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003, p. 484). The purpose of a life history is to capture aspects of a person's life experiences revolving around one aspect. In this study, the life histories

captured were the experiences of Black women SSAOs at PWIs. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1994) equated life histories to telling stories that are similar to the traditions of passing down knowledge, values, history, in oral form found in Black culture; therefore, it is appropriate to use life histories to research this population.

Life histories are often used to go in depth into the lives of those who have not yet been studied as the norm and those whose experiences are not yet understood (Patton, 2002). There has been research about the experiences of Black women faculty (Griffin & Reddick, 2011) and presidents (Farrington, 2001; Smith Latimore, 2009; Turner, 2007) within higher education but not yet concerning those working in student affairs and co-curricular education within a university. Life histories help to understand perspectives, changes, and development of culture for a particular individual (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

Phenomenology and life histories are preferred for this study because they take into account the experiences and perspectives of the person as well as the socially constructed stereotypes of society (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Merriam & Associates, 2002). The method of life history "is particularly useful for giving the reader and insider's view of a culture" (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 96) and "the inner experiences of an individual or a group of individuals" (Gall et al., 2003, p. 485). Taking into consideration the intersectionality of Black women leaders requires the exploration of their experiences and how their identity has shaped their leadership. "The excavation involved in re-creating a life story is an extraordinarily intrusive process – time consuming, absorbing, and demanding" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1994, p. 622).

Selection of Participants

According to Creswell (1998) and Patton (2002), there are 16 strategies for sampling within qualitative research, one of which is a criterion sample. Criterion sampling is used to study those who have met a set criterion (Patton, 2002). The purpose of this method is to understand and gather information about cases that expose weaknesses in a system that can then be a target for a solution (Patton, 2002). Criterion sampling is most impactful when all participants studied who meet the criterion also have experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). The criteria for inclusion in this study were three: (1) Black female student affairs professionals who (2) currently held the title of senior student affairs officer and (3) were employed at a four-year PWI in the United States. By specifying the type of position and institution, the study narrowed in on the lived experiences of those who had advanced to the position of vice president for student life and/or dean of students and who had learned to navigate their leadership within a higher education culture in which their race and gender were not dominant. The barriers, challenges, and strategies for success to the SSAO career path could then be identified and potentially used to inform pathways for future generations.

Four participants were selected for this study. This smaller participant size is typical for life history research as demonstrated by Wolcott (1983, 2002) and Hallett (2013), who each interviewed one person. Because this was a phenomenological study designed to provide an in-depth investigation of participants' lived experience, a small number of participants was appropriate (van Manen, 1990). Finally, qualitative research often requires small sample sizes because of its in-depth inquiry into "detail, context, and nuance" (Creswell, 1998, p. 227). The intention here was for the small sample to

produce rich descriptions, information, and insight into the experiences of the Black women SSAOs at PWIs. This approach offered the opportunity for me to engage in extended, in-depth conversations with the participants and to learn about their journey to their current leadership positions.

The SSAOs chosen for this study had been in the student affairs profession for 10 years or more making them ideal because they were able to reflect on their experiences and key moments that led them to SSAOs as well as the factors that assisted or threatened to impede their career advancement. Reflection aligns with the theory of resilience as it requires looking back at experiences and identifying the associated risk factors.

The population was also ideal not only because of their work experience but their life experiences and their ability to make sense of their journeys. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1994) constructed life histories of people who were in their "middle years" (early 40s to mid-50s) because they were in the developmental time of their lives when they are both able to "look backward and forward" (p. 10).

Recruitment of Participants

The participants for this study were recruited through one-on-one conversations, social media posts and direct messages, and referrals from potential participants, co-workers, and former colleagues. The potential participants were also asked to identify others who fit the criteria for inclusion in the study. Current student affairs professionals, Annual NASPA volunteers and conference attendees were asked the following: "I am working on my dissertation proposal on Black women leadership identity development at four-year PWIs. I am looking to interview four Black women SSAOs who are currently working at a PWI. Who might you suggest?" These inquiries led to a pool of 19

potential participants. Of these 19, five were eliminated from consideration because they either did not work at a four-year institution or the institution did not have an undergraduate student body of more than 50% White undergraduate students. The remaining 14 were then organized by institution type (public or private) and institution size (less than 7,000 full-time undergraduate students enrolled). There were six potential participants from small private institutions within the West and South Regions (see Table 1) that I could access either because I lived close by or it was in near proximity to the location of the annual professional association conference

I contacted the six potential participants via phone at their campus office. I then followed up with an email in which I introduced myself and described the study (see Appendix A). Many of the potential participants had administrative assistants whom I corresponded with in addition to the potential participants. After a confirmation either via voicemail, phone call, or email, I sent the participant, and if applicable the administrative assistant, the informed consent via email to be reviewed and signed (see Appendix B) and that she or her administrative assistant scanned and emailed or faxed it back to me. Four of the six agreed to be participants of the study.

In order to keep the participants' identity confidential, each woman was given a pseudonym: Elise, Grace, Judy, and Patricia. All participants worked at four-year private colleges and universities that had been founded more than 100 years ago and that served fewer than 7,000 full-time undergraduates. At each of the institutions, over 50% of the undergraduate students and faculty were White and less than 50% of the undergraduate students and faculty were female. At all institutions, less than 8% of the faculty and less

than 7% of the undergraduate students were Black. In all but one institution, less than 50% of faculty members were female (see Table 1).

Table 1. Participant Institution Statistics

	Faculty Demographics			Undergraduate Student Demographics		
Region	Female	White	Black	Female	White	Black
West	48%	70%	7%	57%	55.4%	6%
West	47%	78%	1%	64%	55%	2%
South	62%	85%	6%	68%	64%	8%
South	37%	79%	3%	61%	69%	5%

*Regions according to the U.S. Department of Commerce Economics and Statistics Administration U.S. Census Bureau (2014).

Data Collection

I used three forms of data collection as recommended for qualitative research: interviews, document review, and research notes (Patton, 2002). Interviews are used as a data collection method within qualitative research in order to retrieve unobservable information such as emotions, behaviors, reactions, associations, or exchanges between individuals from another's point of view (Patton, 2002).

Interviews

After receiving the signed informed consent form, I scheduled a day and time to conduct the first interview. Prior to the first interview, a statement about the study, research questions, purpose statement, confidentiality of the participant's information throughout the study, and the intent of the results of the study were also provided to the participants (Creswell, 2003) (see Appendix A).

Each participant was interviewed twice; each interview lasted over 75 minutes (see Table 2). There was at least a three-month interval between interviews. Working with each participant, together we selected a location for the interview, method (in person, phone, or video conference), and a mutually agreeable time of day. The interviews were conducted in person, and via Skype and phone. The annual professional association conference for student affairs administrators, NASPA, also provided an opportunity for face-to-face interviews with participants. Interviews were primarily conducted face to face although telephone and video conferencing (Skype) were used when the participant's schedule or cost of travel prohibited a face-to-face meeting. Table 2 provides an overview of the time and location of each interview. Each participant received the interview questions (see Appendix C) at least two days prior to each interview.

Table 2. Interview Duration

Name	Length of 1st Interview	Location of 1st Interview	Length of 2nd Interview	Location of 2nd Interview
Grace	100 minutes	Her office	127 minutes	Her office
Judy	111minutes	Skype	125 minutes	Her office
Elise	108 minutes	NASPA	124 minutes	Phone
Patricia	76 minutes	Phone	121 minutes	Her office

Life histories are told in the form of a story; therefore, it is important to use open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews in order for the participant to guide the stories shared (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Patton, 2002). Semi-structured interviews

start the line of interviewing adhering to a predetermined set of questions in a specific order and open-ended questions in a flexible order dependent on the participant's answers, experience, and perspective (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Follow-up questions were asked dependent on participants' responses. The interview questions were designed to elicit specific memories, examples, experiences, and anecdotes as well as to elicit how the interviewee made meaning of particular phenomena (van Manen, 1990).

All interviews were audio-recorded in order to capture the story as accurately as possible (van Manen, 1990). Interviews were then transcribed verbatim by a third-party professional transcriptionist. The transcriber was approved by the Institutional Research Board and signed a confidentiality statement to protect the identity of and data shared by the participants. I verified the accuracy of the transcriptions by listening to the audio recording while reading the transcript. I sent each participant a copy of the transcript along with follow-up and clarifying questions. For example, if there was a potential theme emerging, an interesting concept introduced by another participant, or a specific issue mentioned in the interview, I would include follow-up questions in an email that accompanied the transcript. For example, I sent Judy the following question, "Why do you think 'you will always be black for pay or gay for pay or whatever your particular underrepresented role might be'? How is that communicated/passed down?"

Participants were asked to complete the Participant Profile Inventory (see Appendix D), which was distributed via an electronic survey tool. They were provided the link prior to the first interview, given reminder emails between interviews, and provided the survey in paper form at the second interview if necessary. The survey has

30 questions within four categories (education, employment, personal, and parent/family history) and was estimated to take approximately 15 minutes to complete. This inventory was intended to gather demographic information about each participant though it proved to be an inefficient way to do so. Their busy schedules required repeated reminder emails to participants and their assistants to collect the completed inventories; in spite of the reminders, some participants left some questions unanswered. It is not possible to determine if the questions were intentionally left unanswered or due to an oversight when completing the inventory.

Document Review

Understanding the context surrounding the life story is vital (Merriam & Associates, 2002); therefore, I supplemented the information received through the interviews with a document review. I requested curriculum vitas/résumés from participants, which allowed me to gain additional information regarding their leadership paths. In addition to the résumés, I searched the university or college websites and search engines for additional public information. If the participants used social media such as Facebook or Twitter, I requested permission via the informed consent form to "friend" or "follow" them, respectively. However this method was not substantially fruitful and therefore was not used in the study. The document review also allowed me to build rapport with the participants as I was able to make reference to experiences, preface a question, or make connections to what the participant was sharing without additional back story needed. Documents such as curriculum vitae and documents shared in public arenas such as the Internet are all important to collect to assist with telling a life history (Denzin, 1970).

Field Notes/Research Journal

When studying the lived experiences of others, van Manen (1990) observed that a journal assists in determining patterns or themes throughout the study. He went on to suggest that reflection is a large part of this process because it allows the researcher's internal thoughts to have voice and to be analyzed. Using the framework of life stories suggests that I also be aware of my own identity and the biases that could affect both the research design and my interpretation of the data. I examined my own life story prior to conducting this study and subsequently shared my story with the participants to establish a level of intimacy between us as they told their own stories (Hallett, 2013).

The life history interviewing was emotionally and mentally draining for me as the researcher; participants' stories were often very emotional as they shared the pain and joy of their experiences. In order to manage my role and reflections during the data collection and analysis, I incorporated a method for debriefing the stories of the participants, the interviewing itself, and my connection to the stories (Patton, 2002). Following each interview, I would reflect on my thoughts, feelings, reactions, and emotions using an audio-recorder or written journal. Before, during, and after the interviews, I kept field notes of our interactions; for example, what I saw, experienced, and thought, supplemented what was captured by the personal narratives of each participant. Ongoing reflection throughout the process of data collection helped me consider different aspects of the participants and how they might be experiencing exchanges that otherwise would not be considered (Hallett, 2013). This format of documenting revealed the insights that stood out in the study and assisted me in preparing the data for analysis (Creswell, 2003).

Data Analysis

Data analysis constitutes preparing the data provided by the participants for analysis, conducting different analyzing procedures, and repeating these steps until the researcher has come to an understanding, an interpretation, and a conclusion (Creswell, 2003). The semi-structured open-ended interview style meant that even though some questions varied according to the flow of the participant's life story, there were also common questions asked of each participant. I began the data analysis by examining the responses to the common questions to ascertain comparable or related themes (Patton, 2002). Because the raw data from interviews are an essential component for qualitative analysis (Patton, 2002), I listened to the recording of the interview while thoroughly reading the transcription in an effort to be fully immersed in the data as they were being analyzed. This also allowed me to begin reflecting on any overarching generalities about the individual interview data and documenting them in the margins of the transcript (Creswell, 2003) before comparing the interviews to one another. Some emergent themes were also added as questions to the second round of interviews.

The themes identified in the initial analysis were grouped by related topics to form 10 categories: faith, hair, identity development, integrated spaces, mentors, tokenism, nurturing motivation, salaries, strategies for success, and leadership styles. The ten categories were assigned abbreviation codes and tagged within the Atlas.ti software to the transcriptions to which they seemingly applied (Creswell, 2003). The code names were determined by the phrasing and terms the participants used, also known as *in vivo* terms (Creswell, 2003). In order to gain a deep, rich understanding of the data, the analysis was repeated four times to identify additional themes or patterns. For

instance, the second wave of theme revisions resulted in the development of the cluster of perceptions of appearance, which at that time included hair, dress, appearances, being mistaken, and visibility at events. The third round included perceptions in the hiring process and the perceptions in visibility, power, and influence. The fourth and final round resulted in the themes presented in this manuscript. When new themes, categories, or codes emerged, they were clustered with and around the original ten themes. Subthemes were identified and the coding began to align to link the stories of the participants with the categories identified as part of the model (Creswell, 2003).

Guided by the theory of resilience, the data were also sorted and presented in two overarching categories: the risk factors that created the experience to overcome and the compensatory variables that allowed the participants to sustain themselves in the environment. Using the theory of resilience helped me to focus on the internal support compensatory variables that the participants were not communicating overtly but that played a power role in their successes.

Data Integrity

Though full confidentiality may be unachievable because so few women met the study criteria, the following efforts were made to protect the participants' personal information. The interview recordings, transcripts, and documents collected about each participant were kept in a password-protected computer. All participants were identified by non-specific descriptors for the institution in which they worked. The interview transcripts and recordings will be destroyed three years following the completion of the study. I shared my biases that might have influenced the study and its findings with the

participants in an effort to be transparent (Creswell, 2003; Gall et al., 2007). Each participant signed a consent form so that she was aware of the agreements being made I wrote and shared a researcher's statement in an effort to examine my own identity (Cole, 2009). I sent each participant my résumé and biographical information prior to the initial interview in order for them to gain some perspective on me and my background before engaging in this intimate process of storytelling and story sharing.

Participants were provided an opportunity to review or member-check their transcribed interviews in its entirety and the categories identified from the study to affirm the accuracy of how they were represented as well as to elaborate or provide clarity of things stated (Creswell, 2003; Gall et al. 2003; Hallett, 2013). They were also provided a draft of the analysis and given the opportunity to affirm or make suggestions to the themes that were identified from the collection of stories (Denzin, 1970) so they could review my conclusions and analysis to ensure correct interpretation and completeness (Gall et al., 2003).

Researcher's Statement

Although I was interested in the women's stories because of the opportunities to extend research to include the experiences of student affairs practitioners and to inform the practice of those who supervise, mentor, and work alongside Black women, the process of conducting this study was both empowering and challenging. It was empowering to sit with these women, hear their stories, and connect with their strength. At the same time, it was difficult to hear their stories about the institutional and quotidian challenges they face. As I struggled to find the words to articulate why the participant's experiences were worth sharing, I experienced internal turmoil that ultimately led to a

personal examination of the ways the participants' challenges have mirrored my own. Some of the participants' experiences of discrimination were so subtle that others might see them as insignificant. However, it is clear that these seemingly small, seemingly subtle acts mount up and take a toll on the participants. I had to confront – and accept – the reality that I, too, experience these daily acts of microaggression and discrimination.

My larger goal for this study is to contribute to scholarship related to women in higher education in general and African American women in particular. My hope is that in telling their stories, the participants have changed even as I have changed. In learning the stories of the women, readers can increase their awareness of systemic oppression that can impede women's progress and they can use the participants' stories as a catalyst for change.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is the specific focus of the research on Black women SSAOs at traditionally White institutions of higher education in the United States. Also, I identify as a Black women leader; therefore, as the analysis of the stories shared was constructed, my identity and thoughts impacted how I made meaning of the data (Patton, 2002). There is the potential for the analysis and importance placed on the findings to be affected by the connection between me and the subject matter. This was managed by keeping a researcher's journal as an outlet to recognize my own experiences and potential similarities or differences of experiences with the participants. This was managed through providing the participants with my researcher's statement prior to the initial meeting and describing my role as researcher prior to the start of each interview. Finally,

I was careful to distinguish between themes that are essential to the experience of Black women SSAOs and those that are not unique to that experience (van Manen, 1990).

The next chapter provides an account of the most salient findings shared by the participants supported by direct quotes and paraphrased encounters. For the purposes of this study, *salient* was determined by two or more participants sharing experiences within a specific cluster theme. The chapter provides a review of the research questions and purpose and the findings of the study organized by risk factor and compensatory variables as defined in the theory of resilience.

Chapter 4: Findings

This study investigated the experiences of Black women senior student affairs officers (SSAOs) at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) in order to understand the strategies for success that led to their advancement to their current senior level positions.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do Black women senior student affairs administrators at predominantly White institutions describe their experiences leading to the Vice President for Student Affairs or Dean of Students position?
2. What professional, institutional, or personal issues affect Black women senior student affairs administrators at predominantly White institutions?
3. What strategies do Black women senior student affairs administrators at predominantly White institutions employ in order to be successful in their careers?

This chapter introduces the four participants and then describes their experiences organized by the theoretical framework of resilience Resilience is the process of overcoming adversity despite risk. This study considered *resilience* as a Black woman reaching the senior student affairs officer (SSAO) position at a PWI. Below I describe the risk factors that the participants experienced in their path to and within their current positions. I then describe the compensatory variables and coping mechanisms that assisted them in overcoming those risk factors. *Risk* was considered any factor or

situation that threatened to impede the participant from becoming an SSAO (Grizenko & Fisher, 1992).

This study employed the compensatory model of resilience as it most correlated with the experiences of the participants. Compensatory variables benefit the participant or help them gain competence, which then indirectly alleviates the chance of the risk negatively affecting him or her. Compensatory factors are therefore different from protective factors, which directly interact with the stressor or risk (Luthar, 1991). Data were collected through the two one-on-one interviews with each participant, which were transcribed verbatim, coded, and analyzed. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings which include tokenism, perception of appearance, perception of communication styles, and inequitable compensation as risk factors and mentors, giving back, and spirituality as compensatory variables.

Introduction of Participants

The research participants are part of a small sample size of SSAO professionals. Of the 13,000 members of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), 2,470 are SSAOs and/or assistant vice presidents (NASPA, 2013), 1,466 are women, and only 248 of those women hold the title of vice president or dean (Courtney Patterson, personal communication, April 1, 2013). These small numbers suggest that women are not advancing to senior-level positions despite their years and experience in the field. I was unable to distinguish members by race due to "some issues with [the] member data-base that has made the [race/ethnicity] variable unreliable" (Brian Sponsler, personal communication, March 12, 2013). With such a small number of SSAOs who are members of NASPA and an even smaller number who are African American women,

it was important to take extra precautions to ensure the confidentiality of the four participants in this study; therefore, the following is an aggregate description with ranges for certain categories. All the names used are pseudonyms.

At the time of the interviews, all participants were the senior student affairs officer at their campus reporting directly to the president and holding the title of dean of students, vice president for student affairs, or both. The participants had worked in student affairs between 10 and 26 years and had held their current position between one and nine years. Three participants had earned doctoral degrees and one a Master's degree. All but one had attended PWIs for their undergraduate and graduate education. All four women were married; two had one to three children, and two had no children. One had between 10 and 15 siblings while the others had between one and two siblings in their support network (see Table 3). The following sections will detail the themes established from the interviews with the participants.

Table 3. Participant Demographics

Demographics	Elise	Grace	Judy	Patricia
Years in the Field	26+	21-25	10-15	26+
Years in Current Position	10-15	7-9	1-2	4-6
Number of Institutions Employed	3-4	5-6	3-4	5-6
Type of Undergraduate Institution(s) attended	4-yr private HBCU	4-yr public PWI	4-yr private PWI	4-yr public PWI
Type of Graduate Institution(s) attended	4-yr public PWI / 4-yr private PWI	4-yr public PWI / 4-yr private PWI	4-yr public PWI	4-yr private PWI
Degree(s)	BA, MA, PhD	BA, MA, EdD	BA, EdM	AB, PhD
Relationship Status	Married	Married	Married	Married
Children	1-3	1-3	0	0
Siblings	10-15	1-2	1-2	1-2

Note: B.A. or A.B. = bachelor of arts; EdD = Doctorate of Education;
Ed.M. = Master of Education; HBCU = historically Black; MA = Master of Arts;
PhD = Doctor of Philosophy; PWI = predominantly White institution; yr = year

Risk Factors and Compensatory Variables

The experiences the participants described leading to their current position and the professional, institutional, or personal issues fell into two categories based on the theoretical framework of resilience: risk factors and compensatory variables. The four risk factors described were tokenism, perceptions of appearance, perceptions of communication styles, and inequitable compensation. The three compensatory variables explicated were mentors, giving back and spirituality.

Risk Factors

Risk factors the participants identified had the potential to impede them in their career advancement and necessitated the support of compensatory variables in order to be resilient in the higher education setting. The following sections explore the four types of risk factors described by the participants: tokenism (specifically unspoken expectations which includes representing race, proving oneself, and serving as a role model as well as heighten visibility which included integrating spaces, surveillance, and being mistaken for another), perceptions of appearance (specifically attire and hair), perceptions of communication styles (specifically mannerisms, tone of voice, and delivery of communication), and inequitable compensation.

Tokenism. The participants described experiencing tokenism through the unspoken expectations of others in addition to the heigtened visibility of their presence. Some of the unspoken expectations mentioned were representing their race or gender on committees or at events, having to prove themselves, disprove stereotypes, disassociate themselves from preconceived notions of their colleagues, having to adjust their actions based on the perceptions of others, and being a mentor to students of color. One of the

affects of their herighten visibility is that they were often the first and only in spaces or integrating spacing with their presence. They were also often mistaken for the few other Black women on their campus. The participants further expressed feeling responsible for the unspoken expectations and perceived that the expectations they were held to were not expected of others outside of their race or gender.

Unspoken expectations. The unspoken expectations of being asked to represent one's identity, proving oneself, and serving as a role model are all classified under the heightened visibility category of the theory of tokenism (Kanter, 1977). They felt as though their actions and reactions were closely watched for stereotypes and attributed to all Black women, not just to them specifically. Because of this expectation to represent their race and gender, the women had to carefully navigate the perceptions, intents, and unspoken expectations of others as they weighed their emotions and reactions to decisions, actions, and thoughts of others who might or might not be intentionally trying to discriminate. Representing their race was a complicated risk factor that the participants had to maneuver.

Grace described the unspoken expectations of being expected to know, understand, support, and represent all aspects of being a minority whether or not she identified with that group while her colleagues did not share the same expectation.

> Each community expects me to be their supporter and then, I'm also supposed to be the expert on everything "colored" and then also for me it's doubly hard to hear people who are supposed to be institutional leaders say the wrong thing. And I cannot talk about it, I just have to sort of work

> around it. I have to still make sure that the work that I'm doing for all students is [done].

Here Grace alluded to the various constituents all having different unspoken expectations for her, some of which might be based on her identity. Grace's experience paralleled the finding in Hirshfield and Joseph's (2012) research on Black women faculty: "The assumption that she must be sympathetic to, and knowledgeable about, the experiences of students in other minority groups because of her one minority group membership is unfounded yet commonly described" (pp. 218-219). Grace also articulated that when her colleagues said things inappropriate for an administrator, it was somehow still her unspoken and internalized responsibility to silently pick up the pieces. Grace did later describe how she navigated confronting colleagues and how those actions would be perceived by others. Unless a comment or action was egregious or repetitive, she tried to restrict herself to not confront or correct a colleague in a public setting because ultimately she was expected to serve as a role model.

Patricia talked about how her actions were not only being scrutinized by her colleagues and employees, but by the students and younger generations who are looking for a professional with whom they can identify or who have never seen a Black women in a leadership role. "[I] always feel that I'm a role model for my race and gender wherever it is that I am… So yes, when I step forward, I feel like I'm bringing everybody else with me." Patricia described feeling as though it was part of her unspoken expectations to pull others up with her. While trailblazing in her own career, she has the added unspoken expectation of trying to make a pathway for those who come after her. The other participants, like

Patricia, tried to be available to as many students as they could. An example of this was their willingness to participate in this study, which required four hours of their time. At some point during the interview, each participant mentioned how she tries to gives as much as her schedule permits.

Though it may seem admirable and a good use of time, the unspoken expectation of mentoring future generations, if done in excess, could become a risk factor in the participant's career advancement. Hirshfield & Joseph's (2012) study regarding Black women faculty suggested time spent mentoring was time not spent doing research or publishing and that service was not considered in tenure appointment.

The participants spoke about the uneven playing field due to race that they experienced as they interviewed for positions. They reported feeling as though they had to do more to be considered at the same level as their White counterparts. They described the differing expectations and what they had to prove about themselves based on their appearance before their skills and experiences could be considered. Patricia described having to overcome the pre-existing stereotypes of the hiring agent and the difference between herself and peers when being considered for a position.

> Because when you walk in the door…they've got a certain stereotype of an African American person and so you have to jump over that stereotype before they'll even consider you seriously as a candidate So we walk in at a deficit... Whereas other people, that little bar is not even there for them, they just meet them, judge them and then that's it. But for us we've got this little imaginary bar and it's a place for different people.

The deficit that Patricia described for Black professionals whether real or perceived is a lot to deal with in addition to the pressures of job searching. To think that their identity, something that they cannot change or control, puts them behind other applicants can be discouraging and frustrating, but these women rose above it and took it on as a challenge to overcome and a system to infiltrate. Once past this hurdle of the interview, the perceptions, expectations, assumptions, and stereotypes did not dissipate while on the job, yet the women persevered, figured out coping mechanisms, and remained resilient to all the systems in place to deter them from advancing.

Another aspect of career advancement that the participants expressed concern about was how diversity initiatives could be perceived by potential employers. Judy and Elise described how even though they were drawn to working with underrepresented students and ultimately loved it, earlier in their careers they both experienced a moment of pause and a questioning of how the work would be perceived by colleagues and future employers based on the unspoken expectation that people of color get stereotyped into diversity-related fields. For Judy it was about the assumption and potential expectation that since she could identify with some of the characteristics of the students, she would be the best fit to work with them. She did not want her identity to dictate or undermine her abilities; therefore, she chose to go in a different direction.

> ...I was very reluctant to move into the professional field of student services…as it related to multicultural affairs. I wasn't reluctant because I didn't see the value in it. I absolutely saw the value in it but…I had concerns about the ghettoization of up-and-coming talent in higher

> education where if you happen to be a person of color or you happen to be someone who grew up poor, you happen to be somebody who was first-[generation] to go to college, you naturally were going to gravitate towards those kinds of programs and services…and so I respect everybody who did it but I really kind of felt like…I'm not going in that direction, I'm going in a different direction and I did but interestingly enough, it pulled me right back in because the need is so great.

For Judy, it was whether she would work with the diverse populations; however, for Elise, it was whether her work with the diverse populations would be misinterpreted by hiring agents as her sole skill set and therefore limit her career trajectory.

> …so one of the things that I thought was going to be a problem for me was I was the director of Minority Affairs and Affirmative Action and when I got to where I did my internship from when I was doing my PhD, it was a predominantly Black school and [my projects were] lots of things that had still to do with race and ethnicity and so I said to [my boss] at one point, "How am I going to be able to translate this work into a VP position…with such…a narrow focus?" and he told me that he agreed with me [that] it was going to be a problem [but] I think what attracted [my current institution] to me *was*…my portfolio, because even though I had these broad duties of dean…what they really needed was a person, and I'm going to just say a Black person, who could mentor students.

Though Elise was concerned about her career path based on her extensive work experience with diversity affairs, it ended up being the asset that made her attractive for

the dean of students position. Both Judy and Elise fought against the perception of a person who specializes in working with students of color. They believed that this specialization especially being a person of color could have ended up being a detriment to their career.

Heighten visibility. The participants, who all worked at predominantly White institutions, described times when their presence integrated the space, both physical and metaphoric, because part of their identity was not represented until they entered. The participants were some of the first Black women to hold their positions, which held symbolism for constituents of the institution and/or community. They were not seen only as vice president but the Black woman vice president; therefore, their identity became part of their role, part of their job, and part of the unspoken expectations that the students, staff, faculty, and community had for them.

During the course of their career advancement and in their daily lives, the participants unintentionally diversified the spaces that they entered, interacted in, and influenced. Judy shared how the integration of space may be viewed by some as a positive as the first person in the space sets the standard for those who come after. They potentially have options and opportunities that others do not because they offer a team or project the diversity of their identity. Judy also shared the negative, degrading, and undermining effects of being the token, such as being seen as not being qualified for the opportunities received but instead being perceived to have been chosen only for her race and/or gender. Similarly, the participants explained that because they were the only or one of few Black women in their positions, they felt called to represent their race and/or gender. This is what Moore (2013) calls “race specialist” (p. 490).

Grace and Elise shared their experiences of not only having to represent their race but also being the first and only within a space to do so. Both Grace and Elise did not realize that their presence was integrating spaces and having a prolific impact on the community based on their identity until it was pointed out to them. Grace was made aware of her status as the "highest-ranking African American" when a colleague mentioned it to her at a banquet. Before that moment she had not thought about herself in that way. After working or studying for years at PWIs and being surrounded by peers who did not look like them, the participants repeatedly described instances like Grace's where they had forgotten to consider their integration of spaces as either a detriment or a benefit. Elise shared that she had stopped looking for connections within her workplace or profession based on gender or racial identity. She "continue[s] to be the only Black person ever hired…on the senior staff [in over 100 years] yet she does not know "many Black professionals in particular who are at predominantly White institutions in my job."

The level of isolation the participants shared was profound. These women did not have role models who looked like them as they advanced in their careers though now they serve in that role for those who follow. That sense of isolation was also found in Turner's (2002) research on faculty of color. The isolating risk factor of representing their race through integrating spaces led some participants to feel as though they had to prove themselves and prove why they deserved to be in the positions they were in or for which they might be trying to interview.

Judy shared a story of a faculty colleague who realized one day that she was integrating the faculty and the faculty meeting that she was attending. Judy's colleague wondered if she was chosen for the position based on her credentials and capability or as

a status quo or diversity mandate based on her race and/or gender. Judy described the unspoken expectations she has to navigate to prove that she is worthy and belongs while she perceived that her colleagues were given that "credit" automatically. Judy further described how the importance of proving herself was heightened because she "constantly feel[s] a certain obligation to repeatedly prove yourself, not only for yourself but for what you represent because you don't feel like you're just representing yourself." Grace affirmed this perception that her actions are not judged as hers alone but that of her race and/or gender

> I'm very conscious because now I'm aware people see [me] as representing all African Americans and it's not true but [I] own that. If [I] were to go out here and [act] crazy, they wouldn't say [Grace] did it, they'd say this crazy ass Black woman… It's that you wear, your suit, and it's on you all the time and people make judgments. It's one thing to talk about me but if I do something stupid, don't put that on all African Americans…

From Grace's comment, "now I'm aware," we can gather that she has learned the unspoken expectations of how her actions may be perceived by others over time. Though she may not like the perceptions of others, she recognizes that she cannot change them so she chooses to be more aware of her actions because "it's…your suit and it's on you all the time," Feeling as though you are representing your race and having to constantly prove yourself as an exception to stereotypes is emotionally taxing and, according to Kanter (1977), is a common response to tokenism. The feeling that despite their skills and experience they still needed to

prove themselves to gain the respect of their colleagues is another sign of tokenism (Turner, 2002).

It could also be argued that these additional expectations could be attributed to what Hirshfield and Joseph called "identity taxation" (2012, pp. 214). The phrase *identity taxation* is an extension of Amado Padilla's (1994) cultural taxation, a term to express the additional expectations on faculty based on race and gender that adds to their physical, mental, or emotional workload and therefore threatens to impede their ability to do their job or function in the work environment. Hirshfield and Joseph's expansion of the phrase identity taxation to include other intersections of identity including sexual orientation may be connected to additional expectations and responsibilities being added to a faculty member's workload. Another potential unintended consequence may also be added pressure to present themselves in a certain way or to prove themselves worth of the job they are already in.

What Judy shared was an example of the internal struggles with having to prove oneself while Patricia shared the external struggles while serving on committees. Patricia was asked to serve on a committee that was outside of her job function, which put her in a position of being a liaison between community members and a fellow colleague on the president's cabinet.

> There was a minority business forum and so our president sent me. I have nothing to do with the business function of the [institution] but yet he, of all of the Vice Presidents… he probably should have chosen the vice president for business and finance not me but because I'm the African

> American vice president, oh let's send her… He wouldn't have asked the previous vice president of student affairs to go to that. That wouldn't have made sense and he probably didn't think enough about what role that [he] wanted the person to play. He saw minority and figured I should go...

Patricia was put in a position to represent the diversity of the institution. She perceived that she was chosen because it was assumed that she would connect with the other Black community members on the committee. This also made her a liaison back to her colleague who she thought should have been at the meetings in the first place and who she believed would have been if not for her identity. In this instance, she was being used by the institution as a poster child or token to reflect the institution's diversity in its senior leadership. Patricia believed that speaking up against it and pointing out the microaggressions would not assist in her career advancement. Like the other three participants in similar situations, she went along with it and did the best she could in the situation while repressing her feelings of injustice.

Judy mentioned similar examples of integrating spaces and wondered if she was asked to partake in committees and projects as an expression of how she was valued by her superiors and the institution or due to her inability to put herself first and say no to opportunities when she already had too much on her plate. Elise made it a point to emphasize her realization that her presence on committees and at meetings was not a recognition of her power but rather her visibility.

> [Two upset employees] characterized me as a person who was abusing [my] power… that's ridiculous 'cuz I don't have any! I think [that] they are confusing visibility with power. I have a lot of visibility as the only

> Black person on the Senior Staff so I'm in the meetings, I'm at the table, but I don't have any power. I have a small sphere of influence, yes, I'm not going to lie about that, but at the end of the day I don't make the decisions about any large sums of money or hiring, except my small area, so they're confused about that.

Elise agrees that she is very visible in her role however believes her visibility is confused by others with influence. Though she admits that she has influence over certain topics specific to her job function she realizes that she does not have influences beyond that at the institution These nuances are evident to her because of the minimal representation of her gender and race in equivalent positions at her institution. "We don't have a stellar history of including Blacks in senior positions," she stated. Her colleagues believed that she had power due to her position within the institution's organizational structure. Elise however believed that her identity provided visibility and therefore some level of influence but not power. Grace also mentioned her need to clarify her power and influence as a Black woman administrator.

> I think people misjudge the power they think you have because you're an administrator and if you're an African American administrator or a woman administrator you can make things happen. Clearly there are things that I can do or I can get attention drawn to because of the position or even my race because some people are going to hear an issue differently when it comes from me.

Grace described the influence that she has in particular when it comes to issues related to students of color because her colleagues trust her opinion and judgment

on the matter due to her identity and potential affinity to the issue. Though this additional clout is a potential benefit in this setting it is again an example of the unspoken expectation for her to represent her race. In the same way that the women's identity can be used to draw attention to issues of concern, it can also draw attention to the woman herself. The participants discussed the expectations and perceptions surrounding not only their influence and power but also their visibility on the campus.

Grace and Patricia shared that they had to be visible on campus and how that is magnified because their complexion stands out in a crowd at a PWI. Patricia expounded on this realization of the additional expectation that she has based on her identity, which is different from the other vice presidents.

> I joke and say, when we have an event on campus where we're expected to be there, if I'm not there, everybody notices right? And if somebody else, one of the other VPs isn't there, at some point in time maybe somebody will notice but they don't notice the way they notice when I'm not there. So I always feel like I have to go [because] my presence, my lack of presence will be noted, right?

Patricia felt the unspoken ramifications of the absence of her presence perhaps more so than her presence at events. Grace shared the opinion of one of her mentors, who concurred with Patricia's experience: "It'll be three Black/African Americans, in a crowd of a thousand, but they'll remember that it was a lot of African Americans. I think people are uncomfortable...still with too many African Americans…" Grace's remark speaks to not only the visibility at functions but also to what occurs when a limited number of

Black employees are hired within the institution. With so few Black employees, there are even fewer who are administrators and fewer still who are Black women administrators. This causes a heightened sense of surveillance of their actions and again the idea that they are representing more than themselves.

Being mistaken for another. Another product of having few Black women employees is that they are often mistaken for one another. This phenomenon could be a result of difficulty with cross-racial identification which has been examined with juries that cannot distinguish between people of a different race or that are informed by prior experiences with persons of that race (Rutledge, 2001). Whatever the reason or rationale being mistaken for another Black woman on campus was an experience that both Patricia and Judy described occurring. Patricia spoke about the increased chances of being mistaken for one of the few other Black women employees on campus when they have a similar stature or complexion.

> … This is going to sound really kind of comical but also sad… I've had conversations with a couple of my colleagues on campus, there's only maybe about four African American women on campus that I can really think of who are serving in some professional capacity and there are two who are similar in skin complexion and stature and so we tease about the fact that we can't wear our hair the same way because we will be mistaken for the other…

Here Patricia mentioned how few Black women are in a professional capacity, inferring that there are many other Black women in non-professional positions on the campus (e.g. administrative, custodial, food service). I also found it interesting that at the end of this comment, Patricia stated that if their hairstyles were too similar, they would be mistaken

for one another, not that they might be. The certainty of the response of their colleagues is profound and telling of the climate that Black professional staff members endure. Judy shared both her experiences and rationalization of mistaken identity on her campus.

> …it's not that it doesn't happen to White people, because of course it does, but that's the benefit of privilege in that your racial composition and the privilege that you hold around your race would never get you to think that on some level the person mistook you for someone else for some trivial reason versus they stopped taking in information once they saw a Black face or they stopped really getting to know you, they see your role, they see your relationships at the college and they don't really see you. …that is a real representation of tokenism, when there are so few of us and there's no real need to get to understand who we are as people. I can have a five-minute conversation sometime with a colleague, who I don't know that well but know well enough [to know that] they're mistaking me for someone else.

Judy's theory acknowledges that mistaken identity happens despite race yet also describes the differences in rationale for its occurrence. She described the tokenism that occurs when the person is seen as just the role that he or she plays on the campus and not a person to get to know and value. This tokenism leaves Black women questioning their value to the community as an individual and whether they were hired to fill a quota or to provide the perspectives of that race and/or gender on diversity initiatives. The experience of being mistaken for another is a risk factor. It is something that Black women professionals have to

consider, endure, and overcome to succeed. The participants had to not only adjust to colleagues who mistook them for other Black women but also those who blurred the identities and experiences of different minorities as a homogenous group.

Because of the tokenism they faced at their PWIs, the participants shared a theme of unspoken expectations that they experienced. As the participants integrated spaces, they faced the different views of what that meant including that they were provided the opportunity solely based on their identity, which caused them to feel they needed to prove themselves. The participants felt the expectation to represent their race in a number of settings; on committees, on the President's cabinet and at events. While in those settings though, they were careful to share their perspective and they acknowledged that they had influence in those setting but they were emphatic that it was not power. They also recognized that their visibility was more noticeable not only because they worked at a PWI but also because there were so few Black women professionals employed at their institutions for whom at times they had been mistaken. Finally, the participants shared the expectation but also their love for mentoring students. Despite the potential perceived rationales for a person of color to be engaged in work with minority groups, they still loved and continued to do what they did. The tokenism the participants faced in the workplace did not, however, stop at unspoken expectations and heightened visibility but continued into perceptions of appearance as well.

Perceptions of Appearance

According to Kanter (1977), women who are tokens in the workplace perceive added pressure on appearance so unlike their male counterparts, they are judged not only

by their skills, experiences, and past performance alone. The participants all discussed the ways they were perceived by others and the effort they put into overcoming assumptions based on their outward appearance. From the hiring process to on the job, they were challenged with interpreting and navigating the unspoken expectations of their colleagues. The participants shared their experiences regarding the assumptions around their expertise based on perceptions of age and stature, pressure to conform to the appearance of the dominant culture, and finally their struggles combating the internal and external messages and misperceptions around Black hair and how that is addressed and perceived in the workplace.

All of the participants stood at or below 5'4" and referenced their height at some point during the interviews. The participants commented that their youthful appearance at times threatened to impede career advancement because hiring agents at first glance equated a youthful appearance with a lack of work experience and the ability to do the work required for the position. Participants indicated that even if their professional and academic credentials were excellent and served as a benefit in getting them an interview, the first impressions not only in the hiring process but also ongoing once the job was acquired was a hurdle that had to be repeatedly considered. Patricia described her experiences with interview committees:

> …you know, people, when they think vice president, they always think, they don't think old, but they think mature. And I know… sometimes when I interview for those big positions, I think many times at first people are looking at me like can you really do this job?…my disadvantage is, I'm 56 years old, but I'm short…so people tell me that I look younger than

> I am. So I know when I sit down for a face-to-face interview, no matter how many times somebody has read my résumé, and looked at the dates and they look at me, they assume that I'm much younger than I am…I know that I have to always overcome that in an interview…

A youthful appearance may cause a hiring team to question the fit of a candidate for a higher-level administrator position such as a senior student affairs officer because an assumption that age is correlated with work experience and leadership. Though these experiences may not be a uniquely Black woman experience, they are still a perception with which the participants had to contend on top of numerous others. The two most salient aspects of their appearance that influenced the expectations in the workplace and how their colleagues reacted and treated themwere attire and hair**.**

Attire. Three of the four participants felt extra pressure to be attentive to their appearance, more specifically to the messages their attire sent. Participants indicated that they felt additional pressure to craft and present their professional appearance to overcompensate for possible prejudgments related to their race and gender. The participants seemed to have to first "conform" to fit in and get an even footing within the profession; then once they had made a name for themselves, they could deviate and express their identity without fear of the judgment interfering with their career advancement. Judy shared some of the complexities of appearance in a professional setting that females have to often consider that her male counterparts do not have to be as concerned about such as make-up, manicured nails, jewelry, shoes, whether one is wearing a skirt or pants. Judy further expanded on how what she wore was deemed acceptable based on what position she held in the organization. What is considered

acceptable for a program coordinator to wear may not be acceptable for a vice president to wear in the same setting.

Finally, Judy added race to the considerations around appearance. She shared how she might use her decisions in her outward appearance to neutralize or combat some of the stereotypes that faced her as she walked in the room. If her appearance was "put together," then the likelihood that she would be respected as a professional or at least heard at the table was greater. Patricia agreed stating that there was a different, higher standard that Black women needed to meet than their White peers, "….I think we also have to…be more professionally groomed than maybe some of our colleagues have to be." Grace also affirmed that she had to put more thought into her appearance than her counterparts. Her rationale for this was that she had to combat the prejudgements of others based on her identity and her White co-workers had the privlege of not having to think about their attire in the same ways. Grace provided an example where a White colleague's comment on her attire revealed some assumptions about her identity that she then had to carefully navigate.

> ...there was one day that I came in to work and I had on, I don't know, the colors happen to come together as red black and green. It was not intentional, it just happened, and somebody said something [like], 'Oh you're wearing the revolutionary colors.' I says. 'I am?' At the time I didn't even know...[but I went with it]. I said, 'I am, I have a battle ahead of me today,' and I just, it was totally unconscious…White people were intimidated by this…I mean it's crazy... the fact that someone would say that...

Grace navigated the minefield that is the perceptions of others by using the coping mechanism of witty banter to sidestep her coworker's deficit African-focused comment on the historical symbolism of her outfit. Although this incident had occurred several months before, in retelling the incident during our interview, Grace found that she was still angry about it, which reinforced the deep impact such comments can have on others. Grace recognized that her coworker perceived the combination of the colors she was wearing as a representation of her assumed African roots and further that the colors were used to unite and strengthen the Pan-African and African-American people for a cause. Her coworker's comment on the combination of colors as a preparation for an attack led Grace to realize that her coworker may have felt on the defensive and intimidated by her presence, and this was an opportunity for her coworker to express it whether consciously or not.

The importance of this example is the effect that it had on Grace and how she had to navigate the situation based on her outfit and a comment linking the color of her skin to her rationale for wearing certain colors. Grace had to not only be aware of what she was wearing but how it might be interpreted by her White colleagues. In that moment Grace's strategy for success was to set aside her own thoughts and triggers from the comment and banter with her coworker about how she was getting ready for a rough day ahead, therefore leaving that working relationship in tact for future interactions despite what she endured from the racial implications. The issue of appearance is important for women as a whole (Bartlett,1994); when combined with race, it becomes more complex.

Judy commented about the evolution she has experienced in regards to managing the constant awareness of the perceptions of her appearance due to her race and gender.

As she has advanced in her career and became more comfortable with her self-perception, she has transitioned from viewing interactions with colleagues as a battle to prove the perceptions incorrect and break down the stereotypes to a battle to silence the need for it all.

> But your own internal dialogue is no longer about 'I don't care what you think, this is who I am, I can do the work, I'm going to get it done.' [Instead] you find yourself almost overcompensating for the things that you think people may perceive about you based upon appearances. Based upon how you talk, how you look, how you walk, who you have dinners with and your lunches with and all of that. I used to almost take that as a challenge to say, 'I'll defy everything that you think that you know about me and demonstrate that you know, when it's all said and done, nothing about me,' [but] (a) it's a lot of effort [and] (b), I mean, I've just come to recognize with time that impressions are very powerful for people and you get to a point [when] it's no longer about you having pride in being different, you actually want to do everything you can to limit the noise.

As Grace and Judy described, managing the impressions and perceptions of others takes its toll. Unfortunately, the perceptions of appearance did not stop at attire but extended to hair. Patricia echoed Grace's sentiments that she has had to be more aware of her appearance in order to be on a level playing field with her colleagues, "…we have to be more professionally groomed than some of our colleagues have to be." Like navigating a landmine, the participants had to attempt to recognize patterns and avoid inconsistencies. These unspoken expectations for appearance did not end at age, height, grooming, and

attire but continued with hair: the messages sent and received, the assumptions and perceptions around texture and length, and navigating hairstyle decisions and how that influences one's acceptance and respect as a professional or changes based on the culture surrounding the institution.

Hair. All four participants spoke about how hair influenced their appearance as well as how their different hair texture and, subsequently, their hairstyles choices were influenced by the reactions and responses of their colleagues. The fact that hair was such a salient theme for the participants should not come as a surprise because hair and Black identity have been intertwined for some time (Prince, 2009). Hair in the workplace is fraught with issues of White dominance, male dominance, and difference that make the participants' concerns and experiences related to hair unique from those of other women Green, 2003). Hair represents different things for women of African descent than it does for women from other ethnic groups (Patton, 2006; Rooks, 1996).

How a Black woman feels about her hair is tied to its texture and length. Unfortunately, the dominant societal messages sent to Black women are that their hair as it naturally grows out of their head is ugly and in need of reform to be considered beautiful. "Positively nothing detracts so much from your appearance as short, matted un-attractive hair" (Byrd & Tharps, 2001, p. 77). This is one example of the media messages Black women receive regarding their hair and the hair products they need to correct the texture, length, and volume.

When a Black woman's hair is not as kinky or perhaps longer than shoulder length, she is considered privleged and her hair is coveted by others. Those who have the kinky textured hair have a few ways of temporarily transforming their hair into a more

dominantly attractive style: relaxing, pressing, or attaching other hair. One way that Black women can straighten their hair is through a chemical process called *relaxing,* where the bonds of the hair are broken down from the roots. After years of hearing, seeing, and being told that Black hair is ugly, tangled, coarse, not desired, kinky, wild, or unkempt, it is no coincidence that the sodium hydroxide chemical that burns Black women's hair into submission is referred to as a *relaxer*. This process can last from 4 to 6 weeks but depending on the strength of the chemicals, frequency of use, or length of time left on the scalp, it can burn through skin, cause the hair to break, or the hairline to reside. The comedian Paul Mooney in the American comedy documentary, *Good Hair*, commented on the effect that Black hair in its natural state has on the dominant culture: "If your hair is relaxed, White people are relaxed. If your hair is nappy, they're not happy" (Mooney as cited by Rock, 2009).

Some women who choose not to put chemicals in their hair instead use a hot comb to *press* their hair straight. The comb is heated electronically or on a stove top and then pulled through the hair from the roots, temporarily straightening out the hair. Pressing is a very temporary solution because if the hair is exposed to moisture, it returns to its kinky state. Another way that women cope with the demands of adjusting their hair to the dominant culture is to add extensions through braiding, gluing, sewing, or clipped-in hair pieces with combs. Black hair is a $9 billion industry, of which 50% is owned by White and Asian companies (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Rock, O'Donnell, George, & Stilson, 2009). Black women spend a large sum of money (sometimes starting at $1000 per session) on processing, straightening, or hiding their hair under purchased hair in order to fit into the mainstream definition of professional (Rock et al., 2009).

For the participants, hair was a risk factor towards their resilience. It was an obstacle with which they had to constantly contend during their career advancement. Elise, unlike the other participants, did not have to worry about hair in the same way as other Black women because she has long hair that was not kinky. Despite her privilege, she still witnessed and heard of the struggles of Black girls regarding hair as a child.

Grace, Judy, and Patricia described changing their hairstyle and the subsequent reactions of their colleagues. They intentionally chose a specific hairstyle for a job interview and then for the job itself based on how they anticipated their hair length and texture might be viewed by the search committee, on weather and region of the country where they were interviewing, and on the length of time before the hairstyle would need adjustment. They assessed their surroundings, managed perceptions, and adjusted their hair expression until they found a balance between their professional appearance and personal needs. Grace explained, "So what I did for the interview, first of all I straightened it, I pushed it back into a low pony tail… when the job interview was over I went back to my natural, so then when I got the job, I cut my hair, I just cut it off." Grace opted to straighten her hair to get closer to what she perceived as the norm for the environment. The perceived norm is straight, long, well-mannered hair that is controlled and smooth and does not draw too much attention to itself.

Grace also found that her White colleagues reacted to her hair style choice depending on the texture and length of her hair. "When my hair was bushy, it scared 'em….When I shaved it, well not shaved, it but it was really, really short, they were okay with it. They were intimidated by African-American hair." Grace discovered that when her hair was styled in a way that her White colleagues could better relate to, they were

more accepting of it and allowed her to "get back to letting her work speak for itself." Similar to how Judy adjusted her attire based on her audience, Grace spoke about adjusting her hairstyle choices depending on her audience. "…with trustees I'm much more conservative. [because] I don't have any more perm in my hair, I was thinking about wearing it nappy for the couple of weeks [in] the summer, [but] I don't want to hear the comments."

Grace made some of her decisions about hairstyle based on how she thought it would be perceived by her colleagues and how much the comments, questions, or stares would affect her work. With a Black woman's success tied to her ability to intentionally navigate perceptions, it is especially difficult when she is new to an institution or the region.

Judy shared that her original decision to put her hair in braids when she started a new job was not only due to the unpredictability of how her hair would respond to the weather in a new region but also because of the unpredictability of how her colleagues would perceive her.

> …for the first two years I was here, I wore my hair braided because I was just afraid of the weather, I was just very afraid of the weather, and I didn't want that wild card. I didn't know what my hair was going to do. And it was so critical to me that I felt like I had some control over my professional appearance.

For Judy, braids created a safe and controlled hairstyle so that she could project a consistent professional appearance. Judy also explained how the region in which one works makes a difference in regards to how people respond to a Black woman's hair style.

> And so it wasn't until after two years when I took my braids down…and I wore it semi-natural for a while and that was great… But, here in [this region], I kind of got the sense, it didn't matter how I wore my hair, people were sort of like, they didn't have a whole lot of, they didn't have much of a reference point, so they really didn't know [what to expect]. You know, if I wore it in an afro, I mean they may find it interesting and want to talk about it. But it didn't necessarily denote anything [negative] in particular. Whereas I've had conversations with some of my colleagues [in other regions], women of color, particularly African American women or women who are of African descent, who can say, "When I wear my hair more natural, people have a particular perception of me versus when it's straight..."

What Judy was discovering was that the more Black women there are in the population outside of the institution, the more scrutiny exists within the institution towards the hair of the Black women working there because they have more context and reference for the norm for Black hair. Judy found that hair perceptions differed depending on the institution or region. While she was faced with stigmas of Black natural hair not being seen as professional at previous institutions as did the other participants that was not the case at her current institution. She did feel, however, that she had to consider whether

colleagues would recognize her when she changed her hair style. Judy explained how she was factoring in the response of her colleagues to the hair change in her decision of the next style she would get. "Do I take it out in six weeks and people are confused again, and don't know who I am and for me what is the way in which I want to be perceived on this campus?"

As Judy shared, change in hairstyle caused some Black women to have to re-establish themselves with certain colleagues or in Patricia's case it caused her to have to navigate awkward comments and the request to touch her hair due to a White colleague's curiosity. This would draw more attention to the hair than Patricia desired; therefore, she established a coping mechanism of having a conversation with her staff about hair at the start of a new position explaining that, as a Black woman, her hair styles would change drastically from month to month. She believed this helped her staff know what to expect and how to respond.

> So like many of us growing up in predominantly White neighborhoods and always having to answer questions about our hair…I think now I'm at the place where I, I have a strong Black identity, uh you know, I tell people when I start a new job, I'm like don't ask me about my hair... I say, "Don't ask me about my hair…it may be red this week, it might be blonde next week, I might have…short hair and I might have hair down to my butt and you know but do not ask me, don't touch it, leave me alone . If you think I look nice, you can tell me that, but don't ask to touch it, just don't ask." So that's my hair mantra…Yeah, oh yeah, you know I get tired of people, what makes you think you can judge my hair?

Judy also reported that her strategy for self-expression at work changed as she

advanced in her career. She realized that bringing her true self to work in the form of her hairstyles was not being appreciated as such; instead it was taking away from her professionalism. Now she separates her work self from her home self a little more and saves the "outrageous" hairstyles and style for her friends and family who can recognize it for what it is. She has to continue to code switch even with her hair to succeed. Judy found the balance for herself by learning which parts of her identity could be left at home while still being authentic and professional at work. Another lens to see this from is that of Kanter's (1977) theory of tokenism where Judy, within the category of visibility, is masking parts of her identity to confirm to the dominant culture.

The participants also at times experienced microaggressions or comments that subtly and overtly reflected ongoing discrimination. During one of the occasions that Grace was wearing her hair natural and short, she overheard a comment from a member of the board of trustees of the institution comment, "Black women with short nappy hair need to cover it with wigs." Though the trustee was not speaking directly to Grace, the fact that she was in the vicinity to overhear the comment is telling of the climate of the work environment from the top down within that organization. In addition to perceptions of appearance, there are perceptions of communication styles that the participants shared as another risk factor they encountered. Being a tokenized woman in the workplace as to how they communicate their drive and determination can at times be misinterpreted as aggression or intimidation whereas for their male counterparts this type of behavior is typically rewarded (Kanter, 1977).

Perceptions of Communication Styles

The participants discussed perceptions of the intimidation that they had to contend with once they were in their positions. Their communication styles differed from the norm. All the participants described having to contend with the perceptions that their colleagues held based on parts of their identity... Elise was surprised that she could be perceived as intimidating: "I'm not very tall, I'm about 5'4". But I've had White women tell me that I'm intimidating and I'm blown away by it." Elise found that her stature did not outweigh the preconceived notions that people bring from previous experiences with Black women. Judy experienced the same perception and had an explanation: "…I think as a person of color in this role, truly as a Black woman in this role, they're always expecting the angry Black woman, there's always that expectation…" Both women had to continuously contend with a stereotype based on the fact that they were Black women whether it matched their personalities or not The women described situations where if a White colleague did or said the same thing, it would be perceived differently than if it was coming from a Black woman.

Grace experienced something similar. Her supervisor told her she was "hard to read" because she did not show her emotions or objections on her face or in her body language. She confessed that she is quiet and takes in information at meetings often only speaking up when she has something to add to what is being said, at which time her colleagues would be taken aback because they could not anticipate what she was thinking. Her presence was misinterpreted as unapproachable based in part on the stereotypes and/or misperceptions that her colleagues had about Black women, causing her to have to counter that sentiment with warmth.

> I've been told that…that I have an air about me that says, "Don't mess with me." So I think that because that's possible, I tend to want to be warmer. To make it so people feel comfortable. So [now] I hear all the time, "Oh, I thought [the] dean was really mean, but she's really nice." …I want people to feel comfortable coming to me 'cuz if they're intimidated, they're not going to come [and then] I'm not going to know what's going on. So I need to do these things.

Whether people's interpretation of her presence is because of her title, her identity, or a combination of the two, Grace has had to develop a coping mechanism of being extra pleasant to combat the perception and do her job effectively. Though hosting gatherings is something that other SSAOs do regardless of race or gender, it was interesting that Grace chose specifically to reach out to Black or underrepresented students, administrators, faculty, and staff. Grace mentioned that some of the other Black or minority staff if not from her division were usually custodial or athletic staff.

All the participants spoke about their communication style and how it was incorrectly perceived. Non-verbal communication, facial expressions or lack thereof, and hand movements are some leadership styles that were misinterpreted by their colleagues. In professional settings, the awareness of nonverbal communication, mannerisms, and tone is important, yet these Black women professionals expressed additional sensitivity and the need to adjust their non-verbal communication due to stereotypes connected to their race.

Patricia spoke about how the history, ancestry, and culture of Black people have all influenced leadership style to include comfort with speaking.

> Somehow I think most of us [Black people], maybe because we come from a call/ response tradition. We're good orators, right? So we tend to speak really well and be comfortable public speaking because we've all been doing it since we were 3 in front of everybody. Right? I hadn't thought about it until just now.

This acknowledgement emphasizes the impact and importance of the experiences growing up and the influence of parents/guardians and family in the development of a Black professional's skills, style, and comfort zones. Even in Patricia's example, she is demonstrating her call-and-response influence by repeatedly saying "Right?" She does this to gain acknowledgement and agreement, and to ensure understanding of what is being said, to include the listener in the conversation, and to keep the exchange going. That is her call as she waits for my response. In this linguistic code, people have to have similar experiences to engage in conversation as the conversation depends on them recognizing certain references. Patricia went on to explain when she has to have a double-consciousness, code switch, or adjust her communication styles depending on the audience and their potential reaction to her communication style.

> Sometimes in the way that we [Black people] express ourselves, we raise the volume of our voice, we use lots of gestures. Some people are like, "whoa" and I tend to not do that as much when I'm not in an all-Black setting and so that probably has helped [in my career advancement]. And sometimes we do engage in that behavior, and we have no idea about how it's perceived by others.

> Patricia adjusted her communication style in an attempt to assimilate in a way similar to how the participants adapted their hair styles and professional dress. Judy affirmed Patricia's observations and expressed how critical it is to be intentional in what one communicates with both oral communication and actions. So one of the things I've really come to understand it's how important it is to be extremely mindful of what you say. Extremely mindful of what you communicate because people are really listening and they're really observing. I think that's one of [the] things that's really been important that's emerged from my time [in this field].

Patricia and Judy ultimately concluded that what is intended to be communicated and what is perceived by others do not always align. The participants shared examples of how they adjusted their communication styles after misunderstandings were brought to their attention by their colleagues regarding how they were being perceived. The participants consistently mentioned that the communication style and presence was interpreted as intimidating.

Unlike Grace, Judy, and Elise, Patricia did not experience similar struggles with the perception of her presence although she had a colleague who did.

> One of my colleagues…is also African American. She does tend to raise her voice when she gets angry, and if she were not African American, it wouldn't be interpreted in the same way. But people have used words [like] "intimidating" [and] "bullying"…to describe her, and that is not her at all but I think it's because they have not interacted with an African American woman before, and then when she exhibits behavior that they

> think… fits into whatever stereotypes that they have…So that's been…tough for her to figure out, how can I be myself? How can I be a good manager?...I've had a lot less of that but I think it's mainly because I have a different persona and so I think my different persona has allowed people not to make those same stereotypes…I like to believe that I have…a combination of a soft and strong style. So I believe people perceive me as a strong woman, and a strong leader. But I lead with a soft stick. So I think that lessens whatever intimidation factor somebody might have.

Patricia described the fine balance between being true to self, being aware how that expression is perceived, and adjusting accordingly and appropriately. She explained how she and her colleague differed based on their ability to control their communication styles, therefore managing perception and ultimately reputation. The patricipants found that their tone of voice, facial expressions, and mannerisms were all factors in how they were received by colleagues; therefore, being aware of them and making alterations based on the situation or what they wanted to communicate was an important skill to master in advancing their careers.

Patricia and Judy received direct feedback from their staff about how their non-verbal communications were being interpreted during staff meetings, and they both made efforts to alter their actions in recognition of how it was affecting the overall staff communication. Judy looked at people over the top of her glasses, which was being interpreted as her looking down on them as though they were inferior or that she was judging them and what they had to say. To compensate for this perception, Judy started

taking off her glasses all together when she looked at people during a conversation in the hopes that the gesture could communicate her removing any barriers instead of her judging them. Patricia would pull herself closer to the table and push herself up in her chair when she was upset, which would effectively stop her staff having the conversation that upset her. It took a while before members of her staff brought it to her attention, and she was grateful that they were brave enough to do so because she did not realize she was doing it. Now when she realizes that she is getting upset in a meeting, she sits on her hands to stop herself from pushing up and therefore shutting down the much needed processes for her staff.

Another risk factor is compensation, which Elise and Patricia perceived to be inequitable in comparison to their counterparts on the president's cabinet; whether this was due to their intersection of identity or the perceived inferiority of the field of student affairs or a combination of the two is still being debated.

Inequitable Compensation

Elise and Patricia mentioned salary several times in our conversations. They expressed their displeasure that they made the least of all the other vice presidents and/or deans on the president's cabinet. They suggested that this was not only because women and minorities have a hard time negotiating salary, staff, and resources but also that the division of student affairs is not valued within higher education in the same way as the other divisions. They were repeatedly told by their superiors that the work of student affairs did not translate to the public sector markets as the other vice president jobs did; therefore, the compensation packages were not as competitive. Elise and Patricia did not perceive that their hard work was reflected in their compensation or that it demonstrated

their value to the institution. Elise specifically commented on the amount of praise, words of affirmation and appreciation she receives in comparison to the compensation she receives. "Well, I'm constantly talked about as being just the best thing since sliced bread and I say that very facetiously but if I could have the amount of money instead of the complements I would be at equal par with my colleagues."

Although her work was acknowledged by her peers, supervisors, and co-workers, Elise expressed frustration with how her salary was still less than the other vice presidents, which was not an appropriate reflection of the work she continually got praised for doing. Not only did these women contend with the effects of being a minority at a PWI in regards to their race and gender but the field of student affairs was also viewed as inferior, which multiplied the challenges to advancing in their careers.

Based on published salary reports, minorities and student affairs professionals have lower salaries than their counterparts; therefore, it is reasonable to attribute this to the lack of skill in negotiating salaries and not knowing or fighting for salaries that measure up to what they are worth (*Chronicle of Education*, 2013) or perhaps it stems from engrained institutional racism and/or sexism. Patricia said that after she was hired, she found out how much the other vice presidents made and she met with the president to re-negotiate after a few years on the job. Her initial acceptance of the salary was based on her perceived limited experience as a vice president and trusting that her soon-to-be-supervisor would offer her the best salary for what she was thought to bring to the institution.

> …when I was negotiating my salary… I was talking to the president and I said, "I understand that I am the lowest paid vice president…when I first

> accepted the job, I first of all didn't know what other people were making, second of all I thought you made me what was a fair offer, third I hadn't been a vice president before, so I didn't have a track record…but now I have a track record, and it doesn't feel good to be the least paid member of the team." And he says, "I hear you …understand though that your market is different than the market of the others…" So for example, the VP for business and finance can go work at a corporation…so can [the] VP for development because he can go raise money so when he's competing for those people, he's competing with the outside world. Well, the outside world isn't looking for a vice president of student affairs so I understood his principle…

Like many others before her, Patricia assumed that her boss was offering her the best salary for what she would bring to the division and the institution. At the time she also did not know at the benchmarked salary for a vice president. Elise experienced a similar outcome when the salaries were published for the public record. She also went to speak to her supervisor and received a similar explanation for why her salary was substantially less than her peers. Even Elise's colleagues noticed the discrepancy between the ratio of work to compensation with her and the other vice presidents. The only rationale for the difference was her race and her position:

> …when the new data came out…I said to [the president], "This is humiliating for me to see this, where this woman who have been in her position three years compared to my being in mine 11 and the credentials that I bring and the direct reports that I have so on and so forth." That

> somebody's going to tell me it's what the market will bear that she has to make $18,000 more than I do. I don't think so. And one of my colleagues said, "You know that...should be embarrassed for your salary to be published when you're the only Black person and look how little you make compared to them and how much time you put in."

In this example, gender was not a factor as her counterpart who was making more was also a woman. Elise and her colleague did not think that she should be compensated more because she was Black, but they did assume that one of the barriers to her not receiving a salary in a closer range to her senior administrator colleagues was due to her work in student affairs. Elise believed that the president had the ability to close the gap on the discrepancy in salary between the vice presidents if she or he truly wanted to express a value for student affairs or for the work that she does on a daily basis. "…I think in a private institution, the president makes those decisions, and I know this to be the case, so if he valued me in that role, then you know [she or he]'s going to make sure that I'm getting a very competitive salary."

Slowly, as more vice presidents speak out about the injustice of the salary in comparison to others who hold a similar job, this compensation could increase as could the staff and/or resources to support overwhelmed and overworked departments. Judy shared her frustrations not directly with salary, but with support in getting the ever-increasing work done. She shared how an institution could demonstrate that the work of a student affairs administrator is valued not only by involvement in key decisions but with resources to execute the work. "If you value my perspective so much in these areas, where is your value of my

perspective around the way in which an office like mine needs to be staffed?" Compensation and a demonstration of value come in many forms: salary, benefits, housing, staff, departmental budget, release time, and/or tuition remission for dependents.

How student affairs as a field is valued and respected in higher education has impacted how the professionals within the field are treated and how they are compensated. Patricia explained the inferiority she has experienced in comparison to the other cabinet members and how that has, in the past, limited the career advancement of SSAOs to the presidency.

> …I won't say that our positions are undesirable, because they're very desirable but our pay as the VP of student affairs, we get paid less than anybody else on a president's cabinet so therefore we don't have the same opportunity, and it's not as direct a path to the presidency, or at least it hasn't been historically. That's changing a little bit. So that puts us at a disadvantage. It puts us in a place where we can't go any further. We don't have the same pay scale as the other people around the table.

Both Patricia and Elise spoke about how the division of student affairs and the position of vice president for student affairs are viewed relative to other divisions and vice presidents within higher education. Elise claimed that "Student affairs is the stepchild of higher education." Patricia used the same phrase when describing the sentiment towards student affairs and further explained how academia, though currently getting better at recognizing the value in the work that is done outside of the classroom, has often viewed student affairs as inferior to the other divisions.

Patricia offered three rationales for this conclusion: the field of student affairs is not typically an auxiliary department, which brings in revenue for the institution; it does not supervise faculty; and it has a larger ratio of underrepresented professionals holding the position.

> I believe … that the vice president for student affairs is the ghettoized position on campus because when a president [is] looking to diversify his or her cabinet, he or she looks for the VP of student affairs job. That's where they're going to put their person of color. That's just how it is. When you use the term *ghetto*, what's coming behind that? Well what that means for me is…that is the place where people are most comfortable with us. The two places where we are…if we're a member of the president's cabinet, the first is VP of student affairs, and the second is…VP for diversity or affirmative action….So that's why I call it a ghettoized position because the ghetto to me is the place where you corral everybody.…It doesn't mean I don't enjoy it or that I don't want to do it. We're not respected generally by the academy.

Patricia purported that vice presidents for student affairs often identify as minority; however, not many of those who sit on the president's cabinet are both minority and female. Patricia observed that women can be found in assistant or associate vice president roles but few are on the president's cabinet running the division. It is this perception and perhaps this reality that make this research necessary. 82% of the chief diversity officers were people of color while 10% of chief academic officers and 20% of SSAOs were people of color (King & Gomez,

2008). What Patricia called to question though are the hiring practices of an institution and how that has an effect on who is on staff and how they are compensated.

Although institutions are beginning to consider diversifying their faculty, staff, and administrators as their student populations are changing, some continue to use old recruitment, advertise, and selection techniques. The participants perceived that they were at times at a disadvantage and/or dismissed from a process with politically correct rationale disguised for other forms of discrimination. "Some academics, in and beyond the [Ivy League institutions], say the term *qualified* is a loaded code word with many functions: It acts as a smoke screen that enables discrimination while deflecting blame from perpetrators" (Patton, 2013, p. A4). Though hard to prove, code words within a hiring process are a form of microaggression and a risk to the career advancement of the participants. Another aspect of the hiring process that influenced the participants was their résumés and credentials, which created potential impediment or advantage depending on where the participants received their degrees; some participants had studied at historically Black colleges/universities (HBCUs) while others studied at Ivy League instiutions.

Participants felt they were judged based on the perception of their background. Patricia and Elise described different sides of the issue. Patricia experienced her academic background at Ivy League schools as an advantage to being considered for positions while Elise described witnessing candidates from HBCUs being discounted for positions based on the institutions where they previously worked or studied. Patricia talked about the advantage that she received based on the prestige of the institutions from

which she received her undergraduate and Master's degrees. This privilege, although good for her, is where others without it may be discriminated against in the hiring process.

> …but the advantage that I do have is I have really powerful credentials, you know having an undergraduate degree from [an Ivy League school] and a Ph.D. from [an Ivy League school]. Um, you know, I'm always going to be competitive for a job, I may not get it, um, I may not, I may not interview well, they might decide I'm not the right fit or what have you but they can't argue with my credentials.

Elise also affirmed from her experiences that the type of institution at which the applicants had previously worked or the lack of specific experience identified for the position would be used to elliminate candidates with transferable skills. Elise recounted that the hiring agent would not come out and admit the discimination; however, it could sometimes be inferred based on the commonalities of those being excluded from the process.

The participants had to contend with the stereotypes, misperceptions, and expectations of the hiring committee, colleagues, students, parents, or board of trustees. At times participants felt as though there was apprehension around bringing any more persons with their same identity as they were to represent the group, voice, and opinion of their people. Grace was told she could not hire someone based on race because then there would be too many of one race on staff in her division. A Human Resources employee told Grace that she could not hire any additional Black people to her division because she had two Black women working for her already. "I documented this with his boss. I'm surprised he still works here. I had [two Black women] on staff and they were

on the leadership team and he said, 'You know you can't hire anymore Black people'." Once the participants navigated the perceptions within of hiring process such as code words and the scrutiny of work experiences, educational credentials, or cultural capital experiences, which served as potential risk factors threatening their resilience, the perceptions they had to endure did not dissipate.

With all the risk factors the participants had to withstand (having to manage unspoken expectations, having to anticipate perceptions of appearance, having to adjust to perceptions of communication, realizing that they were getting inequitable compensation for their work) and with the layered complexity of deciphering which aspects of their identity were being subtly or overtly discriminated, anyone would be left in doubt, questioning his or her abilities, and internalizing the inadequacies expected. These additional adjustments are in addition to having to compensate for being a Black woman in a White male-dominated field and working in student affairs in an academic affairs-driven system.

Up until this point, the chapter has focused on the risk factors that the participants experienced in their career advancement and in their work settings. It is important to also explore the compensatory variables that sustained these women and assisted them in being resilient in the face of the risk factors just detailed thereforee the presentation of findings now switches to a focus on compensatory variables.

Compensatory Variables

The three compensatory variables that the participants identified as reasons they could withstand the challenges were mentors, giving back, and spirituality. These compensatory variables existed as both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators that true to resilience theory helped the participants intercept the discrimination, obstacles, or other risk factors in their career path and sustain them in their roles as SSAOs at PWIs.

Mentors

One result that I expected to find in this research was the positive effect of mentoring as it was consistent with the literature (Blackhurst, 2000; Langdon & Gordon, 2007; Twale & Jelinke, 1996). All four women talked about mentors who saw their potential or transferable skills, provided them opportunities to get valuable job experience, or encouraged them to pursue the next position. Mentoring here refers to anyone who affected the journey of the four women participants through informal or formal mentoring, points of insight, wisdom, or advice. Patricia referred to them "guardian angels," because not all people who helped in her career path were formal mentors. The term also hints at the spiritual or faith-based influence that Patricia and some of the other participants shared, which is discussed in a later section. According to Shorter-Gooden and Jones (2003), it is important for Black women to have a circle of support to affirm and support them. Judy described the pattern of having people affirm and motivate her in her career advancement.

> I never would have applied for that job, ever, but you know somebody tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Hey, I've been watching you work for a year and I think you'd be a good candidate for this position so apply

> for it…" and that's pretty much been the story of my life, you know... for people to tap me and say, "Hey, I think you can do this," whether I had the experience in that area or not or the next step was way beyond what I was already doing. I think that's been part of my success is because I've been blessed with great opportunities because people have really believed in me.

Like Judy, the other participants spoke of how the mentors in their lives recognized their talents and suggested that they reach higher than their current position. Grace and Elise received their first professional positions because people saw their potential at a young age and gave them a chance. Grace described a supervisor she had as an undergraduate who hired her in her first professional position right after completing her undergraduate degree. Her supervisor offered her the position of student activities coordinator because she had seen Grace organize community rallies, conferences, and voter registration campaigns as a student and had the confidence that she could coordinate activities for the campus.

Later in Grace's career, when she was an associate vice president, another supervisor told her, "You deserve to run your own shop… but I don't want you to leave." After this conversation with her supervisor, Grace applied for and was appointed to her first vice president position. Prior to her supervisor's comment, Grace said she would not have pursued the position. Grace's supervisor came to her because one of her other colleagues had repeatedly and unsuccessfully applied for vice president positions. Grace's supervisor wondered why Grace was not doing the same because although she did not want to see her go, she saw that she was more prepared than her colleague who

was pursuing the higher positions. Grace is not the only participant who did not recognize her own potential or have the desire to pursue the next step until another person brought it to her attention. All the participants described being content to remain doing a good job at their current station and they did not strive for the next thing until prompted by a mentor or supervisor. Patricia described this as a concern for all Black women who do not instinctively climb the career ladder.

> So, I suspect for many of us there's this issue of self-doubt and so because we have that self-doubt and we may be afraid to reach too high, that if we're in a place where we think we're doing a good job and [are] content, why rock the boat and so sometimes it isn't until someone says to you, "You know you really ought to apply for this job. You really could do this" [that you] think well, if that person has faith in me…

Although I expected to find that mentors were of assistance to the women, I did not expect to find that without a mentor, supervisor, or "guardian angel" seeing their potential or transferable skills, encouraging them to pursue the next position, or providing them with opportunities to get job experience, they would have stayed in their current position and not advanced.

Although the participants all mentioned positive experiences with supervisors at some point, Judy and Patricia also had experiences where they were not encouraged to expand their horizons. With Patricia it was a dean of admissions position and many colleagues on campus encouraged her to pursue it except her direct supervisor who did not see her potential. With Judy it was a position with a professional association where again many colleagues encouraged her; however, her direct supervisor not only did not

support her taking the position but also did not allow her time during work hours to complete tasks for that role. "…when I spoke with my boss about it, he said, 'absolutely not,' and that if I did it, I would have to demonstrate through time records that all of the effort that I was doing to support our profession, to support my role, and to represent our institution in that light…had to be all [off] the clock." Despite their direct supervisors not encouraging them, both Judy and Patricia were able to succeed and advance due to the encouragement of other colleagues and mentors in their life.

Spar (2013) articulated the increasing reluctance of men to mentor women due to the perceptions of romantic relationships, therefore putting women at a disadvantage for networking and ultimately career advancement. Yet based on my conversations with the participants, there was a theme of men being mentors who helped them navigate the advancement of their careers. Grace shared, "You know, the women have been, sometimes really good supervisors and mentors but the people that have pushed me…were usually men. Men have really been encouraging and supportive." Judy also explained how she elicited the counsel of different mentors based on their expertise and the need for that particular attribute in that point in her career advancement.

> I have two friends who, two men actually, [that] I knew at different stages of my career who I reach out to depending upon what my situation is. One, I talk to when I'm interested in having a broader and more vulnerable strategic conversation about you know, what am I doing, where am I going…and then I have another good friend who…when I made the transition here I needed to talk about negotiating, I picked up the phone and called him…and I would check in with him [about] how I can

> negotiate my own brand…Because… no one can be your everything, you kind of have to know who to pick up the phone and call…

As Judy discussed, she stayed in contact with her mentors and influential people throughout her career.

Grace talked about her network of other student affairs administrators that she sees once a year at the annual or regional conferences and catches up with or if necessary they will have conference calls to provide one another perspectives on a situation. Elise also stayed connected to her counterparts at other institutions across the country mostly online though occasionally they get together in person.

The participants shared that part of their ability to be successful in their careers was having the trust and support of their supervisors. Both Grace and Patricia experienced verbal affirmations from their supervisors regarding their work. For Grace it was both her boss's encouraging word and his willingness to offer assistance to get the job done that made her feel valued at work. "The president yesterday reaffirmed that… 'I respect you and I'll do anything to help you', and so … I feel very much supported by the president, like most of my colleagues, and then my staff. I have great people I work with."

For Patricia it was her boss not only telling her one on one how much she was appreciated but also doing so in front of other employees, her staff, and colleagues that made her feel supported. "I have a great boss, he is great to work for, he has always expressed his support for my role and give[s] me positive feedback…on the work that I've been doing, both publicly and privately, so I feel very supported by him." Both

women expressed feeling supported by their respective supervisor because their supervisor recognized and affirmed their contributions to the institution.

Just as much as the people who believed in them had an influence, the people who did not believe in them did as well. Patricia recounted an experience where her coworkers all encouraged her to apply for a dean position but her supervisor did not.

> I remember that I was going to apply for the dean of admissions…what was interesting was while my boss didn't encourage me to apply for the job, other people at the [institution] did. Well, I think it was because he really didn't think I had the skill set. So maybe it had nothing to do with me being Black and being female, but the fact that he was my boss and didn't see that in me but other people on campus who were just my colleagues saw that I could.

In her analysis of the situation, Patricia acknowledged the difficulty in identifying the source for discrimination or ill will. Grace identified her husband and sister as supporters of her work. Her husband supports by allowing her some reprieve from discussing work concerns at home and her sister who also works in higher education provides her opportunities to process situations.

Although I expected to find that mentors were an influential part of the participant's lives, I did not expect to find that without mentors validating, finding opportunities for, and informing them of their potential they would not have advanced so quickly or to the positions they are in today. I was also pleased to find that mentors took on various identities (gender, position level) and served in different capacities for each participant.

Another aspect of mentoring that the participants attributed to their success was the opportunities provided to them: opportunities to gain experiences and to meet, network, and demonstrate their potential to future employers and coworkers. Patricia confirmed that her success was due in part because of her varied experiences in multiple areas of student affairs, thereby providing her the tools she needed to supervise those areas as a senior administrator.

> I think the reason I've been successful is I was just blessed to have so many different kinds of experiences that by the time I got to the vice president's position, I had experience in just about every area of student affairs so it was really easy for me to articulate how I could be a senior manager [of] different kinds of units, [because] I had experience in most [so] when there are issues that are brought to my attention in particular areas, I know how to respond, because I've worked in most of them, not all but most of them.

The participants shared how the opportunities they were given opened doors, broadened their networks, and helped them gain valuable and necessary skills to be in their current positions. Elise attributed her career success to the opportunities that she was provided by her supervisors and mentors who saw her potential and gave her the encouragement and space to grow.

> …so my internship was at [a community college]. [M]y boss, the president, I worked directly with him. I attended all the senior meetings, I mean…it was fabulous, and he had a lot of trust in me and gave me every available opportunity to be involved at the leadership level, the board of

> trustees, everything. This was a stellar experience honestly, and I wouldn't trade it…that was key to helping me to navigate leadership positions...

Giving Back

All four participants identified the students that they worked with and for as a motivation to continue the work that they do despite any obstacles or risk factors that threatened to impede their advancement. The common theme was the impact they could see their presence has had in the lives of the students. Elise shared how the student body, not her co-workers or even the career advancement, is what has kept her willing to withstand the demands of the job for over 20 years.

> I don't go to work...looking for a relationship with my colleagues…honestly it's not about them, it really isn't. I get my joy from work[ing] with my students… for 20 years I've been doing this work and is it all just because an opportunity became available to me? I don't think so. It's because there was the opportunity but it mattered to me and that I have seen tangible results. I think that's the biggest reason that I can keep doing more and that is so tangential now to all these other balls that I have to keep in the air. I can keep doing this work because I see the results in the students' lives who I work with on a daily basis…

Grace garnered motivation from working with the students and she recognized that certain students need additional attention and advocacy from her. Her experiences with students not only impacted her motivation to stay in the position, it also impacted what issues she focused time and energy on.

> …They assume [underrepresented students] get into [college] and that's all [they] need but it's not necessarily [true]... they need a different type of support… every interaction informs my work…Informs how I work with the next student, informs the next program I endorse, informs the next policy that we develop, informs the next new initiative because I'm always looking to try to make it a little bit better. When I get to a place where I feel like I can't do it anymore, then I'll leave.

In Grace's office were mementos of students whose lives she had touched such as photographs of her with different students, art work from students' study abroad adventures as well as thank-you notes from students and their parents. These all served as reminders of her impact when the validation was not so forthcoming.

Judy chose to support students by hiring them in her office and encouraging them to be mentors for the next group of students so that the lessons get passed down and the students are better prepared for jobs once they leave the institution.

> I hire a lot of students to put on our programs and support our efforts on campus but my approach has been to create a pipeline where I'm grooming students in their first and second year to take on leadership positions in the office and become part of this strong kind of community and for them to mentor and support young students and also do it out in the community…

Patricia talked about a moment when she was asked to speak on a panel about a program she had initiated and realized that there were three generations of students who were impacted by the program in the panel. That moment summarized what she wants as her legacy in the field. "[My] professional legacy would be…those whose lives I've touched who turn around and touch others, who turn around and touch others."

Students served as a compensatory variable for the participants as they provided a reflection of the good they were doing in the community, they informed their work, determined where their attention should be focused, and ultimately motivated them to continue doing the work they are doing on a daily basis.

Each of the participants expressed being motivated by and to help, take care of, look out for, and provide assistance to others. I correlated those motivations with their maternal instincts though only two of the participants have children of their own. It could also be tied to the Black mother or mammy analogy (Collins, 2000). This nurturing motivation that all the participants share is a key component of their experiences and strategies for success in being resilient in an atmosphere where they are the minority. It also connected to their career path as a way to show gratitude to the people who helped them on their journey by helping the next generation or paying it forward.

Elise described how her spirituality helped her to remain grounded in the midst of her successes and to recognize that all that she had been given requires her to give back to others who are not as fortunate.

> …what I know for sure is without my religious faith, and without my journey with Christ, I don't have anything else, I mean that sincerely… my life is grounded in my faith and in my belief in Jesus Christ that I want to do a lot of great things in life but I can't get there without that and that it means that I must help other people, that I cannot misuse my sphere of influence, the little that I have, and that I am required to be humble and grateful because I have been blessed and highly favored, and…understand that [I must] give something back to somebody else.

Elise's spirituality gives her life purpose. She believes that she is called to give back and she has translated that into being the vice president for student affairs at a predominately White institution. Her job is not just an occupation or a career; it is a vocation. Her spirituality makes her resilient because she is able to withstand all the judgment and discrimination of being the first and only Black woman vice president at the institution because she believes it is what she has been called to do. Her belief intervenes in her career advancement and gives her the strength to sustain in a difficult environment. Elise's faith grounds her and gives her motivation to continue to do her work well. She stated multiple times in our conversations things like "to whom much is given much is required…" and "I have been blessed and highly favored, and… understand that [I must] give something back to somebody else." Elise strongly identified with her faith and knew that one way to give back was to nurture others.

The participants shared that paying it forward is one of the aspects of the job that keeps them going and motivates them to sustain themselves despite the discriminations and hardships in their career advancement is paying it forward or helping others as they

were helped. They collectively shared that their motivation to continue their work is the students for whom they have an impact. They do not always get to hear what happens to the students they help but when they do, they hold on to it to get them through the tough times. Elise shared the joy she feels when she works with a student struggling with mental, physical, or behavioral concerns who is able to overcome his or her struggles. She talked about how the thank-you notes she has received from those students and their families make it all worthwhile.

The participants made sure to clarify that their impact is not limited to one type of student. As Judy stated, "Our role is to provide leadership for the entire campus and not just for people like us." Though they assist students no matter their identity, they do admit to being drawn to those students who identify similarly to themselves. Patricia expressed her satisfaction with working in the student affairs field because of the impact that she can have on the lives of students like herself. "[I am]…wanting to try to make a positive impact on young women like me and others…to make sure that they have the best and richest experience as undergraduate students they can possibly have, and by working in student affairs I can help make an impact on that." Elise agreed with Patricia's sentiment stating that "I love having some sphere of influence… there is an energy associated with seeing a person grow and develop."

Though they all expressed that it is their job and they derive satisfaction from helping all students, Elise, Judy, and Grace in particular also shared the importance of giving back to their communities. Judy articulated how she fell into the work but upon reflection recognized the connection between her identity and those she had a desire helped. "…If you're a person of color doing this work, you want to support your

communities. I don't know that, that was a conscious decision but I knew that that's where I wanted to put my energy."

Grace also articulated feeling drawn to the Black students but also that there was a clear sense from her colleagues that they did not understand their experiences as she intimately as she does.

> We need to be here for the African American students…I literally worry who would do it. Not that others wouldn't, it's just that there's a sensitivity to some of the things they're dealing with, I think people may feel they understand but sitting in these meetings you know they don't....There's a sense…of urgency or consciousness knowing that you have to be really deliberate in terms of helping African Americans.

Grace elaborated by explaining how the Black students do not seek her out as easily as the other students; instead they are embarrassed to need help, not realizing that she can get them connected to services to which they are entitled before it is too late.

> I think it's hard sometimes for African American students to…they come to see me it's like when they're desperate. It's like…they don't want me to know they're not doing well, they don't want me to know that they might need me to talk to somebody for them…there are some that are shy about approaching and there are some that…feel like they're letting me down if they don't do well and I say, "No, you let me down if you don't ask, cuz believe me, everybody else takes the help, they demand the support and so you need to get what you're paying for."

The role a Black SSAO can play differs depending on the student. While as Grace pointed out, they can serve as a role model to Black students, Elise also found that they can be a role model to the White students for different reasons.

> One of my colleagues said to me some years ago…she came from [an] HBCU …and she was a visiting professor with us and then [became a student affairs] profession[al]. She said, "But you know I feel like…my job is as important here as a role model for these White students as it is when I was at [the HBCU], maybe even more so, because the learning that our students have because they see me in this role all the time and interact with me has, I'm sure, been phenomenal for many of them who don't even have…I still have students who live in towns [with] not a Black person in their communities."

In order to reach students of all different backgrounds and in an effort to give back to the community, like Elise, Patricia also spoke about how she helps students through doing presentations, interviews, and even participation in research projects such as this study whenever possible. "I think you have to put yourself out there and remember that, you didn't always hold these roles that some people perceive as powerful." These acts of service are one of the few things that keep the participants motivated to sustain themselves in administration, student affairs, and/or higher education. Their habit of giving to individuals and communities with similar or fewer resources as the ones in which they were born or reared is an aspect that contributes to their resilience. They are motivated to return the gesture or inspiration that they received from another and consider their service a way to pay the kindness forward, therefore continuing the cycle

of developing future leaders like themselves. It is more than a positive thought or action; it has become part of their identity.

Elise, Judy, and Patricia each spoke about how their identity influences how they engage others and why they are motivated to do the work that they do. Elise spoke about recognizing and accepting that she is perceived by others based on her race. With that awareness, she then strives to help future generations accept their identity, take pride in their ancestry, and recognize the responsibility that they have in helping the next generation build on their experiences.

> …I first and foremost have always felt that my description as an African American, I can do Black or African American, is what defines me, it always has defined me…at the end of the day, when I go into a room, they're not looking at me as a woman first…when and where I enter, I enter first as an African American, and so for me I feel that my role in life has been and will continue to be as long as I work and after, helping other young people to understand that [it's] okay to be defined by that, it's what you do with that in terms of how you help others and reach back and you know make some things better for other people.

Judy intentionally identified herself in a way that could reflect the multiple aspects of her identity beyond being a Black woman. This provided her with opportunities to connect and dialogue with people of varying identities yet similar experiences.

> I definitely…find that I'm…calling myself a person of color, a woman of color, and wanting it to be inclusive in that way. I've been having

> conversations with students where I really recognize that…biracial, multiracial identity, multiethnic identity, multicultural identity, we are a part of this much broader fabric. So I will also use that interchangeably especially as I'm trying to be a bit more inclusive about my identity as it relates to the experiences of others who may have similar kinds of experiences and background. I want to go beyond me being Black. I want to go into, what it mean[s] to have difference, especially around race and ethnicity.

No matter how or why the participants choose to identify, their values and experiences shaped the kind of leader they are. Regardless of their identity, they all articulated the importance of being available to as many people as possible and they all recognized that their intersection of identity could be a barrier for some of the students, staff, or faculty with whom they have to interact.

Spirituality

Spirituality is a compensatory variable described in the success stories of three of the four participants: Grace, Patricia, and Elise. I have chosen to use the term *spirituality* as it encompasses faith, belief, religion, vocation, altruism, humanitarianism, a power greater, and living by certain values that the participants were either raised with and/or developed later in life (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Love & Talbot, 2009; Weddle-West, Hagan, & Norwood, 2013). I came to this term from compiling the testimonies of the participants and recognizing the common thread despite the different ways they practiced their spirituality. The participants described how their spirituality influenced their thoughts and actions, and how it served as an escape. Three aspects of spirituality

came from the interviews.The first was positive thought, a belief in a higher power or master plan that contributes to their positive perspective.

The participants spoke about how their beliefs, practice of their faith, or positive thoughts served as an escape from a world where they are often in the minority. Patricia listened to gospel songs as she commuted to and from work. Elise went to church services regularly. Church was described as a safe space where they could let down their guard in a different way because they were surrounded by mostly other Black people. Another comparable place mentioned by Patricia was the beauty salon. In both these places the participants found solace in the congregation, and the weekly immersion provided them energy to persevere in their predominantly White work environments. After working at a PWI all week, Patricia described the reprieve she felt on weekends. "I worship at a Black church on Sunday because I get to hear my people screaming and shouting and I get to hear that music, so I can be integrated Monday through Saturday but on Sunday I'm going to be all Black."

Acoording to Choudhury (2007), "Faith is the essential ingredient in the practice of life, and supplies the foundation for controlling the mind. With faith all things are possible; you just have to believe" (p. 219). The participants described how faith impacted their thoughts, allowing them to believe that (1) there is something greater than themselves guiding and supporting them, (2) there is a master plan for their lives, and (3) eventually justice will be served. Believing in a higher power allowed them to rationalize and/or ignore the situations that they encountered. Their belief that a higher power would not give them trials that they could not overcome reinforced their strength to persevere. Patricia described how her spirituality helped her:

> …I was brought up, like many of us, in the Black church, and I love having that spiritual base. I think many of us who are African American have that. I mean if we don't formally worship in a particular place, many of us do, but even those of us who don't, we still have that spiritual core and to me that just helps ground me, helps center me, helps keep me from going off…

Spirituality provided the women peace of mind and solace as they determined what the best response would be to the discrimination and microaggressions they might be experiencing. Grace described her spirituality not as the act of following the rituals or traditions of a religion as she did as a child but how that has morphed as she has gotten older to influence her thoughts about others who may be similar or different from her and her actions towards them. "I am…very spiritual… I don't officially belong to a church now…I was raised in a Baptist church and as I got older and went to college, I sort of disconnected from the official structure…I'm not critical [or] dogmatic…just very open, forgiving, and...welcoming of all beliefs and faiths.…"

Spirituality served as a compensatory variable for the women as their positive thoughts allowed them to choose an alternate responses or reaction in situations, thereby potentially altering the outcome. Spirituality also influenced the women's outlook on life, how they treated others, and their concept of their life's purpose. Having positive thoughts of self, others, and outcomes was described as an essential part of spirituality due in part to the idea of karma and that you get back what you put into the world not only in action but thoughts as well. Patricia described how positive thoughts affirmed her:

> ... I think positive thinking really does make a difference, you know I'm just a glass is half-full or all-the-way full person... I just refuse to embrace negativity in my life, I refuse to believe that other people come into the world to try to jack you up, and I think that as long as I feel like…as long as I know God is working in my life, as long as I have a positive attitude toward my life and what the possibilities are…as I have those two things, I'm good."

Again, letting spirituality guide her thoughts towards the positive provided her the resilience to persevere in situations where others might crumble with negative thoughts. As Margaret Thatcher has been quoted as saying, "Watch your thoughts, for they become words. Watch your words, for they become actions. Watch your actions, for they become habits. Watch your habits, for they become your character. And watch your character, for it becomes your destiny. What we think, we become" (Jones & Lloyd, 2011). These women found a way to focus themselves not on what others thought of them, not on what others said about them, not on what obstacles were against, before, or behind them but what they knew to be true and knew about themselves. Elise has stayed grounded by constantly reminding herself to be grateful for all the help she has received to get her to where she is today.

> …I remain a decent and humble person so that is absolutely one of the reasons [I have made it to this vice president position]. I don't believe I'm any better than anybody else, I certainly know that I'm not smarter. I don't work any harder than most people, and that's the truth. So I have to

look at those external things that have been in place for me that I think really aren't in place for everybody.

Despite all that she may be going through, Elise keeps her thoughts towards gratitude and not taking anything for granted. She puts her circumstances in the context of the big picture, not just the moment that she may be in.

Keeping their thoughts positive was a coping mechanism for the participants during career advancement. The participants did not let their circumstances stop their momentum. They told their stories, learned from the experiences, and continued to move forward and ultimately up. They did what was needed of them. They stayed genuine and true to themselves and if a space was not accepting, they did not fight for too long before they found a space that was more accepting with the help, guidance, and support of their mentors. This manifested in job, institution, field, and/or regional relocations. These positive thoughts also ultimately translated into their actions, all of which are spirituality correlated with what they valued and believed, and for which they ultimately stood. One of the participants called as I was writing this chapter to tell me that she had resigned from her position. Though she did not feel comfortable disclosing the details of her decision, I discerned from the way she spoke about her choice that it was not an easy one and that the decision was discussed and supported by her family and friends and ultimately she felt it was the right thing to do. She translated her thoughts into action.

What a person thinks directly affects what he or she does; therefore, a lot of beliefs translate into action.The two actions most described were prayer and service. In the same way that spirituality helped the women take a moment to reflect, it also assisted them in choosing their battles and at times not reacting to the discrimination they

experienced. Patricia described how her spirituality was infused throughout her work day, "…I meditate to myself when I'm in [my office]…I really believe strongly that God is guiding me…I feel there's a presence …When I need more deep contemplation or I'm really stuck, then I know there's that opportunity for me to, as they say, 'take it to the altar.'" Patricia's spirituality helped her cope with the demands of her job and thereby contributed to her career resilience. The women were able to go within themselves through actions like prayer or meditation in order to withstand the obstacles they faced. Those methods allowed them the space to be still and decide to take no action or to choose their words and actions carefully preventing them from being too rash, from overreacting, or from jeopardizing their career advancement. In this way, being spiritual-minded served as a compensatory variable in the resiliency of the participants.

The participants chose strategies that helped them navigate the terrain of their respective PWIs. They spoke up when stereotypes or prejudice were left unspoken, they chose to ignore and compartmentalize certain interactions, and they chose to address situations in defense of others. Elise described that feeling of the elephant in the room or of there being something on a person's mind or influencing his or her actions yet it is not spoken or addressed. She specifically experienced this when she was named vice president and her staff was made up of all White employees.

> Well, I think it is the fact that things are not spoken. The fact that you know there's probably a pretty good possibility that people are feeling things and making assumptions and nothing is coming out in the open. Of people talking and addressing what this feels like to be the Black woman in charge of these eight or nine [White] people and how that's playing out

> in the [institution's] community…so I felt it was important to force the issue…

Here Elise demonstrated her awareness of some of the perceptions and unspoken expectations of her colleagues and coworkers. She knew that she was being judged based on her race and gender, that her actions were under survellience, and that they would be looking to see what she did, and how she supervised, and judging her every move. In particular, they were interested in how she would interact with her subordinates from different races and how the college/university community as well as the town surrounding the institution would react to a Black woman in a position of power. Elise decided to take matters into her own hands. She trusted her instincts that conversations and speculations were going on behind her back and decided to be in the forefront of what was being discussed. However, one of Patricia's strategies was to not address certain situations, to compartmentalize the emotions, handle the task at hand, and ultimately to stay focused on the good instead of getting overwhelmed by the hate that might be around her or coming her way.

> …unless they directly call me the 'N' word to my face and nobody's done that. I choose not to see racism or sexism, it might be there, it might exist. Even if I believe it might be the case that someone's interacting with me differently because I'm female [or] because I'm African American, I choose not to even dwell on that. I do my job, I continue being me, I continue doing the work that I was [hired] to do. And I just let the rest of this stuff go…I've

> chosen to just keep my eyes closed because I don't want to have that emotional reaction…I don't want to get stuck there…[but] by choosing the path that I have chosen, I am giving up some of myself because there may be places where I might want to assert my African American-ness, or my Blackness or my womanhood more, and I pull back… I also think it's important to make a distinction between, choosing not to see it and not seeing it at all…I'm choosing not to see it, which isn't to say that I don't acknowledge that it's there.

Patricia recognized that in order to advance her career, she has sacrificed, at times, by conforming to the status quo instead of expressing parts of her identity. She recognized that like quicksand, the more she fights, the harder it is to move up in her career; therefore, with the help of her spirituality and her external supporters, she tries to see the good in situations and people and to move past the toxic experiences. Judy's compensatory variable was to recognize when it was not her fight to pursue. "[We] have to just allow for [it] to be their problem. There needs to be some space for you to be able to process it because it's hard to just keep it constantly on your chest…and sometimes laugh about it but you also have to be comfortable knowing that some point in time it's not your burden."

Grace agreed with Patricia that for her own sanity and well-being, she does not address every comment, action, or microaggression.

> If I tackle every single sexist, racist thing I heard, I'd be crazy, I'd suck my thumb in the corner, I'd be under this table rocking…I have to see a

> pattern...[I]t depends how egregious it [is]…Until it becomes something that's going to affect staff people, other people, students of color, then I speak up.

Like Grace's coping mechanism of defending others the participants gained strength from the act of giving to others and it serves as both an intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to carry on.

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the four participants of this research with their pseudonyms: Elise, Grace, Judy, and Patricia. Descriptors including years in the field, current title, type of undergraduate and graduate institution and degree(s), relationship status, and number of children and siblings were provided in aggregate to protect the confidentiality of the participants. I then recounted the experiences of the participants through their career advancement to their current positions. The theoretical framework for the study was the compensatory model of resilience; therefore, the findings were organized first by risk factors, then by compensatory variables.

The risk factors were experiences that the participants identified as threatening to impede their career advancement. These risk factors centered on four main themes: unspoken expectations, perceptions of appearance, communication styles, and inequitable compensation. The unspoken expectations they encountered on the job encompassed how they often integrated the spaces they were in with their intersection of identity and how they were looked to as a representative of their race, gender, or of the student affairs field. They shared feeling as though they had to prove themselves and that they were not solely in their positions due to their identity. They were tasked with committee work or

recruitment events and at times they questioned whether their requested involvement was due to their position or their identity. Their race and gender often made them uniquely visible on campus because there were so few Black women professionals at the institution, and so much so that they experienced was being mistaken for another Black woman on campus who looked nothing like them.

The second risk factor was perceptions of appearance and included the comments, reactions, and unspoken expectations of how they dressed, were groomed, and styled their hair. Though hair in the workplace is of concern for all women, the participants recounted the marginalization they experienced such as co-workers touching it without permission and the media pressure to alter their hair texture or cover their natural hair to conform to the dominant culture. In order to accommodate for these perceptions, they had to be deliberately intentional about how they presented themselves to different stakeholders on campus and also during the hiring process. They spoke about how they felt discriminated against so subtly that it was difficult to prove or truly identify.

The third risk factor described the participants' communication styles, whether verbal or non-verbal, and how at times they were misunderstood and misinterpreted by co-workers, causing the need for adjustment or mindfulness on their part to again conform to the norm. They were viewed as intimidating to coworkers simply by their presence. Their stature and height were seen as larger than in reality. Their tone of voice and non-verbal facial expressions or lack of expressions were misread as anger. Their mannerisms and gestures were also misconstrued, causing the participants to adjust them to the dominant culture.

The fourth and final risk factor was the compensation that the participants did not think reflected the amount of work they put in or were expected to put in and which was not equitable compared to the other president's cabinet members. They shared that one of the rationales for this was that the profession of student affairs is considered a minority within higher education; this added to all the other marginalized identities that contributed to their lower compensation.

The two compensatory variables shared were mentoring, giving back, and spirituality. The variables encompass both external and internal forces, people, and spaces that provided the participants the support, affirmation, motivation, and the strength to proceed to senior administration within higher education. The participants spoke about mentors and supervisors who helped them network, encouraged them, and provided opportunities for them to develop the skills and experiences necessary to advance in their careers. These affirmations and validation were kept them motivated and moving forward in their careers. Many of the participants attributed the words and encouragement of an external person to why they were in their current position; without it they might not have thought they could or might not have taken the chance to apply. Giving back provided both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations as the participants served as role models for students and young professionals and also paid forward the support they were given. The participants in their roles were committed to providing the nurturing to help all students whether they looked like them or not.

The compensatory variable of spirituality was expressed by three of the four participants. This included attending church, praying, meditating, yoga, having faith in a higher power, believing in karma, and having an escape to a place where they were not

the minority but the majority. In those spaces they could let down their guard of having to be aware of the perceptions others were using to judge their actions as a representation of their race; there they could express themselves. Judy did not mention spirituality, faith, or any comparable compensatory variable.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Consistent with the traditions of qualitative research, this chapter includes both a discussion of the findings as well as personal reflection. It begins with a discussion of the findings in relation to the research questions, then shifts to implications of the study followed by recommendations for practice, policy, and further research. The chapter concludes with the researcher's reflections.

Addressing the Research Questions

At the core of the study were three research questions that explored the participants' experiences leading to the SSAO position; the professional, institutional or personal issues experiences while in the job; and the strategies they used to be resilient where so many others have not been able to do so. After analyzing the participants' experiences, the following overarching outcomes directly answer the stated research questions.

Mentors. All four participants had informal or peer mentors (Blackhurst, 2000; Langdon & Gordon, 2007; Twale & Jelinke, 1996; Jarnagin, 2010), sponsors (Cook, 2013), connections from friends or family, supervisors, or colleagues who saw their potential and suggested they pursue the next level of responsibility; this informal tap on the shoulder is a common catalyst that can move those not currently considering leadership positions onto a path of executive leadership (McNair, 2014). In this study I broadly defined mentoring as all the external supporters who had a significant effect on

the career path of the four women participants. Many of the participants did not identify the persons that assisted earlier in their career mentors at that time however upon reflect they recognize and attribute the credit to those individuals. The participants in this study had been content to remain in their current positions until it was brought to their attention that (1) they were overqualified for that position and had the insight and experience to take on more or (2) their peers were searching for jobs when they were not. It was often these external influences that helped the participants navigate their career paths.

Though the mentor relationship was so critical in the participant's success it is important to note that the acknowledgement of potential was not solicited by the participants. Because Black women have the potential to be perceived as inferior and incompetent (Gutierres y Muhs, Niemann, Gonzalez, & Harris, 2012) they often will not ask for help when they need it most for fear that they will reinforce these perceptions. This is in contrast to dominant mentoring paradigms whereby a person intentionally seeks a mentor for guidance without fear of feeling incompetent. The mentors, guardian angels, role models or supervisors of the participants of this study provided advice, validation, connections, and/or opportunities for the participants to gain experiences that assisted them in their current job. They also leaned on their colleagues from other institutions and used external activities, such as conferences, as a way to connect with others outside of their institution. They recommended that other professionals wishing to advance should get involved, volunteer, and take on internships on their campuses or in a professional association.

Finally, the participants expressed the important role of their family in processing their experiences, providing an escape from thinking or talking about work, and keeping

them grounded by reminding them who they were before the title and responsibilities. The connection to family, the church, and their community contributed to what Caldwell and Stewart (2001) called "cultural rituals of renewal" (p. 228) that help protect them from the effects of living a double conscious life, which included mental and health concerns as well as isolation and depression.

The triple bind. Black women are in a double bind (Jamieson, 1995), in double jeopardy (Beak, 2008; Cole, 2009), or multiple negative (Menges & Exum, 1983) because of their intersecting racial and gender identities. In addition to issues related to race and gender, participants also had to contend with a third marginalized identity: being a student affairs professional. The participants spoke about the ways the field of student affairs is marginally viewed within the academy and that this was most distinctly communicated by the disparity in compensation they receive as SSAOs in comparison to their counterparts on the president's cabinet. They also reported being provided as a rationale for their inferior level of compensation that there was no comparable vice president for student affairs job that required their salaries competitive in the public setting yet as stated by Dungy and Ellis (2011) an SSAO has multiple competencies and with that potential job titles rolled into one.

In 2012, the chief student-affairs/life officer at an undergraduate institution in the United States earned a median annual salary of $119,650, the 17th highest-paid administrator, while the dean of students position at an undergraduate institution earned a median annual salary of $83,492, the 66th highest-paid administrator (*Chronicle of Education*, 2013). Salary is one way the double bind is reinforced the other was heighten visibility which ironically also at times heighten their invisibly as well. It is another

example of how the work of student affairs is often invisible and devalued and that in addition to the participant's intersection of race and gender adds to their marginalization in a senior leadership position in higher education.

In/visibility. The participants acknowledged the struggle they experienced of both being hyper visible due to the fact that they were the first, only, or one of few Black women in leaders juxtapose to them feeling invisible as they were mistaken for others on the campus. Their professional dress, hair texture, and mannerisms made them visible however the perceived necesity for assimulating to the dominant culture and therefore surpressing their full self expression contributing to the feeling of invisibility. Due to the invisiblity of their professional identity as well as their social identity, made up of race and gender, my participants are actually contening with a triple jeorpardy. The participants also described their visibility as being expected to represent their race or having an awareness that their actions would be generalize on a broader scale yet when that occurs it simulateously causes their expression as individuals to become invisible.

They spoke of how they had to code-switch and use double-consciousness to remain resilient in the higher education setting. They smiled in the face of pain or made light of difficult situations in order to put their colleagues at ease. According to Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) sometimes "wonderfully talented, hard-working selfless [Black] women –often shift and suppress their own needs for so long that they push insidiously, unwittingly, often invisibility, towards depression" (p. 124). Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) term this complex sisterella "a manifestation of depression that is all too common in Black American women today. Much like the classic Cinderella character, Sisterella is the Black woman who honors others but denies herself." (p. 124).

The women's identities were further complicated with their position of power and influence as the senior student affairs officer. The SSAO position exasperated the isolation and need to prove oneself as the expectation for a senior position is that one has it all together. With their position in the organizational structure they gained a form of privilege which came with a different kind of influence therefore it created additional expectations of responsibility, greater pressure and simultaneously a pressure to potentially make things different for themselves and for others by virtue of their position. Despite holding that privilege they still struggle in ways that are similar to their entry and midlevel colleagues or students who may not hold the type of privilege or particular access to influence as they do. This simultaneous visibility and invisibly therefore causes tension that perhaps does not fully allow the privilege to be fully be acknowledged.

Resilience. Using the compensatory model of resilience (Benard, 1991; Jackson, Firtko, & Edenborough, 2007; Kaplan, Turner, Norman, & Stillson, 1996; Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 2001; Newman, 2002; VanBreda, 2001) to analyzed the experiences of the participants, I realize that the compensatory variables identified (mentors, giving back, and spirituality) outweighed the risk factors identified (tokenism, perceptions of appearance and communication styles, and inequitable compensation) creating the opportunity for the outcome for the participants to be positive despite the risks. The compensatory variables do not directly intersect or influence the risk factors but it does provide the individual the inner strength to withstand the risks.

Throughout the study the participants expounded on coping mechanisms (Pearlin & Schooler, 1982) or strategies for success that they used and continued to use to sustain their rank and title within higher education. The first was surrounding themselves with

people who respected them and/or provided encouragement, understanding, or opportunities. The second was finding the inner strength to follow their values and choose their battles. Finally, they gave of themselves and continued to be motivated by the students and staff they helped, the programs they supported, and the lives they touched no matter the identity of the recipient.

The participants demonstrated their inner strength through their choices both in the moments alone as well as in the presence of others. They expressed their spirituality in church, at the beauty parlor, in yoga, in hiking, on their commute, or even in their office with the door closed. They disclosed the vulnerable moments they experienced when they could not decipher the intent of the actions of others but they still had to decide how they were going to react. Depending on the situation, they prayed, breathed deeply, talked with others to gain an additional perspective on the situation, confronted the person in private and addressed it diplomatically in a meeting, used humor, or simply walked away.

Another way the participants conveyed their inner strength was through service or giving back. The participants' willingness to give of themselves every day seemed to be a driving force behind their leadership. They gave to any student or staff member who walked into their office, opened their homes to student clubs and organizations for their celebrations, prepared speeches, attended events, and even participated in doctoral research studies such as this. The fruits of their labor are evident in their offices through the pictures, artwork, and thank-you cards from the people whose lives they touched. They hold on to the stories of the lives they have impacted as they sit in meetings and as they discuss revisions of policies or determine which programs to endorse. They long to

do more, to do for others what their guardian angels did for them. They are senior administrators in part because they view it as their calling or vocation, not a title to possesses or a rank for which to aim. Their focus on service helps them be resilient.

Hair. All the participants discussed their journey with hair, the decisions that had to be made regarding hairstyles, and the effects that their hairstyles had on how their work and presence was viewed. Hair can be a struggle for all women in the work place but reactions and comments described by the participants demonstrate the additional marginalization of Black women as it pertains to hair. These situations of marginalization carry over outside of higher education as well. For example, American television host and actress, Tanika Ray, shared an experience similar to the one Grace shared regarding the hair issues Black women face. She recounted, "I did *The View*, and…Barbara Walters was like, 'Your hair. It's so cute!' And she put her hand in my hair on national television" to which actress Nia Long replied, "She wouldn't do that to a White woman" (Taylor, 2009, p.140). Though hair is a part of everyone's outward appearance, the experiences described by the participants demonstrate the additional effort, thought, and scrutiny they had to navigate based on the appearance and upkeep of their hair. The women shared the effect hair had on their appearance, what thought had to go into the hair styles they choose, and how they were perceived and treated by their colleagues because of their hair/hairstyle.

The participants shared that as they advanced in their careers and they developed as a professional, their own concerns about how their hair was perceived dissipated. Perhaps this was due to their increased comfort with their identity or a sense that because they had proven their worth through their work, there was less of a focus on their

appearance. Either way the women realized how much energy and thought they were expending on being congnicent of their outward appearance and as they advanced in their careers, they lessened how much their appearance such as their hairstyle choices were guided by how it would be perceived by their colleagues.

For Black women in the U.S., the severe treatment of hair serves as a metaphor that illustrates how social pressures (including the management of hair) force the transformation of Black women to meet hegemonic norms to support their career advancement. Attorney Angela Reddock affirmed this in a recent magazine article:

> A Black woman's hair choice can limit her mobility, depending on how progressive her work environment may be. Is it right? Of course not. Does that feeling still exist? For sure. You develop a sense of what makes people feel comfortable in corporate America. The reason many of us straighten our hair is to take that out of the equation. Folks in the boardroom can actually hear what we're saying instead of being distracted by our hair. (Andrew, 2014, p. 49)

The participants also shared comments that ranged from how Black hair should be covered up to colleagues being fascinated by the texture of the hair and wanting to touch it, sometimes disrespectfully and without permission. For some of the participants, their hairstyles and hair changes eventually became a form of expression once they had established themselves in their position and at the institution. Patricia developed a coping mechanism of explaining her hair style changes to her staff early on in their relationship to avoid awkward exchanges later; however, Elise put her hair in a ponytail every morning and let her work speak for itself. Though the participants were learning to cope

and be resilient in their career path, the conversation continues regarding what the act of covering up or altering a Black woman's hair texture will do to her psychologically in the long run. We fight our hair and in so doing, one could argue that we fight ourselves, all to fit in or to get ahead. All women have to contend with choices regarding hair and appearance in the workplace; however, based on the experiences of these participants, there is an additional level of burden that Black women have to be aware of and endure.

When the experiences of the participants were shared informally with people of marginalized backgrounds, their experiences were affirmed and were no cause for surprise. This reaction suggests that the microaggressions experienced by the participants are considered the norm for Black females in higher education. In contrast, White colleagues that I shared the findings with had never heard of things like that happening to their colleagues or were surprised that those experiences were still occurring since they were never brought to their attention. While the findings from this study may not be new information to Black women, what is noteworthy is that the experiences are still occurring and few women are reporting, discussing, or making an effort to institute a change towards eradicating them in the culture and climate of the academy.

This study can be a call to action to the current and future generations of higher education professionals to not continue to accept what is but to redefine it, to question it, to do what we ask of our students: critique and think critically about their environment and if it is inequitable, do something about it to bring it closer to where it needs to be. Sometimes *good enough* has to become our standard; however, while that advice works on a student getting stuck in a circle of writing and edits, it does not work for women

administrators who should not be accepting the treatment that they are getting no matter how well masked and ingrained in our internalized oppression it is.

Reflection. Some of the participants described the opportunity to share their stories as "therapeutic" and said it helped them begin to notice patterns in their own experiences for the first time and correlations behind the reactions from others in situations that were still too emotional to disclose. The participants' experiences suggest that both the subtle and overt discriminatory treatment has gone on for so long without change that some have given up trying to make it different. The women indicated that they did not even think to complain, comment, or bring it to someone's attention for fear that they become known as the angry Black person, the one causing trouble, the overly sensitive person. After years of being punished in so many ways for doing nothing wrong, it is a passed-down compensatory variable to avoid bringing attention to oneself that leads to their resilience.

Implications: Silence Speaks Volumes

The findings in this study can impact our current understanding of the experiences of professionals becoming and working as an SSAO, which ultimately provides insight into the people and practices of higher education. A major outcome of this study is that few of the experiences mentioned by participants were profoundly new for women of color in leadership; in other words, their experiences reflect what has been previously reported in the literature (Britton, 2013; Smith Latimore, 2009; Somer, 2007; Stanback Stroud, 2009) and reflect the need to continue discussing and exploring how women of color experience the academy. Whether I shared my study results during informal conversations with colleagues or presented them formally at a NASPA Western Regional

Conference, those from minority backgrounds felt affirmed by the stories of the participants. At the same time, those from dominant identity backgrounds were surprised by the stories because they had stopped hearing about them and thought that many of these issues had been resolved. During and after the presentation at the 2013 NASPA Western Regional Conference, my audience validated that the stories of the participants resonated with them and confirmed that they were experiencing similar things at their institutions, which led me to questions about why these stories persist and how they have contributed to this modern form of system oppression.

Part of the oppression experienced by people of color is internalized; the oft-repeated message is that talking about the seemingly harmless comments, insults, and suggested tones that can be explained away by things other than discrimination will not do any good, yet it is clear from the study participants that not talking about these micro-aggressive interactions has also failed to produce changes. This study is one way of talking about the experiences that marginalized populations endure each day in the field of higher education and of making a declaration to not be silent anymore.

The experiences of Black women have not been frequently written about in mainstream research although they are much discussed within the inner circles of those enduring the experiences. These silences have contributed to the perception that discrimination no longer occurs and is no longer a cause for concern, which is harmful for our students, professionals, institutions, the future of the student affairs profession, and higher education at large. The silence is deafening. The personal and professional resilience required to pursue the SSAO position is something that few possess. In both the experiences of my participants and in my own experiences, I have found that

encounters are discussed among those with similar identities or as allies to commiserate, not to engender change.

Though the participants navigated the system to get to these positions in which they have some level of power and influence, they still demonstrate a common fear among people of color of retaliation; of being labeled a troublemaker or rabble rouser, or as unjustifiably crying discrimination if their discontent in opposition to the status quo is vocalized (Kanter, 1977). One example was Judy not wanting to be responsible for organizing the networking event on campus for the Black faculty and staff. There is a fear that the minority person will be judged, criticized, or seen as the problem instead of people recognizing the situation as the problem. In these situation, the victim does not want to get the offender in trouble; he or she just wants the action(s) to stop. That is one of the reasons the reporting rate from victims tends to be low in comparison to what is actually occurring (Felson, Messner, Hoskin, & Deane, 2002). From the examples of my participants, I would imagine that the reporting rate for microaggressions and discrimination may be low as well.

An example of silence being chosen is how Grace handled the situation with the trustee who made the comment that Black women should wear wigs. During the interview, she mentioned how other board members apologized for the trustee's behavior yet nothing was done to stop it or address it. The examples the participants shared confirmed that their experiences at their PWIs tended to reward the mentality that they should rise above whatever discrimination, microaggression, or judgment was happening and become "bigger" than that in order to sustain themselves in the environment. For example, Patricia talked about ignoring and choosing battles as her coping mechanism,

Grace demonstrated making light of comments made about her attire, and Elise talked about praying for those who discriminate against her. With the risk factor occurring in the workplace, compensatory variables also occurring in their lives are imperative.

The participants named mentors, guardian angels, co-workers, and sponsors as having a big impact in their career advancement and in their resilience; therefore, it is important that we continue to support and encourage the current and future generations of Black women so that they can sustain themselves in the higher education environment that exists today. This will allow them to take the veil of the silence off and talk about their experiences and perhaps eventually change the culture. Qualitative research tells us that truth resides in each individual (Patton, 2002). So whether it is the experience of the dominant culture, it is the truth of the women whom I interviewed. These experiences cannot be ignored or disregarded by the hegemony. The dominant culture cannot say that the experiences are not real or not occurring because these stories demonstrate the contrary. Not only are these experiences the truth for my participants but those truths have already resonated with many with whom I have shared it. This affirms that this is a common experience in need of attention by our institutions and the field of student affairs.

The conversation needs to move beyond the safe spaces with one another. The secrecy is not working. The academy needs to know what it is like for a woman of color working in today's colleges and universities. My participants shared recent experiences, not ones from decades ago. Even the students at my current institution have shared with me examples of experiencing similar discrimination in class only a few weeks before. This is not behind us but it needs to be in front of us. I hope that this research empowers

people to come forward, share experiences, and have open, honest conversations with one another. According to Sarah Gibbard Cook (2012), the participants were learning to read and navigate their "organizational culture" both in how they were perceived and how they should best respond or adjust (pp. 14). Another way to view it is that they are building their resilience to the experiences.

Microaggressions

Patricia talked about the difficulty of identifying where discrimination may stem from. "I think when you're a Black woman and people treat you differently, you don't know if it's because you're female or if it's because you're Black." Spar (2013) agreed, "…the challenges that confront women now are more subtle than those of the past, hard to recognize and thus to remove" (p. B7). Though the term *racial-microaggression* was originated by Pierce (1970) in reference to the hidden insults directed toward Black Americans, it has also been used to describe the treatment of other marginalized groups (Sue, 2010). The participants of this study provided examples of comments made, actions taken, nonverbal insinuated discriminations towards them from colleagues. As a society, the United States is still dealing with discrimination, and the participants' experiences suggest that discrimination in the form of microaggression is often more subtle now and therefore more difficult to identify and report. Discrimination has been so embedded that there are rationale reasons for behaviors and words that explain away hurtful encounters. These rationalizations leave those who are experiencing the discrimination questioning themselves, thinking the problem is in their head, or not saying anything for fear of seeming too sensitive or making a big deal about a small issue. The victim potentially can assume that if he or she is silent, ignores it, and rises

above it that he or she is doing everyone a favor. The alleged aggressor can at times not intentionally be trying to be cruel or even realize that what he or she has said or done has affected the colleague in any way; however, that does not relieve the impact that it has on the victim. The silence perpetuates the fact that not many people know that it is still occurring. My participants still remembered the encounters they had in detail whether they had happened recently or months in the past. Some stories still elicited emotion that they had carried around with them unresolved. It is not the intent that matters; it is the impact as well as how the situation is addressed after it is brought to the offender's attention. "I did not mean anything by it" can be replaced with "I did not know that and I will do my best to not say or do that anymore."

Sadly what tends to happen is that the people being oppressed have to educate the oppressors and eventually that burns people out. This may be another reason or rationale for silence. However, what has the potential to occur is that people hold in their anger, frustration, disappointment, confusion, and other emotions after an encounter until one day they explode inappropriately at what seems like a small thing. That reaction then has the potential to perpetuate the stereotype of the angry Black woman and the cycle of discriminatory thinking and behavior continues. The examples of the participants expressed the pressure they felt for their actions and words to role model and even represent their race or gender. The examples shared were risk factors that the participants learned to cope with or overcome in order to succeed though the pressure felt was not always exterior but at times revealed to be ingrained in their thinking as well.

Internalized Oppression

The participants' examples of actions they took came not from the comments or behaviors of external sources but rather from their internal dialogues built up from external sources over time, dialogues that have been internalized and set on continuous repeat. They have been taught for so long to "grin and bear it" that not reacting to acts of discrimination is a now a form of survival. And they are not alone. Beauty blogger Patrice Grell Yursik recounted, "My earliest memory of any hair treatment was being told to sit still and ignore the burning sensation, because the more it burned, the straighter my hair would be" (Andrew, 2014, p. 48). Even from a young age, Yursik, like my participants, was taught the benefits of being silent through the pain as well as that there was something about her that needed changing in order to fit in. This internalized risk factor may be one reason it was so important for the participants to seek the compensatory factor of spirituality as it requires quiet introspection to combat our recurring thoughts.

Recommendations for Practice

Though much can be learned from the experiences of the participants that could carry over to potential practice, four overarching recommendations for practice were identified: creating conversations along the pipeline, providing a network of supporters, developing supporters, and expanding the accessibility to staff demographics.

Conversations along the pipeline. The first recommendation for practice is to prepare future generations of Black women leaders by beginning to discuss experiences and potential experiences they may encounter as well as options for addressing or processing the situations. This could occur in mentor programs for undergraduate

students considering the field of student affairs such as the NASPA Undergraduate Fellowship Program (NUFP), within student affairs or relevant master's programs, or among affinity groups at an institution, in a region, or nationally through professional associations. These pipeline programs are one of many places where the expectations of what is experienced and acceptable for the profession can slowly be shifted and with it the culture of the field. By beginning the dialogue about the potential of experiences like those of my participants with aspiring and new professionals early in their careers so that they can anticipate what may come their way, know how to cope or to support others going through it, and hopefully strategize how to begin to change the existing culture. We can no longer be complaisant if a systemic change is to occur.

Offering help. The participants shared that they felt as though their actions were under surveillance, that it was perceived that they represented their race and gender because of the tokenized (Kanter, 1977) role they filled on their campus. The triple bind of representing their race, gender, and profession in their mind necessitates the need to appear confident and asking for help suggests incompetence and produces a perception of inferiority (Watt, 2006) therefore women and women of color specifically may not seek support. With this in mind it is recommended that potential mentors, supervisors, or colleagues seek out current and future leaders not because they lack skills or from a presumption of needing help but because campus climate (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Harvey, 1991; Hurtado, & DeAngelo, 2009; Mayhew, Grunwald & Dey, 2006; Cadwell & Stewart, 2001; Somers, Cofer, Austin, Inman, Martin, Rook, & Wilkinson, 1998; Sandler, & Hall, 1986) may not support them if they ask for support. In order to cultivate a supportive climate potential mentors, coaches, sponsors will want to make the initial

connection to women and women of color despite what the dominant mentoring culture usually dictates. It is also recommended that Black women attempt to determine who they can trust and ask for the help they need.

Professional development. Grace shared how networking with other vice presidents at conferences was something to which she looked forward and was an opportunity for her to connect with like-minded people who could understand their work, their mentality, and the concerns that come with the position regardless of race or gender. Judy shared an experience at a previous institution where within the campus there was a Black faculty and staff organization that met on a regular basis and how that is something now missing at her current institution. This organization, however, is not able to be replicated because there is not a critical mass of Black faculty and staff members to initiate or sustain the organization. With these experiences in mind, PWI institutions could provide opportunities and spaces for their Black senior leaders to discuss experiences on their campuses or at conferences, drive-in or one day conferences, and webinars. This would require resources such as funding to attend professional conferences, workshops, or webinars and the ability for them to take time away from work to attend. Professional organizations have networks based on affinity or functional area such as ACPA's Networks and NASPA's Knowledge Communities these structures are in place for creating intentional space for its members to identify, network, learn, and grow. If this is something that cannot be provided at an institutional level they are viable options for institutions to support their leaders of color by providing them the resources to benefit from these settings to get recharged.

The participants all advised getting involved, volunteering at and attending workshops, conferences, and keeping engaged in professional associations (NASPA, ACPA, and African American Women in Higher Education in particular). A recommendation for the professional organizations is to extend seminal and well attended programs such as NASPA's African-American Women Summit to regional conferences, which is a stable full-day pre-conference were extended to the regional conference, it would have the potential to reach more professionals who are likely to be newer to the profession and bound by regional or professional development fund restraints.

Another possibility is the collaboration of the affinity or functional area networks or knowledge communities that concentrate on women or Pan African Americans that could intentionally connect professionals across their intersections of identity at the conferences as well as throughout the year. Finally, if the products of these programs, workshops, pre-conferences, discussions, and collaborations were recommendations for the profession and institutions based on the experiences shared, that would incentivize participation and forthright testimony as well as ensure progress within the system of higher education in general and student affairs in particular.

Network of supporters. The second recommendation for practice is to provide more spaces for mentoring and other forms of empowering one another. Based on the experiences of the participants, Black women professionals need space, time, money, and opportunities for mentoring to occur whether through formal mentoring programs, peer mentor circles, or sponsors (Cook, 2013) to speak on their behalf. All the participants emphasized the importance of having others acknowledge, validate, empower, encourage, and suggest to them that they could advance in their careers; therefore, more of these

experiences need to be fostered. Two of the participants also expressed their discomfort with gathering and talking while at work as well as apprehension surrounding whose responsibility it was to organize such gatherings for fear of malicious talk or misperceptions of the content of their discussions or of favoritism for one identity group. It should not be the responsibility of only the staff to create, maintain, and sustain networking based on race and/or gender, but rather the networking needs to be embedded into the system and a shared responsibility because it has value for the employees. It is recommended that whenever a new employee is hired a system is in place for them to be connected with others within the institution who have similar components of identity based on how they self-identify on the employment application. The institution seeks to create those resources for students, but it often does not focus on the necessity for the development of the professional staff who need those same basic things as well. Some adult development theories support the role of student services in an undergraduate student's life and college career to help the student transition to a new environment, to find his or her niche, to encourage him or her to make friends, and to navigate successfully yet some of these same support mechanisms are not put in place for the professional staff and perhaps they should be. Another way networking could be effective is within a consortium of schools in close proximity so that employees' experiences can be discussed, professionals can realize that they are not alone, and institutions can work to address the concerns of the collective.

Developing supporters. The third recommendation for practice is to develop and educate co-workers, mentors, and supervisors on the experiences of Black women, the risk factors, the ways they can contribute to their success, as well as the signs when help

is required. When a Black woman is in need of the most help, it often looks different from others in the dominant culture and therefore they tend not to receive help as quickly as needed or at all. It is imperative that more higher education staff members are made privy to the "sisterella" syndrome (Shorter-Gooden & Jones, 2003) wherein a Black woman manages stress, depression, or being overwhelmed by being even more efficient and productive than usual at times to the detriment of their heath, well-being, and work/life balance. Another term sometimes used for women in general is the *superwoman myth, schema, or syndrome* (Spar, 2013; Woods-Giscombé, 2010). More people including Black women need to be made aware of the syndromes, how to recognize the signs and how to appropriately intervene or offer support.

Another option for institutions is to provide funding for an expert to speak to employees on topics such as microaggressions, racism, and sexism that is open to the entire campus to inform the employees annually so that the women themselves are not asking for this opportunity or not the ones responsible for coordinating or funding it.

Disseminating staff demographics. The final recommendation for practice is for institutions as well as the professional associations to better disaggregate data reported about higher education employees by gender and race. When research statistics for this study I pulled information about the demographics of the faculty and undergraduate students from each institution's website however I was unable to locate the demographics for the staff. The makeup of the staff contributes to the campus climate (Mayhew, Grunwald, & Dey, 2006; O'Keeffe, 2013; Weddle-West, & Bingham, 2010) just as much as the makeup of the faculty does and is an important component of student retention; therefore, it should be reported in a similar manner. Professional associations such as

NASPA should conduct a self-study of their members and report the number of members at each level within the profession disaggregated by at least race and gender if not other forms of identity. Currently data in the Almanac of Higher Education (2012) staff are clumped into the category of executive, administrative, and managerial college and university employees making it impossible to decipher student affairs staff from clerical positions; senior administrators from middle managers or entry level professionals; or ancillary departments such as food service or facilities from those front line staff employed directly by the institution.

Recommendations for Policy

Based on the experiences expressed in this study, three recommendations for institutional policy were identified: advocacy, training, and hiring guidelines and one recommendation for or federal policy was identified: more equitable pay. In an effort to transfer some onus to the institution regarding the treatment of Black women professionals, I recommend a process and/or position be provided as an option for employees to report and process incidents or insensitive comments related to race or gender (i.e., microaggressions, tokenism, or assignments to projects perceived as based on identity and not job function) that occur in the workplace in a protected and confidential space without fear of retaliation or misperceptions of intent. The second recommendation for policy is to have opportunities for training/informing all employees about the concerns of Black women, for instance, the potential difference in communication styles, the struggles with hair and inappropriate ways not to interact or interpret a coworker's hair. The third recommendation for policy is to enforce guidelines and criteria for hiring practices that reduce nepotism, tokenism, and failed diversifying

attempts. For instance, one suggestion would be to examine where positions are posted and provide a diverse assortment of posting, marketing, and recruitment options from which hiring managers can choose. Another suggestion would be to provide and enforce the use of rubrics for reviewing resumes and curriculum vitae in order to account for and recognize transferable skills and the value of differing institutions or fields. Lastly, the findings suggest that it would be beneficial for institutions to have a personnel manager to advise hiring managers and provide guidelines to ensure their interview process and ultimate decision are unbiased. The final recommendation for policy is one that would require policies from the institution and perhaps the federal government as well. I recommend there be guidelines in place to create a more equitable pay scale between male and female employees but also with intersections of identity (i.e., Black women). Because women and persons of color have been reported to not negotiate as well as their White or male counterparts (Fitzgerald, 2013), perhaps hiring agents can stop "playing the game" of offering the lower bid expecting the counter offer because not all cultures have persons who can educate and advise these candidates on "the system." Therefore, a part of the population is repeatedly at a disadvantage.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study focused on four Black women in senior student affairs leadership at small private PWIs; therefore, additional research remains necessary with respect to different position levels and years within higher education, different institutional types and geographical regions, as well as other intersections of identity and other marginalized populations of different races, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, non-mainstream queer identities, trans identities, and spiritual identities, to

name a few. Elise introduced briefly the concept of complexion, which I think warrants further study: whether one's complexion has an effect on career advancement. Finally, two of the participants mentioned the cultural differences they experienced with Caribbean-American supervisors; therefore, exploration of Black subpopulations would be beneficial as well.

The participants in this study mentioned how strongly their guardian angels influenced their career movement, suggesting a need for research about the impact of external influences or what causes people to advance in their careers. Research is needed not just on formal mentors but also on sponsors (Cook, 2013,) who share their networks, advocate for another, and who see, comment on, and encourage another's potential regardless of mentorship title or role.

The participants detailed experiences of microaggression in the workplace, the impact both emotionally and psychologically, as well as the coping mechanisms they established because of the interactions. More research needs to be done on the racial and gender-based microaggressions whether conscious (microassaults) or unconscious (microinsults or microinvalidations) and the effect on the career advancement of people of color (Sue, 2010). The participants spoke about the tokenism they felt on certain committees and initiatives; more research is recommended regarding committee and collateral assignments of senior administration disaggregated by race, gender, and role. The participants demonstrated a great resilient capacity to overcome the risk factors experienced in their PWI environment; however, an area still to be researched is the reason(s) why other Black women on the path to SSAO or with the credentials decide not to pursue the position or not to stay in the field of education all together.

The participant profile assisted me in gathering some information about the backgrounds of the participants (socioeconomic status, education of family, type of neighborhood they grew up in); however, there could be more correlations between the influences of the environment in which they were raised and the characteristics they develop that assist them in being resilient in their careers. Also, spouses, siblings, and external networks contributed greatly to the success of the women; therefore ,further study on these roles could be of benefit as well.

It was difficult to find statistics on the diversity of the staff at institutions and even more difficult to find it disaggregated by race, gender, position type, and institution type. What also added to the complexity of gathering the data was that there was not a standard way of identifying who was considered custodial, clerical, administrative, managerial, administration, and/or executive staff members and to which division they reported. This information in addition to the diversity statistics of faculty and students can assist potential students and staff members in obtaining a bigger picture of the campus climate and perhaps even retention of minority staff.

If this study were to be duplicated, a researcher could include a focus group between participants in addition to the one-on-one interviews. This method may allow the researcher to solidify themes and gather more information from the participants feeding off one another's stories and experiences. This option however would require another level of confidentiality and trust not only between participant and researcher but also with the other participants.

When I started the study, I defined *resilienc*e as the Black women SSAOs simply being in that senior position; however, there is more to the definition of *resilience* that

could be explored. Perhaps there should be a study where the criteria for resilience includes not only being in the senior administration position but criteria that specify details of the person within the position. For instance, the period of time within the position, the salary, the level of respect and influence among the staff and colleagues determined by recommendations and the level of impact on the campus or in the profession has created a notable reputation. In order to best change the culture, we need to seek out who is thriving in the environment and study them. As one of the strengths-based education experts, Chip Anderson, used to say, "To produce excellence, you must study excellence" (Clifton & Anderson, 2004, p. xiii). If we want to change the system of higher education, we should study the best of the best.

Researcher Reflections

Upon reflection, I realized that one of the unconscious rationales for this study coming to fruition is my exploration of the treatment I was receiving in my own professional journey, which I did not want to believe was correlated to my race and gender. My coping mechanism was to not dwell on the negative in my situation but to look for a positive outcome even if it was in the future. I wanted to believe that Black women professionals like me could be resilient despite all the discrimination and microaggressions they had to endure. I wanted to know what was waiting for me in the student affairs profession should I persist and what strategies I would need in order to sustain myself. While I was researching and writing this study, I was simultaneously undergoing a number of losses and changes in my personal life that caused me to explore my identity in a deeper way. I believe that things happen for wise reasons; therefore, though it was a long difficult path, I know that this study was what I was supposed to do.

The impact the study has had on me was profound. I will provide three examples; I am facing my fear of learning the history and terminology of racism, I have begun to articulate my experiences within those frameworks and I am accepting myself, my identity, and its impact on my work and life.

It took longer than expected to process and write up the participants' stories because I was so angry that they had to experience such blatant racism. I walked around with their stories speechless and immobilized yet empowered that I was not crazy and making things up. Their stories were triggers for me and they forced me to relive my own experiences and opened my eyes to all that I had suppressed, ignored, and shrugged off. Because the research became so personal, I struggled to determine how to tell their collective story, how to organize it, how to make sense of it, and how to come to terms with the emotions I felt while writing it. I was overwhelmed by the number of stories they shared and I had a difficult time identifying which experiences were salient for this study and which were interesting and powerful but would not be able to be shared here.

Working on this study has initiated my learning about racially related theories and history, being able to put words to my experiences, and understanding that my experiences are not unique but rather a systemic problem that too many women suffer alone and in silence. I learned a lot about some of the things I once shunned. I could put a name to the experiences that I have had and was still having. I was sad to find out that the experiences and trials were not going to get any better or any easier if I were to advance in my career. The more I learned, the more I realized that my earlier stance of keeping myself ignorant and unable to recognize the patterns repeating themselves or to articulate my experiences. If I blamed myself and looked for other excuses for the way I

was treated, then I stayed in my place and did not cause a scene, thereby allowing the treatment to continue and to be accepted as how it was. I did get angry as I suspected and I did analyze my current and past experiences through my newfound lenses but rather than weighing me down, it was freeing to know where I stood. I was able to question and seek clarification about the intention of others and have conversations rather than assuming and suffering alone.

The second impact this study has had on me is learning about and coming to terms with my intersections of identity that do not having to do with race or gender: my spirituality, my status as a student, and my voice as a researcher. Admittedly, when I found that some of the participants' coping mechanisms encapsulated spirituality, faith, and belief, I was distraught because I did not think that I had a strong spiritual base. I went into a tailspin trying to figure out how I could ever be resilient in student affairs or advance within higher education and not burn out without that internal motivation of spirituality to assist. Although my mother grew up in the Baptist church and I spent eight years in catholic school during elementary and junior high school, I do not regularly go to church and I do not identify myself as having a strong faith background. The one practice in my life that I could equate with spirituality was Bikram yoga; however, during the course of researching, I had stopped having the energy to regularly balance that type of strenuous exercise, the long hours of working in student activities, as well as staying self-motivated, disciplined, and focused to write up the study. I had to eventually come to terms with the different ways that spirituality manifests itself. Though I did not consistently attend or practice a religion, I had faith in something greater than myself and a plan for my life so I had to lean into knowing that I would be okay even though my

coping mechanisms did not look like those of my participants. I knew coming into this doctoral program was going to change my life, have a profound effect on me, and be a time of self-exploration. I had no clue what was in store or how hard the journey would be, but from this experience I have learned to love and accept myself more, express gratitude more, and take care of myself as I did so easily for others.

The next identity I had to recognize and let go of was that of being a student. Technically my father has a doctorate; however, he has never lived in the same country as I do, so therefore I self-identify as a first-generation student because I did not have the access to information about applying, attending, or succeeding as I pursued my undergraduate or graduate degrees. Throughout this process my biggest supporters could not offer advice or direction. They have learned alongside me. In addition, as this is my terminal degree, it is also an ending to a large part of my identity as a student. After 25 years of schooling, it will be unchartered territory for me to not be the perpetual student in the family. Now instead of student, I will transition to being a lifelong learner.

The final way conducting this study has impacted my identity is by helping me embrace my newfound role as researcher. In processing the impacts of the doctorate with colleagues, I realized that I had been suffering from imposter syndrome (Davis, 1994) well before I ever knew what the terms was, that it existed, or that I was not alone in feeling that way. I was feeling as though I did not belong, as though I would be found out as an imposter in the doctoral program, in the profession, or within scholarship. Because of this uncertainty, I recognize now that I was engaging in self-sabotage, which contributed to the prolonging of the completion of the study and therefore the doctoral program. Since I knew so few people with a doctorate, it has been difficult for me to

accept this potential new identity and it was only when I realized that the expectations on me were not going to suddenly shift and that I was not going to lose myself that I was able to move forward. I saw my finishing the doctorate as yet another loss of a part of my identity and an unknown for which I did not know how to prepare. I had to dissipate the voices of my internal congregation. I had to reassure myself that I was not a sell-out, not thinking I was better than anyone else, and not trying to be someone I was not. I realized that this study gave voice to my inner researcher just as much as it gave voice to the stories of my participants. I am thankful that ultimately my work could make a difference by bringing awareness to what is still occurring and could provide suggestions for changes in practice, policy, and further research.

Conclusion

At the end of my first interview, I asked all my participants what they knew for sure. It was in homage to the last story in every *O Magazine* where Oprah Winfrey summarizes her life lesson for the month. After writing this dissertation, what I know for sure is that we need to talk about our experiences. We need to share what is still happening in our institutions. We need to open our eyes and face what we fear for it is in those acts that we deeply grow and learn. My life has changed with this study as I expected it to though even when one anticipates something, it does not necessarily make it easier to accept.

This study was also influenced indirectly by positive psychology. I intentionally chose the theoretical framework of resilience due to its focus on how someone thrives; it uses a strengths-based approach (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 2001; Masten et al., 1990). Though the experiences of the participants were

difficult to hear and to process, ultimately I knew that they were going to be shared, have the potential to be a testimony for others, and help the common good. I was determined not to dwell on what was wrong with the system but rather to identify ways that women have made the system work for them. The hardest part of analyzing the findings has been to put to words the meaning behind the experiences of the participants, to give their truth voice. I was able to make sense of the experiences of the participants when I not only looked to scholarly literature but popular literature and media as well, which depicted some of the experiences that could not be found as prevalent in text. I hope I have paid tribute to my four participants with this submission.

A goal for this research is to help those minority women in middle management positions to transition to senior management by providing awareness of the compensatory variables that have worked for some to overcome the risk factors potentially prohibiting their career advancement. I want things to change, if not in the system or in the field, then in the mindset of the women in the positions to feel empowered to speak up for themselves, to choose their battles, and to not take on too much while still being a role model for students. I want the silence to end and for more Black women to persist into senior management. We have to keep working to change systems Changing systems cannot be the sole responsibility of people of color; it needs to be the responsibility of the entire organization

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APPENDIX A. RECRUITMENT CORRESPONDENCE

Appendix A. Recruitment Correspondence

I am writing to invite you to participate in my dissertation research study exploring the experiences and career advancement of Black women senior student affairs administrators employed at four-year predominantly White institutions within the United States. Below is some information about the study and what your involvement would entail. Attached is my curriculum vita for your review as well as the consent form for the study which includes the risks involved, benefits of the study, and how your information will be secured.

Purpose Statement: The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of Black women senior student affairs administrators at predominately White institutions in order to understand the strategies for success that led to their advancement to senior level positions.

Research Questions: This qualitative study has three overarching research questions:

1. How do Black woman senior student affairs administrators at predominately white institutions describe their experiences leading to the Vice President for Student Affairs or Dean of Students position?

2. What professional, institutional, or personal issues affect Black woman senior student affairs administrators at predominately white institutions?

3. What strategies do Black women senior student affairs administrators at predominately white institutions employ in order to be successful in their careers?

Your Potential Involvement

- **Pre-Interview Survey:** Each participant will be asked to complete a "Participant Profile Inventory" which will be distributed via an electronic survey tool. This inventory will assist in gathering demographic information, educational history, employment history, and parent/family information about each participant.

- **Interviews:** Each participant will be interviewed at minimum 2 times and maximum 4 times for a minimum of two hours each time. The interviews will take in a setting designated by you. Interviews may be conducted via video conferencing or phone.

- **Document Review:** Each participant will be asked to provide documents regarding their leadership/administrator roles to gain context (i.e. résumés/curriculum vitae, biographies, articles, press releases).

- **Optional Focus Group:** The four participants will be invited to participate in a focus group for a minimum of two hours. The focus group will take place at the NASPA Annual Conference in Phoenix, Arizona.

- **Follow-up Questions:** Each participant may be given follow-up questions to journal on and provide back to me.

- **Member Checking:** Each participant will be asked to read and provide comments/ clarification on the transcripts from their interviews and/or my analysis of interviews.

- **Communicating with Researcher:** Each participant will be given the opportunity to communicate with me via social networking tools through-out the course of the study.

If you are interested in participating in the study please sign the consent form and either scan and email it to <insert email address> or fax it to me at <insert fax number>. If you have any questions you can reach me at: <insert cell number>.

APPENDIX B. INFORMED CONSENT

Appendix B. Informed Consent

I, _____, state that I am over 18 years of age and that I voluntarily agree to participate in a research project conducted by Shauna Sobers, a doctoral student in Education Administration and Leadership in the Benerd School of Education at University of the Pacific. The research is being conducted in order to meet the University of the Pacific Doctor of Education in Education Administration and Leadership degree requirements. It is designed to examine the experiences of Black female senior student affairs administrators employed at predominantly White institutions and how they have advanced to that position. I will be interviewed for two hours. An audio and/or digital recording device will record the interviews. I understand that, as a participant, I may turn off the recording device at any time. The interview will occur in the home, social or professional setting of my choice.

I understand that I will be asked about personal information; consequently possible areas of discomfort include being asked to recall unpleasant times, incidents, and situations within my professional life and/or having to "relive" stressful experiences related to race and/or gender discrimination or other stressors experienced in my historical and present role as an administrator/leader in a predominantly White institution.

I acknowledge that Shauna Sobers has explained the task to me fully; has informed me that I may withdraw from participation at any time without prejudice or penalty; has offered to answer any questions that I might have concerning the research procedure; has assured me that any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with me will remain confidential; has assured me that data obtained will be kept in a safe, locked location and will be destroyed after a period of three years after the study is completed; has assured me that any information I give will be used for research and professional development only.

I consent to Shauna Sobers reviewing documents regarding my leadership/administrator roles (i.e., website, speeches, biographies, articles, press releases, résumés/curriculum vitae). I consent to my Facebook profile being viewed or my Twitter account being followed, if applicable. I consent to the results of the study being published in a submitted dissertation and used in future publications and presentations for academic, professional conferences and professional development.

I understand that I may contact Shauna Sobers, M.Ed., <insert #> (student), or Delores McNair, Ed.D., <insert #> (dissertation advisor), if I have questions about this study. Call the Institution Research Board Administrator, Research & Graduate Studies Office, at University of the Pacific (209) 946-7367 with any questions about the rights of a participant in a research project.

My signature below indicates that I have read and understand the information provided above, that I willingly agree to participate, that I may withdraw my consent at any time and discontinue participation at any time without penalty, that I will receive a copy of this form, and that I am not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.

_____ _____

(Signature of participant) *(Date signed)*

APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL CATEGORIZED BY RESEARCH QUESTION

Appendix C. Interview Protocol Categorized by Research Question

How do Black women senior student affairs administrators at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) describe their experiences leading to the position?

1. Describe your path to the SSAO position (i.e., choices and opportunities).
    a. Why did you initially choose to work in student affairs?
    b. Why do you continue to work in student affairs?
    c. Why did you initially choose to work at a PWI?
    d. Why do you continue to work at a PWI?

2. When you think of your life experiences and their impact on who you are today, what comes to mind?

3. What legacy do you want to leave at your current institution?
    a. In the field of student affairs?

What professional, institutional, and/or personal issues affect Black women senior student affairs administrators at PWIs?

4. In your experience as a Black woman leader, how have you had to deal with issues that your other colleagues do not?
    a. How did you experience racial or gender influenced barriers to your advancement?
    b. Has that changed as your authority or position has changed?

5. Describe your work with faculty, staff, and administrators in your current role.
    a. What was your most pleasant era or experience?
    b. What was your least pleasant era or experience?

6. When you are confronted with racial or gender issues, how do you choose when or whether to address them?
    a. Has that changed as your authority or position has changed?

7. What issues / challenges are not changing quickly?
    a. How do you cope?

8. How do you affect change?

9. Please provide examples of your experience that reflect how or whether you identify with the following statement from Anna Julia Cooper: “When and where I enter…the whole race enters with me.”

What strategies do Black women senior student affairs administrators at PWIs employ in order to be successful in their careers?

10. How do you define success?
    a. What are your strategies for success?

11. How do you stay hopeful / inspired?

12. What keeps you going?

13. What advice do you have for young professionals pursuing an SSAO position?
    a. What are the experiences needed to prepare for an SSAO position?

14. How can Black women be better mentored, recruited, and supported into senior student affairs programs?

15. What do you know for sure? (O Magazine)

16. What question did I not ask that you think I should have?
    a. What is the answer?

APPENDIX D. PARTICIPANT PROFILE INVENTORY

Appendix D. Participant Profile Inventory

SECTION A- PERSONAL INFORMATION

• What year were you born? _____

• Marital/Relationship Status

a. Single/never married b. Married c. Separated d. Divorced e. Widowed

• Children

a. No Children b.1-2 c. 3-4 d. Over 4

• Siblings

a. Only child b.1-2 c. 3-4 d. Over 4

SECTION B- EDUCATIONAL INFORMATION

• Highest degree attained

a. Master's b. JD c. Ed.D. d. Ph.D.

• Year of degree attainment for each degree _____

• Did you enter college directly after high school?

a. Yes b. No

• Type of undergraduate institution attended

a. Historically Black Institution (Public) b. Historically Black Institution (Private) c. Predominantly White Institution (Public) d. Predominantly White Institution (Private)

• Area of study for undergraduate institution

a. Education b. Business c. Other_____

• Type of Master's institution attended

a. Historically Black Institution (Public) b. Historically Black Institution (Private) c. Predominantly White Institution (Public) d. Predominantly White Institution (Private)

• Area of study for Master's institution

a. Education b. Business c. Other_____

• Type of doctoral institution attended

a. Historically Black Institution (Public) b. Historically Black Institution (Private) c. Predominantly White Institution (Public) d. Predominantly White Institution (Private)

• Area of study for doctoral institution

a. Education b. Business c. Other_____

SECTION C- EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION

• How many years of higher education experience do you have?

a. less than 10 years b. 10-15 years c. 15-20 years d. 20-25 years e. 25 or more

• During your career, how many postsecondary institutions have you worked in?

a. 1 to 2 b. 3 to 4 c. 4 to 5 d. 5 to 6 e. more than 6

• How many years have you been in your current position?

a. 1 to 3 b. 3-6 c. 6-9 d. more than 9

• What position did you hold before you were a senior student affairs administrator?

_____

SECTION D- PARENT/FAMILY HISTORY

• Parents' marital status

a. Single/never married b. Married c. Separated d. Divorced e. Widowed

• Whom did you live with as a youth (age 0-18)?

a. mother and father b. mother c. father d. Other_____

• Highest level of education of male parental figure

a. high school b. associate's c. bachelor's d. Master's e. doctorate

• Highest level of education of female parental figure

a. high school b. associate's c. bachelor's d. Master's e. doctorate

• Highest level of education of spouse/partner (if applicable)

a. high school b. associate's c. bachelor's d. Master's e. doctorate

• In your opinion, what class was your family when you were a youth?

a. upper class b. middle class c. working class

• In your opinion, what class are you and your family currently?

a. upper class b. middle class c. working class

• In what kind of community were you reared?

a. urban b. rural c. suburban

• What positions within what professional associations have you held?

• What involvement did you engage in as an undergraduate student?

APPENDIX E. STATISTICS OF COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY FACULTY & STAFF

Appendix E. Statistics of College/University Faculty & Staff

Table 4. University/College Executive, Administrative, Managerial Employees by Ethnicity

Date	Total	American Indian	Asian	Black	Hispanic	White	Race Unknown	Nonresident Foreign
Fall 2011	117,843	0.30%	.3.40%	8.50%	6.30%	77.90%	0.40%	0.023
Fall 2009	109,012	0.30%	3.60%	8.90%	4.90%	81.80%	0.50%	2,604
Fall 2007	100,673	0.30%	3.20%	9.00%	4.60%	82.50%	0.50%	2,510

Adapted from Almanac of Higher Education, 2010; 2012; 2013

Table 5. Female University/College Executive, Administrative, Managerial Employees

Date	Total Female Base	American Indian	Asian	Black	Hispanic	White	Race Unknown	Nonresident Foreign
Fall 2009	53.70%	0.60%	3.40%	11.00%	5.60%	78.90%	0.40%	2,455
Fall 2007	53.00%	0.60%	3.10%	11.30%	5.20%	79.50%	0.30%	2,028

Adapted from Almanac of Higher Education, 2010; 2012

Table 6. *Female Full-Time Instructional Professors, Instructors, Lectures, and Other in Degree-Granting Institutions, by Race/Ethnicity: Fall 2009, And Fall 2011*

Date	Total Female Faculty	Female Contribution to Total by Ethnicity		
		White	Black	Other
Fall 2011	334,637	74.1	6.9	13.0
Fall 2009	313,156	75.5	6.9	12.2

Adapted from NCES, 2012