“I DID EVERYTHING I WAS SUPPOSED TO:” BLACK WOMEN ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALS’ PUSH OUT AND OPT OUT OF HIGHER EDUCATION WORKPLACES

by

BRITTANY MARIE WILLIAMS

(Under the Direction of Darris Means)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore Black administrative professional women’s push out and opt out of student affairs and higher education workplaces. To construct this qualitative research counter-narrative, I used a Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality lens with a Black feminist epistemological underpinning. The Black women in this study reported experiences of institutional and community betrayal; navigation of workplaces where trauma, violence, and policing were norm; and issues of inequitable pay, resources, and differential labor expectations. These findings were contextualized through participant developed vignettes where media and pop culture imagery revealed feelings associated with participant experiences. Practitioners in positions of leadership can improve Black women’s experiences in the workplace by creating intentional opportunities for cross campus and cross institution connections and by being mindful of the unequal distribution of office labor and workplace pay. This can serve to minimize feelings associated with tokenization and loneliness. Finally, researchers can serve to improve Black women’s workplace experiences by centering Black women in practitioner roles in research and scholarship production, creating opportunities for and encouraging Black women practitioners to write about their experiences, and offering data-driven initiatives and practices to

support the sustainability of Black women higher education and student affairs practitioners at PWIs.

INDEX WORDS: Black Women Student Affairs Professionals, College Administrators, Workplace Retention, Push Out, Counter-Narrative

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DEDICATION

There are three groups of people to whom I dedicate this work.

- First, to my *three* parents, Gwendolyn Williams, Frank Womble, and the late Willie "Sam" Williams for training me to use my brain as a weaPEN. Look ya'll, it is written. ☺
- Second, to my little sister for being unapologetically who she is and reminding me that no matter how much the world tries to change me, I, too, can show up as me, myself, and I.
- Lastly, to Black women—
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Damn shame. I tell you... being a Black woman. Be strong, they say. Support your man— raise a man; think like a man. Well damn, I gotta do all that? Who's out here working for me? Carrying my burden, building me up when I get down? Nobody. Black women out here trying to save everybody and what do we get? Swagger jacked by white girls wearing cornrows and bamboo earrings. Ain't that a bitch? Huh? But we still try. Try to help all y'all. Even when we get nothing. Is that admirable or ridiculous? I don't know...

(ABC Television Network Youtube, 2017, 0:00-0:48)

Delivered by Khandi Alexander as "Maya (Mama) Pope" on *Scandal*

Written by Shonda Rhimes, Zahir McGhee, and Michelle Lirtzman

I yelped. As the tears rolled down my face, I felt something listening to Khandi Alexander's delivery of the aforementioned monologue I had not felt in a long time: validation. I watched her oration over and over and over until my computer's battery required recharging. Though I had long ago found a community of Black women in student affairs to confirm my experiences were not mine alone in a vacuum, the writing and delivery of Alexander's speech gave voice to emotions we had all struggled to articulate. The questions of *is it me?* or *maybe I'm tripping?* for lack of better language that once swarmed my mind are now replaced by my awareness that there is an expectation set for Black women that does not exist for others around us. From having our ideas taken from a small group conversation and rehashed in large group dialogues sans credit, to copying programs and giving them new names, Black women remain simultaneously integral and ignored in higher education workplace contexts.

It was not until Morris' (2016) award-winning novel *Push Out* that I realized there was a language to describe the experiences of Black girls—or in my case Black Women— with these phenomena. Morris' (2016) novel explores the criminalization of Black girls in education. She sought to expand the conversation on the school-to-prison pipeline and complicate the language around Black girls' experiences, as the discussion of the pipeline was largely male-centered (Morris, 2015). 'Pushout,' Morris explained, is a pathway to confinement of Black girls, one that is astronomically high compared to other girls in U.S. schools (Morris, 2015; Morris, 2016). After reading her work, I wondered if the concept of 'push out' could be ascribed to my experience and the experiences of other Black women I had heard about anecdotally in Student Affairs and Higher Education (SAHE). Though Black women are not being moved into a pipeline from SAHE that would result in their incarceration, we are being removed from pathways that result in professional advancement, status, and opportunities to shape the higher education landscape more broadly.

After all, Black women and girls have been monumental in shifting campus cultural climates to make the collegiate environment inhabitable for *all* Black students. From Ruby Bridges' bravery during the desegregation of public primary education to 21st century campus movements for Black lives, Black women and girls exist at the core of the U.S. education system and movements for resistance yet remain systemically ignored. Black women are underrepresented in positions of leadership (e.g., Dean of Students, VPSA, College Presidents, Executive Directors), and there are too few programs and research centers for Black women's advancement (e.g., a national center for the study of Black women or center where Black women's initiatives are at the forefront) (Jackson & Harris, 2007; Madsen, 2012; Maki, 2015; Waring, 2003). Such centers and sites of research do exist for Black men, such as The National Black Male Retreat, A^{2}MEND, The Black and Latino Male Summit, and various Black Male

Success Centers on college campuses. A notable exception for focusing on the experiences of Black women is the Anna Julia Cooper Center at Wake Forest University developed and advanced by Dr. Melissa Harris-Perry—one of the most recognizable faces of academe in contemporary media. While more large-scale research centers purport to publish research on the experiences of Black people and issues of race broadly, they often do so through examinations of Black and brown men (see: The Center for Higher Education Enterprise, Center for the Study of Race & Equity in Education, and the USC Race and Equity Center). Moreover, the directors of these centers have most often been Black men and the scholarly entry points of their research have been the same.

This is not to suggest that Black and brown men's experiences should not be studied. Instead, I propose that we equitably examine the experiences of Black women and girls. Beyond the higher education landscape, Black women's and girls' sacrifices and the associated risks that come with serving in or attending predominantly white higher education institutions have warranted little concern from influential Black people, including former President Barack Obama. From the Obama Administration's "My Brother's Keeper" to large-scale research detailing the persistence and completion of Black men in higher education, silence around the experiences of Black women and girls in higher education is an ongoing phenomenon (Alexander-Lee, 2014; Harper, 2013; Miles, 2012; Stewart, 2016). This largely uninterrogated notion that Black women are *okay* in higher education and, thus, undeserving of extensive research has created a gap in the available literature on some Black women's experiences (Stewart, 2016).

Though scholars have made significant strides to highlight Black women in the academy, a bulk of this research examines Black women faculty and students thereby rendering Black women administrative professionals mostly invisible (Griffin, Bennett, & Harris, 2013; Jones,

Hwang, & Bustamante, 2015; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Shealey, McHatton, McCray & Thomas, 2014). In my own research (Williams, 2017), I have explored the career development and socialization experiences of Black first-generation administrative professional women in SAHE serving at predominantly white institutions (PWIs). Like most scholars, I sought to understand Black women's experiences with these phenomena broadly. The findings from this study indicated Black women experienced (over)policing, differential socialization messaging, and struggle with mentorship and relationship building (Williams, 2017).

My findings confirm and further Patitu and Hinton's (2003) findings on Black women administrators. I departed from Patitu and Hinton's (2003) work, however, by positioning the place of white allyship as an opportunity for advocacy of Black women administrators. Rather than further burdening Black administrative professionals by suggesting Black women in leadership must both mentor and support other Black women while simultaneously doing the work of educating white allies, Williams (2017) suggested allies must have a significant role in the professional preparation and centering of Black women administrators through themselves advocating for Black women to other white people. This is a means of utilizing their placement and white identity in shifting conversations where Black leaders may not be present nor welcomed (Williams, 2017). Henry (2010) acknowledged the multiple ways in which Black women experienced marginalization in SAHE workspaces and explicitly examined institutional practices that could facilitate Black women's success and survival at such institutions. However, many of the findings placed the onus of successful navigation back on Black women who were experiencing institutional betrayal rather than institutions themselves. Why should Black women adjust how they show up in the workplace instead of adjusting expectations of what a workplace looks like?

The idea of institutional fit and workplace standards are routinely used to minimize attrition of Black women professionals (Bondi, 2012; Byard, 2016; Reece, Tran, DeVore, & Porcaro, 2019; Williams, 2017). Institutional fit refers to a professional's ability to become a part of, work within, and move through a college or university campus and is often paired with notions of professionalism and professional standards (Accapadi, 2007; Rios, 2015; Spelman & Johnson, 2017; Williams, 2017). Fit is connected to recruitment, retention, and attrition because it is often used as a means of employee control and to redirect attention from systemic structures that negatively impact individuals in SAHE in order to place blame and shame on an individual for failure to "fit in" (Byard, 2016; Charles, 2016; Frank, 2013; Marshall, Gardner, Hughes, & Lowery, 2016; Reece, Tran, DeVore, & Porcaro, 2019). But what if Black women are leaving jobs (opt out) historically and contemporarily simply because of how they show up to, interact with, and engage predominantly white workplaces? More than this, what if they choose to leave positions because the conditions of that workspace necessitate their leaving for survival (opt out as a result of push out)?

If these questions can still be asked, alone, they underscore the necessity of further examining of *push out* and the *opt out* of Black women administrative professionals. Without an indictment of the entire system where Black women must do more than Black men on account of gender and white women on account of race, we perpetuate the idea that Black women's decision to leave is somehow the fault of their individual failures rather than the structure of the system at play. Perhaps some Black women leaving the field because their skills and talents can be used elsewhere. Yet, this does not negate that there is both research and anecdotal evidence to suggest Black women are resisting norms that cause harm to them and that their failure to adhere is tied to their (lack of) success (Byard, 2016; Cilente, Henning, Kennedy, & Sloan, 2006; Marshall, Gardner, Hughes, & Lowery, 2016; Tull, 2006; Williams, 2017).

The legacy of this struggle is further amplified by the writings of seminal Black feminist writers including Akasha Hull, Patricia Bell-Scott, Barbara Smith, and Kimberle Crenshaw. Of particular note is the groundbreaking volume Hull, Bell-Scott, and Smith edited the 1982 text, *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies* (Hull, Scott, & Smith, 1982). *But Some of Us Are Brave* rests as the first comprehensive collection of Black feminist writings (Hull, Scott, & Smith, 1982). The totality of this text suggests Black women face added burdens in work and in life as they navigate a society that others their humanity on account of subordinated race and gender identities (Collins, 1993; Hull, Scott, & Smith, 1982), also known as misogynoir (Bailey & Trudy, 2018). It would take until 2010 for queer Black feminist scholar Moya Bailey to coin misogynoir and several years since for Black twitter activist and writer Trudy of *Gradient Lair* to enhance the term into the mainstream lexicon (Bailey & Trudy, 2018). As further explored in Chapter Two, these works underscore not only the ongoing and endemic nature of *push out* practices in our schools, communities, and workplaces but also reveal the costs Black women pay in wealth, health, and life for resisting acclimation and assimilation to an unjust workplace. A practice that leads Black women to exercise agency and resistance by making the decision to opt out of the machine that is SAHE as much as it exacerbates structural issues that limits our ability to take on leadership positions (Stewart & Williams, 2019; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015).

Research tracing the failures of Black women in the workplace are not limited to works on career and socialization, issues in higher education, or even Black feminist arenas. Across the board, there is a broad focus on Black women's success despite the misogynoir and codification of white supremacy they must endure (Alexander-Lee, 2014; Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Henry, 2010; Sobers, 2014). But this is counterproductive because it focuses on the resilience of Black women without focusing on the ways Black women are being harmed in the process.

When we force Black women administrators to avoid explicitly naming their experiences, we reify the idea that the problems they face were their own and that their racialized experiences are an exception rather than the rule. This can show up for Black women administrative professionals who leave an office due to misogynoir, but it is touted as an issue of fit (Ashlee, 2019; Browning & Palmer, 2019). Those who are all but dismissed for failing to uphold a particular office practice by challenging its disparate applicability by being forced to endure brutal work conditions. By moving from talking about persistence to examining root causes, a narrow focus on *push out* and *opt out* experiences of Black administrative professional women is advanced in an effort to flesh out the causes of and responses to shifting the onus on institutions, conversations noticeably absent from broader SAHE discourse. This project advances broader conversations on physical and proverbial workplace policing that advance stereotypes of what Black women's *professionalism* must look like. Accordingly, there is a need for comprehensive research on Black professional women in administrative capacities, causes of and issues concerning Black women's *opt out* and *push out*, and a lengthy review of how Black women remain underrepresented and under-supported in higher education leadership in SAHE.

More than this, it is important to question how current higher education structures reward individuals for enacting beliefs and actions typically associated with Black women to and for everyone but Black women. Thus, more investigation is necessary regarding how Black women experience negative interactions from racial microaggressions like idea recycling without appropriate citation(s) to outright verbal abuse. This study explored one piece of this larger puzzle: an examination of the shared experiences of *push out* Black women administrators faced that contributed to their decision to exercise the agency to *opt out* from higher education administrative professional capacities. In doing so, I utilized this dissertation project to nuance conversations around Black women's grit and persistence; to contribute one of many answers to

questions of what happens when we, as Black women, decide to move on for ourselves versus changing who we are in workplaces due to institutional abuse, neglect, and betrayal. More than this, the findings of this study reveal it is not and never will be enough for one of us to *make it* when the conditions in which a Black woman's success was built upon contributes to the very downfall of other sistas.

Researcher Positionality

The negative experiences I encountered during my earliest professional position(s) in student affairs are publicly documented. I often tell the story of the last words my first professional supervisor ever said to me as a cautionary tale for Black women navigating SAHE workplaces. Hearing "Get out of my office then, you ungrateful little bitch" is not exactly a wringing motivation to remain in SAHE. Speaking my truth, though, has become a form of resistance against the racially coded ways in which my former supervisor spoke to me and an opportunity to force all of us in the field of SAHE to reflect on our supervisory areas of growth. After more than four years, several therapy sessions, a tenure in career services, and three-quarters of a doctoral degree, I can still remember the face I made when she said those horrid words in response to my announcement that I was taking on a new position at a new institution. I still remember the feeling of my then partner (who waited outside the door hearing everything) bursting into the half-opened office door to grab me and prevent me from making a decision that could have irreparably harmed my career. The frustration, betrayal, and disbelief I felt became the impetus for my doctoral study, though. Rather than allow the misogynoir laced language of a white woman's words drive me to act equally as nasty back at her, it became my rallying call to do more than talking about being supportive workplace leaders, but to provide empirical evidence for what these actions might look like.

I was oriented into this work believing that higher education workspaces would make room for who I am as Brittany Marie Williams, the person. The naiveté with which I entered this work contributed to the dissonance I felt when my first professional position ended poorly, despite little critique of my actual performance. The students I worked with continue to call me to this day. The colleagues of color I had in other divisions and departments remain connected to me and my work. My former graduate assistant, from this position, once recently thanked me for embodying what good supervisory practices *can* look like in this work. This negative work experience was never about the execution of my duties, but more about how I expressed my Black woman humanity and ways of being. So, if I experienced disconnects in my first professional job, the role that should have been my *honeymoon phase* in the field, I wondered how other Black women navigated these experiences: how do Black women calculate when it is worth continuing to persist in the profession versus deciding to leave higher education for good? Moreover, is this decision to leave a personal choice or a response to the individual and systemic violence they experience? What might be the difference between the two, I thought.

I entered this research project weary, critical, and with an awareness of the enormous privilege I have to shed light on these stories; that I owe it to the sistas in this study and those from prior research who have encouraged me to dig my heels into this topical area. As a cisgender, heterosexual, Black woman who grew up low-income, sharing these stories is particularly important because I understand the weight with which the decision to change jobs or leave one is made. It was not easy for me to find another job without references—a practice that often felt like white validation; why would it be for other Black women? Accordingly, I do not seek to pretend as if the ways I show up, the things that I know, and the experiences that I have had do not impact this research study (Roulston, 2010). Instead, I seek to name them explicitly

and to critically question the assumptions, thoughts, and conclusions I drew from this research study.

Thus, this dissertation project is both personal and political for me. It is a reminder that my body is politicized in every workspace that I enter, that not every chapter in SAHE ends happily and with good wishes on future opportunities. That not every piece of literature about negative experiences needs to end with a narrative about *grit* and *triumph* or what I call the s*uccessful Black woman myth*—the idea that because of Black women's relative success, we are undeserving of greater inquiry (Stewart, 2016). More than this, it is a reminder that there are shared experiences Black women face. Whether at conferences or other spaces, I am reminded each time I tell my story of just how prevalent negative experiences in the field are when I am thanked, praised, and centered for being *emboldened* to share my story. These experiences have led me to ask continually "at what costs" will we continue to frame racial micro- and macroaggressions, misogynoir, and exertions of power as routine parts of SAHE socialization. Interrogating these experiences through this project illuminates ways in which Black women uniquely navigate SAHE and further confirms the presence of systemic structures that undermine our successes though it is often attributed to individual failure.

Purpose and Research Questions

Almost daily, a tweet, Facebook post, or blogpost is shared by a Black woman expressing kinship with women who have chosen to opt out of workplaces in higher education. These individual accounts often accompany a pronouncement to engage in "#sarogue" or "higher education adjacent" workplaces as a means to continue to support Black women professionals and students in the higher education environment without the conditional expectation of one's employment. Within these posts, Black women lament the workplace conditions they have had to endure in the name of *assimilation* or *acclimation* and detail why they made the decision to

say never mind, I'll do something else. As such, the purpose of this counter-narrative was to explore the push out factors contributing to Black women's decision to opt out from SAHE administrative professional roles. This study is based in a critical paradigm and operationalizes Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1995; Crenshaw, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991, 1995) to not only understand how Black women experience structural forms of violence at the hands of U.S. higher education institutions and their actors, but also the sociopolitical and historicity based expectations that Black women adhere to a specific set of otherwise hidden workplace norms. An underlying assumption of this work is that Black women engage in resistance both because of and despite higher education structures designed to impede their success and well-being (Stewart & Williams, 2019). As such, I positioned the decision to leave or *opt out* as both an act of resistance and reaction to force by white supremacist structures (Stewart & Williams, 2019). Black Feminist Epistemology (Collins, 1990) undergirds this research study thereby allowing me to center Black women's lived experiences and ways of knowing as they interact with the workspaces once called their own. The following two questions drive this qualitative research study: (1) what are the shared *push out* narratives of Black administrative professional women from predominantly white student affairs and higher education workplaces; and, (2) what push out experiences lead Black women administrative professionals to exercise their agency to *opt out* of predominantly white SAHE work environments?

Study Overview

To carry out the goals of this study, this work was executed in a critical paradigm. Critical scholarship requires interrogation of the world around us (Mertens, 2010; Stewart, 2010), and in the case of this study offers an opportunity to engage participant experiences within the contexts in which they live, not as SAHE is promoted. Given Black women's

positionality within and outside of SAHE offices, Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991, 1995) and Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1995; Crenshaw, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) served as the conceptual basis for the study with Black Feminist Epistemology (Collins, 1989, 1990, 1998) undergirding the overall writing and research processes. These concepts allowed me to engage the experiences of Black women in a way that was culturally respectful, responsive, and additive to a more holistic view of Black women in higher education. Data collection took place through two individual interviews with eight Black women who self-identified as having experienced acts of push out and ultimately decided to opt out of SAHE workspaces.

A four-pronged constant comparative analysis technique was used to reveal shared narratives (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 2015) as further described in Chapter Three. The findings of these interviews were written and discussed throughout Chapters Four and Five. The forthcoming sections of this chapter begin by delving into the operationalization of language and conceptual frameworks. From there, I enter a discussion of the epistemological underpinnings of this research given how integral these assumptions are to the overall completion of the research process. I close with a review of the purposes and intents of this study, conditions that necessitate its existence, and concluding thoughts on the significance of this work.

Terms

Several terms are used throughout this research study. It is important to acknowledge the ways in which these terms are operationalized, given the constantly-changing nature of the English language. Though grounded in literature preceding this study, both my personal convictions and the theoretical and epistemological concepts utilized in this study require particular attention to the nature and use of language. In short, words mean things—and how I position their meaning is as important as my utilization of them.

Push out. Most of the available literature on push out focuses on the disciplining of students with an emphasis in early childhood and primary education (Morris, 2015; Palmer, Greytak, & Kosciw, 2016). Others examine the conditions of educational workspaces and how they may lead to attrition (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2016). This study is directly informed by the work of Morris (2015) as her framing of the disparate disciplining and school-to-prison pipeline for Black girls is how I came to think about push out as a spectrum upon which institutional betrayal and acts of misogynoir exist within P-16 educational contexts. I operationalize push out within this study to represent the institutional, individual, and collective actions Black women face in higher education workspaces that together to create conditions, rules, and norms, that make it difficult for Black women to remain.

Opt out. Opt out has historically been used in primary education to discuss resistance to high stakes testing (Pizmony-Levy & Cosman, 2017), aversion to STEM subjects (Diekman, Brown, Johnston, & Clark, 2010), and school integration (James, 2013). Within the context of this study, opt out is used to denote the fact that Black women exercise resistance (Stewart & Williams, 2019) when making decisions, push back against their push out, or leave their current workplace conditions on their own terms. Available literature on opt out in the workplace context discusses the experiences of working mothers leaving pipelines to executive positions (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005), attrition in STEM careers (Diekman, Brown, Johnston, & Clark, 2010), and sense of belonging in math (Good, Rattan, & Dwek, 2012). Others explore how the opt out phenomenon impacts leadership and management (Hoobler, Lemmon, & Wayne, 2014) and contributes negatively to diversity and retention in STEM (Cheryan, Ziegler, Montoya, & Jiang, 2017). Though institutions may refer to this phenomena as attrition, I utilize opt out as a unique nod to the ways in which Black women can both decide to leave on their own as a resistive political act *and* because of their workplace conditions as an exercise of agency

(Stewart & Williams, 2019). Stewart and Williams (2019) provided a framework for opting out as a form of resistance by rearticulating meanings of resistance and activism in educational spaces through their development of a *matrix of resistance* or *Matrix* for short. The matrix has been used to examine campus movements against sexual violence by nuancing acts of resistance that that do not fit within an activist tradition but nevertheless allows room for advocacy and change making (Lacy & Stewart, 2019). Ultimately, I separate opt out from push out through recognizing the agency that Black women display when engaging in this act of resistance but also with the awareness that the interplay between push out and opt out can be simultaneous and ongoing.

Student affairs and higher education. I utilize higher education and student affairs interchangeably and together under the presumption that student affairs is a specific type of department, service, and division within a higher education professional workspace. I do this because student affairs work can happen outside of student affairs divisions, and the shuffling of departments routinely disrupts the ability to place student affairs practitioners into finite categories. Hevel (2016) traced this winding history of student affairs and illuminates ways in which student affairs practice is not limited to a particular department or division. Accordingly, I recognize higher education as an umbrella term under which student affairs exists. Because I utilize student affairs and higher education together, I also shorten them to SAHE rather than HESA, as a nod to the permeation of student affairs work throughout higher education work environments.

Sistas. I utilize sista, as much as I do the words, we," "us," "our," and "I" and "me" as an homage to the community we share as Black women within and outside of the confines of research. These words also stand as a testament to our shared ownership of our stories that can never be told from an *objective* point of view. Though I am centering my participants'

experiences in this study, what these sistas have shared has connections to and implications for *all* Black women within the field. This shift in language is most prevalent throughout Chapters Four and Five as they allowed me to honor the stories of the sistas in this study.

Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

Black women exist at the intersections of multiple marginalized identities. This is often furthered for Black women who identify as LGB, disabled, trans(*), and other social identities. The collision of race and gender and the inability to separate the two are significant in this study, as the ways in which Black women's bodies are policed is both an inherently racialized and gendered experience (Carby, 1992; Collins, 1993, 1989, 2004; Flavin, 2008; Gilkes, 2001; Odem, 2000;). Accordingly, completion of this research study meant I must attend to the intersecting ways Black women experience the world around them. This calls for the use of two existing concepts to more holistically capture Black women's experiences under study. I operationalize Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality as conceptual frameworks in this study. I do this with an awareness that Black women's decision to opt out of a workplace and to undermine institutional and SAHE structures through daily acts of resistance are themselves political decisions that reveal the agency of Black women (Stewart & Williams, 2019; Lacy & Stewart, 2019).

Though Intersectionality is often considered a piece of Critical Race Theory (Harris, 2016), several scholars have advanced understandings of Intersectionality beyond the legal reframe Crenshaw (1989; 1991) used to position it within larger U.S. lexicon (Collins, 1999; Museus & Griffin, 2011; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Moreover, arguments can be and have been successfully made for an articulation of intersectionality well before the term was coined through the works of Anna Julia Cooper, the highly contested *Ain't I A Woman* speech by Sojourner Truth, and the Black feminist statements of the Combahee River Collective among

other works (Beal, 1969; Combahee River Collective, 1995; Guy-Sheftall, 1995; Salami, 2012). By pulling out intersectionality, I seek to re-center Black women's unique positionality. When taken within a Black Feminist Epistemology, these concepts together enable me to holistically explore the experiences of Black administrative professional women with push out in student affairs and higher education workspaces.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory, or CRT, is a theoretical framework that takes an intersectional approach to understanding race and racism (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT has been described as a progressive work by legal scholars of color seeking to nuance the ways in which race and racism are accounted for in American law (Matsuda, 1991; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). It is positioned as part of a larger systemic shift in dismantling systems of oppression and subordination in U.S. society more broadly (Matsuda, 1991; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) extended understandings of CRT by positioning the theory as a way to enable scholars to conceptualize the elimination of subordination among other social identities and to improve and challenge the pedagogical practices and standards in education that may reproduce these norms (Solórzano, & Yosso, 2002). In other words, a critical race theory of and in education is one that recognizes the permeating presence of race within and outside of the classroom and with(out) the presence of white people as whiteness and white supremacy are always in play (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Although my understandings of CRT align with the scholars presented here, I insist on naming CRT as a theory by and for people of the African Diaspora with African Americans at the center, given the construction of the U.S. justice system against these populations and the continued marginalization of research by and for the very same populations within academe.

CRT was borne out of critical legal scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s as a means of drawing attention to differences in experiences with the legal system due to the intersections of race, law, and power (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Researchers agree on five consistent tenets of CRT: (1) the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination; (2) the challenge to dominant ideology; (3) commitment to social justice; (4) the centrality of experiential knowledge and/or storytelling; and, (5) the transdisciplinary perspective (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Solorzano, 1997, 1998). Educational researchers have shifted language around these tenets to better reflect norms of higher education (Hiraldo, 2010), but the nature and uses of them remain the same. Accordingly, scholars employing CRT position the impossibility of discussing issues of race, racism, and whiteness on race-neutral terms, or to recognize race as solely skin color when it is also a part of a holistic Black communal, political, and Black cultural experience (Crenshaw, 1995; Johnson & Parry, 2016). This means CRT provides a framework for situating the centrality of race in life's every interaction whether race and racism are openly discussed or not given that race is always in play. In the next section, I explore these tenets and their connections to higher education and the present study.

CRT and current study. The centrality of race and racism—the ingrained nature of racism into daily U.S. life—shows up in educational research broadly. Scholars have examined issues of race in higher education for so long (Isgar & Isgar, 1969; Spaights, Dixon, & Nickola, 1985; Terrell, 1988) that there is emerging research not debating the presence of racism but the neoliberal ways in which we engage criticisms of racism and racist practices (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, 2017; Cabrera, 2014; Harper, 2012; Harris, Barone, & Davis, 2015). Within the present study, the permanence of racism is integral to understanding how Black women experience SAHE workplaces differently and how those differences may lead to decisions around opting out

or perpetuate conditions that facilitate push out. Challenges to dominant ideology look like critiques of liberalism and notions of liberalism in the U.S. For higher education scholars, this means examining perpetuation of incrementalism as a norm for racial justice change (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Pratt, 2002; Quaye, 2007). Because this study seeks to add language to the conditions promoting opt out and push out of Black women in higher education, an immediate opportunity exists for offices and supervisors to shift and prevent their attrition. However, the pervasive nature of neoliberalism may result in resistance and push back to this study, especially given the qualitative methodology employed in a materialist society where quantity is valued over quality.

Committing to social justice means continuing research, policies, and practices related to improving conditions and opportunities for liberation. Several educational scholars explore this in their research (Dillard, 2006; Dowd, & Bensimon, 2015; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Patton, 2016), and SAHE's seminal documents allude to the significance of this work (ACES, 1937, 1949). This is also where discussions of interest convergence arise and where scholars problematize the pervasive nature of whiteness and ways in which conditions of white supremacy necessitate interest convergence for People of Color's survival (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). This study relates to creating more socially just work environments by establishing awareness of issues facing Black women administrators and providing terminology for their experiences.

Storytelling is the fourth piece of CRT and has become a large part of the ways in which we study experiences of students, faculty, and staff in education. Recently, researchers have examined everything from how students retell their graduate school experiences (Hubain, Allen, Harris, & Linder, 2016) to how students exist at the borderlands of both multiple marginalized identities and the borders of the academy (Ralston, Nicolazzo, & Harris, 2017). Given a rich

history of ignoring narratives that have long existed along the margins of marginality in academe, counternarratives allow room for legitimizing experiences that Black people have known to be true (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). By utilizing counternarrative within this study, I was able to examine how the structures and norms of predominantly white workplaces impact Black women in ways that lead to their push out and/or opt out of SAHE while operating from an awareness that race, whether openly discussed or not, is always in play.

The final tenet is the transdisciplinary perspective or commitment to engaging in racial justice work and research across research fields (Delgado, 1984; Gutiérrez-Jones, 2001; Harris, 1994) to challenge historical inaccuracies (often through the fourth tenet) (Pratt, 2002). I utilized a transdisciplinary perspective by employing concepts and theories relating to human resources and organization development, considering sociological and anthropological realities of Black women's experiences, and endeavoring to offer solutions that fit within and outside of higher education contexts. As a counter-narrative, this study disrupts the status quo perception that Black women's push out and opt out is due to individual rather than systemic failures and allowed me to reject neoliberal notions of Black women's SAHE success. The culmination of this work was made possible by including literature and bodies of knowledge beyond the field of SAHE.

Intersectionality

Kimberle Crenshaw (1989; 1991; 1995) introduced *intersectionality* into larger U.S. lexicon most notably in a discussion of the ways in which the intersections of racism and sexism contribute to unique ways in which Black women experience battering and rape. Though the concept existed well before its naming, Crenshaw sought to specifically advance public and legal understandings of the ways in which Black women navigate oppression on double fronts within the legal system. In fact, because of the simultaneous development of CRT and Intersectionality

and ways in which CRT scholars draw from intersectionality theory, it is often referred to as a tenet or core component of research utilizing CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Harris, 2016; Museus & Iftikar, 2013). I understand Intersectionality to be the interplay between systems of racial domination and sexism, fronts which Black women are uniquely centered to experience given our minoritized race and gender status.

Crenshaw (1991) problematized the way we talk about identity by noting that "the problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite—that it frequently conflates or ignores intra-group differences" (p. 1241). That Black women experience gender differently from white women and understand race differently from Black men remains elusive and misunderstood decades after her initial writings (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Given the participants in this study are Black women, I would have done a disservice to them by failing to acknowledge the ways in which our social identities interact and are enacted upon (misogynoir). The multiple dimensionalities from which Black women operate do not, however, lead me to assume that these identities are the most salient for my participants. Instead, I acknowledge that they are visible identities from which people around them can make assumptions and/or choose to treat them different as a result of their existence. In her framing of intersectionality, Crenshaw (1991) discussed three categories in which intersectionality comes into play: structural, political, and representational.

'Structural intersectionality' refers to the ways in which uniformity in addressing people's needs can fail to account for differing experiences. In her example, Crenshaw problematizes how helping a battered or abused woman find safe housing is often considered secondary to addressing the visible and physical trauma they experienced. Because Black women and other Women of Color are at higher risk of housing disparity and houselessness, this approach fails them legally and socially: this cements their structural oppression within systems

designed to assist after physical violence or rape (Crenshaw, 1991). 'Political intersectionality' refers to the ways in which Black women must negotiate two political identities that are seemingly at odds with each other (Crenshaw, 1991). This manifests in movements for racial equality where Black women are asked to stop separating themselves on account of gender, and in gender movements where Black women are asked to stop separating along the lines of race. None of the individuals suggesting this, however, show a realization that Black women experience these identities at the same time. 'Representational intersectionality' refers to the cultural implications Black women face for trying to attend to issues of both race and gender (Crenshaw, 1991). For instance, Black women are often challenged by deciding whether to hold Black men responsible for acts of gendered violence they commit against us due to the ways in which racism and racialization manifests for them within the legal system. Crenshaw provides an example of this in her analysis of the Central Park Jogger rape case where innocent Black men faced disproportionate punishment not only for a crime they did not commit but on account of their Black manhood (Crenshaw, 1991). Black women experience sexual violence at high rates leading many of us to empathize with victims of sexual violence, but to also do so cautiously as racism can contribute to false conviction and imprisonment for such crimes—especially when they are against white women. In a similar sense, Black women struggle to coalesce with white women, particularly around issues of feminism, as they often engage in acts of racism. This makes connecting with white women difficult as Black women cannot afford to place gender above race as misogynoir means we experience the interplay of racial and gender subordination simultaneously.

Intersectionality in Current Study. By centering Black womanhood and resisting the notion that one must examine this phenomenon solitarily, intersectionality allowed me to engage my participants with an awareness that we can be neither 'Black' or 'woman' in singularity

(Collins, 1999; Collins, 2004; Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw, 1991). Although the salience and awareness of these identities may shift, they are never devoid of one another. Taking these compounding identities into account allowed for a more nuanced conversation around Black women's experiences with push out and opt out from higher education. By employing a critically raced intersectional approach, this work aligns with Museus and Griffin's (2011) assertion that singular dimension research studies categorizing people along distinct identities means one has yet to fully grasp what it means to do research on multiple marginalized identities. By engaging this research on Black women resisting assumptions that Blackness and womanhood are separate, I have also created a project that can facilitate work environments and classroom spaces with deference to intersectionality.

Black Feminist Epistemology

This study is undergirded by Black Feminist Epistemology, a groundbreaking concept from Collins' (1989, 1990) *Black Feminist Thought* text. As understood from Collins' work (1989, 1990), Black Feminist Epistemology serves as a mechanism by which one can problematize "the standards used to assess knowledge or why we believe what we believe to be true" (Collins, 1990, p. 252). Given the positionality of Black women in the U.S., we are routinely tasked with managing two different epistemologies: those of white patriarchy's norms and standards, as well as those things we know to be true through our experiences and understanding as Black women (Collins, 1990; 1999; 2000). By working from a Black Feminist Epistemology, I resist the positivist notion that I must devoid myself of the connections I share to participants' experiences in favor of objectivity. Instead, I name that shared connection to center those lived experiences as a truth of its own.

Within the context of this study, Black Feminist Epistemology served as a mechanism to center Black women's ways of knowing and being. Throughout this project, I held myself

accountable to the ways I would show up, engage, and otherwise interact with sistas that may *blur* the lines between researcher and people being researched. The construction of the counternarratives presented in this study, however, depended upon my ability to connect with and show understanding to my participants. This meant engaging the thoughts, feelings, and emotions their stories brought up for me and displaying vulnerability by sharing some of my own struggles where deemed appropriate. There were moments where I outright acknowledged "that's ridiculous" to and alongside the sistas in this study as a means of both responsible research (Dillard, 2000) and good Black feminist praxis. Operationalizing a Black Feminist Epistemology enabled me to authentically engage with the sistas in this study who often, themselves, understood that our individual and collective experiences are deeply intertwined.

Study Significance

This study is significant on multiple fronts. First, this work illuminates ways in which institutional, social, and campus cultural norms can contribute to the opt out and push out of Black women from professional roles and, thus, pipelines to leadership. It also exists as a representation of culturally relevant conceptual, theoretical, and methodological processes and the ways in which they contribute to data authenticity. Although these can be useful teaching tools, there are additional ways in which this study ties to research and practice.

For scholars hoping to engage in research on Black women and other historically marginalized populations, it is important to construct research studies centering those populations rather than viewing us through oppressive, hegemonic lenses that ultimately invalidate our ways of knowing. This means resisting research that normalizes white ways of knowing and that do not attend to the ways in which (in this case) Black women operate and navigate the world. It is also important to dispel the notion that, because there are Black women quickly advancing through higher education and taking on leadership positions, we are doing

okay. For one, who defines *okay* and what definition of *okay* are we ascribing to Black women's success? What does success mean, anyway? To understand Black women's SAHE workplace experiences, we must interrogate not only how many Black women aspire to student affairs leadership but how their goals are adjusted due to their working conditions and journeys.

Similarly, higher education administrators and leaders can utilize these findings to think critically about turnover and burnout among Black administrative professional women. This can show up through greater awareness of implicit bias and how mitigating poor supervision can serve to strengthen Black professional women's relationships to their campuses, in turn reducing their opting out and push out of SAHE. More than this, administrators may want to examine how we socialize Black women differently than others in the field. What are the messages Black women receive around persistence as compared to non-Black women? How do these messages shape what campus administrators believe Black women should be prepared to handle or willing to withstand? Lastly, campus leaders may want to think about how the norms and standards they consider to be office culture are not inclusive of Black women's experiences, norms, and perceptions. Being more equipped to support Black women in the workplace is a direct result of shifting one's office values—a practice that must begin office by office, department by department, and school by school.

Chapter Summary

The previous sections of this chapter illuminate the impetus, goals, constructs, and conceptual underpinnings of this study. I connect these sections to my work as a burgeoning scholar under the assumption that I owe it to the sistas before me and those who will assuredly come after to me to contribute to the improvement of the academy, literary canon, and SAHE workplace. By asking critical questions and reflecting upon the things we know to be inherently true (Dillard, 2012), I endeavor to use the stroke of my research pen as a weapon for the good of

all Black women beginning with those most relegated to the margins of research within my own field. By shifting the language around Black women's success and failures, I seek to undo the tired tropes that expect for us to suffer in silence or to wear our ability to overcome obstacles that should never have existed in the first place as a badge of honor. From the career center to the residence hall, this project stands as a form of resistance, rallying call, and direct call out for us as Black women and those who engage us to do, see, and be more in the workplace setting. I endeavor to ensure that the conditions of our offices, quality of our supervision, and actions as colleagues are not a contributor to the decisions Black administrative professional women make to opt out or be pushed out of our field. I aim to disrupt the cycle of our feeling pushed out of the workplace.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following sections describe the experiences of Black professional women in student affairs and higher education (SAHE) workplace contexts. I begin with an overview of the ways in which we discuss, understand, and nuance standards of professional practice and research in the field. From there, I expound the research on Black women's socialization into SAHE. I, then, move into a larger section detailing the available research on Black women's SAHE workplace experiences as administrators and faculty. The culminating sections explore broad connections and divergences across this literature to illuminate the necessity of my line of research and inquiry. The chapter concludes with a summary of how the present study connects to the included literature.

Socialization: Moving into and Through the SAHE Workplace

It is impossible to discuss the experiences of Black women in the workplace without first examining the socialization processes leading up to and throughout employment. I understand socialization to be the means through which one is acclimated into a culture or set of norms (Baker, 2013; Collins, 2009) and the ability to adapt to and change with that culture as it shifts and moves. Several scholars explore workplace socialization in SAHE contexts (Antony, 2002; Hirt, 2006; Liddell, Wilson, Pasquesi, Hirschy, & Boyle, 2014; Lombardi & Mather, 2016; Tull, 2009) although more examination of Black women's SAHE socialization is needed (Baker, 2003; Williams, 2017). Antony (2002) provided one of the first studies on socialization in higher education and examines preparation of doctoral students for professional practice. Antony interrogated the ways in which the changing job market and nature of higher education pursuit

has contributed to doctoral training programs needing to shift training and professional preparation practices to accommodate career pathways beyond the academy (Antony, 2002). Given the ways in which SAHE work can take place outside the campus context (Stoller, 2014), be it through multicultural competence positions at a Fortune 500 company, recruitment and selection for large multinational corporation, and even summer student program roles for internship onboarding, trends in preparation of doctoral students and students broadly impact SAHE as our trends mirror those of other fields and programs.

Liddell, Wilson, Pasquesi, Hirschy, and Boyle (2014) similarly examined development in graduate school but looked specifically to the ways in which professional identities are constructed. Liddell et al. (2014) departed from Antony (2002) by specifically examining students leaving SAHE preparation programs and hoping to enter the SAHE field. Despite the 12 year difference between these studies, both found that out-of-class experiences are most significant to enhancing one's professional praxis and that students are looking for interdisciplinary and cross-professional ways to utilize their graduate training (Antony, 2002; Liddell, et al., 2014). Many of the SAHE students studied by Liddell et al. (2014) shifted career foci between graduate school and professional practice, and this most often occurred within student activities (Liddell, et al., 2014). Their findings indicate the importance of functional area socialization, as students are often competing for few highly coveted positions in certain functional areas.

Whereas Liddell et al. (2014) looked at the role of graduate school in developing professional identities, Lombardi and Mather (2016) explored anticipatory socialization of SAHE professionals preparing to enter the job market. Lombardi and Mather (2016) focused less on broad preparation in graduate programs in an effort to hone the ways in which that preparation contributes to decision making within and around professionals' first post-graduate

student affairs role. The conclusions suggest that navigating, finding, and understanding institutional and functional area fit, the role of personal relationships in the professional search process, and the need to manage expectations were integral in students' socialization and ultimately their job search processes (2016). The findings in Lombardi and Mather (2016) confirm earlier research on opportunities for advancement and office fit (Bender, 1980; Renn & Hodges, 2007), differential expectations and the need to employ different skills from one's graduate socialization based on the institution type (Hirt, 2006), and the importance of managing expectations and self-awareness in transitions to new workplaces (Renn & Hodges, 2007).

Wilson, Liddell, Hirschy, and Pasquesi (2016) examined career entrenchment of student affairs educators and found that career contentment, community connection, and values congruence are deeply interconnected with how student affairs educators connect with their careers in shifting higher education landscapes and times of financial and institutional uncertainty. This connects with Bureau's (2018) work on shared values of graduate students in student affairs preparation programs and reveals there is a consistency between the realization that there are professional values across student affairs practice and that those values should align for practitioners particularly as they reach the midlevel. Though Bureau's (2018) findings drew from a largely white, female group, I include them for context of the SAHE workplace. The students reported diversity and inclusion, collaboration, learning, student centeredness, change, ethics, and development, among others, as chief values (Bureau, 2018). Though this study did not explicitly examine the experiences of Black women, it offers insight into how graduate students are socialized to work within the context of student affairs and what values are considered to be associated with this experience. The disconnect between these espoused values and the lived experiences of Black women within the field, as expressed in later sections of this literature review, does raise some questions and concerns. These examinations of shared values

and career entrenchment connects Bureau (2018), Liddell et al. (2014), and Wilson, Liddell, Hirschy, and Pasquesi (2016) with Baker's (2013) and Tull's (2009) work on socialization which differs from the other studies due to their examination of the role of supervisors, mentors, and relationships in socialization practices.

Baker (2013) examined SAHE professional socialization and suggested a bulk of the socialization process happens through informal connections and relationship building, but racism, tokenism, and isolation are threats to Black women's success in such a model. Baker's (2013) study illuminates the significance in mentoring relationships, engagement in professional associations, and affirmation of salient identities as integral to successful integration into the field of student affairs for Black women. However, if Black women have trouble building relationships with the very people who can positively influence their careers (Williams, 2017), then these partnerships are unlikely to have the same effect for Black women as they will for other SAHE practitioners. Tull (2009) traced the history of scholarship on supervision and mentorship and explored how new professionals identify and make meaning of supervisory and mentorship partnerships. Tull's (2009) findings underscore the significance of socialization in professional decision making and reveal the significance of out-of-class supervision on one's practice. The findings suggest new professionals gain exponentially when they hold formal and informal relationships with leaders in SAHE and can be directly tied to job satisfaction, retention, and managing expectations.

The gains made through formal and informal connections with seasoned practitioners connects Tull (2009) and Clarke (2016). Clarke (2016) examined the role of unconventional pathways to the field of student affairs and the impact this has on preparation and socialization for engaging the responsibilities of the field. Situated within the authors experiences, Clarke (2016) recognized that the realization of student affairs as a professional pathway and their

commitment to the field crystallized when they met with a Dean of Students from a large research university. This further underscores the importance of connection and mentorship in the socialization process not only into the field, but also for potential practitioners who need to realize the field exists in and of itself (Clarke, 2016). This suggests current practitioners play an integral role in the development of new and emerging student affairs educators. The author went on to acknowledge the role of study abroad in their development and the need for greater awareness of interconnection across higher education as the internationalization of educational practice and study continue (Clarke, 2016). This connects to Hornak, Ozaki, and Lunceford (2016) and Williams (2017) who underscore the differential socialization of practitioners on account of workplace spatial and social locations and identity respectively.

Williams (2017) found that Black women were not only tasked with engaging professional socialization but also (self)policing along the lines of Black womanhood. Her findings indicated many Black women engaged in practices that may enable them to avoid coming off in stereotypical manners (i.e., loud and lazy) but often struggled with knowing what to do without adequate workplace guidance (Williams, 2017). Given the focus of her study on first-generation professional women in SAHE, Williams (2017) illuminated how many of the women simply *did not know* what to do with acclimating to the office beyond the function of their roles and responsibilities. When taken together, these studies show there is a disconnect between messages received about working in the field of SAHE and expectations around that work. This is similar to findings in Hornak, Ozaki, and Lunceford (2016) around positionality. Where Williams (2017) discussed Black women's internal and external pressures for greater socialization on account of their minoritized race and gender status, Hornak, Ozaki, and Lunceford (2016) found that specific institution types can produce similar actions. Hornak, Ozaki, and Lunceford (2016) examined socialization of new and mid-level community college

practitioners in student affairs. Their findings suggested that while socialization within the institution is a part of the workplace acclimation process, so too is socialization into the field broadly. These processes happen simultaneously and contribute to how practitioners understand their workplace and where their workplace rests within the broader field of SAHE (Hornak, Ozaki, & Lunceford, 2016).

This means, for practitioners socialized within community colleges, they often held roles in offices that were smaller in employee size but held responsibility for larger groups of students and stakeholders (Hornak, Ozaki, & Lunceford, 2016), a confirmation of the findings in Hirt (2006). This was particularly true for support of underrepresented minority groups (Hornak, Ozaki, & Lunceford, 2016). Where the Black women in Williams' (2017) study needed to develop more on account of identity, practitioners within community colleges needed further socialization and development *because of* the identity differences in the students and colleagues they served and worked with (Hornak, Ozaki, & Lunceford, 2016).

Beyond broad understandings around socialization and the few studies examining Black women's development in SAHE, there is a need for clearer examination of Black professional women. The findings in these sections align with scholars' writing about the socialization of Black women students and faculty, as researchers agree Black women students experience leadership development and campus support differently (Domingue, 2015). Others illuminate the ways in which Black students at predominantly white campuses find themselves between worlds with very different norms and expectations (Hannon, Woodside, Pollard, & Roman, 2016). The different ways socialization occurs, the differences in access to preparation, and how preparation manifests are all tied to the ways in which Black women engage SAHE workplaces. Because these experiences have been examined from differing social locations of and for Black women, there is a need for more comprehensive looks at SAHE workplace preparation in future studies.

Staffing, Hiring, and Workplace Practices in Higher Education and Student Affairs

The Winston and Creamer (1997) Staffing Model (WCSM) was the first comprehensive model on staffing in SAHE (Carpenter, Torres, & Winston, 2001). The original WCSM model focused on: (1) recruitment and selection; (2) orienting; (3) synergistic supervision; (4) staff development; and, (5) performance appraisal (Winston & Creamer, 1997; Carpenter, Torres, & Winston, 2001). With expansions and changes to higher education, several of Winston and Creamer's (1997) doctoral students sought to expand the model for more contemporary moments in education. Beeny et al.'s (2001) efforts resulted in the formation of the Integrated Model for Staffing Practices (IMSP) which culminates in six significant categories: (1) recruitment and selection; (2) orientation to position; (3) supervision; (4) staff development; (5) performance appraisal; and (6) separation. It is important to note that Tull's (2011) discussion on the IMSP delineates staff supervision from staff development as development is understood to be the facilitation of further knowledge while supervision is more focused on relationships. For the purposes of this study, the greatest emphasis is placed on recruitment, selection, supervision, development, and separation.

The following sections explore the roles of staffing and workplace practices on student affairs practitioners and provides context for what this means to Black women administrative professionals. Researchers agree there are issues with professional retention in SAHE (Renn & Hodges, 2007; Tull, 2006). Given this, I sought to examine the ways in which staffing practices, hiring, and workplace relationships broadly operate in the field of student affairs. Moreover, I examine the role of wellness and self-care in practitioner's experiences. Most of the research in these areas explore candidate recruitment and hiring (Davis, 2016; Estanek, Herdlein, & Harris, 2011; Ogburn & Janosik, 2006), relationships on the job (Strayhorn, 2009), reflections on preparation for the workplace (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008), and connections between

supervision and separation (Tull, 2006). While the issues of health and wellness focus on problems of stress and burnout (Marshall, Gardner, Hughes, & Lowery, 2016; Mullen, Malone, Denney, & Santa Dietz, 2018), health implications of racial exclusion (Allen et al., 2019; Gee & Ford, 2011; Smith,2004), and the impact of racial battle fatigue in employee wellness and retention (Husband, 2016; Smith, 2015).

Recruitment and Selection

Ogburn and Janosik (2006) lay a foundation for hiring and recruitment that is candidate-focused. They position this process as one of shared responsibility and allude to the selection team as one of the single most important factors in the process of hiring and recruitment given the human element (Ogburn & Janosik, 2006). They position best hiring practices as those with clear guidelines and expectations, where candidate preparation is the responsibility of all parties, and where candid honesty contributes to overall success (Ogburn & Janosik, 2006). Estanek, Herdlein, and Harris (2011) confirmed similar standards in their examination of mission-driven hiring for Catholic campuses. Estanek, Herdlein, and Harris (2011) identified the importance of learning what candidates can do over what candidates know as a large determining factor in decision making, but this conflicts with research on the experiences of minoritized people in the workplace who find critiques about their personhood over their knowledge and abilities to perform functions (Williams, 2017).

These foundational pieces established contexts for Davis' (2015) comprehensive look at hiring and screening. Davis (2015) approached these processes through examining mental models. Davis' findings align with each of these studies preceding it but diverges in that the data present issues of bias in the hiring process, particularly as it relates to traditional paths to the workplace and candidate education. Davis' work highlights the role of elitism in hiring and how such practices lead to disparate hiring for students from schools that are *familiar* versus those

that are considered *proprietary* or *for-profit*. Given the associations with the latter in communities of color and low-income communities, however, one could reasonably infer this also enhances issues along the lines of race and racism in hiring and recruitment. Ultimately, hiring in student affairs is contextual, dependent upon attitudes and human elements, and works towards a goal of building a particular office fit. Candidates in traditional student affairs preparation programs display more preparedness for navigating the hiring system but find that, once they are in their roles, supervisors and peer relationships determine whether they stay.

Development and Supervision

Wolfe and Freeman (2013) made a case for including and increasing the number of administrators of color at PWIs in higher education broadly. They proposed a more integrated and holistic approach to diversity in order to increase the number of administrators of color in PWI SAHE workplaces. The culmination of their case suggests the most meaningful way to increase the number of administrators of color in SAHE is to advanced policies of equity and inclusion that can facilitate and support such endeavors (Wolfe & Freeman, 2013). Though a broad approach to inclusion, their suggestions and contentions hold for Black women administrators as they are clear that deference to the differences amongst practitioners of color are, too, significant (Wolfe & Freeman, 2013). More than this, there is evidence to suggest relationships with peer staff are integral to workplace retention (Strayhorn, 2009) and data corroborating the role of quality supervision as a determining factor in attrition or retention of new professionals (Tull, 2009).

For many, development and supervision are connected to translations of theory to practice and set a standard for the quality of the workplace environment (Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003). Shupp, Wilson, and McCallum (2018) offered the most recent explorations into inclusive supervision practices and strategies in their development of an inventory for leaders to assess

their multicultural supervision competence. Their inventory offers an opportunity for scholars to complete more comprehensive assessment on multiculturally competent supervision and even offers questions that can be used as reflective exercises for practitioners. Renn and Hodges (2007), in exploring workplace transition experiences in SAHE, highlighted the ways in which development and supervision are not only integral to success but can contribute to the likelihood of a practitioner remaining in the field. Although the practices outlined in the above section are examined from a SAHE perspective, other fields employ similar tactics to exploring retention issues, moving through recruitment, and for understanding the role of supervisors in workplace dynamics (Allen, Bryant, & Vardaman, 2010).

Concerns with the development of student affairs administrators broadly can shed light on the plight of Black women administrators in SAHE. Wolfe and Dilworth (2015) highlighted how white people in higher education limit the leadership development and advancement of African American administrators (men and women) by ensuring leadership is connected to white benevolence and interpersonal relationships. This contributes to a culture of associating leadership positions as the property of whiteness making it difficult for non-white leaders to gain and maintain leadership roles (Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). This impacts recruitment and selection pipelines as racism, sexism, and/or misogynoir can dictate how development takes place and who remains a viable candidate for leadership within SAHE organizations. Improving both sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2009) and improvement to supervision practices can facilitate the development of more diverse leaders.

Wellness, Self-Care, and Health

Issues of wellness, health, and inability to adequately practice self-care are documented across higher education (Anderson, 2015; Smith, 2004; Gee & Ford, 2011; Husband, 2016; Mitchell, Fasching-Varner, Albert, & Allen, 2015; Mullen, Malone, Denney, & Santa Dietz,

2018). These issues often happen in tandem with job stress and burnout that can contribute to professional turnover (Marshall, Gardner, Hughes, & Lowery, 2016; Mullen, Malone, Denney, & Santa Dietz, 2018), but they are not limited to a single population or group within higher education. Anderson's (2015) edited volume focused on the emotional, social, intellectual, physical, and spiritual wellness of students. Within this work, scholars revealed sites of wellness practice (or lack thereof) often associated with students including stress management and sex as well as academics and physical fitness. For faculty, much of the recent conversation around wellness and self-care center on racial battle fatigue.

Smith (2004) examined the patterns of racial exclusion across higher education environments that go on to extend to the very white students Black faculty are tasked with teaching. White students, Smith (2004) contended, are racially primed to enter the classroom space where they can unload attitudes and perceptions that will further exhaust Black faculty. This is in addition to the institutional and structural issues Black faculty endure (Smith, 2004). However, racial battle fatigue is not only salient for Black faculty (Smith, 2004, 2015) but also for administrators (Husband, 2016; Smith, 2015). These findings align with Husband (2016) who maintained the stressors of racism and racial battle fatigue make the self-care and wellness practices of Black practitioners infinitely more important given their negative associated outcomes. Husband (2016) rearticulated the necessity of counterspaces and the need to support mental health wellness amongst Black practitioners to facilitate their success. Both Black faculty and practitioners experience issues with health and wellness in higher education but for SAHE practitioners without the protection of faculty senates and tenure processes and practices, the issues can be exacerbated.

The totality of these findings connects with Gee and Ford's (2011) analysis of structural racism as a root cause of health inequalities in racial minorities. They maintain that racism in

social segregation and immigration policy practices have intergenerational implications for the health and wellness of racial minorities. This is further underscored in Allen et al.'s findings (2019) that self-reported racial discrimination contributes to cumulative biological dysregulation or higher allostatic load. Though Allen et al. found that education may mitigate *some* of the chronic stress associated with racial discrimination, this does not account for the differential ways Black people experience racism across social class groups. Mullen, Malone, Denney, and Santa Dietz (2018) examined issues of stress and burnout among higher education practitioners specifically and found that reporting of these issues was lower than expected, yet the associations between job stress and burnout are predictive indicators for the likelihood of a practitioner's attrition. However, given their low response rate and overwhelming whiteness of their participants, there is a chance that these findings would vary for practitioners of color. I include their work within the context of wellness and health, however, because they reveal a connection between job stress and turnover—the culmination of which may be tied to overall employee wellness.

Miller (2016) examined the disconnect between the promotion of self-care within student affairs and difficulty actualizing practices associated with wellness. Rooted in the realization of a need for wellness practices after a colleague's completed suicide, the findings of this piece suggest there is an urgent need for conversations around workplace time and presence *on the clock* and normalization of not only having but also utilizing flex time (Miller, 2016). The recommendations in this piece suggest senior student affairs officers must normalize and promote *mental health days* as well as sustained workplace practices that facilitate healthy work and living. Miller's recommendation connects with Burke, Dye, and Hughey's (2016) to teach student affairs graduate students mindfulness practices before they become busy practitioners. Burke and colleagues' (2016) examination of graduate students' perceptions of mindfulness and

coping strategies suggest students are aware that these practices can be useful and saw changes within their daily lives during the study, but there were feelings of weirdness and silliness associated with them. These findings reveal implementing practices associated with wellness can increase the likelihood of students normalizing them as part of their daily routines (Burke, Dye, & Hughey, 2016).

Furr (2018) studied strategies for wellness to combat social justice fatigue amongst student affairs practitioners. Furr posited that social justice fatigue is unique among SAHE practitioners engaged in equity and justice work on campus (Furr, 2018). The findings of this study revealed SAHE practitioners engaged in justice-related work grew exhausted with the lack of resources to complete the functions of their duties as assigned (Furr, 2018). This led to feelings of strain and frustration and the mere participation in the study proved exhausting (Furr, 2018). Furr (2018) found that Women of Color reported the most fatigue which may suggest a greater need for wellness interventions amongst Women of Color and further underscores the need for a larger examination of Black women's experiences with job stress, attrition, and health as left behind in Mullen, Malone, Denney, and Santa Dietz (2018). Furr's findings raises questions not only of the implications of diversity work but also of the role of racism and sexism in the experiences of diversity education practitioners given the unique burdens reported by Women of Color (Furr, 2018).

As presented here, health and wellness issues exist across the higher education landscape. Racism can exacerbate these issues as can the stress of racial battle fatigue as prolonged coping can worsen overall health (Smith, 2015). Understanding how job stress contributes to wellness issues and the inability to engage in self-care practices has implications for all practitioners, but especially so for Black women given their subordinated race and gender status.

Separation

Despite misconceptions, there are some positive associations with turnover, attrition, and/or employee separation. In management fields, researchers believe turnover can contribute positively in instances where leaders hope to build new norms, restructure, and make changes to the overall function of an office or unit (Allen, Bryant, & Vardaman, 2010). Although attrition may indeed allow room for changes, it poses a particular issue in SAHE as most reported changes relate to issues with supervisors (Tull, 2006) as well as workplace racism and other issues related to bias (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Harley, 2007; Harlow, 2003; Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Separation in student affairs often means rising costs as it takes time to hire, train, and recruit (Allen, Bryant, & Vardaman, 2010), and additional resources one needs to successfully introduce and integrate a new hire to campus culture (Cilente, et al., 2006). Tull (2006) offered a comprehensive discussion on separation through issues and practices around supervision and notes that there are multiple factors that contribute to attrition. These factors include challenges with quality supervision as well as issues in workplace orientation and disconnects between this orientation and socialization. Understanding workplace dynamics that contribute to separation of SAHE professionals can serve to minimize attrition issues in the field for Black women and practitioners broadly.

Understanding Black Women Professionals in Higher Education and Student Affairs

Black women obtain advanced education at high rates yet remain underrepresented in upper level administrative professional and academic positions (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Given the associated negative experiences Black women report, many of them have begun to opt out of the higher education system for employment and professional advancement (Patton & Croom, 2017). In other words, Black women are entering higher education and the academy with goals and ambitions of remaining there but leave due to a combination of misogynoir,

exhaustion, labor intensity, bias, and unsupportive work and schooling environments (Logan & Dudley, 2019). This is crystallized by the fact that Black women administrators and faculty often lack the same degree of access and opportunity that can contribute to increased prominence, pay, and opportunities for advancement to high-level positions as Black men in student affairs—a gap that has existed for several decades, if not longer (Belk, 2006; Wilson, 1987).

Accordingly, Black women employed in higher education must manage being simultaneously hypervisible and invisible (Mowatt & French, 2013). Mowatt and French (2013) critiqued the ways in which we abuse and misuse representations, labor, and output of Black women both within the academy as a workspace and within the literature as research participants. Though they focus on a specific content and scholarly area, their critique of the laissez-faire attitude we take to research the experiences of Black women, often from paradigms and traditions that do not align with the Black community, is well taken. I position Mowatt and French (2013) here because I find it essential to not only recount what the literature says about Black women but in an endeavor to look closely at how it has been said, who has been saying it, and to illuminate where this study fits within this historicity. This is connected to conversations within industry and outside of higher education and even the United States where scholars position the representation of women in leadership as a necessity if we want to help more and more women advance (Arnold & Loughlin, 2019). The aforementioned scholarship contextualizes issues of socialization, wellness, supervision, and leadership within and outside of higher education and lend to an understanding of their function within SAHE workplaces. The following sections examine the literature around Black women faculty and administrators in SAHE and related areas. They paint a picture of the ways in which Black women's relative successes with educational attainment may not always translate to professional success and how

the struggles of Black women across title and rank in higher education lend themselves to this discussion.

Serving in Academe: For Faculty Only?

Interrogations into working conditions of Black women in the academy overwhelming focus on faculty roles (see: Jackson & Harris, 2007; Madsen, 2012; Maki, 2015; Patton & Harper, 2003; Pittman, 2010; Zambrana, Ray, Espino, Castro, Cohen & Eliason, 2015). Others examined issues of socialization and mentorship (Baker, 2013) and negative experiences with information challenging (Pittman, 2010). Despite the abundance of available literature, the experiences of Black women faculty reveal similarities to those of administrative professionals, but similar does not mean all-inclusive. Harlow (2003) found that students' attitudes about race and displays of racism not only impact a Black professor's experiences, emotional management, and classroom control, but also results in undue burdens of managing gaslighting and emotional turmoil associated with recognizing racism. Harley (2008) confirmed the findings in Harlow (2003) in noting the ways in which Black scholars have to do more work not only with students but on their own as a result of social constraints of university settings. Harley (2008) explored the outcomes of Black women who go on to land coveted positions in the academy. The findings indicate Black women often find themselves swamped with work least associated with tenure and promotion and while being pulled in multiple directions for service and teaching (Harley, 2008). For many Black women faculty, they report experiencing Students of Color clinging to the few available faculty who they perceive to *get it*, leaving those faculty little to no opportunities to engage in research or securing grants that may improve their tenure dossier (Harley, 2008).

Despite these struggles, many Black women go on to enjoy full professorship, but this is not without costs. Croom and Patton (2011), for example, explored privileges associated with

full professorship as a rank within institutional hierarchy. Their findings suggest Black women faculty experience exclusion at every step of the tenure process thus contributing to the limited number of Black women holding full professorships in U.S. higher education. Griffin, Bennett, and Harris (2013) found similar experiences in their research of the gendered differences among Black faculty with their findings illuminating differences in how faculty respond to and navigate expectations of their labor. But what does this mean when Black women faculty are overworked, overextended, and devalued? The realities of Black women faculty's success (and students) are tied to their community to and within one another (Fries-Britt & Turner Kelly, 2005). Fries-Britt and Turner Kelly (2005) illuminated the significance of a mentor/mentee relationship that spanned over nine years and resulted in their retention within academe. The totality of the aforementioned studies suggests that while Black women faculty experiences are explored more frequently, and their presence and retention issues are consistently noticeable, they share in the struggles Black women administrators do with issues of retention and community.

In completing a critical content analysis of Black women's reflections on departing higher education, Chambers (2011) found that Black women faculty often fail to receive tenure due to personnel matters that are often race-based (e.g., low student evaluations), face uneven and subjective standards relating to quality performance, and are forced to contend with issues relating to personality when they do not reify white norms (Chambers, 2011). Chamber's (2011) analysis highlights the normalcy of Black women recounting their stories anonymously online, while little is changing on an institutional level to improve their chances at promotion and tenure. The reality is that many Black women scholars have risen to the challenge to highlight and account for the challenges associated with success for Black women faculty (Myers, 2002) and even creating sister networks for support and encouragement (West, 2018; West & Jones, 2019).

Faculty in Administrative Functions

The research examining Black women faculty does offer context and insight for the struggles of Black women administrators. Waring (2003) offered an examination of Black women's ascension to the college presidency by looking at 12 African American women president's career pathways. Though the majority of the Black women presidents ascended to the role through academe, the function of this position is administrative and the number of women who have come through administrative pathways deserve inclusion in this study. Waring noted that despite the routes to the presidency, mentorship played a critical role in their development and preparation (Waring, 2003). All but two of the women in Waring's (2003) study held advanced degrees compared to a quarter of all presidents. It is worth noting that in the time since Waring's (2003) work, demands of higher education leaders have changed and so may have there been shifts in educational requirements. Though recent evidence suggests holding a degree at all may not be a requirement to be named an interim university president, even if briefly, for white men (Levitan, 2019) such opportunities to advance without education are not often afforded to Black women. Logan and Dudley (2019) similarly revealed struggles associated with Black women's leadership advancement. Though focused primarily on their experiences as faculty, the second author documented her struggles to move into administrative leadership within the faculty realm. The findings reveal difficulties to receive support, mentorship, and promotion to a chair position where administrative capabilities would be possible. These works extend the collection of writings Bower and Wolverton (2009) developed on African American women's leadership in higher education. Bower and Wolverton (2009) call to carpet the lack of Black women college presidents historically and contemporarily, but also of the unique pathways Black women often take to these positions. Despite this necessary influx of available research on faculty, more work examining Black women administrators is necessary. Of the existing

analyses, most are autoethnographic and paint a picture of these experiences more individually than systemically. The next section explores what is available in these areas.

Seeing Black Women Administrators in SAHE from Ourselves and Others

For Black women professionals, the available literature is emerging and ongoing. Most of the available research looks at the experiences of Black women in administrative roles (Clayborne, 2006; Patitu & Hinton, 2003); resilience and navigation of predominantly white workspaces (Fields & Martin, 2017; Sobers, 2014); opportunities for cross institutional engagement and strategizing (West, 2017a); and, feelings of insider/outsider status (West, 2017b). Others examine issues with promotion and advancement (Alexander-Lee, 2014) and exposure to higher paying positions within SAHE for women broadly, including Black Women (Blackhurst, 2000; Jackson, 2003). Given the number of personal accounts within the available research, overall experiences of Black women administrators remain a location for research exploration.

Dillard (2000) examined narratives and reframed them as *life notes,* an embodiment of specialized knowledge. Within this work, she examined the experiences of a doctoral student training in higher education administration, a high school administrator, and of her own administration work as an academic within a predominantly white institution and workplace (Dillard, 2000). Dillard's (2000) findings revealed a glimpse into the struggles of Black women administrators with managing resistance to leadership change and diversity, micro and macro aggressions, and the struggle to get academe to seriously include, center, and support work by of for Black people but especially Black women. The culmination of these findings led the author to develop an endarkened feminist epistemology that extends how we think about Black feminist research traditions, knowledge production, and ways of knowing (Dillard, 2000). The articulation of endarkened feminist epistemology and of these life notes as a site for knowledge

production and sight for rich resistive academic inquiry connects with all of the texts throughout this section in that it calls for a realization of Black women's contributions to the education workplace.

A significant amount of research on Black women's career and educational experiences in SAHE examine barriers to advancement along the lines of differences in personality, leadership style, and lack of support structures (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007). Such findings were explicit in Clayborne and Hamrick's (2007) exploration of mid-level African American women practitioners, where Black women reported feeling a greater duty to model the behaviors they wished to see in the workplace, issues with supervisory attentiveness the father up they moved, and the increased significance of family and spiritual structures. These findings showed the ways in which Black women's orientation toward leading in ways that require heavy interpersonal connections and relationships was similar to current literature and beliefs around supervision but did not always serve in their best interests in terms of satisfaction and continued mobility (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007).

Where Clayborne and Hamrick (2007) sought to understand experiences overall, Patitu and Hinton (2003) examined changes. Patitu and Hinton's (2003) study is unique in that it examined experiences for both Black women faculty and administrators. Their findings suggest racism, sexism, and homophobia bore serious consequences on Black women administrators as these issues often contributed to hostile work environments (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). More than this, the conditions of the workplace would often force Black administrative professional women to privilege race above gender or gender above race, as there was little room in administrative conversations for intersectionality (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). This was particularly true for Black women administrators who found themselves navigating spaces as one of few other Black women. Though they examined changes, most of the differences happened amongst participants

rather than institutions (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Racism, sexism, and homophobia remained rampant at the institutional level, but many of these women discussed ways they resisted and how personal maturation contributed to what the authors called a *fighter's mentality* (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). This is particularly poignant in the context of this dissertation project, as a resistance to acceptance of abuse and one's willingness to endure negative workplace experiences should not be a prerequisite for SAHE administrative professional success. Ultimately, their data suggest increasing our accountability of hiring committees when time and time again Black women are overlooked for positions in leadership.

Where Patitu and Hinton (2003) offered discussions of Black women's development and maturation to exist in PWI workplaces by focusing on self-development as a strategy for success, Clayborne and Hamrick (2007) highlighted disparities in research on Black women in higher education by noting the extensive body of research on coping rather than resistance. Henry (2010) offered a continuation of this literature on success practices by articulating strategies for Black women's success that include the importance of mentors, the role of racism and other negative experiences in generating undesirable workplace feelings, the importance of developing support for one's self and role of the individual in learning the workplace (Henry, 2010). Though Henry's (2010) work extends those before it in offering strategies for Black women to employ, it goes a step further by articulating opportunities and strategies for leaders and institution. This shift begs the question—what happens when Black women continue to adhere to recommended changes but institutions continue to lag behind and offer incremental solutions to systemic problems?

Alexander-Lee (2014) offered an example of what happens within this disconnect. Alexander-Lee's (2014) study explained that, when accounting for diversity, positions that lacked a clear pipeline to authority and leadership in higher education were often held by Black

women. Not only, then, are Black women tracked into lower-paying and lower-ranking higher education positions, but we lack the necessary mentorship and exposure to higher-paying jobs and more supportive functional areas that may lead to advancement, despite our best efforts at implementing strategies for SAHE leadership success. These findings suggest that, for those of us who do stay, opportunities for advancement and high pay are limited, which can contribute to growing workplace dissatisfaction. West (2017a) nuanced Black women's experiences in her coverage of the *African American Women's Summit* as a space for validation, support, strategizing, and gathering resources to resist pitfalls most associated with dissatisfaction in the field.

This thread of focusing on resilience and strategizing as it relates to one's ability to be resilient is clear across available research. Sobers (2014), found that working through internal and external perceptions, tokenism, communication differences, and compensation discrepancies were part of the territory with advancing to senior student affairs officer roles. This is confirmed in West (2015) where working through marginalization at PWIs remains significant. This remains an important point of discussion as West (2017a) identified coverage relating to this area in annual meetings and in informal settings. Moreover, the theme of trauma and resilience is even clearer in an artistic representation of Black women's SAHE experiences, as expressed in Fields and Martin (2017). Their poetry on navigating academic and professional spaces serve as a reminder of the challenges associated with existing in the academy as Black women and the continued policing of Black women's bodies in these spaces. It also mirrors the narratives offered in West (2015), and Marshall, Gardner, Hughes, and Lowery (2016).

West (2015) and Marshall, Gardner, Hughes, and Lowery (2016) offered perspectives of the decision to leave and difficulties associated with managing working in SAHE workplaces. West's (2015) study discussed issues with navigating remaining true to one's self, difficulty

avoiding isolation, feelings of overwork and undervalue, and the psychological impacts of oppression in SAHE. This mirrors some larger trends in the field reported by Marshall, Gardner, Hughes, and Lowery's (2016) mixed methodological study that attributed burnout, issues with opportunity, loss of passion, and the role of supervisors as inextricably tied to a person's decision to leave the profession. Though this study offered nearly no discussion of Black women, it highlighted the ways in which the experiences of white professionals connect to those of Black women professionals, but there is an added burden of navigation from a multiply minoritized positionality.

Bertrand Jones, Scott Dawkins, McClinton, & Hayden Glover (2012) facilitated the construction of a seminal book length text addressing issues connected to higher education employment for Black women. The totality of their volume offers insight into policies and practices Black women, allies, and institutions can do to facilitate the continued success of Black women in higher education employment contexts (Bertrand Jones, Scott Dawkins, McClinton, & Hayden Glover, 2012). Within this, Bertrand Jones and Dufor (2012) revealed the importance of mentorship in the success of Black women administrators. They positioned mentorship as an activity that must (re)occur daily and that requires Black women leaders to have multiple mentors with numerous areas of expertise (Bertrand Jones & Dufor, 2012). They offered tips for mentors and proteges to facilitate this success that together can ensure a mutually beneficial and reciprocal relationship by, for, and amongst Black women administrators and those willing to support them.

Mitchell (2018)'s work extended that of Bertrand Jones and Dufor (2012) in acknowledging not only the need for better leadership and support for Black women administrators but also calls for greater recognition of the race and gender based discrimination Black women in leadership experience despite accessing such strategies and support systems.

Mitchell's findings illuminate that although scholarship calling for Black women's mentorship is helpful, increased mentorship without institutional actions will continue to perpetuate discrepancies in leadership. These works together can be further understood within the context of McClinton's (2012) findings of the value of institutional and community support in balancing family and work to facilitate the success of Black women administrators. In acknowledging examples of PWI institutions where Black women are supported, encouraged, and uplifted in ways that allow for the continued success of their careers, McClinton (2012) offered strategies for reproducing conditions that facilitate Black women's success. This is important for Black women who fail to visualize pathways to leadership as positions that can co-exist with family obligations given the increasing demand for time and energy (McClinton, 2012).

More recent works on Black women administrators examine counter spaces (West, 2018; West & Jones, 2019), experiences within predominantly white workplaces (Smith, 2016), and institutional factors in African American women leaders' success of lack thereof. Lloyd-Jones (2019) called for more nuanced research examining the experiences of African American women leaders. In articulating sexism and racism, stereotypes, isolation, issues of pipelines, and concrete and glass ceilings, Lloyd-Jones suggested there are institutional issues that contribute to the lack of Black women administrators in leadership. Similar variations of these struggles can be found within Mitchell (2018), McClinton (2012), and across Bertrand Jones, Scott Dawkins, McClinton, & Hayden Glover (2012). Through calling for better leadership research and improved approaches to research and data collection of the stories of Black women leaders, Lloyd-Jones (2019) suggested there can be improvement in the totality of Women of Color advanced in leadership. The findings of this study not only reveal the importance of this very research project, but also the continued support for projects along the lines of these areas of inquiry.

Smith (2016) found that Black women administrators have a desire to connect more with other Black women, found strength through their spiritual beliefs, understand their experiences with discrimination through a lens of misogynoir, and make decisions based upon their subordinated race and gender status when in the workplace. This raises the significance of counterspaces West (2018) and West and Jones (2019). West (2018) examined the experiences of Black women who consistently participated in the African American Women's Summit. West considered the development program a counterspace and participants described the experience as a culturally responsive space with resources and useful curriculum. Similar contentions were revealed in West and Jones' (2019) examination of the Summit as well as Sisters of the Academy (SOTA), and Research Bootcamp, all spaces designed to support and encourage Black women working in higher education. This text suggests a growing number of Black women play a critical role in their own ability to remain within higher education workplace and how these spaces dually serve as architects of change in the ivory tower (West & Jones, 2019).

Ultimately, the available literature on Black women's experiences examine issues with marginalization and dehumanization, indicate a degree of resilience and wherewithal, and promote strategies for continued success through support, programs, and counterspaces with and for one another. They also show some alignment with larger issues in the field, but Black women's experiences with these issues are often exacerbated by racism, sexism, and/or misogynoir. These works offer insight into how Black women administrators can experience the higher education workplace and what conditions within these workplaces can and do breed the very workplace cultures that lead to push out and opt out under examination within this research study.

Chapter Summary and Concluding Thoughts

The studies explored here suggests there is disparate information available on the workplace experiences of Black women. The findings indicate Black women face undue scrutiny, are tasked with navigating a hidden curriculum, are often met with dissonance in SAHE workplaces, and find themselves on the receiving end of misogynoir-laced violations. Although most of these studies offer insight into Black women's navigation of SAHE environments, they each reveal a commitment to perpetuating narratives of and opportunities for Black women's persistence despite working conditions. Because persistence is inherently tied to the amount of trauma an individual is willing to withstand, this literature reveals a dark issue with how we talk about Black women's work in the academy: *trauma as normal*. This study positions opting out as a resistive political act (Stewart & Williams, 2019) and push out as a systemic issue, thereby resisting the acceptability of trauma as normal in SAHE workplaces. Although the experiences of Black women in higher education vary, the commonalities that exist indicate environmental, institutional, and negative intra-communal forces contribute to Black women's departure from higher education. Yet, we have failed to examine those factors in an effort to shift the system and have constructed a system for how Black women should navigate the workplace and how those decision can result in success. In light of the current political culture and shifts facing higher education, understanding the dynamics and interplay of these issues has never been more critical.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The following sections outline the research design for this counternarrative study examining the corpus of Black women's individual and shared narratives with navigating push out and making decisions to opt out of administrative professional positions in predominantly white SAHE work environments. I begin this chapter with an explanation of the epistemological underpinnings of the study and overview of the methodological strategies guiding this research. I then detail the processes for data collection, analysis, and trustworthiness.

Black Feminist Epistemology

It is important to understand how Black feminist epistemology manifests in my approaches to this research. I enter this work from an epistemological assumption that Black women's experiences are shaped by our beliefs and these beliefs are inextricably tied to our positionality of being both Black and woman (Collins, 2000; Lacy, 2017). Given this, I seek to shift what Collins (1990) asserted as the white-centered knowledges that have been privileged in conversations surrounding Black womanhood (Collins, 2000). Black women, according to Collins (1986), have been long aware of and been privy to white America's dirty laundry. Because epistemology is widely held as one's concept of knowledge and/or ways of knowing, Black women's *outsider within* status provides a unique perspective of SAHE workspaces. That is, the interlocking nature of oppression in an imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal system positions Blackness within a constructed norm where our identities are

intrinsically unstable and shifting (Collins, 1989, 1990, 1993, 1999;; Dillard, 2000; hooks, 1989, 1990, 1997, 1998;).

My understanding of Black feminist epistemology propels me to see Black women's experiences as (re)constructed in four ways: (1) with(out) the presence of whiteness and white people; (2) we come to understand ourselves and one another through continued conversations amongst Black women; (3) our experiences of Black womanhood are inextricably tied to ourselves, our emotions, and our empathy for others; and, (4) our ability to physically and spiritually show how we know what we know and what we do with this through our actions and understandings of self (Collins, 1989). Within this, Collins asserts that Black women's knowledges are interconnected with our social location, as the privileges afforded to Black men on account of manhood and white women on account of whiteness are not conferred upon us (Collins, 1989; 1990). This makes our understandings exponentially more significant as the costs associated with lack of information and inaccessibility are burdens too big to bare alone. As a Black feminist scholar, my utilization of Black feminist epistemology requires an ethic of care (Collins, 1989; 1990) or research as responsibility (Dillard, 2000) and personal accountability to myself and the Black women whose experiences I seek to understand.

Ethics of Caring, Researcher Responsibility, and Personal Accountability

An ethic of caring and being personally accountable are integral to my operationalization of Black feminist epistemology. As a Black feminist and scholar, it is my duty to be accountable for the knowledges I put forth, positionalities I privilege, and meaning-making I derive from my research studies. These interconnected, yet different, responsibilities illuminate the significance of resisting positivist notions of researcher-participant relationships. More than this, it means realizing I am responsible to the communities from which my participants come—a community that I, too, share with them (Dillard, 2000). As such, I elected not to hold back when participants

shared distressing information, nor did I appear as if I was unbothered. Throughout this project, I took the approach that I must always empathetically engage the sistas I'm studying as individuals whose emotions and experiences are deserving of empathy and respect (Collins, 1990). Collins (1990) described these actions in a three-component approach to an ethic of caring: one must first privilege individual uniqueness; second, allow for and encourage appropriate emoting; and lastly, develop and commit to a capacity for empathy (Collins, 1990). Within the context of this study, this meant not essentializing my participants experiences when they (mis)align; supporting participants through discomfort and acknowledging my own emotions and how participants may be reading me as a result of them; and appropriately sharing, providing support, and acknowledging and naming things for what they are, like instances of misogynoir. When contextualized with personal accountability, the totality of this concept means I have both a scholarly and personal duty to do right by the women in my study as much as I do the data collection and analysis processes.

In the Present Study

Black feminist epistemology is interwoven throughout this study. Ontologically, it manifests through attention to the ways in which systemic oppression contributes to the social construction and manifestations of unique experiences Black women face. In terms of research, it would be impossible to accurately contextualize this study without centering Black women's knowledges. This is directly tied to how, irrespective of differences in our physical and social locations, our shared membership as Black women uniquely places us for knowledge acquiescence and intersecting violence. We are both within and outside, and this understanding of our placement is impacted by the world around us as much as it is how we see ourselves. On an axiological level, my commitment to minimizing harm and centering Black women's contributions to this study through an ethic of caring and personal responsibility means being

intentional with how I challenged and supported participants during the interview process. Methodologically, it meant resisting the notion that subjectivity and neutrality need be centered to accurately reconstruct participant narratives (Johnson-Bailey, 2013).

Ultimately, this epistemological assumption served as a framework for acknowledging the ways in which Black women hold more precise perceptions of the world around us due to our socially constructed identities and lived experiences (Collins, 1990), an existence that cannot be constructed within a dominant paradigm or under the guise of neutrality. More than this, Black feminist epistemology empowered me to narrate participants stories as a resistance of and to whiteness and within the contexts in which they live but also as a direct result of my understanding of their knowledge creation. My understandings of Black feminist epistemology are, too, further enhanced by Dillard's (2000) proposition of an endarkened feminist epistemology. Though I situated this work more explicitly within the constructs Collins (1990) developed, Dillard's (2000) work falls within this tradition and inspired the *(life) notes* I wrote to sistas regarding the research process. This expression of appreciation and acknowledgement is in the opening of Chapter Five.

A final yet integral piece of operationalizing research within a Black feminist epistemological construct is doing more than simply publishing the findings for this study (Collins, 1990; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). I position, then, further action as a piece of the methodological process. This has already begun as I shared the preliminary findings of this study at an annual conference meeting and endeavor to utilize them to start a support network by and for Black women. Johnson-Bailey (2003) critiqued researchers who collect and publish stories without ever asking what happens next to those it included. More than this, she set up an argument for criticizing scholars who fail to produce actionable, practical steps to reduce the inequalities discussed in their findings (Johnson-Bailey, 2003). I understand this as interrelated

to Collins' (1990) personal accountability and ethic of care or Dillard's research as responsibility. As such, I, and all researchers owe it to participants to do more than name and prove a problem: we must also theorize solutions and work with practitioners and individuals on the ground to refine such opportunities.

Qualitative Design

Qualitative research requires scholars to make meaning "between different components of their design, assessing their implications for one another" (Maxwell, 2012, p. 3). This culminates in an expectation to share the essence of a participant's experience, while being careful to ensure this commentary remains contextualized (Maxwell, 2012; Seidman, 2013). Given how qualitative interviewing processes allows researchers to take an in-depth look at the lived experiences of participants, pairing this knowledge and understanding with CRT, and undergirding by Black feminist epistemology, one can illuminate a more colorful picture of life within racialized contexts (Seidman, 2013). Beyond this, qualitative inquiry allows researchers to make meaning of these stories and situate them as part of a larger historical record through paradigmatic contextualization (Seidman, 2013). As a qualitative research counternarrative, I position this work as simultaneously within and beyond traditional narrative inquiry traditions.

Narrative Research

Narrative inquiry is more than the recounting of experiences and constructing stories (Patton, 2015). The method rests upon the assumptions that we, as people, construct and thus give meaning to the experiences in our lives (Clandinin, 2006). Clandinin (2006) purported the use of narrative in creating meaning as an age-old process, yet scholars failed to position it as a viable research methodology until the fall of positivist and post-positivist notions of scholarship. Narratives allow us to construct our own identities and can shift the ways in which identity presentations take place (Temple, 2008). Broadly, narratives allow for plurality in storytelling—a

space for multiplicity and where *capital T truth* does not automatically rest upon the master story (Clandinin, 2006). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) have developed a clear conceptualization of narrative inquiry as methodology. Their work began through deference to *narrology* and acknowledges the ways in which privilege of embodied knowledge has a long history in the humanities and arts despite social sciences and education failing to subscribe to them. There are critiques of narratives, however, as some scholars believe them to be an active construction and retelling that may not reflect the intricate truths of particular situation (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008).

Because narrative inquiry in its purest qualitative form focuses so intensely on the meanings we give to our experiences, the method can (depending upon the scholar) fail to account for the ways in which the world around us assigns meanings and labels to us (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2006). These outside perspectives contribute to one's sense of self and, thus, contribute to the lived experiences of participants. Because I have already constructed this research in a Black feminist epistemology and am committed to nuancing an ill-conceived master narrative of Black women's success that in and of itself rests upon racism and white supremacy, counternarrative serves as the methodology for this qualitative research study. The historicizing of counternarrative methodologically through a CRT context means accounting for power, privilege, and oppression exists at the crux of this research. Though counternarratives often nuance perceptions of accounts and have rich social and academic history (Delgado, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Taylor, 1999), I provide context of narrative inquiry as utilization of counternarrative as a methodology is not as widely accepted.

Counter-narrative as Methodology

The concept of storytelling as a means of resistance is not new (Cobb, 2008; Delgado, 1990; Kouyate, 1989; Rose, 1994; Shomade, 2008; Smitherman, 2000). Nevertheless, a public

discourse and understanding of counter-storytelling, referred to here as counternarrative, became part of the larger U.S. lexicon through work on Critical Race Theory and racism (Bell, 1984, 1989, 1995; Delgado, 1987, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1998) as a means of centering stories that critique and/or resist the master narrative. Critical Race Theorists within critical legal studies utilized stories to critique master narratives of U.S. meritocratic myths that failed to accurately account for how the United States' imperialist, racist, and capitalist structures construct different lived experiences for people living in the same country (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Ladson-Billings (1998) utilized racial barriers in the legal system to drive this point home. Ladson-Billings (1998) explained issues with constructed U.S. norms in her critique of how the O.J. Simpson trial played out in public. The permeation of white supremacy and racial hegemony made it where a diverse jury of mostly Black people and one white and Latino juror is seen as "Black" while a mostly white juror where there may be two non-white people would be seen as both diverse and acceptable (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Given how much stories are woven into the ways we understand U.S. culture, utilizing them to disrupt mainstream perceptions can nuance understandings of the world around us and make room for critiquing incremental racial justice (Taylor, 1998).

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) provide a compelling argument for the use of CRT concepts in qualitative inquiry as its historical roots in storytelling and providing space for counternarratives lends itself to legitimizing known truths of Black people and other folks of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002.) Since the academy has a rich history of ignoring stories that have existed along the margins of multiple identities, CRT, they argue, is a framework that can allow these narratives and the minoritized positions of those whose stories it explores to exist centrally within research narratives (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). They warn, however, that these oral stories can steer too far from research goals in a sense and

transform the narrative from an intended lens, should researchers come in expecting a particular answer (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Though a point of contention, I would argue this is good for educators and researchers, since it is important that we conduct research in a way that tells the stories we find, not those we wish to hear, to avoid becoming a part of the very systemic structures we seek to dismantle. Stories have the potential to change minds (Delgado, 1989, 1990), and changes in public perception and groupthink can serve this research project by repositioning the experiences of Black women as deserving of important, longitudinal, and well-constructed study.

Johnson-Bailey (2013) positioned storytelling practices as a way for us to construct meaning within and of our lives. As a work by, for, and about Black women, utilizing counternarrative as methodology is, then, not only theoretically significant but culturally relevant. Although the African Oral Tradition is well documented (Cobb, 2008; Rose, 1994; Shomade, 2008; Smitherman, 2000) and Black people have long resisted inaccurate master narratives, the concept of counternarratives provides a name for these phenomena and allows room for scholarly development of them. Given the endemic nature of racism, counternarratives function as a methodology that allows for gathering participant narratives with deference to the contexts in which they live (Delgado, 1989; Milner & Howard, 2013). Bernal (2002) situated counter-narratives as opportunities to undermine assumed western, Eurocentric notions of group and individual experiences.

Several scholars have used counternarratives in broad educational contexts including rearticulating Black teacher experiences post-Hurricane Katrina (Cook & Dixson, 2013), exploring microaggressions amongst Latinx students with (dis)abilities (Dávila, 2015), and the promotion and functionality of whiteness as property in science classroom contexts (Mensah & Jackson, 2018). Cook and Dixson's (2013) work shifts the shared understandings of learning and

teaching in a political charged environment like New Orleans in a post-Katrina era by illuminating not only frustrations and feelings of teachers but opportunities for growth and hope that are often missing in discussions on the city. This is similar to Dávila's (2015) work on Latinx students reflecting realities of structural impediments to learning success in the same ways Cook and Dixson's (2013) illuminate the continued effect of environmental, social, and educational racism on student learning in New Orleans. The issue is not necessarily negative portrayal and experience but when these narratives are promoted as a singular, all-encompassing story. Mensah and Jackson (2018) used similar strategies to compile and describe experiences of preservice teachers in STEM who by their literal existence in STEM education contribute to a disruption of conflation of STEM and whiteness. The study confirms both the permeation of whiteness as property in science teacher education while offering an opportunity to theorize using CRT what shifting STEM as property can do and mean for Students of Color.

As constructed in this study, counternarratives are a way of completing narrative analysis with a critical lens and attention to disrupting a master narrative. This is similarly true of the epistemological underpinnings of this study. Black feminist epistemology allows me to center and accept experiences and knowledges of Black women rather than talking about Black women's experiences from Eurocentric perceptions (Collins, 1989, 1990). By adjoining these methodological strategies, I am taking appropriate steps to ensure Black women's experiences are at the core of this project each step of the way. The focus of this study is on the negative experiences Black women administrative professionals have in SAHE. More than this, the study seeks to examine how those experiences contribute to the perceived or experienced push out of Black women from positions and pipelines toward leadership. Because this study seeks to disrupt the perspective that *all* Black women are doing *well* in higher education, the counternarrative

serves as an opportunity to disrupt the perceived normalization of Black women's pain and suffering in higher education contexts.

Research Methods

The following sections outline the recruitment, selection, data collection, and data analysis methods for this study. They are followed by my commitments to data integrity and authenticity to ensure participant narratives are constructed in meaningful and contextual ways. Interwoven within these processes is my commitment to an ethic of caring, and personal accountability in how I collect, conceptualize, and codify participant's experiences.

Recruitment and Selection

A total of 52 Black women expressed interest in participating in this study. Eight of women were ineligible after reviewing the answers associated with their submission alongside the study criteria. A final group of 12 were selected as study participants, but only eight participants chose to move forward in the study due to scheduling issues. I did not return to the initial pool of participants due to having initially removed them from the pool as well as the timing of the attrition. All of the sistas recruited to participate were found utilizing social media platforms (e.g., twitter, Facebook, GroupMe) with specific attention to pages where Black administrative professionals in Student Affairs exist (e.g., BlkSap, Black Women in Higher Education). A purposive sampling technique (Patton, 2015; Seidman, 2013) was used to find Black women who have made and/or are making decisions to opt out or identify with being pushed out of higher education. To be included, sistas met the following criteria: (1) identify as a Black woman; (2) currently or recently (within the last five years) serve(d) in a full-time student affairs and higher education capacity; (3) have served or currently served in a predominantly white work environment when the experiences contributing to their push out took place; and, (4)

opted out or felt pushed out of a SAHE position or workplace. Recruitment was open to any Black woman meeting these criteria until spaces were filled.

To generate a more holistic understanding of participant experiences across Black womanhood, active steps were taken to recruit Black women with multiple and varying intersecting identities such as Black queer women, Black dis/abled women, and Black trans women through posting in spaces for LGBTQ+ Black women. Participants self-selected a pseudonym for participation throughout the study. Participants were asked to email me to indicate interest in the research study. Participants were asked to complete a Qualtrics survey where they consented to participate in the study, followed by submission of a brief demographic questionnaire to ensure diverse participation. Subsequent portions of the survey detailed the guidelines of the study, expectations, as well as their release to be audio recorded during our interviews. The demographic portion of this questionnaire asked for participant nationality, gender identity, sexuality, race, age, years in student affairs, as well as current or most recent level in student affairs. Final participants were selected based upon the criteria for inclusion, full completion of the Qualtrics survey, and availability to interview with the researcher. Questions for inclusion in this survey can be found in Appendix A.

Data Collection Methods

Several techniques were utilized throughout this research project to collect participant narratives. Participants engaged in two individual, semi-structured interviews and provided short journals and vignettes detailing their experiences beyond the parameters of an interview (Appendix B). Data collection took place throughout the summer and fall of 2018, with details of participants narratives contributing to a foundational understanding of why Black women experience push out and continue to opt out of the higher education administrative professional landscape. Seven sistas participated in two 60 to 90 minute, semi-structured individual

interviews between May and August 2018. An eighth participant completed the first interview and was ultimately included in the study given the strength of her narrative. A semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix C) was used to allow room for a more seamless discussion where I asked participants about things they described without the constraints of a structured interview method (Edwards & Holland, 2013; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Patton, 2015).

By using a semi-structured interview approach, I included important details and potentially related but tangential conversations that place and may even reveal more nuance for the dialogues at hand. The first interview was designed to gain information about the participant's experiences leading up to being pushed out or opting out of a SAHE workplace. This interview lasted approximately 90 minutes. Between the first and second semi-structured interviews, participants were tasked with providing a photographic vignette describing their workplace experiences discussed in the first interview (Patton, 2015). Sistas were given instructions to take a moment (how few or how many was up to them) to reflect and draw, write, digitally type, scribble, take a picture, etc. of something(s) that represents what it felt like being pushed out or having to opt out of a student affairs/higher education workplace. The finished product was to be placed on one sheet of paper up to 8.5x11 (standard printing size). In the second interview, participants discussed their images from their own perceptions and understandings. The images themselves were also interpreted within the context of the participants' experiences by me as the primary researcher. This vignette became a large portion of the sistas second interview. These visual representations allowed participants to personally reflect and then express how push out and the decision to opt out impacted them. The second interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes and included questions specific to each individual participant's vignette submission. The totality of the two interviews and the vignette served as data collection methods.

Data Analysis and Coding

I utilized a constant comparative thematic analysis in this study (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Boeije, 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 2015). This facilitated opportunities to deconstruct and reconstruct participant narratives around larger emergent themes by identifying, condensing, and categorizing participant narratives with attention to their lived contexts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Given my employment of a Black feminist epistemological framework and commitment to critical research praxis, an interview format in and of itself required me to engage with participant responses with deference to culturally specific modes of communication. In order to be able to interpret dialogue made possible by such an interview to complete a constant comparative method, I positioned critical race theory and Black Feminist Epistemology at the core of how I think about these communicative practices because they are culturally rooted in my own position as a Black woman conducting the interview as much as they are for the Black women being interviewed. This meant acknowledging adlibs, circumlocution, and even seemingly unrelated musings sistas shared as a significant piece of the data analysis process. The data analysis and coding processes employed within this study required me to move beyond the literal transcription of the interview text to instead reveal and make meanings of my engagement with participants within our shared understandings of Black womanhood and with attention to the Black women's unique communicative practices.

While introducing findings, I added participant profiles to facilitate the parsing out of sistas individual narratives as much as the aggregate of their stories. These profiles are situated within descriptions of the vignettes participants provided to offer an overview of how their experiences and journeys with push out and opt out manifests. I then move into their shared narratives around the major themes developed from the study. Themes were developed through a constant comparative process. The culmination of these themes came after completion of a four-

pronged analytic approach. The four-prong approach I used for data analysis included: (1) open coding through line by line review and listening to transcript audio; (2) axial coding or the breaking down of initial open codes; (3) thematic grouping; and, (4) analytic memoing (Charmaz, 2006; Maxwell, 2012; Patton, 2015). Within the context of this study, open coding is the process of reading through the data and assigning meaning (Patton, 2015; Ryan & Bernard, 2003;). Axial coding is the process by which I develop connections among seemingly disparate experiences of my participants under the guise of a larger grouping (Patton, 2015; Seidman, 2013). Axial coding enabled me to not only minimize the overwhelming data that seemed relevant within participant interviews and vignettes, but also to cut through and determine what was important and how continuously it showed up (Charmaz, 2006; Patton, 2015). Thematic grouping is the process of reading through, assigning codes, and grouping until the data is in a manageable format (Patton, 2015). Though finding similarities is important, rather than grouping items that are seemingly disparate, I left room for important issues that arose but did not appear across multiple participants (Seidman, 2013).

In addition to these data analysis methods, analytic memos allowed me to track the process of data analysis and to make sense of any disparate understandings of the findings as presented (Maxwell, 2012). Saldaña (2015) likened memos to journal entries and positioned them as an opportunity to reflect on the participants, issues, and systems under examination. I was able to utilize my memos as a space to parse out my feelings and emotions around the subject as well as issues with technology and mechanical issues with the audio (Saldaña, 2015). Furthermore, memoing created space for me to identify issues and questions of ethics (Saldaña, 2015). These memos also provided opportunities for me theorize next steps and to shift the alignment of the research questions in this study as based upon the findings, codes, and themes that emerged from this process. This process allowed me to operationalize my ethic of care and

researcher responsibility (Collins, 1989, 1990; Dillard, 2000) as I thought through what it meant to parse and reconstruct the sistas narratives at every turn. The results of these data analysis and coding methods are displayed in Chapter Four.

Authenticity and Trustworthiness

To ensure balance in constructing participant counternarratives, I utilized member checking, peer debriefing, and researcher memos to ensure data authenticity and trustworthiness (Maxwell, 2004). As explicated in my positionality, I do not purport to be *unbiased* nor do I believe I have been *unchanged* by the process of data collection and analysis. Instead, I worked to ensure participant's stories were constructed as they were told to me. I facilitated this by ensuring the conclusions I drew were clear across multiple sistas in the study. I also engaged sista-scholars who study Black women through peer debriefing around the findings and conclusions presenting in this study to talk through my lines of thinking. Utilizing a member checking process allowed participants opportunities to review and provide feedback on their transcripts to ensure the integrity of what they've shared, and to see the ways in which their responses (mis)align with those relayed by other participants when brought together for findings (Patton, 2015; Saldaña, 2015; Seidman, 2013). Similarly, peer debriefing allowed sista scholars to identify areas where my interpretations were clear and others that needed further refinement.

By sharing the major themes developed with the sistas in this study, I offered them an opportunity to provide critique or support for the findings in this study (Patton, 2015; Seidman, 2013). Participants were, then, not only provided information from each interview they completed but also able to help me think through the themes. I utilized voice and written memos to document the emotions and feelings that arose from hearing my participants stories (Maxwell, 2012). In many moments, I found myself pausing, starting, stopping, and repeating this process over and over throughout data analysis. This was expected given the focus of this project on

experiences of push out that can lead to opting out. Throughout this process, I got the sense that while there was sometimes discomfort for me and the sistas in the study, this work was also a space of healing. Memos allowed me to name that discomfort when it showed up for me and to separate how I felt about and for my participants from what they reported as experiences for the purpose of reconstructing their stories individually and collectively.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the epistemological and methodological processes used in this study. As a counternarrative, this study operates in a transformative paradigm and illuminates the ways in which common narratives around Black women's success in higher education ignore how Black women are pushed out and otherwise opt out of SAHE professional positions. Undergirded by Black Feminist Epistemology, this counternarrative operationalizes storytelling through individual, semi-structured interviews and individual vignettes as data collection methods. Member checking, memos, and peer debriefing served as means to ensure data authenticity.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the narratives and experiences contributing to Black women's push out and opt out of SAHE workplaces. Eight Black women participated in this research study. Seven participants completed two interviews and a vignette while an eighth completed one interview. Functionally, four participants currently or previously served in diversity and equity roles (Shane, Sara, Troy, and Claudia), one in student activities (Jodie), one in academic support services (Michelle), and three in residence life (Ebony, Terry, and Shane) (See: Table 1). I acknowledge Shane's roles in both diversity and equity as well as housing due to her position change taking place during the data collection process. All eight participants reported feeling pushed to leave a SAHE role leading them to opt to do so for the sake of their own well-being. While it is clear that names within this section have changed to protect participant's identities, I have also changed names of people they described. This shift is denoted with an asterisks (*) throughout the chapter as a signal to those of you reading that while the names have changed to protect the innocent (or guilty) the people being described are very real.

The following sections outline the findings of this research study. In this chapter, I reveal how the Black women participating in this study connected their (push out) experiences in the workplace to their decision to leave (opt out). These findings are broken up into a pilot, three episodes, and a finale. The pilot details the participant profiles and how they broadly defined and described their experiences of push out and opt out through a vignette. Episodes one through three examine institutional and community betrayal, issues of pay (in)equity and differential labor expectations, and experiences of push out and opt out that became defining moments in

participant's decision to leave respectively. The finale features advice and suggestions the sistas in this study have for Black women considering SAHE workplace careers and for institutional leaders and campuses who wish to better support, engage, and retain Black women practitioners. I utilize the terms pilot, episode(s), and finale intentionally here as a nod to the consistent and ongoing ways Black women dealt with these issues as well as the counter-narrative design of this study. Moreover, as participants likened their experiences to TV and media in their vignettes, this language proved contextually fitting.

Pilot: TV, Media, and Pop Culture Do a Pretty Good Job of Showing How It Is

Zora Neale Hurston once wrote, "If you are silent about your pain, they'll kill you and say you enjoyed it." Hurston's immortal words rang through my head as I explored the experiences of the sistas in this study. This project rests as a work of political and resistive art that details the experiences and the daily acts of resistance Black women engaged within their higher education workplaces. The narratives throughout this chapter offer a glimpse into the experiences of Black administrative professional women in predominantly white workplaces. As such, the narratives in this pilot set the context and stage for understanding how eight Black women endured push out and engaged resistance against it by deciding to opt out of a SAHE workplace.

The following sections detail the background experiences of the eight women who participated in this study. The sistas who made room to share their narratives include Shane, Troy, Sara, Ebony, Jodie, Claudia, Michelle, and Terry. In telling their backgrounds and demographics, I also offer a description of how these women understood and felt looking back on the instances of push out and opt out they endured and engaged as SAHE practitioners.
A total of seven vignettes were analyzed and discussed as Sara was unable to complete the second phase of the interview process. In the following sections, I first offer individual recounts

of the images of each participant with added contextualization for how the participants thought about the vignettes themselves. I end this section with a composite vignette that together offers a shared depiction of how each participant's experience offers a glimpse into larger, more complex, understanding of what serving in a student affairs workplace that engaged acts push out or opt out felt like for the Black women in the study. This composite image, then, becomes the framework for how the latter episodes and the finale reveal participants' experiences and understanding(s).

Shane. Shane is a 30-year-old, Black, heterosexual woman from a lower-middle-class family. Hailing from the Mid-West, Shane holds a master's degree in Adult Education and currently serves as an Area Coordinator at a public, midsized, institution. At the time of the study, Shane left her primary functional area of diversity and inclusion and moved into a residence life role with equity and diversity components. Shane considered race and gender as her most salient identities and attributed this to the visible nature of these identities when she enters a space. Shane hand drew her vignette on a piece of college-ruled notebook paper in landscape layout.

Her image featured a cliff on the bottom right leading left to a group of mountains that covered the center and left of the page. Atop of the cliff was a woman with wings (a pictorial of Shane as both a person and set of emotions). Chasing Shane up a cliff was a wolf. Shane labeled the wolf "doubts, anger, fear." It was these terms that she likened to her experiences in the workplace she felt pushed out of. She saw herself being both chased out by doubts, anger, fear and the very real negative experiences she withstood. At the same time, this push could have come to mean something more. "I felt like I literally was chased by all those negative emotions… that's why I drew the wolf chasing the girl off the cliff," she explained. I feel like I had no other option but to, like, jump" she continued in explaining her image. Not all hope was

lost, though. Her pictorial illuminated a degree of “hope and dreams” as drawn in the clouds above the mountains. “I got my wings to soar over all the unknown, like the sharp, jagged rocks” she explained. She went on to acknowledge that she “could've made that decision to stay and then be devoured by those toxic feelings and in that toxic environment or [she] could've took that leap of faith.” Inferences could be drawn that despite being chased out of a position, experiencing such horrors would allow Shane to continue to soar as she has already experienced negativity and violence. In other words, despite feeling haunted by “doubts, anger, [and] fear” within her role as a student affairs practitioner, Shane’s push out experiences resulted in a push closer towards her “hopes and dreams.” But her image, like all of those in this study, begs the question: what would it look like for Black women to navigate the workplace without first experiencing trauma?

Troy. Troy identifies as a queer, upper-middle-class, chronically ill/sick/Deaf, Black woman from the West Coast. Troy attributed the high salience of these identities to the unrelenting experiences of violence and discrimination associated with them despite their *invisible* nature before going on to identify as someone navigating compounding oppression. She is currently a doctoral student in leadership and management and holds a master’s degree in education policy. At the time of the study, Troy was leaving her position as an Assistant Dean of Students and Director of Equity and Inclusion at a private, mid-sized, liberal arts institution due to push out. This led to her experiencing unemployment throughout key points in the data collection process. Troy submitted a hand-drawn image that left me breathless. Her image was drawn directly to me as her fellow sista scholar studying an experience we both deeply understood.

The hand-sketched and colored image featured a Black woman in a green top with a large curly natural hair ‘fro seated at a desk. The woman in the photo is laying with her head down on

the table from the seated position with her hands crossed beneath her face and head, creating a barrier between her head and the desk. On the desk underneath her arms are a computer and multiple books/notebooks—including a blank spiral notebook on which the Black woman prepares to write with a pen in hand. Atop of her head were thought bubbles. The first thought bubble said, “If I had my way… Life would be just fine but the world’s too much and it makes me cry SOMETIMES I feel like leaving but I must be wise.” Within the text the word ‘world’s’ is in green, ‘sometimes’ is capitalized, and ‘wise’ is underlined. The second bubble stemming from the right side of her head says, “because time is not on our side.” ‘To Brittany’ is written on the right side of the page under the second thought bubble. Her signature is in the bottom right corner of the hand-drawn image. In talking through the image she submitted, Troy explained:

> When I was thinking about your prompts and trying to figure out a way to convey what I was feeling throughout the year, but especially what I was feeling now, I thought about, you know, you can see the person has been working. You can tell that person has been tired, they've been putting in work. Their books are out, their notebook is there, their papers are on their desk, their laptop is up. It could be any time of day, it could be any time of night. That person is always working, always trying to better themselves, or be better in the work. That is kinda what I was conveying. That person is tired. Right? They're tired, they're falling asleep. The lyrics are, the words in the bubbles are actually very divisive. Because when I was sketching this picture, that song, was stuck in my head. It's called, "Time," the song… It's a beautiful song, but it's very catchy, it's a very catchy beat. It was stuck in my head, and so I decided to play the song, and as I was playing the song, and I wrote out the lyrics. I was like, the lyrics fit this picture, and also what I feel right now.

This description when taken in totality with the image, one could infer that Troy is overwhelmed with the demands and expectations placed before her in the SAHE workplace. However, these feelings of being overwhelmed have more to do with unrealistic, changing, and somewhat illegal expectations placed upon her rather than her production and productivity alone. Troy was performing well beyond her expected capacity. “Exhaustion was a thing, but it was also expected of you,” she explained. “If you weren't exhausted, you weren't doing your job,” she continued. From this, it is clear that her frustration with being overwhelmed is directly tied to the demands placed before her. She went on to explain:

> I don't know if I could have adequately separated myself. I don't know if I could have done more than I tried to do to break away from that. In that workplace, and I tried to do so also, by utilizing my legal frameworks to do so. Family Medical Leave Act, that was my legal framework, which was the boundary. Even so, unless I felt comfortable disclosing my disabilities, or disclosing my illnesses to people on campus, then that gave people the right to question whether or not I was doing my job based off how present I was, or how often you could see me. Or how late I was in the office.

Troy, as sketched through the Black woman in the photo, and through her descriptions here, is navigating a system that consistently and repeatedly makes her existence and ability to show up that much more difficult. As Troy explained in our interviews together, her institution enacted ableism despite her documented invisible dis/ability for so long that, by the time an accommodation came, it did so on the heels of her resignation. This led the institution to close her accommodation letter acknowledging there would be no need to make changes because she had already left the profession/institution. It becomes demonstrably clearer that Troy is battling institutional betrayal and unrealistic expectations when she acknowledges what the picture means for her. In doing this, Troy clarified:

> I think this picture for me is the art… the communication of the end of a phase. The end of a, and I'm not saying that the things that are represented in this picture aren't [inaudible] that I may encounter in future workplaces at future times. NO matter how good the next position might be, or how beneficial the next position might seem, there may still be difficulties that I encounter. There might be times that I still feel like giving up. At any workplace, I don't want to be foolish and say that it was just localized to this one place, which happened to be among the top 6 most shittiest places of all. But I can look at that and say, "I was at that place." I need to know now that during the interview process, during the search process, can I recall some of those feelings in my body that I had in certain situations at this red place, to guide me to making a better decision, when it comes down to choosing where I want to work next. How can I let this art piece be a guided meditation for me to say, "Okay, when I felt some kind of discomfort around a particular person or an intuitive sense that the space wasn't good, or that the job wasn't quite what it said it would be. Or the people seem a little too nice, or what are those subtle cues that I was not awake or aware of in the first process because I was excited to get a job? I was excited to be a Dean. How can I now step back and have that pause, and say, "Hmm, okay, my belly feels this way, the last time I felt that in my belly was when XY and Z happened. So that means that this environment could potentially cultivate another situation like that. I don't think this is going to be a good job situation."

One can conclude from Troy's discussion of her image and the image itself that she is starting to realize the significance of trusting her instincts and inner voice regarding SAHE workplaces. As expressed, the image shows what one could only describe as exasperation with a broken system that says it wants to do better while continuously doing worse. The image, then, concretizes actions that lead a Black woman to lament her own existence

Sara Renee Fireball. Sara identifies as a Black, queer, woman of color from a working-class background. The 33 year-old has a background in diversity and equity positions and currently serves as a Diversity and Inclusion Coordinator at a large public institution. Sara holds a master's degree in student personnel services and considers her salient identities as a badge of honor that enable her to support and empower historically marginalized people. Sara participated in only one section of the research study—the first interview. Because Sara did not participate in the second round of interviews, she did not submit a vignette as part of her participation in this process. Nevertheless, Sara's narrative has been included in this study because the thick, rich, descriptions (Patton, 2015) she provided in her interview provided enough context for understanding her experience being pushed out and ultimately opting out of her first student affairs workplace. Sara's experiences overall suggested she dealt with navigating issues with racist supervisors, issues of inequitable pay, and lack of understanding of and support for her work in diversity and inclusion.

Sara's experiences suggest the work environment she opted out of and experienced pushout within was a place where advancement was rewarded based on favorability rather than impact. Moreover, colleagues would make jokes about her role and the work she had chosen to dedicate her life to within diversity and inclusion. The culmination of these moments led Sara to herself describe her experiences as a "slight push out." These experiences offer insight into the challenges associated with engaging work of diversity and equity as a Black woman in the SAHE landscape.

Ebony Mitchell. Ebony is a queer/bi 27-year-old Black, Christian, woman from the North East. She currently serves as a Residence Hall Director and considers residence life and the Dean of Students functional areas to be her primary focus. Ebony holds a master's degree in

student affairs and counseling, and is currently serving within a public, mid-sized, liberal arts institution. Ebony’s image evoked concern, frustration, and disappointment.

She submitted a landscape word document with images pulled from the Internet and typed words to convey what she felt about her SAHE experience. Hand-typed atop of the page was the word confusion. Directly beneath this was a see-saw image with a ball on each end: the lowered red ball and a larger, raised ball that was Black. Next to the see-saw was a ‘Mission Failed’ stamp with the word disappointed next to it. One could infer from these images that Ebony saw in herself an inability to balance everything expected of her in SAHE. This meant giving up some of herself and things on her plate: not by choice, but instead by her inability to complete them—something she referred to in our meeting time as her work “slacking.” She considered her time in SAHE a failed mission of disappointments, connecting directly to her commentary about dealing with racial battle fatigue and exhaustion with the SAHE workplace. Beneath these images from left to right is the typewritten word ‘hurt,’ an image of balled-up paper that says, “not enough”, and a fuel gauge listed on ‘full’ with the words ‘you are in control’ directly atop of it. From here, one could deduce that Ebony’s time in the field went from feelings of confusion and disappointment to hurt as she felt she was not good enough to be in the field. However, the closing image shows Ebony’s attempt to regain control in her decision to leave the profession—full and in control.

For Ebony, like other participants, putting together the vignette was a cathartic process. “I think it made me process where I was versus where I am now because the you are in control is very important for me” she explained. The opportunity to understand the value of that control came through expensive counseling and pushing her body’s capacity as much as it did creating this image. “And I think if not for this space I don’t think anyone else would have asked me that

question or asked me to kind of reflect on that" she said. When talking through the images on the page, Ebony explained that:

> So looking at that first image on the top left, that's what I – I felt like that red ball—I couldn't make moves—because it was just so much in the way from the time of wanting to push your students who are in res life and all of the financial barriers or you know I opened the first gender neutral residence hall, so even my trans students – I learned a lot in that year of just not being able to help them enough and it was one of the first times that I even felt that way, just like I'm not even serving my purpose, what am I here for. So that's what that first image really depicts for me and it did lead to a lot of confusion of like, okay, all my mentors told me I would be great at this and I'm feeling like I'm failing…

Ebony continued to explain the image through her understanding of what she expected from student affairs versus the realities of her time in the field. "That mission fail [image] was like thinking about like my mentors and the people who helped me and how they made it seem so easy, they didn't really tell me about the struggles," she noted. "Looking at my mentors…I wanted to emulate what they were doing, and I didn't think I had the opportunity to do that" she lamented because she left the field almost as quickly as she entered.

Ebony continued, when talking through her vignette, to describe its connection to her experiences with push out in the field, "People don't understand like, number one, I see that as a traumatic experience" she continued, "it sent me to therapy, I was in therapy, I was – I worked out, like I lost 40 pounds that wasn't in a healthy way, but I feel like I was – the gym was like my – it was my everything." The vignette, as understood through Ebony's experience, then, relays just how difficult being in SAHE was for her. It was a way to validate the reasons she described that necessitated her need to leave the field. The drawing for her, then, "kind of

summarized it and kind of added that closure I needed to be okay with you know fully immersing myself in Ebony you're not going back to student affairs… I don't want to, I don't want to be in that environment, it's toxic."

Jodie. Jodie identifies as a 31-year-old middle class heterosexual Black woman. Although she is not a U.S. National, Jodie calls the South her home. Her most current student affairs title is Assistant Director for Student Activities at a private religiously- affiliated institution. Jodie considers student leadership development to be her primary functional area in student affairs and higher education. She holds a master's degree in student affairs, and considers race, gender, and immigrant status to be her most salient identities. Jodie's vignette was more of a collection of Graphic Interface Formats (GIFs; animated images) than one individual picture.

Atop of the document she submitted with the four GIFs, she explained that GIFs are a primary way for self-expression for her as they capture as much as pictures, motion, and body language together could capture. Jodie ordered her GIFs one-to-four and added the following labels: (1) "Upon getting hired"; (2) "Day to day, navigating how I feel and am treated with what I can say"; (3) "In the moments where I was put out front to look good for the institution"; and (4) "What it often feels like explaining any of this to even the most well-meaning white folks." To describe what it felt like upon getting hired, Jodie's GIF is of a Black woman on a couch with the words "I'm tired of being the extreme minority and I don't want to go to a place where people might (think/believe?) I got in just because I'm African American." From this, one could infer that Jodie was already entering the workplace cautiously as she hoped her colleagues and peers might see her for who she is as much as they see her for her phenotypic characteristics. The GIF associated with the second area or day-to-day navigation is of a Black woman speaking in front of a wall and window with the words "at home, I'm Jodie–I can say or do whatever feels right. But at school I'm the queen of the negroes..." Here, Jodie implies that her fears prior to

work were confirmed and that she is often tokenized with an expectation that she could be of service to everyone within her racial group or a queen of her racial/ ethnic group. The third image associated with being trotted out for the good of the campus featured a GIF of a Black couple. The two appeared in formal attire and had on sashes and crowns denoting symbolism of either royalty and/or something relating to a homecoming. The words "Oh, what the hell. We may be tokens, but we're damn good looking ones," rests at the bottom of the image. Here, one could infer that Jodie often feels as if she is a part of the campus for the good of visual and compositional/representational diversity than any actual efforts toward equity. She, too, feels she *looks good* whilst representing the institution even though she knows her presence may not bring about long-term actionable change. The final GIF associated with trying to navigate these feelings and emotions in SAHE workplaces shows a Black woman standing in front of a table where two white women are seated. The two look at the Black woman where she explains "you guys are hopeless…", alluding to the white women in Jodie's workplace who continued to ignore the intersectional oppression she continues to navigate while trying to explain herself and her feelings. This series of GIFs offers a glimpse into what it feels like day-to-day for Jodie.

In discussing her image, Jodie explained that she took a four-image approach that together "reflects the idea that there's kind of a foot in each world" or of her ability to do SAHE work and be physically present but also not be wholly herself or feel adequately represented. The GIFs she selected came from a show with a main character Joey and for Jodie, "Joey articulated that [(the struggles of being both in and out)] really well over the course of several seasons on the show where she and her boyfriend were the token Black people and they're like you know what—sometimes you just have to put up with it." "You're still allowed to express distress and the comfort and anger and frustration with that state of affairs," though, she continued. Her awareness of tokenization came as early as before she even took the position, though. In

discussing her image and navigation of the workplace, Jodie lamented “when I was leaving my interview one of the guys that ended up being one of my coworkers said something to the effect of I can't even remember the exact words but it was something to the effect of you did well and you're Black, so it'll be good… and then I was like yeah, no, that's good for that 'cause then you're left to wonder the whole time, is that why it happened? That's not the only time I left an interview feeling that way.”

Jodie’s questioning of whether she was going to be hired for her racial identity so as to make the office appear diverse rather than her competence proved challenging as it forced her to question her intra-communal connections as much as those extra-communally. “There are any number of things where I got put on a committee because it looks good for me to be there, but there wasn't really anybody in that space I could talk to about that” she explained. In being forced to withstand knowing she was merely representational diversity, Jodie sought to find community in others but did not always have those connections. “And again, going back to that idea of not everybody that looks like you is for you… Even in situations where there were other Black women or Black people, there was no way of knowing if they were on the same side of that issues as me” she lamented. The women Jodie referred to were often much older as she described being “the youngest person at that office probably by a good 15 to 20 years” making it challenging for her generational and cultural understandings of what is acceptable along the lines of race to even be understood by other Black women. This is not to suggest that older Black women do not see or even understand the micro and macroaggressions Jodie faced, rather they displayed more of a willingness to work within environments those behaviors permeated because they were socialized in a time where there were fewer options.

In her third and fourth images, Jodie described feeling something near a sense of *resignation*. When talking through her vignette, she explained:

> Yeah, I think there's a sense of, resignation feels too strong of a word, but I think that there's also places that I'm glad to be to the extent that I don't necessarily care if that's what got me there or not. I can kind of put that aside because if the opportunity's good, it will then give me other opportunities. It's kind of a survival thing if it makes sense. If being that person who can speak in that way will get me gigs that will pay me money, that will give me shelter, give me food, what is the larger issue? Generally speaking if it's not a matter of principle it's the kind of thing where I'm like well I'm getting something good out of this. I am able to hear this information with people. People who get it will get it. Those that don't, there's not really anything I can do about that. But just kind of that sense of all right, to an extent, that's how this is and you kind of have to learn to exist within that.

Here it is clear that Jodie found herself weighing the costs and benefits of acknowledging the issues in images one and two but decides to see things and people for what they are in images three and four so as to best care for herself. Thus, one could argue that Jodie realizes the necessity of her survival over simply naming or calling to the floor the issues of her workplace. She continued with the four-image noting that there are people who listen to understand when she speaks on issues of identity *ism's* in the workplace. She explained:

> I would say I've had the most success of having those conversations and by that I mean being able to speak about issues of identity and feel heard and feel understood… has been with people who aren't sold into the higher ed student affairs thing and I think you know what. There are people who are whole hog in. I hate the term drinking the Kool Aid, but that type of thing where they're just like no, we're good, this is great, what we do is great. People that are dated about that or have a healthy level of skepticism about that, I find them having better conversations with. Which is a little bit concerning when I think about

who they're in terms speaking with or colleagues might lead from that and by them I mean the people who aren't having those conversations. Where is the disconnect, I'm wondering.

For Jodie, those she was most able to connect with at work around identity were people who were not socialized to believe in student affairs and higher education as an end-all- be-all perfect workplace. Rather, it was people who had experienced in other fields and other understandings of the world around them that could have a conversation about identity and not take those things personally. Her images crystallized the frustration but continuation of navigating SAHE workplaces where representative diversity rather than meaningful diversity is most often moved forward and she is left to try and correct and redirect with well-meaning but often misunderstanding white people.

Claudia. Claudia is an upper-middle-class 37-year-old Black woman from the South. She identified race and gender as her most salient identities and attributes this to both where she is from as well as the workspaces she has held within student affairs and higher education. Her current role is Assistant Dean of Students at a small liberal arts college and she has a doctoral degree in equity education. Claudia primarily engages in SAHE work through diversity and inclusion positions with particular attention to student diversity. She has experience overseeing LGBT, international, multicultural, first-generation, undocumented, and Pan-Hellenic student group organizations and concerns. At the time of study, Claudia changed institutions and positions. Like others in the study, Claudia submitted a Microsoft Word document of GIFs and images from the Internet to represent her time in SAHE.

The first row of GIFs has two images. The first is a GIF from the movie *Waiting to Exhale* where the main character, Bernadine, played by Angela Bassett, sets a car on fire and

walks away from the flames. When I asked Claudia to talk me through her selections, she explained:

> Well, Angela Bassett, just something about her image, I really have a kinship to. I can't let go of that. I just keep thinking about that scene, that movie of here's a woman who's done everything that she was supposed to do in her marriage and her family, what have you, and then her trifling husband does whatever he want and she left with nothing, and just that anger. That's how I felt with [campus]. I did everything I was supposed to do to try to improve the [multicultural center], support the students, bring them together. I tried to do everything I could to support my supervisor in her work, and she's out here wilding out, totally exploiting me, being messy and I'm left with nothing. I didn't actually want to burn shit down, but I felt that was a rage I felt. I was like, "What the hell?" I made it a point to be classy on purpose because I knew that if you left the other way, that would follow you too, so I made a point to not do that, but that definitely captured how I wanted to leave [campus]. And, I know that me leaving meant they were going to struggle, because they had deferred all the problems of Students of Color, international student to me, and as soon as I left, that became their fire to put out.

Claudia knows her relationship, or at least awareness, of the institutional and office struggles on that campus did not end with her departure. As such, her next GIF was one of Viola Davis playing Annelise Keating in *How to Get Away With Murder* where Annelise makes a face with disgust, rolls her eyes, picks up her purse, and walks out of view. Here, one could infer that Claudia found herself frustrated and ready to leave a SAHE position and possibly the field altogether as these images and their use in Black popular culture communicate someone being fed up or exasperated with conditions or a situation around them. When I asked her to break this down, she noted, “I'm so waiting for all the gossip in the next few months to tell me what's going

on... I know that it's going to be messy." This messiness she is awaiting had already shone through the images that together depicted her vignette. She continued:

> Annelise, her leaving, is just that quintessential, I'm tired, I'm over it, I'm out of here, let me just get my bag and go. That's how I felt the last month. I was like, "Let me just show up and do what I got to do and leave." I'm not trying to ... especially when everybody was trying to be, they were trying to do a lot of ... there was a lot of guilt that people tried to ease and a lot of apologies and, "Oh I wish you would stay, or I wish things had been different." That to me is what, my internal response to that is like, "None of you want me to stay, because if you did, you would've done something before."

These images provided a glimpse into the internal feelings Claudia held close despite externally having to show a brave face so as to avoid criticism and critique. Claudia was well aware of the issues that could arise should she have chosen to leave campus without appearing *classy*. The image selected here, from *How to Get Away With Murder* is one that has become synonymous with Black women's frustration and recognition of the need to remove themselves from a room, situation, or environment where change is less likely to occur. Claudia acknowledges her colleagues' lack of care around her experiences both at work and in her decision to leave. This is in part why she moved from rolling her eyes and walking away to a celebratory *Beyoncé* stance vis-a-vis a depiction of Lebron in gif that allowed her to express what it felt like to leave a place that was toxic and unsupportive to go somewhere that was a much better fit.

Her second row of GIFs/images, features a GIF of Beyoncé's "Sorry" lyrics saying, "middle fingers up, put them hands high; wave it in his face, tell him 'boy, bye.'" This is placed next to an image of California Congresswoman Maxine Waters speaking into a microphone with the words 'reclaiming my time' atop of it. These images suggest that Claudia's place of work represents the figurative boy in the song from which Claudia is working to meet her needs. On

the third row, there is an image of basketball player LeBron James packing up and leaving a press conference next to an image of Audre Lorde with the quote "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare." Here it appears Claudia is rationalizing her decision to opt out of a particular SAHE workplace in an effort to better meet her needs and be of better service to those around her to ensure wellness. The last row and final image on her vignette is a typed photo of a Maya Angelou quote: "When someone shows you who they are, believe them the first time." The word 'believe' is bolded in the image so as to suggest that, while Claudia remains in SAHE, she does so with the understanding of who the field centers, betrays, allows progress, and protects. In moving me through the emotions behind the next sets of GIFs, Claudia explained:

> I was ready to go. Of course, Beyonce. That's how I feel. There's a lot of anger that I didn't get to express. I still have those moments where I'm in my office at [New Elite Liberal Arts] and if things are going great, I'm like, "Fuck you [old campus], Fuck you [old Supervisor]," that's my boss, because that's how I feel. You could've had me, but you decided to be ridiculous. I like Maxine Waters a lot in general, but I do feel like I'm ... you can't really reclaim your time, but I do feel like there's a way in which I get to do a do over here at [New Elite Liberal Arts] and I get to take back my skills, take back my brilliance and it's on my terms now, my time and not their time, if that makes sense. I love LeBron. His, I'm over this, I'm walking out situation. I don't have time to explain it. I'm out of here, I said what I said, and then just really the Maya Angelou and Audre Lorde.

The aforementioned combination of Beyoncé, Lebron, Maya Angelou, and Audre Lorde in this section of her vignette suggests Claudia is aware that the negative experiences she had at her old campus are more-so representations of the workplace than they are solely of her abilities. By

invoking powerful celebrities here, or people considered to be among the best, one could infer Claudia is making a case for why she is great at her job. She confidently asserts that she knows what she does and why she deserves the new role and institution to which she moved. Moreover, she understands just how poorly her last campus is doing around diversity and equity for students and employees, against the backdrop of her own successes, and she expects that these realities will continue to shine through. As she went on to explain her vignette, Claudia made clear that leaving was an opportunity to put herself first. She continued:

> I just feel like my decision to leave was a self-care act. I knew that it was political. I knew that it would result in a lot of anger and people not understanding and making all kinds of narratives about ... I know they're making narratives about me right now. I think the part on Maya Angelou was I knew from my supervisor's first interaction with her that I shouldn't trust her. I wasn't ready to leave at the point, but I felt strongly, like, "Yep she showed me exactly who she was from the very beginning," and I remember at that moment when the [Elite Liberal Arts] job posted in the fall before I applied in the spring and [My Colleague] sent it to me and I was like, "I'm not ready yet." I knew there was all these things that told me I should bounce even though I wasn't ready to bounce, and then going back to the fact that everything that was shady just got worse, reminded me to always believe them from the first time. Don't give too many chances, because at some point, you get burned. I guess that's where all those came from, in general.

Although Claudia clearly wanted to remain loyal to her old campus, others around her, as much as she herself, recognized it was not the healthiest environment for her leading them to send her job postings. This included a position that she went on to accept. The idea that taking care of herself is a revolutionary act was not only depicted in the decision to leave, then, but also in here decision to choose herself over an institution. While the images in her vignette together tell a

story, more interesting than her actual images were the subtext of her vignette. In our time together, Claudia expressed what her vignette may have looked like should the repercussions for a less-than-classy departure of a Black woman be allowed and be allowed without harsher consequences. She explained that:

> If I had my choice of how I left [the last campus], it would've been messy as fuck. I would've been out there yelling at people. I would've been reading people for filth. I would've really got in, but I couldn't. Even in that last moment, I had to have a ... I didn't want a going away party ... who was mad that I was leaving to go work with [an old supervisor] again. Even students ... I didn't want to have a going away party for students. It was all these things people wanted me to do to perform my exit and I was like I just wanted to do my job and go. I'm not trying to ... one reason why I'm still here is I wanted that paycheck a little bit longer. The only reason why I stayed, I would've been gone in April, but I needed those checks. I knew that I couldn't leave like Angela Bassett, because I knew that's what people would remember. I know people are still going to have whatever narrative about me, what I was not going to let them do was to be able to say to me, "She was angry and she was bad..." They can't say that. I left my office sparkling clean, even work orders, take the trash out was done. I wrote a binder for the next director with a letter from me saying, "Hey you want to talk to me, I’m happy to have a chat with you."

It is clear, here, that there is tension between what Claudia wanted to give back to the institution because of what was and was not given to her versus the realities of what that might entail. She went on to note of the institution she left that “Oh yeah, this place is going down…” And while she considers the institution to be a place for potential, growth, and hope in higher education, the continued commitment to white supremacy and failure to trust and listen to Black women and

people who have real understandings of the world around them may be the ultimate downfall of the campus. She ended our discussion her vignette noting:

> [Last campus] is a brilliant place, but I feel like the college has not learned from any of the past. They just ignore, ignore, ignore and it is a sinking ship. Every time I hear a snippet about [Last Campus] these days, it's like, "Oh yeah, the students are ... the numbers are lower again," or "They're doing another round of layoffs again," or "Oh, they're back in the news about this," it's always something. I'm like, "Well, you clearly have learned nothing." I've been there for two years and I can identify all the problems and yet here we are again. It's a shame, because I feel bad for those students that just want to get an education, that just want that [campus] ... I feel bad for them. I feel bad for the alums. The current legacy is tarnishing. I feel bad for those staff members and faculty that really care…. And still try to move through all the challenges.

Although Claudia is aware of the SAHE dynamics on the old campus as well as the political and cultural dynamics within and outside of that space, she seemed to breathe a lot easier recounting the current situation on campus given the distance between those dynamics and herself. There is no longer a need to hold her breath and wonder if she'll be included in the next round of layoffs or be targeted by students or media because it is no longer her responsibility. The constant threat of will I be next or how will they hurt me next has, at least for now, calmed for her since she has taken on a new position at a new institution.

Michelle. Michelle is a 46-year-old, Black/African American, heterosexual woman who feels her race, class, gender, and first-generation college graduate status are her most salient identities. Michelle described herself as being compelled to provide support for students from backgrounds similar to her own. Originally from the North East, Michelle considers herself to be from the middle of the lower class (sic). Michelle enters higher education by way of student

support services roles and currently serves as an Associate Director at a public institution within that functional area. She holds a master's degree in higher education and student affairs.

Michelle submitted a one-page word cloud with a collection of terms she associated with her push out. The words ranged in sizing leading one to infer that the bigger the word the larger the feelings associated with it. The image depicted 18 words total. The words illuminated, in order of perceived size, from largest to smallest were: (1) unloved; (2) worthlessness; (3) rejection; (4) depression; (5) shame; (6) tears; (7) despair; (8) worthless; (9) unwanted; (10) sad; (11) feelings; (12) shame; (13) no value; (14) not needed; (15) loneliness; (16) not measuring up; (17) no purpose; and, (18) alone. The words were scattered across the page and ranged in colors. Each of the words were a shade of deep red, red, gray, and Black. From the words on this page, one could expect that Michelle left SAHE feeling very negatively about her experience and the field overall as there is not a single positive word, nor term that could be construed as positive within her image. When discussing her image, Michelle explained, "So, my image was worthlessness—it was about depression and hopelessness and lack of purpose. And that's what... It's kind of a little depressing and that's probably another reason why there's a little… trauma sharing, because it [(thinking about SAHE)] puts me in a—what's the word—a very negative state of mind, while trying to have a good day." From this, one could presume that not only would Michelle continue working outside of higher education, but that she may never return as even thinking about her SAHE experience forces her to revisit negative emotions. In thinking about the bigger picture of why this rings true and why she selected her image, Michelle lamented:

> Okay. You spent a lot of time and energy creating a business, your career, as well as having an investment of not only just money but through your master's program and education. Professional development. Relationship building. Networking. Things of that

> nature. You've spent a lot of time on that and then you basically are told you are not good enough. And, it is very depressing. And, you feel very worthless because it tells you that everything you've done is not good enough. So, you know. And, I'm sure that anybody in any position, when they have been laid off or terminated or pushed out. Especially, I think, for me, the pushing out was hard for the simple fact that, you know, you work hard and you know your work ethic. You know your goals. You know your visions. You know what your assets are. That's a talent that you bring. But, then at the end, it's just kind of like...it was really hard to put into words [or an image]. It's easier to talk about than to write about. But. That's what basically my image was.

Michelle's frustration is clear through her word usage and in discussing her image as she feels she invested heavily into setting herself up for a strong career in the SAHE field only to have that come to a close. More than this, the image evoked for her a realization that she had an impact and self-worth, but it no longer continues from her. Michelle explains:

> Basically, you could say '94 to 2014. My life was higher education, student affairs, student development. Being there for the students wanting to see students succeed. You know, having good intentions and then to have it all kicked out. And, you know, I learned about myself as a professional as well as on a personal level. There's so many different levels and now It's just kind of like "Okay. Bye… So, the image, you know, it just kind of put me in that sad place because I still do keep in contact with some of my former students. And, what's funny is how they will always say "I really miss XYZ", miss the affirmations that you did not receive from your supervisor about what you've done for them to help them career-wise, professionally, academically at that time. You know, they were in school then. They've since graduated. But, yeah to have some of the lessons that

> they still keep with them that they said they still remember. And, that burns. You know, I was worth something to someone or some people.

The pain Michelle is expressing here suggests that there is a sense of loss around professional identity and the ability to continue impacting students. It is clear from her former students that there is wisdom and knowledge she imparted that was long lasting, but the worth she feels for having done that seems to be questioned by her inability to remain.

Terry. Terry is a 34 year-old heterosexual, middle class, African-American woman from the Mid-West. Beyond this, she considers being cisgender, fat, and college educated as significant pieces of her identity. Though she described herself as middle class, Terry problematized this as she was socialized more around race and gender than class and often grew up without discussing class identity. She currently serves as an Associate Director for Residence Life at a public mid-sized research institution. Terry holds a master's degree in higher and adult educating and is pursuing a doctoral degree in education administration. At the time of study, Terry was considering her exit strategy from the field of student affairs. Terry took an artistic photo approach to the images she submitted as part of her vignette. Rather than depictions from the Internet or other artists, she took photos of a plant across several weeks with her iPhone X.

In the first image, the plant, an orchid, is new and fresh with beautiful blue hues in bloom. In the second picture, the blooms have fallen, but the plant appears healthy at the roots and leaves of the orchid with fresh hues of green. In talking through the selection of these images for her vignette, Terry explained:

> A month ago, exactly four weeks ago, somebody bought me an orchid. I've never had plants because I just couldn't make the mother fuckers grow, to be honest. I just don't have a green thumb and so they got me the orchid because they said it's easy, right? Now the [first] picture, it's beautiful, right? It's beautiful and I took that picture at three weeks.

> I had that thing for three weeks and it was beautiful, and I was like oh my god, I'm so proud that I had been able to keep this orchid alive and it looks good. In the second picture, obviously the blooms have fallen off. Obviously, you can see from the leaves that the plant is still very healthy and very much alive, and the leaves are even higher like it's got good roots, it's got a good base, but the flowers are gone… And I'm hoping the flowers will come back at some point, however long that's going to be. I feel like for me, that's been my physical [representations of my student] affairs career.

Here, one could infer from this that Terry views her time in student affairs as having started at her most fulfilled with pieces of her essence and beauty now needing further nourishment, support, and upkeep. She continued noting:

> I feel like at some point that mother fucker [(sic)] was blooming, I was watering it, I was following the directions, right? I was doing everything that you're told you're supposed to do, and it's not blooming anymore. Even though I'm doing everything I'm supposed to do and there's still a good base, right? I'm my base. I'm good, I'm solid. Shit is still just not panning out in the way that I'd like it to. For me, I'm kind of at a point where I'm at with this. I keep watering it, right? I keep watering it, and nothing's happening and it's still not flowering. Yeah, that's just how I feel right now [with] student affairs… I'm thinking a lot about how "man I'm worn out." I'm the Black woman to *right* in my department. Well, now there's a couple of Black women. You know, that's because of my efforts, last year I was the [only] Black woman in department [and] number two. It's hard, right? I have to be so political all the damn time. Now I'm like man, if I'm at this place, if this is as good as it gets, there's no way I'm going to be able to continue higher ed when I leave here. I think this is my last shot.

From Terry's discussion of her experiences, she recognizes that she is at a workplace that is seen as a *great place to work* in the field but still continues to struggle as the highest-ranking Black woman in the department. For Terry, the exhaustion and frustration of continuing to be good at her roots does not overshadow the ways in which exhaustion through her SAHE workplace is shifting how that manifests outwardly. Like the orchid, her external appearance is no longer what it used to be and the realization and awareness of this is leading Terry to consider using her talents beyond the scope of a SAHE college/university workplace. She is unsure, for now, of where she might go but had initially expressed in her interviews that she does not see herself in higher education in the next five years. In recent member checking for clarity around a quote, she explained she had already placed her resignation for the end of the semester to go and be closer to her family.

"Student affairs can feel like an abusive relationship:" A Composite Vignette

The discrete images presented here reveal the individual ways in which the Black women participants in this study independently navigated workplace frustration, decisions to opt out, and ultimately even pushout of full-time positions. Together, though, they suggest many Black women's experiences in student affairs follows an expected pattern. This pattern consists of initial excitement for entry into the field or position, immediate disconnect between espoused and enacted workplace goals, disillusionment, pain and institutional betrayal, anger and frustration, and departure from the workplace through push out or opt out.

Towards a Composite Image. If the representations of Black women's experiences discussed in this study were taken together to fit on an 8½ x11" page, it would display something to the effect of the following: On the left is the representations of one's entry into SAHE. There, field of full bloomed orchids—blooms in hues of blue represents the liveliness, radiance, and wholeness of a Black woman's being upon the decision to enter this field (Terry). The fullness of

the orchids deteriorates with each flower as they draw closer to the center of the page and off a cliff (Shane), an embodiment of Black women's immediate disconnect with espoused versus enacted goals of the workplace. At the bottom of the cliff lays a car on fire with a Black woman walking away. Here disillusionment has set, but, before the Black woman can realize the issue is with the institution and not with her, she self-sabotages as the car on fire is that which she owns (Claudia). As she walks away, the Black woman realizes it is the institution, not her as an individual, that is at fault, but this does little to lessen her visible depression (Michelle). Here, she turns to see a group of white women having lunch beneath the drop of the cliff and on the edge of the beach where she laments "you guys are hopeless…" as they stare dismayed at her response to institutional betrayal rather than expressing frustrations with the fact that she had to experience an institutional disconnect in the first place (Jodie). As the Black woman continues away, you see a thought bubble that says, "If I had my way… Life would be just fine but the world's too much and it makes me cry SOMETIMES I feel like leaving but I must be wise." (Troy). This signals that she feels somewhat hopeless, exhausted, and ready to concede to the operation of higher education workplace. From there, nothingness; a blank hole in the middle to represent the loss of what higher education should have been for her and the realization that it may be best for her to leave the workplace or the field altogether. This piece of the image doubles as a representation of Sara, given her inability to continue the study beyond the first interview. After some time, revealed by a designation of six months later on a calendar, the Black woman shows a renewed sense of self, purpose, and hope as she has opted out of the workplace in question. This is seen through a sign which denotes "you are in control" (Ebony) as

she rushes away with her luggage and baggage in hopes of a new beginning. Figure 1, below, displays a pictorial representation of the composite image described here.

Figure 1: Composite Vignette Visual Representation

Toward an Understanding of Push Out and Opt Out

In multiple instances, the sistas in this study described the decision to opt out as a response to institutional push out. As expressed in their vignette reflections on serving in a SAHE workplace where they had to endure push out, these sistas understood that a degree of classiness, savvy, and ability to prepare for something better would prove integral to their longer-term success in the field. The sistas in this study often had to engage their campuses with much calm, respect, and willingness to support than the campuses ever met them with. Across these images, it is clear that institutional and community betrayal, issues of inequity and expected

labor, and acts of violence, harm, and misogynoir contribute to how they understand previous employment experiences in the field. These shared narratives and background stories offer insight into how these Black women made the decisions they did in light of the institutional and individual acts they endured. As such, the following episodes and finale detail Black women's experiences, acts of resistance, decision making, and advice for future Black women engaging in a SAHE workplace.

Episode 1: "Sometimes You May Need to Pick the Cotton with a Smile": Institutional and Communal Betrayal

The sistas in this study reported dealing with several instances of institutional and community betrayal. This betrayal was a contributing factor to their push out and/or opt out. Institutional betrayal is broken down as issues with lack of workplace planning and racist supervision, workplace nepotism and hiring struggles, and experiences with tokenization. Communal betrayal on the other hand refers to the moments people the sistas thought they would be in community with betrayed them. This was often other Black people and well-meaning white individuals and supposed allies.

Institutional betrayal

Institutional betrayal manifested regularly for the sistas in this study. Issues within the workplace often happened top down and showed how little thought campus leaders had placed into the culture and dynamics of the workplaces they brought Black women into. The interplay between lack of readiness for Black women on campus and lack of infrastructure to support Black women on campus together led to issues of betrayal. The following sections reveal how the sistas in this study experienced and responded to these situations.

Workplace planning, racist supervision, and leadership practices. Issues related to poor leadership, lack of campus planning, and problems with on- and off-boarding were

significant for Troy, Shane, and Claudia. On- and off-boarding represents the institutional practices associated with helping a new employee get started within their SAHE workplace while off -boarding is the wrap up process for helping employees to transition out of a campus. Troy, Claudia, and Shane experienced issues with navigating acclimation to and from their respective workplaces due to the perception that they would do as told rather than question and offer suggestions. Troy, for instance, was tasked with heading campus diversity initiatives, but there was never a guide for what the standards for this work needed to include. Troy recalled:

> They didn't really have a campus diversity strategic plan. They didn't really have the committees and faculty dropped off these committees. Every time I got engaged about this committee, or every time I got engaged about diversity inclusion, there was always some kind of resistance. I realized it was because the Chief Diversity Officer [(Troy's supervisor)], and the things that went along with that, while I was a good face for it, this person wanted that power attached to it because it was a direct reporting line to the President. I didn't catch on to those politics right away. My biggest critique was that the institution was not holding this person accountable for having that job title. Because I was trying to do the work, but I was also being sidelined. I was also being under-resourced and trying to do the best that I could. But again, when you're young, when you're, they didn't have like a makers lab. I wish institutions had a makers lab for young professionals to sit down and think about and invent, like a hack-a-thon.

Troy was continuously adjusting her strategies to contribute to campus due to the lack of formal structure for tackling campus diversity. When she did the work, it would come across as undermining because the campus chief diversity officer (CDO) never built the infrastructure to support her ideas though this person was her direct supervisor. Troy lamented the fact that the CDO cared more about the title and power associated with the role than actually executing the

functions of the job. Troy was full of new energy and plans for the institution given the high caliber of student, but she could rarely get things off the ground. One such idea was her plan to introduce a *makers lab* where students, faculty, and staff could come together to develop and execute ideas outside of the classroom that connected with their in classroom learning. The inability to have those ideas heard by campus leaders due to her supervisor's gatekeeping suggested that not only was she to engage the work of diversity and inclusion through someone else's vision, but that she would not receive full credit nor be able to suggest changes within her position.

Where Troy struggled with having a leader in place who could not facilitate the quality of her work and lack of institutional planning, Shane was effectively expected to enter a campus and make things work with no guidance. She went on to note:

> My supervisor who hired me, she told me she was quitting my first day, so I only worked with her in the month, so I opened the school year by myself and led the department by myself. I think it put a lot of pressure on me because I think people had a perception of me being her and they had negative interactions with her. And it carried on with the students 'cause staff would have inappropriate conversations with students about this staff member. So, it created an environment of just being toxic. So, I had to over exert myself in a way, to gain the trust or build that community of rapport with students so they could make their own decisions on how they felt about me.

In both of these instances, there was an expectation that the sistas in these roles engage this work in ways the institution wanted but lacked the foresight to name. This was particularly troubling for Shane and Troy as there was a disconnect between their professional ideologies and those of the people tasked to lead them. That Shane's former supervisor had a poor reputation meant working extra hard to become well received. "I think the institution, they didn't know how to

handle me 'cause I was the only Woman of Color, only Black woman in the division for a good amount of time," she went on to add. Shane, then, was carrying the weight of doing diversity work in a context where there were negative attitudes, she had no control over and without enough information to lead to her success.

Claudia often had additional duties and responsibilities added to her portfolio. Though she, too, entered and navigated an institution in disarray, the realities of institutional betrayal were cemented when the campus leadership made clear that she had the necessary qualities for a promotion but opted not to move her because it would be inconvenient. Claudia recalled the insulting moments when this became clear:

> It even got to the point that that president said to me during the transition of our deans, "Claudia, we thought about you to be a Dean of Students and to be the interim but you know what, we want to keep you in the Multicultural Center." That kind of language about let's just keep you in that space are strategies that I think people use to...it was clear to me that in that institution I was never going to be seen more than Director of the Cultural Center. No matter what skills. People would say things, "Claudia I'm surprised that you can do conduct. I'm really surprised that you handled that so well. I'm really surprised that you are really good on-call." And I'm like, first of all, everybody who does diversity work is trained as a generalist first. There are very few that are trained in diversity first. We all get those same skills. We happen to specialize in a direction in a way that people see student activity. A-I am insulted by that and B-you obviously know nothing about a diversity type space because everything about doing that work is responsive on-call, is to manage that conflict, is to hold students accountable, is to hold that. So why wouldn't I be good at that? If I can handle students saying slurs to each other and addressing that after the fact. If I can handle post roommate conflicts, I can handle

> major campus unrest, why can't I handle a student who got caught with marijuana in their room. Why is that such a far reach for people to understand?

For Claudia, there was a form of betrayal in the sense that the campus trusted her enough to pile on responsibilities, but they didn't trust her enough to move her into further leadership despite her readiness. There was also the continuous questioning of her skills despite having hired her for holding them.

Like Claudia, Shane also served in diversity capacities and despite being one of the most educated people amongst her colleagues, she was routinely overlooked for promotions and expected to accept additional responsibilities well beyond *other duties as assigned*. This became especially clear when a white male with less education, few years of experiences, but connections to the Board of Trustees at her last place of employment was promoted. Shane explained:

> I think people manipulated others or because they had certain personal or social connections. Like the Board of Directors, having family on the Board of Directors caused them to be able to elevate from, to elevate from being Director of the Student Life department to the Vice President or Executive I forgot what the title is but they didn't want to call this person Vice President because they don't have education to be a Vice President because they don't have a master's degree, within a year. Yeah, within almost a year and a half one of the individuals that I worked with went from a Director of Student Life office to the VP of Student Affairs with only a bachelor's degree.

Later in the conversation, she went on to offer that it wasn't simply this person's lack of education but also their ongoing character issues that led her to question the role of their white-male identity and connections as problematic. She expressed:

> I think for me it wasn't so much that the person didn't have the education. I think for me it was the issue because that person's character that they would lie on colleagues and pit people against each other. Just to save face and to not own the issues that they created or own the harm that they were actively doing to students. That was my issue because that is a character flaw it has nothing to do with education even if he had a degree I don't think that would have changed who he was and how he treated people.

That this person would be unsupportive *and* unqualified proved to be the more challenging aspect of his relationship with Shane. This person's lack of readiness for their role contributed to campus turmoil rather than helping to decrease issues of infighting.

Claudia, Shane, and Troy all served in diversity capacities and all felt like they were simultaneously seen and unseen. That there was an expectation that they engage in additional labor but that somehow, they would not have the necessary skills to do that work. Claudia went on to lament, "I think the role of a Black woman at many colleges whether you're doing diversity or not is to be a caretaker and whenever that woman decides not to do it or push back on them. To question that or to name that, that is a problem and there is a way to get that person out of there." Here, the betrayal is crystallized because campuses are gaslighting Black women by simultaneously saying they want their presence and support but only within specific contexts. I utilize gaslighting within this context because it represents a practice of manipulating the sistas in this study to question the realities they know to be true (Dillard, 2012; Roberts & Andrews, 2013). Claudia continued:

> I felt like a mammie. That's what I felt like. I use that word intentionally. I feel like no matter how progressive people try to be, they view collectively Black women as caretakers of not just Students of Color or diverse students but everybody. The expectation of my job was to hold the emotional of everybody's stuff, including my own.

I remember near the end of my job there was a moment where, I have a problem saying this. We were having a conversation about our, we were having a volunteer separation program, there was some people that applied. Some white colleagues applied. I was not eligible to apply because my job was too critical. So there was no point in applying. We were talking about some of my white colleagues and there was a conversation that went on about, “yeah, this white colleague, we don't know anything about him, we didn't even know he was on paternity leave until recently and he doesn't really do anything. He's been here for four years. Maybe we should just give him a chance? Maybe he should just stay here longer and maybe he'll show and do this role finally, four years later?” Meanwhile in that same conversation, “Claudia, I need you to do all these things that are not even in your job portfolio. Can you actually run, it's April but can you run this program on dialogue between Students of Color and Jewish students? Can you also do this, blah, blah, blah,” literally in the same breath. Here's superwoman. Give all of yourself for the campus regardless of the issues. Do all that we need you to do, meanwhile white people literally get to be mediocre, literally are allowed to have space to not do their job. Nobody wants to hold them accountable but the minute the Black woman says no or pushes back, oh, what's her problem. She's difficult. As long as the Black woman is the caretaker of the college, everything is great but the minute she demands more money, the minute she wants more staff, the minute she needs more support or the minute she starts complaining then she's just… she's just too entitled. There were literal conversations that said we had to find a way to bring Claudia in because she thinks she can do whatever she wants. Nobody is checking her. Know what I mean?

Here, Claudia was tasked with accepting the lack of accountability across colleagues on her campus. There was an unwritten professional expectation that she be willing to overextend herself while the college, which was battling financial troubles, spent money supporting professionals who did not fulfill the basic functions of their employment. The idea that she could not do everything was something Jodie similarly expressed. Jodie explained:

> So, what ended up happening was we had this really large scale programming effort, essentially, pushed upon us. Upon largely, what I think, was supposed to be the Division of Student Affairs, where for a weekend, which was Thursday to Sunday, we needed to have, like, five things that were happening. Theoretically those programming responsibilities and oversight should have fallen across the division wherein one person from every department would have something that they were either overseeing or participating in. That very quickly then turned into, "How can we work with it in such a way that we get paired with a student activities event because somebody from that staff will already be there?" So, it disproportionately burdened our office for something that we never agreed was a problem, and, ultimately, ended up being more additional work for us than for any other department. It created an unsustainable pace of work, which was highly different from what I had been told at the beginning, but also just came from a place that wasn't proven. It was a lot of work. So, there's increased workload that was happening. Separately, that was also the fall where there were a lot of student protests happening on campus and we had a lot of Students of Color on our campus who had opted to protest as part of that movement. And because our multicultural programs office was one person, it then very quickly settled to, "Alright, who else can help us out with this?" And that, for whatever reason, then fell ... Well, it's not for whatever reason, I know why, but then fell not just on people for whom that was their role, so organization

> advisors weren't directing multicultural programs, but anybody who looked the part to be able to provide that additional support. So, already feeling overburdened with the workload, and personally affected by those things, it then defacto became my job to also deal with these students who were having issues with that. Which, personally, I would never take issue with doing that, but feeling mandated to do so, in addition to all that other work that was being done, and not having anybody see that all of that was going on at once just felt like an unsustainable environment for me.

Like Claudia, Jodie had to endure taking on more responsibilities in her office and the experienced left her questioning how much of these added roles were tied to race. The question of whether it needed to be her and her office or if it was because they represented diversity plagued her. Jodie went to on to say:

> And what I am seeing as in institutional pattern is that these institutions hire Women of Color and then turn us into problematic Women of Color within the institution once we hold that mirror up. Then they try to break the glass and then turn the mirror back around, so that we see a shattered image of ourselves. We stop contributing because we stop feeling like we talk in a meeting. Or we add this idea or we contribute this thing. We notice the people don't echo our ideas anymore but they'll echo Susan's and Barbara's and Kate's. You notice that all of sudden, you pulling a Shirley Chisholm. They didn't invite you to the table, you brought your folding chair. You know, you always having to invite yourself in the conversations you should be invited in but you're always into conversations that you feel should be other people's responsibilities.

Here, like Claudia and Troy, Jodie is contending with the difficulties of being hyper (in)visible in the workplace and being expected to tow a line of white appeasement. Like the other sistas,

Shane continued to experience institutional betrayal when hierarchies, rules, and expectations that did not exist for others on campus were made for her, her office, and her students. Shane went on to recall:

> So, one of my student organizations that I advised who maybe in the first or second week of the school year opening, and one of the student orgs posted fliers all over campus. They posted them on glass doors, on walls, bathroom, they posted them everywhere, any viable surface. So, it was a little over the top. It was a little over the top, so everyone knew about this particular cook out happening. I got an email directly from the Dean himself telling me to tell the students to remove it. I thought it was a little over the top that someone that high up would be concerned about a flier.

One could infer that the subtext of Shane's annoyance with the flyer issue was that in no other situation, even if students were unwieldly, would people so high up concern themselves. But increased visibility of an event for Students of Color could be taken different than that of events to support white students. In this situation, like many others before it, the sistas in this study not only had to navigate consistently shifting policies and practices but also had to question how much race played a role in their treatment. That this came from the people tasked with leading them and campus they were employed by suggests the institutions and their representatives failed to meaningfully support the sistas in this study.

Unlike the other instances, there was no questioning of whether a supervisor was racist for Sara. Sara experienced betrayal when an institutional leader above her engaged in racist acts and said racist things with no reprimand. She explained:

> There were recordings between him and a student where he stated that he didn't want the student dating a Black student because that's not what they do…. He's just trying to look out for her safety and her wellbeing, and dating a Black guy is not the right ... He said,

"I'm just trying to look after you like I would my own daughter. I'm sure your dad would appreciate that." So, this was caught on record. So, when that student went back and played the record for pretty much the campus body, staff heard it, students heard it, even campus partners heard it, people outside university heard it, it was almost all eyes on the university. What are they going to do?... So, at that moment in noticing how the leadership had handled such a sensitive issue, given the already tense climate that's happening on campus, or the lack of support that I received from the leadership, and the lack of sensitivity, I knew right then and there that I didn't feel valued as a person of color working in an overworked, underserved position. I see that they didn't value the Students of Color in how they addressed the issue… I think when it came down to expressing my thoughts and opinions, I think that's when the relationship started to get severed and that's when the mistreatment started to come into place.

In this instance, Sara felt betrayed by the institution for their lack of response to the clearly racist incident. That nothing happened to this person sent signals to her that she not only would be unappreciated but that there may racist comments and language used towards her. This would also make her job more difficult as students would rightly raise grave concerns over these actions.

Troy also had instances where it was clear that racism impacted her experience. Her time on campus had worsened as she began to disclose the disabilities she developed and to do advocacy and awareness work around them. When discussing her disability advocacy work around her fibromyalgia Troy recollected:

So, then I started doing all this work about one of them, which I don't mind disclosing because it's actually a very common one, because it's a common one only because it's a diagnosis of exclusion. So, fibromyalgia... But this is the one where it makes you sit the

fuck up and you go hey, wait a minute, where does that come from? What is the cause of fibromyalgia? I'm gonna tell you my cause of fibromyalgia. I don't know about anybody else's. My cause of fibromyalgia is inheriting, holding in, and holding space for and making space for all of the traumatic pain that generations of Black women have sustained at the hands of this institution, trying to care for, love on, and support being Black and everybody else's students that come through that space, because we happen to love that space, too. It's like this weird thing that I think that is sort of like an ancestral trait we have somehow gained.

Because her disability did not require her to use something people could see and associate with ability, like a wheel chair, there were moments where the institution ignored or downright downplayed that she had it. She attributed the development of this issue, which did not exist for her prior to that campus, to holding in and taking on the unrealistic demands of that toxic workplace. This form of institutional betrayal was not only difficult for her physically but was also downright illegal.

Claudia’s battles with institutional betrayal happened until the very last minute of her employment at her last institution. Upon announcing her departure, the campus responded by almost immediately treating her as if she was no longer part of the work environment. Claudia recalled:

> Even the minute I said I was leaving, that same day that I told my dean I was leaving my job, something was going on campus and she told the president I was leaving. I found out around the table through diversity officer and they were trying to struggle, they were trying to figure out how to write a campus letter about what was going on with the issue and verbatim, the president said, in a public space, somebody said we should really talk to Claudia about this. She is really good expertise in navigating this, let's talk to her and

> the president said, well, she's leaving, why do we need to talk to her? Now keep in mind, that president was announcing retirement a year prior but yet we had to respect him... But literally the day, literally hours after I announce to the Dean of Students that I had took a position, I was already not valuable.

In saying this, Claudia makes plain that the ways in which Black women are considered and valued is tied to how long an institution believes it has them.

The sistas in the study often struggled with issues of betrayal because employers would often lie, conceal, of otherwise minimize the significance of the responsibilities attached to their jobs. When Ebony was hired, she had to navigate opening a residence hall with no leadership, training or support. It was expected she would figure everything out with no resources due to her impressive credentials. While this may work in some instances, Ebony was tasked with opening a gender-neutral residence hall in a town where the concept made the news and there were demands and threats flying. The issue of no support from leadership and an expectation that she could figure it out as a Black woman led Ebony to explain,

> The gender-neutral residence hall, at first it didn't even go over well. It was in the paper before I got there. Students didn't want it because they didn't understand it. They were like, safety reasons, what's gonna happen. On move in day I had parents who were like, "I need my child to move to another residence. This isn't safe." Very ignorant in terms of diverse issues or social justice, what-have-you. And most interesting, my staff was never trained. Luckily, I was the person who opened the resident's hall and I think they saw my resume and that's why they did it, but there was no training.

Ebony believed there would have been more support for opening the hall but had to rely on her skills and training from another campus. Although things turned out *okay* having more guidance

for the specific institutional context she was working within as a residence life staff member could have softened the struggles with opening.

Though Claudia and Ebony struggled to find support for their expertise and general functions of the job, Sara had difficulty with navigating a tenuous campus climate where racism did not negate opportunities for advancement. Sara spoke candidly about the ways in which institutional betrayal when combined with white supremacy in the workplace resulted in further promotions for white professionals and continued marginalization for others. While awaiting feedback for a campus climate survey Sara found herself struggling. She explained:

> [I was] anticipating to get the results to prove... to further prove what the students are saying, and reflect how they feel and affirms how they feel what they've been dealing with, it affirms how faculty of color, staff of color feel, what they've been dealing with at this institution, and it also affirms that even though People of Color are marginalized, that there are still other People of Color that marginalize other People of Color.

However, those results never emerged. In our time together, she continued by noting:

> But that document never came out. Which is then further reinforces the idea that something was written, and it was not very positive. It didn't highlight the institution in the light that they wanted, and that's why they didn't put it out. And so, I had to go. I had to go. And also that person, the administrator that made the comment, he still stayed in his position, was promoted to another position [like another poor supervisor I knew], and still leads the pipeline for student of color attention on campus.

Not only then was the current climate on campus not taken seriously, but a professional who committed an egregious act of racism was promoted and furthered. Troy had to deal with similar issues when she watched multiple Black women pushed out through firing from the campus that employed her and experienced resistance to her advocacy for the campus diversity center to be

moved to a place that was more convenient for students and central to campus. Troy went on to recall:

> That combination of watching this Black woman, two Black women, one I knew kind of well and one I knew really well, leave the institution in unfortunate circumstances. The third one I haven't even mentioned yet. Actually, I'm forgetting one. It's four. All from residence life. Actually, three from residence life, one from disability services. If it wasn't for that experience of those friendships and watching and maybe that pattern, if it wasn't from sharing a search and interacting with students who kept telling me that there was something wrong with the people that they were working with, that it was a disdain or a certain level of contempt that they felt that they were receiving from professionals at their institution that they couldn't shake. It was the outward ... What began as small, calculated, undermining moves under things that I did, or proposals that I wrote, or seeing my name being taken off things or not being invited to meetings, or being invited to meetings only to be asked to take the notes. Or writing the proposal and doing all the work for the proposal, but having it assigned to a white woman in conference services. Doing a whole ... launching a whole shuttle system that never existed [on campus] and having that handed over to the white woman in conference services. Having the white woman in conference services be given my physical office in the dean of student's office without me knowing and without my consent, because I had the audacity to move my center to a new building?

Troy was systematically removed, minimized, and punished for her decision to advocate and center students. The shifting of her duties also aligned with a mass exodus and removal of Black women from campus who were making noise and attempting to create change.

The dynamics of supervision outside of SAHE served as an example of how things can be counter to the models, we have that can contribute to institutional betrayal for one sista. Jodie expressed how setting expectations with supervisors in SAHE was hard because it looks different than other places where people will take seriously the role of matching your leadership style with your role and your work. For Jodie, part of the betrayal of how push out and opt out manifest goes back to master's programs, and socialization in the field. Jodie explained:

> So many [graduate students] were saying they wanted the opportunity to be creative and wanted to change things and I think there were grad programs that were telling people that's where your energy should be going. But then I think about when I went onto campuses and wanted to do that, how many times I was told I wasn't allowed to for one reason or another, even if it was backed up by what leadership wanted, even if I had the information to share it the way I was told it could happen. So, I think we are, the expectations are mismatched. We're telling grad students that are going out in the field you're gonna be able to make change when you get there and the people who are in charge of letting that happen hold back or pull back and say nope, you can't

She continued:

> I talk to people a lot who are saying I didn't know it was gonna be this bad or no one told me to expect this thing or something else. I think in a lot of ways those things weren't necessarily hidden, but it's just a matter of if we told everybody how difficult it was gonna be to acclimate and that you would feel as though your opinion didn't matter, you would feel like you didn't have the power that we told people that they'd have. If we told people that at the outset, no people would come. Why would you get into this work knowing that? So, I think, yeah, no one will tell you.

Jodie's words raise some larger questions for what has been presented in this text. There are things about serving in SAHE that people often fail to disclose, ideas that are promoted in preparation programs, and then dissonance that happens for practitioners because of misalignment. All of these issues contributed to the problems sistas recounted in this study.

Tokenization. These acts of betrayal were compounded when the sistas in the study reported feeling tokenization. In examining their individual and shared narratives, it was clear that most of the women in this study navigated such experiences and emotions. However, Shane, Claudia, Michelle, and Jodie explicitly named tokenization as part of their campus experiences. "It was more so I felt that at times people want you to be a token versus being actually representing and what does that representation look like that? What does that follow through look like," said Shane. Shane was not alone in this sentiment as the only or one of the only people who looked like her on campus. Claudia added:

> So, it was really lonely. When you are literally one of the only...up until my last few months [on campus], I was the only Black person in the division. Highest ranking. So, there was no one to go to except for a few People of Color outside of the division that I could talk to that were friends. But it was just me against the entire campus. That's what it felt like.

For Claudia, the feelings of tokenization were deepened by the lack of community on campus. Michelle similarly felt tokenized because people would often trot her out or ask her to take on additional duties to make the campus and institution appear more representationally diverse. Michelle explained:

> Because my position – I mentioned a little earlier I was an academic advisor and assistant director of student activities and I worked predominantly with diversity increasing – basically working with admissions to increase diversity within the school. I believe I

> made it easier because a lot of the recruiters for internships, full time job opportunities, they would see it as, oh wait, we haven't seen a person of color in this office in quite some time, well maybe we can tap her shoulder and ask regarding – you know ask about the students that we may be interested in without coming out and saying, oh, where are your Students of Color because legally they were not allowed to do that.

Michelle inadvertently became the person that people would be able to ask off hand how to find more Students of Color. This ask, though, was less about her expertise and more about how she appeared. Jodie questioned the role of race in doling out responsibilities and thus tokenization. Jodie recalled:

> I think for me, having the opportunity to explore some elements of where race might have played into how I was being assigned work and otherwise treated, it was, again, it was something that up until that point I hadn't put a whole lot of thought into. Then I think that [(race)], then, too affects some of the topics that I choose to speak about and how I choose to use some of the platform that I have now. So being able to find ways to talk about those topics in a way that makes sense for me, but also feel worthwhile and approachable for other people. I think it's impacted my career in that way. It's also made me very sensitive to how I might be used and how I might be perceived when I go into a speaking environment or a facilitating environment, and the idea that I would be heard differently when I entered those spaces. Even in a position of authority because I am a Black woman. It's something that I think five years ago I never would have thought about, and now I think about it every single day. I think it impacts how I go into spaces, and I think in some ways it keeps me from being unduly hard on myself. Because I have always been the kind of person that's very high performing, very high achieving, and likes to do well at things. I think having an understanding of the idea that sometimes how

> I'm perceived or how what I'm saying goes over, they're elements of that that are part of my performance, they're also elements of that that have nothing to do with me. It's a little bit freeing to go in because I can say, "I know what I'm here to do, and I know that I'm good at this, and the people that get it will get it. And there are people that I might be able to reach, but there are also people that I might not be able to reach, and there isn't really anything I would be able to do about that.

Jodie's narrative illuminates how tokenization can impact a person's career in the long term. Jodie had a sense that her race played a role in how she was treated and the roles she got assigned in the workplace and because of that she is particularly sensitive about how she is perceived in different environments and what impact that perceptive may have.

Community Betrayal

Community betrayal can be described as instances where people and structures we expected to be in community with did not uphold that unwritten expectation. For most of the women in this study, a bulk of the instances of community betrayal were related to colleagues constantly centering themselves at the expense of the women. That centering of themselves could look like anything from assigning the women a disproportionate amount of work to not leaving space for the women to express their ideas in meetings. Other examples include when Black women are liked by peers for overworking but disliked for setting boundaries.

Betrayal between People of Color on a white campus proved particularly salient for some of the sistas in the study. Shane battled to get her students to understand how their undermining of her leadership and position in the office felt like community betrayal. She explained, "I think because I was a woman of color, that's why the students disrespected me in the way they did. I think if this was a white faculty member, regardless of gender, it would not have been a conversation and those students would have been expelled." The students in question failed to

accept no for an answer from Shane and thus engaged in disrespect. There is a sense of frustration in how she talks about this not only because they refused to follow her directives, but because it came from the students who *should* be understanding and empathetic of her positioning.

A similar type of betrayal happened to Claudia. The betrayal was harder for Claudia when she realized her boss, who was a woman of color, was willing to throw her under the bus to secure her own standing at the college. Claudia explained:

> So, we strategize together as Black people on a white campus, on how to survive. And, that means everything. My last dean, even though she was a woman of color herself, she was not woke. She was all about herself, and she was doing everything that she could to shut down my approach. Everything that my dean [before her] loved, my consulting, my publishing, my leadership, my style, she hated, she critiqued, she thought was awful. She wanted to manipulate for her own benefit but didn't want me to benefit at all. And so we were never ever going to work.

Claudia continued:

> She was, a queer woman of color at that. So, everything about that said, "We should be homeys." In theory. We should be at least kinfolk. We were not. I think for me, the very first moment was when she insisted that I do conduct. I was fine with doing on call. Sure, whatever, I don't mind being woke up in the middle of the night. I'm good at it, but I knew in my gut as a value ... Brian* [previous Dean] and I talked about that, and so long story short, Brian didn't finish my promotion. Selena did. Brian promised and I don't have any shade to Brian about this. He promised and didn't finalize. Whether it was a hiccup through HR, him, it wasn't resolved. So, when I've had finalized promotion, Selena was the one that had to create the terms. When she created the terms, her vision of me being

> assistant dean was very, very different than what [my last supervisor] Brian wanted. For her, that included being on call, doing conduct and what have you. I always felt strongly that I did not think it was a good idea for a director of a multicultural center to have to do conduct, because one, if my job is to build community, and to be a support person, I can't also be the heavy. I can’t be both, and it's confusing to students. And I knew there would be moments and foreshadowing. I knew there would be moments where I may have a case of a student of color and I have to size up and it ain't going to be favorable. I knew that ... I just knew that it would be a bad idea. I pushed her and said, "Hey, here's why this wasn't the situation, blah, blah, blah." She made a decision because of convenience for her because we were short deans.

Claudia experienced community betrayal at the hands of Selena*(her Woman of Color Supervisor) not only because of the way they bumped heads, but also because Selena wanted Claudia to take on additional duties even if they would put her roles in conflict. Claudia felt strongly that this would not be a good idea and despite her education and experience was not listened to.

Where Claudia and Shane struggled with the People of Color in their orbit, Troy had to listen to another Black woman offer her bad advice. “Either I shut up and put up and sit over here in this corner and pick cotton with a smile…” Troy said. When asked whether this was a direct quote she went on to say “‘Sometimes you may need to pick the cotton with a smile,’ It's seared into my brain. I have to repeat it everywhere so that I never forget somebody ever said that to me,” she said. Here, Troy is having to battle not only a sense of communal betrayal from another Black woman, but betrayal that invokes imagery from one of the most brutal experiences and portions of the Black American experience.

Ebony, too, felt hurt when a Black woman in SAHE offered her bad advice. Although this did not evoke images of and relating to enslavement, or the fact that Black women should endure pain as a means of having a SAHE positions, she felt misled nonetheless. Ebony explained, “I had one mentor who she's like a sister to me now and I told her in my first – I think it was my first—year, I called her up and I was like, why didn’t you tell me it was going to be this hard; and she's like, what are you talking about” she continued. For Ebony, there was a feeling of betrayal from other Black women as she was told more about the positives of serving in SAHE but those same people failed to share the struggles associated with being in the profession.

Ebony went on, “I'm like, as a Black woman, this is – like it’s hurtful, it’s a constant slap in the face, it’s abusive” Ebony explained in thinking through her time and what her experience was like as compared to what she was told. “She's super bubbly, she's always on the outside always happy and I'm like, ‘you made it seem so easy and she was like, ‘you're right” as she thought about her feelings of betrayal. This further underscored not only that Ebony’s mission to attain and remain in a SAHE position failed, but that she was also ill prepared to start in the SAHE workplace to begin with.

Issues of race, racism, and race-related imagery came up for other sistas in this study. Terry recalled times where she served in a position in Louisiana and colleagues butted into her conversations with racism. Terry recalled:

> I had an RA who was this like white woman from – she was from that area, but she was super like – she was just of another world and so she was – she wanted to be a human rights lawyer, a civil rights lawyer, and so that’s where her mind was, very social justice focused. So, we were – she was in my office and came to tell me a funny story because anybody who knows me knows I like to laugh. I'll listen to your stories. And she said to

> me – she said something to me that she did that was like – I don't even remember what it was, it was super minute but it was super funny and so I looked at her and I said, "you are such a rebel." Not thinking anything of it, you are a rebel, you like – and so here comes this queer white man in my office and he's like, "what do you think about people being – you know people putting up the confederate flag", and he was like, "and what do you think about the rebels?" He was like, "I went to a high school where our mascot was the rebels and our symbol was the confederate flag and I mean, that's just not what it means." I mean it's awkward because he made it awkward, right, like I – I stand in my Black womanhood and I looked at him and I said, "yo, you've got to get out of my office because that's not my context. Me and her are having a whole different conversation, rebel does not – I don't associate – I'm from the north, right, I'm a Yankee, I don't associate rebel with the confederate flag." I'm like, we're in here, I was using that on purpose with her being funny talking, what are you talking about, get out of my space. But you also – you are a queer white man in the confederacy – if the confederacy won you wouldn't be welcomed either. What is your problem?

In this instance, Terry had the language she used shifted out of context by a male colleague. Given how stunned she was by how he came in, she immediately sent the colleague out of her office for inability to read the room. She went on to clarify, for the colleague, that while he is engaging white supremacist imagery, he may not wish to as he, like her, would not be welcome on account of his queer identity. Terry went on to name another time racist imagery and depictions came up. She continued:

> I had somebody take me to a restaurant called Cotton. Now I didn't really think much of the name, I mean it was like, okay, that's the name. And the food was delicious, it was the nicest restaurant in town and it was about maybe our third or fourth time that we

> went, and they were like, oh, look up at – “Terry, have you looked at the art work?” And so obviously I know my heart is pounding and I know this is going to be bad if you're pointing this out to me on purpose, right? And I hadn’t mentioned it before. I'm short so the art work is not in my periphery. So I look up and the art work in this restaurant was folks – was Black folks sharecropping. There was even a drink on the menu called the sharecropper and this is where these people were taking me– right, it was like, man, y’all are so tone deaf that we don’t even have a chance, I've got to go, I'm not safe.

In this instance, Terry realized that not only did her colleagues not care about her Black identity but that they would go out of their way to point out racist imagery. The realities of how callous her colleagues were with micro and macro racial aggressions led Terry to desire to leave the position. These incidents embody colleague betrayal in a context where one would assume to display common decency so as to not take a Black colleague to a place that might make them uncomfortable.

Experiences of betrayal that connected to race were not uncommon. Though the examples previously mentioned are brazen, it was sometimes the microaggressions that hurt sistas in the study the most. Sara’s colleague’s hurt her tremendously when they minimized both the work that she had done and the importance of multicultural centers. Sara lamented:

> So, there were a lot of my colleagues in these open sessions that would make remarks. I always go out to lunch with them, I've hung out with them, we've collaborated together, and they would say things in the open sessions that like, “Well I sponsor the multicultural center, but I never know what they do. What do they do? It's hard to understand what that office does. All I see in there is just students hanging out.”

She went on:

> Now I'm hearing two different things when I hear comments like that. One I'm hearing all this time that we've worked together, even if you didn't have a clue you didn't think to ask, right? And then two, when you say all you see is people in there hanging out, what I'm hearing is, all you see is Black people being loud and rambunctious. That's what I'm hearing. Even though they didn't say that, that's that feeling I got… So I was like wow, the community I'm working in is a little hostile too. Cause I'm thinking everyone is friendly we smile, we hang out. But this is how you really feel. And I felt like I've been thrown underneath the bus because I'm representing this office. I cannot fathom why that is. I cannot. And I don't condone it. My values didn't align with that. It was just totally misalignment and I couldn't deal with that no more.

Sara's colleagues undermined her not only in their failure to see the purpose of having safe spaces on campus but also because they made the assumption that a gathering of Black and brown people was simply *hanging out*. This sense of betrayal contributed to Sara's departure to find a workplace that better aligned with who she is as a professional. Her colleagues, actions, though were perhaps tied to how they kept Sara out of the loop and engaged in practices of exclusion. She clarified:

> With it being small, small knit, that means a lot of people know each other so you have pockets of those who are it, the upper echelon you would call it. They would have meetings, Friday nights certain places, and if you were a part of that crowd, the senior administrator, city council members, exec, things of that nature, you would be a part of that but if you weren't you're outside of the group and that's where the decision making comes from.

The painful ways in which colleagues dismissed Sara's work was further amplified by the fact that she could never get to tell them about her work more because she was not invited to their

secret meetings. This underscores the ways in which the sistas in the study did not have opportunities that other colleagues had on account of their whiteness. This was even more difficult for her when they piled on microaggressions about her appearance with it.

> They'll ask me about where I'm from. And I'll say oh I'm from Illinois. And they say oh you have any siblings? Yeah I have one brother, we're eight years apart though. And then the follow up question is, oh do y'all have the same dad? What? Why would you think that? Can you explain to me why you would think that? Oh I was just wondering cause you're so far apart in age. That's where we go? That's where you took that? Oh okay. You know so, it's microaggressions, macroaggressions, racial battle fatigue.

Here, it becomes clear that Sara's colleagues not only engage in acts of racism against her, but they seem to either not care or not know that they are doing it. This was similar to incidents Michelle dealt with. "We did have a very interesting colleague who believed she was very diverse [aware], however would say very inappropriate things that could have been taken or was offensive if other people had heard her, was very offensive to so many different areas of diversity," noted Michelle. When prodded for an example, Michelle recalled:

> She [said] inappropriate things about not only Students of Color but – or I shouldn't just say students, I would say People of Color but I would also say your sexual orientation, your economic background, your demographic, your geographic background. So because she had a very – she was the higher up – people were more hesitant to confront her about some of the things that she said, that's a great way of putting it, however, I just couldn't let it slide because I found some things offensive… she would say, oh, you know, the little poor brown kids and I said, I'm sorry, what does that mean because I was a little poor brown kid. What does that mean? And she said, oh, not you, you're different, you don't act like them. So we did have to have those little conversations because she never

thought she was including me when she said things that were inappropriate to the point where I would say, you know, that’s offensive. And the good thing I would say about her is she was, at times, not all the time, but she was open to listening and she would apologize but unfortunately she might apologize today but in a month and a half it might be the same thing because she forgot that she apologized, or she forgot the lesson that was learned.

In Michelle’s case, she became one of the only people to stand up to a leader who engaged in practices that were harmful at work. Though Michelle, like many sistas in the study, would confront the offending professional, it would do little good because it was not accompanied by changed behavior. There was a sense of communal betrayal here not only in how this person tried to frame themselves as multiculturally competent or an ally, but also because the actions would repeat.

Ebony navigated a similar situation to Michelle when it seemed her white supervisor would cause harm and seek to be absolved by her. This goes back not only to sista’s earlier points about Black women having to be for everybody but also how institutions fail to adequately train professionals to engage. Ebony described one of her earliest memories when moving into the residential house she would call home and work and experience betrayal almost instantaneously. Ebony explained:

The first day I was in the house, when I first moved there because my building was still being renovated, and literally the first day she met me she was crying on the couch talking about how Black male students thought she was racist, and she's not racist. That was my first interaction with her. And so whenever I brought up scenarios or different microaggressions and things like that, she say, "Huh. That's interesting. Hmm." I'm just like, "Don't be condescending. You're not gonna do nothing." So I stopped talking to her

> about it. Our meetings were very business-like. She told me that, she was like, "You're so business like." I'm like, "I'm not. You're just not a person that I can speak to about a lot of things." I blatantly told her this. She was just taken aback, like, "Oh my gosh, we need to get Ebony support because oh my gosh I can't support her." It was a mess. And so ... that was that.

It is clear here that Ebony made the decision to engage this campus professional leader with distance as a form of protection although this led to some dissonance for her supervisor. Though one could infer her supervisor had previously thought everything was okay, the lack of understanding on account of her supervisor raised questions. Ebony went on to explain that being *business like* led to people to "perceive [me] on the professional level as, 'She don't wanna talk to us, she don't wanna come out to the happy hour, She don't wanna do any of that." The culmination of the betrayal, then, had implications not only for how she engaged her supervisor but also how she engaged her colleagues. Their lack of care and commitment to equity and diversity lessened her desire to want to connect to them.

Throughout this episode, the sistas in the study described feeling acts of institutional and community betrayal. While the forms of betrayal at the hands of campuses and white people were often expected, it was the betrayal of other People of Color on behalf of whiteness and institutions that caused the worst type of harm and damage. These findings reveal multiple forms of failure that Black women endure while serving in SAHE campus professional positions.

Episode 2: "Now I work for a local government and I get paid more to do less": Issues of (In)Equitable Pay and Differential Labor Expectations

The Black women in this study reported significant issues with (in)equitable pay, discrepancies in workplace financial support, and expectations of additional labor on account of their Black womanhood that was not expected of other practitioners. This was particularly salient

for Sara and Claudia within their work to support issues of race, equity, and diversity. Shane and Michelle also struggled to be included in office decision making and lacked access to professional development funding, respectively. Ebony recalled her inability to afford to live or care for her most personal basic necessities. Yet, Terry who was *well paid* came to understand that her above average compensation still lagged behind her white male colleagues. For most of the sistas in the study, there was a realization that other fields and lines of work would reward, better compensate, and support them for their credentials, expertise, and knowledge.

(In)Equitable pay and financial support

Low pay and lack of financial support both for themselves and their offices proved difficult for some of the sistas in this study. Ebony threw down the gauntlet about how SAHE is financially unsustainable when noting that her salary specifically played a large role in her decision to leave. Ebony exasperatedly noted, “My bills were behind for a long time. Until this day some of them may be ... 'cause I was working part time when I came back. I think it was a lot of emotions, but none of them made me wanna stay.” Ebony has advanced education, some professional experience, and still struggled to maintain her financial wellness while serving in SAHE.

Ebony’s realization of just how deep the pay issues were did not crystallize until she had to move back home with little to show. Like many people in communities of color, the people in her life could not rationalize how she wasn’t *well off* now that she had a college degree given the national rhetoric conflating degree attainment with financial security. Ebony continued:

> I'm first gen so when I came home and I wasn’t going out of control, people were confused. People were confused, like no, you went to college, you supposed to come back with money, and you know give back to everybody. Or like you know like just coming back and I didn’t have a job for about a month, maybe like two months, and

> when I did it was like some part-time job that was – I got back on food stamps when I came back home last year and I'm like, what, I have two degrees, what a life. So, it's hard and it will take so much out of you, but I want women to know that they are deserving of something more than student affairs. And even if it doesn't feel right and we can leave, I hope that I feels right later.

Ebony's retelling of her financial struggles came as a cautionary tale and sign for Black women who may need support to know if they could or should leave the SAHE field. The issue of financial wellness even manifested for Terry who discussed being somewhat well compensated. Though Terry openly speaks about the ways in which she is well paid, she knows her salary is still lower than it should be compared to her white male colleagues—especially a colleague whose responsibilities she is often tasked with supporting. But Terry's story around money and compensation is contextualized by her professional experience outside of SAHE. Terry explained:

> I didn't enter the field traditionally, right, right out of grad school – I mean right out of undergrad, and so I taught for three years and then I actually got into the field – so like traditional age I got into the field, I was like 24 going on 25 when I got my first position but then I did that for a couple of years and then I was able to move into a mid-level position actually and it was in that first mid-level position that I did my master's and I purposefully did not get a student affairs – a HESA or SAHE master's, one, because I didn't want to feel stuck because I would hear a lot of my colleagues who had gotten – across identities who had gotten SAHE or HESA master's as saying they felt stuck, yadda yadda yadda, what am I going to do, and so I did adult education because again I was coming from being a teacher and so that resonated with me and then I was still able to take some of the higher ed coursework, student development, to get that knowledge

> base – that theoretical base that I didn’t have. But I said, okay, well that might allow me to like go to training and development, HR, or do like higher education adjacent work or something like that.

Terry understood that her background in adult education and K-12 experiences would be a jumpstart for her student affairs career, but they also would give her flexibility for how she engaged the field of SAHE. She went on to discuss, though, how a difference between where she is now and K-12 is accountability, equitable pay, and continued placement of additional responsibilities onto her as a Black woman for less money than an incompetent man. Terry lamented:

> They have no regard for making other people do their job, I think that’s how that manifests, other people don’t get called to task, right, and I'm not even a yes person but I want – again, I think more than other folks my Black brothers and sisters like to be student centered, that's why I do this. I'm coming from K-12, I was a teacher, I center students and because I center students—it gets hard to be like, hey, why aren’t you holding that person accountable, that’s somebody’s job, right? That’s why I have a fourth supervisee now to develop a community, that shit is – I mean you talk about clear job delineation, we have a whole person who is over, at my same level, making like $17,000 more than I do a year who is over learning communities. There's something to be said for that and so there's a piece of me that like, I don't know, you know 10 years ago I would have been like, oh, this is a great opportunity, I get something behind my name, I've got enough shit behind my name…

Here, Terry has found herself having to navigate being in a department where her colleague not only makes nearly $20,000 more than her, but where he’s also not as good at his job. She

explained that rather than move him, department leaders often lessen his responsibilities and pass them on to her. This was fatigue inducing for Terry. Terry continued:

> now I'm just – I'm tired, I'm tired, hold that motherfucker accountable, don't give me more work because you know that – one, you know that I'm not going to say no because it's about students, we're talking about students. And two, don't give me more work because that motherfucker won't do a good job and that will make you look good like you're selfish. And you are taking advantage of my selflessness so that you look good, that's just – it's crummy as fuck.

The issue of inequitable pay, then, is exacerbated for Terry because she knows she makes a lot of money, but that money is less than other colleagues and that people will continue to place those responsibilities onto her because of her student-centered selfless approach. This is also troubling because the money she makes is then further reduced by her need to spend more to take care of herself. The money, then, positions Terry to be *okay* sometimes, but those feelings often fade and bring back the realities of not only the pay disparity, but of the fact that she's not as happy as she'd like to be given how senior she is in the field. Terry explained:

> I feel like I've been floating for a little bit and this is the thing, I'm in a place now where my every day, I'm not complaining. It's not that I don't have complaints, it's that I've been in so much worse. I've been in so much worse. I feel like I've spent a lot of my time in the last year turning a cheek, and you know, turning the other cheek and I make this really good money now so I can go drown my sorrows at any of the expensive restaurants of my choice. Or things like that, you know? Or I can pay trips, I do have a freedom that's allowed me to maybe turn the other cheek, but you can only do that so much, you know?

It is clear, here, then, that for Terry, having more money (though it still being less than that of her male colleagues) offered her reprieve, but those moments were too short lived. Like Terry's

shifting job responsibilities, Claudia complained about how her last employer effectively lied about the expectations of her job. The position was described differently in the hiring process only for her to find out the realities of the role on campus. Claudia lamented:

> Right. So, I think ... what was told to me versus what I learned later, was that the job was really big for the last person in the position. It was a lot of work. They really wanted to streamline the work to really be intentionally focused for their two critical populations of students. So, that was the goal. Let's scale this down without a solution of who was going to oversee all of diversity, right? And without any communication that that larger Diversity department was basically not running. The title was there, people thought it was happening, but there was no leadership. There was no guidance. So, you had four different directors trying to hold down a department with no leader, no guidance, and no one trying to manage our collective work together. I think, what I found out later was part of it, was money. So, an assistant dean obviously is a higher salary based, and so they were trying to save money, and they weren't 100% honest at the time, about the financials of the campus. I was told that because of my doctorate and my experience, I was getting paid more than a director was. I was being paid "a dean's salary" but doing director's work. That was somewhat true. Initially that was true. There was ways through different search committees of hiring practices, other directors after I started. I found out, yeah, I actually was being paid more than them, but there were a few directors and people that were not deans being paid more than me. I was like, "Wait a minute. What's going on?" No doctorate, nothing. That answers the question. Basically, I was told one thing; I found out some other things.

That the campus was not forthcoming and honest about pay equity and lacked clear direction proved costly. Claudia came to realize that she was being paid less than colleagues who had less

skills and education than she. This problem with pay equity and promotions, as described here, proved a persistent issue for the sistas in the study.

Institutional financial insolvency. The issues of financial exigency were not limited to the salaries and wages Black women were expected to live off but also offices and functions of being a good SAHE practitioner. This manifested in lack of adequate budgets for performing office duties, funding for professional development, and even support for advanced and continuous education. The irony of the sistas in this study working in higher education but being systemically barred from ongoing learning is not lost on them or me.

Michelle spoke candidly about how her financial issues around salary were compounded because professional development funding was often limited or non-existent. This exacerbated the lack of pay issue for her. Michelle went on:

> As I mentioned, you do have to, at times, be able to pay on your own. Save your money, pay on your own because you know that unfortunately due to finances the institution can't support you financially. They want to – they may want to – but it may not necessarily be the case at that time. That played a large part for me because, as I mentioned, we were furloughed so when you're taking the hit in the pocket in your personal life but then in your professional life you have to make some decisions it becomes hard and you're very – what's the word I'm looking for? You're very appreciative of professional development and being able to research on your own and you know having the willingness to pick up the phone and start calling different institutions even though you may not necessarily have met that person at a conference.

Michelle positions professional development as significant but costly here. She acknowledges that through participating in professional associations Black women can build up connections, but when you have to pay your own way because the institution cannot afford to, when you are

already making a low salary, you have to get creative. It is widely accepted in higher education that some schools are resource rich while others must encourage employees to make do and go without. Michelle went on:

> I will always ask about professional development opportunities in terms of working across campus, support for national organizations, conference attendance, things of that nature and you hear one thing but you receive another or that you don't receive any. There was a lack of support and there was of course as I mentioned change or shift of job responsibilities. And I'm a firm believer in terms of we don't always have to be best friends in the office but we do have to have some type of comradery. We did start off that way but when it came down to a professional level and performance evaluations and things of that nature and not receiving any type of rewards?... There was none of that and that is part of the reason why I started looking outside of higher education until I was ultimately laid off because they – it was told that they wanted to – what was the phrase? Restructure. So, I took that on a professional as well as a personal level for this restructuring. But I can see, hindsight 20/20, there was a need, but then you hire somebody else.

The lack of funding and financial insolvency not only led Michelle to look for work outside of higher education but also crystallized how campus priorities differ for different employees. The issue of an office restructure meant Michelle now had three compounding issues related to money: (1) her low salary; (2) the inability to attend professional conferences or association meetings where she could both grow as a practitioner and grow her networks; and, (3) being forced to contend with the possibility of office changes that would result in the end of her employment. This trifecta of finance issues, when she looked back, should have proved a

warning. When the time ultimately came and she was indeed released from her position, Michelle recalled:

> So I had no choice, you have to leave today. Okay. So, the unfortunate, and where I also take it a little bit personally as well, is you waited until August to do this which is, in higher education life that is not the time to start looking for a new job. So, I started looking for what I could, you know, of course you have to take that moment to take a deep breath. Haven't been without a job since I graduated from undergrad which was many years ago, but the point was more so, okay, now I need to pull myself up by my bootstraps, let's go higher education, various websites, higheredjobs.com, looking on various school's employment pages. There really wasn't much out there in August to be hired for. I did put out some resumes, it was not a good time. Then after I started thinking about some of the things I wanted to get more involved in, just general project management, started looking at actually – because several weeks after I left they put up a job about that for my position, my previous position, and some of those areas which had been said to me was gaining more project management, more fundraising, more of the things that I did not have skills in. However, okay, so I am interested in project management, not necessarily interested in fundraising but that's another conversation for another day. So, I started looking into government jobs and that's when I started seeing more things that I could definitely excel at and things that I loved and I loved to organize and the only thing that was missing was the students and student development. So that is where I started putting a lot of my efforts…. I got a random phone call and said, you applied for a job here back in August. I have your resume and I was wondering if you were interested in a six to eight week temp position in the office. And I said, hey sure, great, no problem. And that six to eight week temp position turned into a year because I

> had a lot to give and she had opportunities for me so she kept extending the contract until she could extend it no more. I did job search during that time and – was still very cautious about other opportunities [that] did not have what I was looking for, I didn't want to take a job just to take a job, I wanted to maintain a career but I was still looking into the government and once again, you know, another blessing that happened was when she had the conversation with me that the contract was running out and she wouldn't be able to rehire me. And the unfortunate part was that college, it was a community college, had a hiring freeze except for extreme essential employees. She let me know I had to leave and then I got a job with the government. So that's how I ended up not going back into higher education.

The timeline of Michelle's layoff contributed heavily to her decision to opt out of SAHE as a long-term career. Michelle was let go from her position around the time that most campuses in the country were operating at full or almost full capacity. This led her to job search outside of the field and into government where she ultimately landed, revealing how difficult it is for Black women who have been cut off from networks that can help them advance or in this case help them maintain can prove problematic in the long term. That Michelle had not been as active in professional associations meant her network was smaller by design so she could not simply make phone calls or reach out to colleagues for support during her layoff. The culmination of this meant Michelle's trifecta of finance issues catapulted her into an entirely different profession with few reasons to seriously consider returning to higher education.

Like Michelle, Sara had to navigate her work with creativity when being tasked with opening an entire identity center with limited institutional funding support. When Sara asked about support for multicultural programing, she was seemingly laughed out of the room. "They had no budget" she said candidly of the expectations of her to create programs with limited

financial resources. Though she served at a school in an area where students would be less likely to find support for diversity and equity outside of campus, the institution contributed the bare minimum of what was socially acceptable and expected her to make that work. Here, Sara's experience embodies a convergence between limited financial resources with uncompensated and unrealistic expectations that exist in SAHE for many Black women.

Like Michelle and Sara, Troy was forced to navigate complaints around financial support and expectations of one's time. Troy was in a doctoral program, unsupported by her employer, and felt she experienced negative consequences as a result of this. When she retold the story of her leaving, she recalled, "I'm still doing my doctoral program which they told me to put aside. They told me it was not a priority. And they ain't even paying for that shit." The issue here, then, is not only how lack of money or financial support can be a problem, but also how institutions withhold it as a means of exerting control. Troy's employer offered financial support for continuing education but refused to contribute to her terminal degree education. Although Troy found a way to pay for her degree on her own, she still used skills and knowledge gained from her coursework within that position meaning the institution not only failed to support her but also benefitted from her paying out of pocket for her further education. The connection between finances and expectations of Black women's labor and higher engagement as employees cannot be over stated.

Unequitable Labor Distributions and Expectations

Sara, Michelle, Terry, Ebony, and Claudia found themselves forced to navigate unequitable distributions of labor and expectations in the SAHE workplace. For Sara, this manifested as unrealistic expectations of work production and demands on her time. Sara's narrative suggested there was a degree of gaslighting and goading her into believing that

overworking was not only an expectation but that her compliance with doing so would result in additional compensation or opportunities for advancement. Sara explained:

> So, the senior administrator… told me, "You know, at least you're doing so good. You're doing good. We're going to make sure to get you a raise, and we're going to talk about it after the meeting with the VP of student affairs." Then we're talking and I presented all the tabs and objectives and accomplishments that I have done and am currently doing to fulfill not only my role, but the director's position role, and to also establish a resource center on a limited budget. I was shot down with, "Well, that's what you're supposed to be doing." So, I was confused because I was presented the idea that my work and effort and the time that I've put into this position would be rewarded based on carrying on a lot of tasks.

Sara’s institution clearly demanded that she overwork and overextend herself, but not expect equitable pay. When she was promised additional compensation for completing supplementary tasks, that backfired and ended up with broken promises as the Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO) told her about next steps for supporting her and her advancement, only to allow her to present her ideas for expanding her role on paper and in compensation and be told no by higher authorities. Sara’s supervisor did not further support her leading to greater exhaustion at the thought that overworking and accepting additional responsibilities is *what she’s supposed to do*. Sara’s narrative aligns with Claudia’s frustrations for how institutions expect Black women to enter a SAHE workplace and act as campus saviors. Claudia acknowledged:

> Yeah. I want to be clear. I was always that person that what you see is what you get. I don't play those games. Even in my new job now, there are moments when I'm doing the southern politeness but I'm already pushing back on stuff on day three. So, they're like who's this person. So, everybody knew and initially my outspokenness, my directness,

> my efficiency, whatever was valued. Oh, she's great. Very Olivia Pope. She's going to come save our campus and fix us. She's so great. This is awesome. This is a breath of fresh air. But the minute I push back on white supremacy or called out white supremacy when I do that, I'm horrible. I think for me, initially my strategy of navigating the job, I knew I was going to be exploited. I knew everything was going to happen, happened. I'm not surprised. I know there are some dynamics even in my current job that I'm like okay great. To be honest with you, I'm already playing my exit strategy here. And I just started. Yeah, I know this isn't a large firm. I'm going to have to peace out. But I'm going to see how long I can get in this job now because I do plan to go.

Claudia’s expression here suggests not only that she expected she be exploited as a Black woman in the SAHE workplace, but that this placed the onus back on her to fight more for equitable workplace treatment. Though she left her old job and took a new position in the middle of the study, she has already started to plan for next steps because there are ways her new institution is following the same pattern of violence as her old one. Sara’s and Claudia’s issues of having to do more because they are supposed to and being expected to display herculean efforts are perhaps best summarized by Sara’s earlier recognition around how Black women were expected to create big programs and execute large ideas with minimal financial backing was a routine occurrence.

Like Sara and Claudia, Michelle found herself having to draw lines in the sand when she engaged an SSAO on a war path. Her issues around workplace expectations and labor were revealed when she bumped heads with a senior leader who expected everyone to do as she says without question. Michelle recalled:

> The expectation was that you did anything that she said to do. I did not do that. A few of my colleagues kind of laughed in their own little way, oh, you can get away with that because they knew she would listen to me. It wasn’t about getting away with it, it was

> speaking on what was right and doing what was right. I would say that some of the norms were basically just when we had staff meetings, everybody stayed quiet, we took notes, and did not challenge when the opportunity arose, however I did more pushback – the challenge is when it came down to her being inappropriate, I think.

In revealing this, Michelle illuminates how colleagues were unwilling to stand up to the senior leader leaving the responsibility to advocate almost solely on her. This meant Michelle not only had to navigate a difficult leader, but she had to do so while knowing colleagues would accept almost anything, even if it were bad for students, so as to not have to stand up to her. Michelle's experience of navigating a workplace where one is expected to do as they are told is similar to how Terry had to navigate doing additional work because of her colleagues' incompetence.

Rather than ask the people around her to better manage their responsibilities or do a better job, Terry had to deal with having additional responsibilities consistently added to her plate. As someone who likes to *follow the rules* this was hard for Terry because she likes to perform well, but the work she was being given extended well beyond her scope and the boundaries she set up. Terry acknowledged:

> I'm a person who is very clear about how to lead from my level. I'm a rules follower, right, like I'm a rules follower and so you tell me what the boundary is and that's cool, I respect the boundary and I'm going to figure out how I can bend that or work around it and try not to break the boundary. And so I think when I was at the RD level people took me as being like enthusiastic and excited and I think now that – as I've progressively gone up the ladder in the mid-level and I mean currently I'm in – I'm the highest I've been, right? Like I have a one, two – I have three levels below me. I think that the resistance that I've gotten has been – it's been palpable, it's been palpable, and I noticed that – and I have a supervisor who is a person of color but he's a man and I see how

> people don’t agree with him but don’t necessarily speak that shit the way they do with me. Or I'm very clear about my boundaries and people just – I mean just push them, just disregard almost. And so yeah, like I think that for me leadership is already a – if service is below you leadership is above you already, but I think for Black women in particular because we tend to be much more competent we [(Black Women)] are achievement driven, I feel like for us that is that ancestral memory, that’s how we operate, nobody taught me this, I didn’t have parents who pushed me to extremes. I mean they pushed me but nothing unhealthy in that realm. And so, achievement is who I am, it is the essence of my being and I think that people here, especially in my last couple of positions, it was like, oh, Terry does a good job we're just going to ask Terry to do this.

It is clear from Terry’s experience that there’s an expectation that Black women add on to their plate irrespective if it’s good for them or if they can because they do good work. This does not necessarily happen solely from supervisors and campus leaders alone. In fact, students, too, can unintentionally worsen Black women’s workload in the workplace.

The exacerbation of differential expectations also continued when Michelle was faced with additional burdens by having to be *the* point of contact for Students of Color. Michelle detailed extensively how her caseload was heavier due to Students of Color requesting her, but she wanted to put it back on her colleagues to do the work well enough so Students of Color would feel comfortable with them. This way, the same way word of mouth spread about Michelle’s position in the office as a Black woman, so could word about the possibility of an ally. Michelle noted:

> Of course, the Students of Color started walking by my office and then look back, oh wait, there's another person that looks like us. So that was another way where students – and my caseload of students started really teetering on the side of being more Students of

> Color not because I requested them but because they request me. My thing was, no, I'm going to challenge you to work with all of my colleagues but you know I am here and we can work through the student organizations and you know whatever the case may be because we did promote diversity, this was not, oh, because I'm African American, you're African American, now we're going to be best friends but I'm going to challenge you to be able to work with all people.

The inequity in labor manifests here because of the unwritten expectation that being a person of color means you can help to solve the issues and needs of all Students of Color. Michelle, however, sought to resist this further burdening by tasking colleagues with being responsible for offering multiculturally competent services. Her decision to put up this boundary, with limited success, is furthered by Terry's acknowledgement of the deep ways we disrespect Black women's boundaries in SAHE as a normal, daily occurrence.

Terry was exasperated with navigating what it felt like to be simultaneously hyper (in)visible in her role. Terry bemoaned that right now she is currently serving within Residence Life and people act as if she invisible when she is not exerting herself for others. "If I'm invisible in my department, what the hell is it going to be when I'm much more generalist. I just can't see how that's going to work," she pondered. Here, Terry is suspecting the duality of being noticed and unnoticed would only worsen the higher she moves up in the field. Where colleagues in residence life have a fixed population and domain of issues to cover, Deans of Students and VPSA's have much broader, more generalist roles, leading Terry to question how campus leaders might ignore her if she is in that position. This all aligned with a comment explored elsewhere by Terry where she advised Black women to simply do whatever it is they want to do because, "…when you do take your days off you're still on. I've sat in the Caribbean and did phone interviews." More than this, Terry explained:

> When Black women say, yo, I'm self-caring and we try to put up boundaries you know like clear boundaries I feel like people push us and I've seen it, right, like in other professionals like the Black women that I am in… that – who work in the field who I'm in contact with, people push us in ways they don't push anybody else. I see other people and they're like, oh yeah, I don't want to be contacted after 5:00pm because that's when I like go to you know dinner with my partner and I pet my dog on his stomach and people are like, oh yeah, cool and they respect them. Honey, I just got a fucking text message last night at 10:00pm, it's summer, like there's nothing going on, there's no emergency, anybody who knows me knows because I am clear with people I like to go to sleep at 9:00pm, that's when the sun is setting, the latest right and it's dark enough for me to go to sleep, I mean and people literally – they just don't – it's like they don't care, even – it doesn't matter that I don't respond, they still try it and I think it's like people try to push this "#BlackGirlMagic" thing and I'm like, I'm all for #BlackGirlMagic, I think I'm dope as shit, *but* I don't want anybody calling me a queen who won't let me be a human and I feel like people try to make us like we are human… Like – I saw something on Twitter the other day that was like, *Black women are super heroes*—bitch, fuck you. I am human, I am not a super human. I am human. If I'm a super human pay me, fuck you, pay me for being a super human, you don't get all my labor. And I feel like when Black women in particular say that shit there is so much pushback. I think – yeah, I feel like the self-care aspect is where I see the biggest pushback. Or and when there has to be constructive feedback you know because again our ancestral way of being is that we are straight, no chasers.

Terry's frustration with these demands are clear and she raises a point that further connects to the issues on inequitable pay explored earlier in this section. Where Terry has lamented about the

expectation of being expected to display super human qualities, Shane found herself confronting the belief that she, as a Black woman, have a high level view of campus happenings and issues whether she is directly provided this information or not. Shane recalled, “people expect you to be in the know even if you weren't invited to the table to know.” Within this, Shane reveals the added burden Black women face in the workplace with being tasked to expend additional labor to catch up to knowledge and information white colleagues share among themselves freely. Shane’s and Terry’s narratives illuminate similar grievances with their institutions because there is a way in which their departmental leadership and colleagues expect them to be everywhere, doing everything, for everyone with limited regard for boundaries or awareness of how hierarchy impacts their know-how. This is noteworthy for Shane whose lack of connectivity with people in leadership and lack of invitation by those who could offer her information points to a deeper issue in workplace divides.

Although the sistas have plenty of examples of expectations around their continuous labor in full-time workplace functions, there were also examples dating back to graduate school that came up in our discussions. Ebony recalled a time where white women colleagues wanted to designate her as the person to go speak to someone in campus equity and diversity about office issues. However, Ebony explained that she was serving at the same institution that awarded her undergraduate degree and would soon confer a graduate degree. For Ebony, this meant reporting workplace issues in her voice, even with perceived anonymity, would cause her to be easily identified. “So, those white women, they would be like, "We need to go talk to the social equity person," blah blah blah,” she recalled. Ebony went on to explain:

> The social equity person I had worked for her in undergrad. I worked for a TRiO program in undergrad. However, she was married to his [(the person enacting harm)]* best friend. [(The person enacting harm)] best friend also was in charge of my grad

program. It was all intertwined in a way that like ... if I went to her, I understand this ... and she's a white woman ... if I went to her, it's gonna get back to the husband. And it's just not gonna be right in my favor. But these white women who were professionals, because they were professional staff, I was a grad student, they were expecting me to be the one to go and say something. And so, I was like let me think it over. When I thought it over, the pros and cons didn't make sense. I'm not going to be the one to take the heat for y'all when y'all never said anything. So, I told the lady her name was Becky*. I was like, "Becky, I'm not gonna deal with it." She's like, "Ugh, I'm so disappointed in you." I was like, "Bitch what? Like, what do you mean you're disappointed in me? Little ol' grad student, when you are a professional who gets salaried and you won't go say nothing." So, after that it was just very like ... another, another traumatic experience with this because I'm still going to the office every day, and experiencing these things, but now I don't have Becky or the other woman to talk to because they're mad that I wouldn't go say anything. Right?

Ebony's narrative reveals how at all levels of institutional professionalism Black women are expected to do more and engage in risks that might be more harmful than helpful for them. Moreover, her status as a graduate student within this narrative is not to be overlooked. Within SAHE workplaces, graduate professionals often experience denigration and mistreatment, even when they have professional work experience prior to becoming a student. This is due to the fact that there is a divide between practitioners seen as *real professionals* and those perceived to be *in training* for SAHE practice. I include Ebony's recollections of this example as both a nod to the consistency of this experience across Black women's institutional positions but also to underscore how expectations that Black women do more or *manage and deal with it* become a point of both negotiation *and* contention.

Terry rationalized her time in SAHE from a lens that accounts for the historical context of Black survival. For her, if Black Americans could survive the historical atrocities of U.S. history, her decision to opt out of an institution could be hard but just a stumbling block as she continued to press her way forward. Terry explained:

> I don't know, and this is like a terrible comparison but like I can't – I don't know – our people fought, like I'm a person of resistance, I don't know this like lay down and just take it life, right. I don't know that life. And so there is that little piece of me that I think what allows me to keep – to transition and not care and to keep pushing is that I do – I want to believe in humanity, right like so bad, I want to believe in us so badly, I want to believe that we can do better but I also believe in better for myself period and I just haven't – you're not going to tell me that in a field where people are out here telling folks, well, you don’t come into this field to make money and stuff like that, okay, good, if I don’t come to make money then I damn sure am going to be happy. And so, I've got to go find that, right, like I'm not about to stay somewhere that I'm – like I'm literally miserable, my health is suffering.

Here, where Terry acknowledges both how she fights to stay but is also growing weary of her inequitable pay multiplied by unequal distributions of workplace labor that together impact her overall happiness. This formula, then, is one that may lead her to leave to avoid her own physical torment and suffering. Terry’s awareness of these larger conditions in higher education connects to Michelle’s awareness of how these environmental factors are why she may never return to the field. Though there are things she misses about SAHE, Michelle acknowledged her current work conditions are better than anything SAHE could offer. She clarified:

> When I say this I try to be funny but now I work for a local government and I get paid more to do less. And, even if I wanted to do more, it’s still going to be more than I was

> making as an Associate [(director)] ever. So, it’s hard on a financial level changing. You see what I'm saying? But there's always that question, oh, when are you coming back to higher education? Students loved you. But I'm at that point where I'm just like, I don’t foresee it and I'll be honest with you, the pay is a lot different when you are making more money and not as stressed as you were time-wise and mentally.

Here, Michelle also connects the issues of financial inequity with those of expected labor. For her, no amount of student love or being good at SAHE could bring her back to accept being overworked for much less money that she currently takes home. Where Michelle could not imagine returning to higher education, Terry could not imagine staying. For her, she has reached the point where the money she would need to make would have to be an amount equal to what it takes to “sell her soul.” Terry explained:

> I think one thing that’s been beneficial about being in different places is that my network is pretty large in the field and so I don’t have to depend on – you know, I feel bad for young professionals who have to really depend on the folks at their institution specifically and so I don’t – you know, I'm just a person who likes to work in integrity and like I said, it’s not about me, it’s about students. And so you know I – if I get an on-campus, I'm going to share it with my supervisor, right, that’s – I mean if I'm going to share with them, that’s the earliest that I'm going to share, and I think it’s about we can't break down the master’s house with the master’s tools because we don’t learn how to use master tools. And white people know that you don’t owe them anything, right, there's so much research out here also that says that folks – that if you stay at a job more than two years you're actually losing money… And so I don’t feel [bad]– I'm going for mine. And I – like I said, I think people value confidence and things of that nature and so I definitely use the people around me to like hype me up, right, because I'm just not going to – I've

> been in places where I was so fucking miserable in student affairs and I'd definitely led with well it can't possibly get worse than what the fuck I'm experiencing now, like it can't so I've got to push forward. Like I said, I don’t know what the price is for me to sell my soul, I just know that it hasn’t been met yet. And I'm not sure that student affairs is going to be able to meet that.

As explicated here, Terry’s decision to stay in SAHE would require much more financial and institutional change for her to remain in SAHE. Like Michelle, Terry recognizes there are ways to gain more financial security while doing much less work by taking her skillset beyond what we consider to be the formalized field of SAHE. In this sense, there is only so much Black women are willing to accept in order to maintain their upward trajectory in the field.

Although most of the findings presented here reveal that Black women are overworked and under paid in SAHE, it is important to also acknowledge how some Black women themselves advance this notion. In the case of Ebony, she talked about how being a first generation college student made it much more important for her to *go hard* in the workplace. Ebony expressed:

> When it came to my immediate supervisor, the first one I had, she was so oblivious. She was such a special white woman. She saw me as a workaholic, "You do too much. Stop doing this ... and that's why you feel that way." And that was very off-putting because number one, as a first gen I have to go ... like if I don't do it, who's gonna do it? That's always my take on things. And so I always put in the work, and I always see the results too. So, I think that's what people don't see. If I don't put in the work, I'm not gonna see the results.

Ebony’s narrative reveals a disconnect between how she understands what she must do as a first generation graduate and what her supervisor sees. For her, the disconnect is along the lines of

race because Ebony interprets the ability to do less and continue to move up as something she cannot do as a Black first generation woman. Given the experiences of the other women in this study, perhaps Ebony is right to a degree. However, she lacks nuance and awareness here of how she too is advancing a toxic and oppressive perception that Black women must overwork for acceptance and opportunity. Ultimately, the findings in this *episode* reveal Black women navigate issues with financial support, equitable, and unequal distributions of labor and expectations.

Episode 3: "I don't want to die for this shit:" Examining Decisions to Opt Out vs. Reactions to Push Out

The findings from this section reveal some of the culminating instances that led the sistas in this study to experience push out and exercise their agency to opt out of a SAHE workplace. Though the issues described across episode one and two reveal problems with campus practices and representatives, this section reveals some of the bigger instances of harm against participants that led to push out and opt out. For some participants, the delineation between the two was stark as they left of their own volition before things spiraled out of control. For the work conditions were made so bad they had no choice but to leave. These findings reveal just how interconnected push out and opt out are. In fact, some participants experienced both but the difference of how their overall experience is categorized in Chapter Five depends heavily upon the agency and awareness they expressed in the interview process regarding their experiences.

Exploring Push Out

The larger issues associated with push out and threats of push out include issues of physical and emotional violence; misogynoir; and rationalization and negotiation. These threads, together, make up some of the most egregious situations the Black women in this study faced throughout their time in SAHE workplaces. This is not to suggest these situations could not fit

within the additional categories and major themes of the paper, but that they were worth drilling down to drive home the point of what becomes a defining moment in a Black woman's SAHE experience that leads her to say *I have to leave, NOW*.

Threats of Physical and Emotional Violence. Threats of physical and emotional violence were particularly troubling. Shane's, Troy's, Sara's, and Terry's recounted experiences as they all left an institution due to the issues discussed here. Physical violence is understood as not only actual attacks against these sistas, but conditions that can lead to the women getting hurt by others or by institutional design. Emotional violence includes gaslighting, deception, or downright antagonistic things that can be said or done to a sista and cause her extreme pain.

Initially, Shane had plans to opt out of her job on her own time. She wanted to save more money and try to find work within the area she lived so she would not have to uproot her life. However, that shifted when threats of violence came from students. She explained, "So it was like, okay, I'm tolerating this job until I get something else. But when my safety got compromised, it went more so, 'Okay, I gotta go.' It's like, I gotta go because this is a ticking time bomb." Shane went on to describe of the threat of violence:

> One of the student orgs, the Executive Board, compromised my safety by barricading and blocking me in my office and I couldn't leave my office. So once my safety was compromised, I made a report and the Dean of Student's Office. [The Dean of Students Office] couldn't understand why I wanted to go through judicial affairs for this to have some type of consequence and I told my then supervisor that I couldn't supervise that student because anytime I give him a directive its increasingly becoming more aggressive and violent, so I didn't want it to escalate further than what it needed to be. She took it as me picking and choosing to do my job and I had to make a clarification that me feeling unsafe or having my safety compromised is not part of my job responsibilities. So, it

> became a lot of friction between me and my boss and she really took it as me wasting departmental funds [by choosing not to take these students on a trip alone] like she was looking at it from such an emotionless decision making point of view when it was really a liability and some risk management issues because we didn't have anything in place as an institution, we don't have anything in place to cover the institution for liability when we are taking students off campus.

Shane continued:

> I feel like I wasn't given any other options because I was basically told that putting myself in danger, like me choosing not to be in a unsafe situation, physically unsafe situation, was me picking or choosing to do my job, and the fact that my supervisor and my supervisor's supervisor couldn't understand as to why that would've been an issue as to why students needed some type of reprimand or redirection in regards to threatening a staff member… Because students have got in trouble for less things, so less offenses, simple things. The fact that a plagiarism issue gets more follow through than someone's physical safety. Or if a professor feels some way about a student, they can get a student withdrawn from their class, because they didn't like what the student said to them one day.

It is clear from Shane's experience that those tasked with supporting her did not take seriously the threat or potential threat of violence against her. Not only did those in leadership downplay the situation by not reprimanding students to the degree of their actions, but they inadvertently sent Shane the message that her safety was less important than student satisfaction. This causes conflict as she had seen the institution formally act against students in instance of academic threat and harm. When prodded, she went on to articulate, "You can't handle when someone else has a violent outburst. You don't have any control on that aggression or the actions another

person may take." Not only then was Shane aware of how little she could do to make students see the seriousness of their actions, but she also had even fewer options for protecting herself and her job had the students taken action against her to say she was underperforming. She went on to say, "It would have been police involved, it would have been something bigger than me just wanting them to go through student code of conduct violations." Here, Shane showed an awareness not only of the threats she was expected to endure but also navigated feelings of betrayal. Given the threat of physical harm and student awareness of what was going on, Shane's students had things to say when she announced her departure:

> Students? I got mixed review from students. Most of them knew I needed to leave. A lot were sad. One of my students withdrew from school and he knew, after I talked to him a few months later, he was like, "Oh, I had to leave, because I was going through so much, but I knew if you weren't there, it was no point in me being there," so it had a lot of impact because I was the main person who had interactions with the Students of Color.

The actions of a few students against whom the institution took no action caused a ripple effect in the campus community. For many students who considered Shane their point of contact, that connection would be no more. Furthermore, one of those students went on to withdraw though it is unclear whether the presence of Shane's support could have shifted that outcome.

Like the other sistas, Troy experienced egregious acts of violence from the institution. Troy battles with multiple disabilities some of which are invisible. The experiences of one of those she disclosed is explored in the section on institutional and community betrayal. However, the overall callousness with which the campus handled her federally mandated accommodations and leave embody a hallmark of the types of actions institutions engage that nearly pushed her out. Troy recalled:

> [O]n top of [everything], having my ADA accommodations, Americans with Disabilities Act and family medical leave, FMLA act, accommodations routinely ignored and unvalidated, invalidated, and never validated? I didn't receive the letter, Brittany, until Friday. No, no, no, excuse me. What is today? Friday? Wednesday of this week. I resigned on last Friday. My last day was this Monday. I didn't get my accommodations in the mail until this Wednesday when ... the last part of the letter says, "Oh, by the way, since you no longer work here, it doesn't really matter now." There began to be a very systemic undermining of my rights, in terms of my ADA and FMLA rights, once I had the nerve to ask for a flexible schedule because of the stress and the very harsh impact of a poor piss ... poor piss position with no, no support, no time off, no vacation. Constant harassment, constant micro aggressive, constant macro aggressive based. I developed three chronic illnesses. Two of them are chronic pain illnesses that I did not have prior to moving here. Did not have. Systemic chronic pain illness.

For Troy, the threat of physical violence to her manifested through the campus' failing to support her in ways that allowed her to exist with as minimal pain as possible. Though the campus knew she had legal grounding, and that it was the right thing to do, it was easier to systematically ignore her requests than to take action. This was further exacerbated by the fact that she was in an extreme winter weather state and in a new building on campus that lacked accessibility for her disabilities. As she continued through her story, she questioned whether she say to the institution, "hey, by the way, it's been a year and a half since we've moved into this building and there's no ramp and no lift... Hey, by the way, I just fell down the stairs and now I have to file a worker's claim because you didn't move those stairs." It is clear from Troy's narrative that not only was she ignored but that there were real and physical ways ignoring her caused violence. These forms of harm are directly connected to institutional coddling of white women explored later.

Sara experienced violence when her supervisor set her up for failure. She was set on a course to ask for and advocate for a raise from a SSAO under the presumption that her supervisor would support her. When the SSAO explained to Sara that her going above and beyond was what was expected, she thought she would receive backing from her boss. The fact that she did not, when her supervisor put her on this course, is not only an act of gaslighting, but a form of violence because Sara continued to overwork for less pay under false pretenses. Sara recalled:

> I was shot down by the VP. So, at the time I'm expecting him, the senior administrator, to support me, encourage me because it was his idea. It was his idea and he turned around and said to me, "The VP says no, Sara, that's what she's supposed to be doing." And the senior admin turns to me and says, "Yeah, maybe if you just balance your work out and give it to the other colleagues in other departments, things might be a little bit better for you."

Not only was Sara misled by her supervisor, but she was talked down to. The worsening work conditions led Sara to try to plan as much as she could to find something better within and outside of SAHE. Sara continued:

> I had been applying for jobs, government jobs, in a corporate position. Looking for training, I'm just looking everywhere. Everywhere. And I wasn't getting anything. I was looking for everywhere and anywhere, I wasn't getting anything. So, that's when I decided if I don't get anything I just need to put in a timeline because I can't see myself staying in this position another academic semester. I just cannot do it. So... that's when I just left. I left. And as I mentioned before I left, I came to [this city] and applied everywhere. I did not wanna go to higher ed because I thought it was... I guess you could

> say jaded and left a bad piece of I don't know. I felt like if it could happen at that institution it could happen anywhere…

Given the *strong* reputation associated with the institution, Sara was left questioning the integrity of SAHE as a field. The reality that promises were made and broken to her at a campus considered to be a beacon of the profession did not rest well with her. Upon coming to the realization that the school would not support her, Sara took the plunge. Sara explained:

> So, I left. I left with no job already lined up, I left with no place to go. I just couldn't deal with it no more. It was making me physically ill, I was stressed, emotionally drained, and the students felt the same way too. I just could not rationalize the actions—I just could not rationalize the actions, nor the plan, or the strategy that was put in place to address the situation. I just could not rationalize it. So I had to go. I had to go.

Though there can be grave consequences for sistas leaving positions without notice or graceful exists, Sara made the decision to do so. Sara actually went on to liken her experience to push out. Sara noted, “It was almost not a... how do I say this? I guess it you know... a slight push out. Like “okay well, eventually you're gonna leave. But we're not gonna make it easy for you to stay.” This was not only due to her lack of a raise, but the compounding impact of the institutional and community betrayal outlined in earlier episodes. These issues together embody acts of push out.

Sara continued to explain that the people who understood the totality of her experience were the reason she was able to connect with me and this study. “Because initially some of those people left right after I did or around the time that I did, and those that knew what I was going through, we still communicate to this day. Hence, why I got this, why I heard about your research cause they knew what I was going through,” she explained. This act of violence stands as a major example of push out, however, because it embodies the last blow it took for Sara to

realize she could not stay. Sara's experiences raise questions around why expectations exist around workplace loyalty.

Acts of push out are not limited to things that happen on campus. Sometimes, these acts include the withholding of information that could compromise the safety and wellbeing of the sistas in the study. Although Terry recently made the decision to opt out of her current role for the sake of family reasons, she paused and recalled a time with a previous employer that on its own underscores the realities of misogynoir Black women must circumvent to remain safe in the workplace. Terry described a time she served in a position in Georgia*, where the job was so bad that she left in the middle of the night because the compounding institutional acts suggested she would not otherwise survive. Terry recalled:

> I got there, I was in – at an institution in Georgia* and I pretty quickly – so what happened that made me say, oh, this might not be it was I'm an explorer, I've lived in a lot of states, I've lived in a lot of places, I travel a lot by myself, I'm not really scared, right, like I don't know karate, but I know crazy I know – you know, I'm from the hood, I know how to navigate the world. So, there's not too much that worries me and I was in the northeast [corridor] of Georgia* and I had been exploring by myself going to different restaurants, just going to different places and my supervisor and the other assistant director who both happened to be white women who were born and bred in the south, one was from northwestern Louisiana*, one was from Birmingham, Alabama* and they were like I guess trying to make community with me and they said, oh, do you – you should go do this, you should go do that, and they named one restaurant and I said, oh, I've already been there a couple of times and they both looked stunned and they were like, you've been there, what do you mean? And I said, well yeah, I've been there, that was like on one of the things you must do list and they – my supervisor who is a 72-year-old white

> woman from the deep south looked at me and said well you really shouldn't go places without telling us. So, we didn’t elaborate on that, but I took that to mean I'm – because they started talking later because the other woman said, oh, well she can go to that place and she said, well not after dark. And I was like, what? Why wouldn't you all tell me that you live in a place like this before I accepted this position, you all met me, you know I'm Black as fuck. Like what?

She continued:

> So that was like maybe a month in and I was like, ugh, I feel uncomfortable. And then I got sick, you know that Georgia weather is like super humid, it was just super hot. My body was not used to it, so I got a summer cold and they really acted like it was going to be the end of the world because I had to call and say, I didn’t have a voice, my tonsils were touching, and they acted like I was hurting them for me to call out sick. And so I actually just didn’t – at that point, it just takes me – I'm a person who it takes me like a couple of months to unpack and so at that point I decided I wasn’t going to unpack. I had a – I have a cousin who is one of the slain Black youth, right, that has been in the national news and again my supervisor, we're in the office one day and she turns the television on and they're talking about my cousin on the television and she was talking about it, she was kind of starting to say some disparaging things so I revealed to her that that was my cousin so she would shut up and she said to me, ‘well wasn’t he doing something he wasn’t supposed to be doing?’ I was like, ‘did you – why would you say that? You don’t actually care about me, I'm like super not safe.’

All of the signs in Terry’s experience suggested that she was not only in an office that was unsupportive, but one that actively sought to cause her violence by not revealing the realities of the town around them and saying emotionally damaging things about the death of a close

relative. In the era of #BlackLivesMatter and #BlackWomenAtWork, Terry experienced the collision of these two issues on both a personal and social level. Her colleagues and supervisors knowingly brought her to a campus where members of the surrounding community did not value Black women's lives and they expected her to accept that whiteness as property as normal. These acts of violence became the impetus for her departure. She continued:

> So I had driven my car across country from Georgia, ended up – last stop was Norfolk*, my best friend got – I was there in Norfolk*. for a couple of days, picked him up and actually drove back to Georgia*, had an appointment for a moving truck. Got my moving truck and we went in the middle of the night to get my apartment – I hadn't packed my office and I had snuck two boxes that were of good size but that could be concealed under my desk and the last thing we did after we loaded up the apartment and locked the door was we went to my office, just took everything down. I left my p-card [(procurement card)], my statements, my ID, my parking pass, I mean I left everything, it was like, you all have no reason to contact me ever again and left those things on the desk super neat at like 1:00am on New Year's Eve and we drove and he – I mean I know that he could feel the like deep tension in me and it was like, I just have to get out of here. And so, we you know at 1:00am he was behind me in the moving truck and I was in my jeep and we drove over the border to Tennessee* and just got a hotel room and slept for the rest of the night before we continued on to Ohio*.

The violence Terry endured led her to leave the campus she was working for under the cover of night with the help of her friends. Given the harm done to her, she utilized her exit strategy to ensure no one from the institution should have to contact or make connections with her because she left everything they would have needed in the office. This meant losing money of her own by paying for things out of pocket so she would have no charges on her P-card and so the students

would have as much as they needed. The threat of violence from this campus did not end with her leaving. In fact, she was told about threats of a lawsuit for quitting the position:

> I mean probably for like nine months after I left, they would try to like make contact with me which was like so strange, it was like why are you – there's literally nothing, right, and I even had one of my hall directors call me and she was like frantic, and she was like, Terry, they said – I overheard folks talking in the office and they were saying they were going to try to sue you, talking about she stole money. Obviously, that's just not something I would do, like I told you, I left my pcard and my pcard statement… I purposefully in the month of December, I didn't buy anything for students for programming. I paid for stuff out of my pocket because I didn't want to have any receipts for the next period. I mean I was like I've got to go.

This experience with push out shifted how Terry thought about what it means to endure working conditions that were harmful and unacceptable. In so doing, she revealed how much she was changed as a professional because she has not only a different outlook on work but an unimaginable threshold for tolerance. She ended the discussion of this experience noting:

> I think being there has made me definitely, for good and bad, it has made me much more up front. Like I ask people flat out, like I own my identities, like y'all look I am a Black woman, am I safe here, is there a place for me here? Not just in the institution but in the town. And that's something I had never thought about before because I just thought – I just knew I was adept at navigating white spaces and it was like, oh no, I've got to ask the question and know that when people are silent or what they don't say, like there is – there is a response in that. Silence is an answer. Hesitancy is an answer.

The acts of violence from her former employer has permanently altered how Terry approaches the job search and office culture. There are ways she engages in questioning of people around

her that did not necessarily exist before. There are also ways in which any office Terry has to navigate can seem much easier than her experience in Georgia. While resilience can be an important workplace skill, Terry's narrative begs the question of how much is too much? What would it look like for Black women to engage a SAHE workplace where violence is not normalized and the ability to withstand it considered a workplace trait?

These issues of violence against Black women in SAHE represent the worst types of actions that can push Black women from the field, and they are not at all as fringe or disparate as people would have us to believe. Although the experiences shared in this section represent individual instances, together they paint a broader picture of how institutionalized acts of harm against Black women are ingrained in higher education. This concept of Black women's ability to cope and tolerate is explored in the next section.

Misogynoir, Rationalization, and Toleration. Misogynoir emerged as a major defining thread in Black women's decision-making process to leave. Misogynoir can be best described as racism that is coupled with sexism and sexism that is coupled with racism. It is the result of Black women's placement at the intersection of two subordinated identities. Anyone can engage in misogynoir, including other Black women and Black people. This is coupled with rationalization and toleration as many of the sistas in the study found ways to endure and accept what was happening to them in the instances prior to their breaking points.

Claudia experienced defining misoynoir moments when she was unfairly labeled as someone who hates white people. Her commitment to justice and passion for Black and brown people and international students were seen as a threat against white supremacy and resulted in personal attacks against her. She recalled:

> I was the angry difficult Black woman. I was unruly. There were complaints from my colleagues, I didn't even know who they were, that ... I'll never forget, they said, "Claudia

> hates white people. She doesn't want to work with us, and she's really difficult, and she really upsets us." So, at the time, my Black dean said to me, "Well, Claudia," First he laughed about it, thought it was hilarious and to me, I laughed initially and then I thought, "Wait a minute. This is fucked up." These white people told a Black dean that a Black woman is racist to white people. They did not have the guts to tell me that to my face, and he then took that feedback, which he thought was somehow worthy, to give me feedback, instead of calling them out and putting them in their place and told me about it. That's messed up, and then, on top of everything, my dean said, "Well, you need to go and apologize for what you said." And I was like, "To who?" I didn't even know who said I was racist and difficult. I'm not just going to go into a room and make a blanket conversation to apologize for saying the truth and the whole reason that happened was, I named the division that ... they were suggesting that we do a required anti-racism training, and I said I wasn't going to go because I was like, "My job is this every day. I'm not saying I don't need to learn anything, but in these dynamics, People of Color share their stories and their experience and their pain for white people's benefit and I don't see why I'm one of the only Black people, literally the only Black person in this room, one of two of color in this room, should have to be forced to do that for the benefit of you all. I don't get anything out of that." So that turned into Claudia's basically being difficult.

The realities of how her racial and justice work made white people uncomfortable on campus were initially laughed off until she realized she was being held to a different standard than others who took on a racial justice approach. The difference here, particularly between her and her Black male dean boss being gender. The misogynoir she faced proved problematic as she not only had to fight back against the uncomfortable white people, but also her boss who was also Black but a man and wanted to send her to engage in coddling of fellow employees. This was a

coddling though that Claudia would never receive in the workplace. As she moved through her narrative, she went on to share how her students also furthered acts of misogynoir when they showed her appreciation for the strong Black woman trope but despised her when she held them accountable. She explained:

> My students also, when I was playing the mammie, they were good. When I was the one buying the food. When I was the one ordering whatever they wanted. When I was the one that let them off easy or took care of them. Great. That's totally fine. But the minute I had boundaries on that, my time, my money, my energy or if I was a strong Black woman, that was cool. Right? But the minute I gave them feedback. The minute I held them accountable, the moment I tried to help them see how they're being hypocritical and hurtful to other people. Claudia's a bitch. She's horrible. Blah, blah, blah. She's an Uncle Tom. All of this horrible shit. This was the attitude the students had.

She continued:

> Some of the biggest critics, the biggest people that came for me, people that wrote open letters, people that filed grievances against me, were Black students, which was ... it was incredibly hurtful. Not that this should be the way it should be, but you would assume that students you share an identity with would get it, right? I had very candid conversations with the students about the ways in which you all talk about modulations and microaggressions and stereotypes ... What do you think I experience when I'm the only Black dean? For a period of time I was the one of the only Black people in student life for a good nine months. So what do you think it's like for me to be in this all white environments and take the hostility and be the one responsible for the Students of Color, international students at the same time? It was hard, both from the student perspectives, some of them, as well as the staff perspectives.

During these most trying moments for Claudia, her supervisor left and she was not only tasked with having to appease white people on campus without being able to push back, but also appeal to Students of Color who did not like when she enacted behaviors beyond a motherly and strong Black woman trope. Claudia's experiences with misogynoir paint a picture of how Black women receive hits from all sides on campus.

Like Claudia, the experiences leading up to Troy's departure are also laced with instances of misogynoir. Her refusal to comply with institutional norms meant people in power on campus would make her job harder for her. Troy also articulated moments where the institution would shelter incompetent white women thereby making it harder for her to do her job. Troy explained:

> So what ended up happening was that there was a climate that began to generate between me and my colleagues in that office around projects that I either wrote or created, that were too good because they required money, or they were projects that were given to a consistent person, a man of color in charge, where they just sat on his desk and kind of waited and collected dust. There were consistent meetings between me and other people and other partners where we got really excited about ideas, especially after renaming my center to honor a deceased Black woman who was in my role ten years prior, who died, actually, during her third semester there, or the fall semester of her third year. All of these things ... there was lot of newness. There was a lot of innovation. There was a lot of energy coming out of my center, a lot of energy coming out of my space, and a lot of collaborative energy coming from my staff. But there was an unshakeable dark cloud of low morale and fear and lack of security, a lack of job security. And if you threw in the competitive nature of having to peacock so that you catch the attention of this new leader so that you can keep your job, so you can see and remain important, then the people I think that were, like me, still saying now is not the time to show her all the good things

that we're doing. She's gonna see that. Now is the time to really take action and change the things that we know don't work. Not so that we hide them from her that they didn't work, but that we show her that we were actively working on the solutions prior to her arriving, and that these solutions will actually benefit her in the future when she makes those difficult budgetary decisions. Instead, I became too loud and too proud and too right all the goddamn time. Instead, I had too many ideas and I didn't know my place. Instead, I did recognize that, no, your job is to keep the Students of Color from protesting and keep the rich white kids from leaving. No, your job is to chair all of these committees that don't go anywhere and sit in on all of these meetings that don't have any agendas and minutes. And your job is to be on call when you're not on call to answer the phone call of Students of Color who can't turn to anybody else 'cause they don't trust anybody else. To also interface with the awkward white students who, for some reason, connect to you because you're slightly awkward and a little bit nerdy too, and maybe you're fun to talk to, so now, oh, you're the cool dean. And you've gained this reputation, and now your caseload outweighs what your caseload is. And the caseload management system is run by a person who was bounced between housing and residential education and bounced into the position because they didn't wanna fire her.

She continued:

There was a lot of sheltering, a lot of protecting, and a lot of shifting of white women out of jobs that they were inept in, and a lot of push out of Black women in jobs that they were great in, but were underserved and under supported in. That is like my whole thesis of my experience, right? Was that, no matter where I turn, these white women who had been hand holding and hand ringing for seven, eight, nine, ten years because they married in or because they were local or because their husbands were local or because they had

local connections or local ties, and maybe half of a degree, could stay there and invest there because they weren't going anywhere and they wouldn't ask for more. They wouldn't ask to be paid more. They wouldn't ask to be compensated more. They wouldn't ask for job flexibility. They wouldn't advocate for themselves and they sure as hell weren't going to hold up the mirror to the institution. But if you bring a person like me who's a young starter, who you're gon' pay me what this degree says I'm going to be paid and I'm also going to be worth what you pay me. Oh, wait, that's threatening to the status quo. Whoa… Oh hey, wait, you talk about being an institution rooted in social justice, but people outside of the institution can't seem to find a way in. Hey wait, why are all of these Black women that I've spent a lot of time with ... What was beautiful was that this Black woman that was fired in February, three days before our Winter ball that she was supposed to open at, and she also did the first three mandatory diversity trainings for the housing staff and student staff and got the president to come speak at it. Fired in the same week because she apparently didn't handle one of the meltdowns that one of the Black students had at the diversity training because he was triggered. And he's dramatic. Everybody knows he's dramatic. It wasn't about that at all. That was a cover. What I noticed was that, this Black woman automatically arrived and wanted to leave, like the first day. It was July 1 and July 2nd, she was like, something's off. I'm applying to jobs. And I was like, wait. Give it a couple months. She was like, I'ma give it two weeks. But they already asking me to stay after work and I just started. Something's wrong. And she talked about it and she talked about it. Then she deteriorated. And then she began to cry every day. And then she began to take days, and then she began to make days. And it makes sense. But she, in the middle of all that, started what we called sister circles. And she would invite ... First it was just me, her, and her supervisee, who was the living

> learning communities person. And we would just meet and talk and talk shit. First, actually, real talk, it was just me and her… So, had to cope somehow.

The realities of Troy's experiences with misogynoir reveal there was an expectation for Black women to engage the institution in a particular manner and if you fell outside of this you caused problems. Troy had to manage multiple exterior threats to her job—many of which were driven by white women—while also trying to support the other Black women on campus who struggled.

The sistas in this study often reported struggles that would lead a person to otherwise leave work, but they second guessed and rationalized the actions as one-offs until they compounded enough to have a real impact. It took growing to a point of exasperation for Michelle to realize that SAHE was not the space for her anymore whereas it took a realization of compounded trauma for Jodie to leave. Jodie explained how the sistas in this study tolerated and rationalized what was happening because it takes the realization that you are not alone in feeling this and that because you have felt it before does not make it right. "You're either accustomed to feeling different so that particular element of the different doesn't stand out from anything else, or we're all not fully sure it's not just us and when we start to see that it's other people, there's a real element of it that we might have overlooked before," she explained. This directly connects to Michelle's feelings that finally pushed her away, "I just felt very hopeless; like, I had nothing left to give… I wasn't good enough, Things of that nature." This rationalization and ability to tolerate harm exasperated Michelle and Jodie. Michelle recounted how she lost her passion:

> like with anyone else when you keep saying negative things it's like you have to self-affirm yourself, no, I'm worthy, and I would have to get up every morning and it brought me a lot closer to God, to wake up every morning and have to self-affirm yourself. You have to listen to gospel music in order to go to work because you know you're doing a good job but you're not hearing it in – in four – no, in five years you have not heard

> anything positive. So – but then you have to make sure that you are affirming other people and those are the people that you are there to serve, your students, your colleagues, and to hear even within our office other colleagues say, you know, if it wasn't for you – you always tell us we're doing a good job, and if we messed up, you say, okay, well what's the lesson learned? How can we do better? Okay, this was good, next year what are we going to do to make this better? To be a cheerleader but having nobody to cheerlead for you. That's where I lost my passion for higher education and the fact to know that this person – it's not because their supervisor is nowhere near physically where we are, there's nobody to make sure that that person is affirming the next person. And I think the big piece is human resource wise there's a lot of things that I wish I knew then that I know now, things may be a little different.

Here, Michelle reveals how lack of access to knowledge in HR combined with poor working conditions can lead to breaking down Black women because they do not know what or how to exercise their rights. She also reveals how praise and affirmations are typically reserved last for Black women whereas critiques and points of growth are discussed first. This directly connects to the misogynoir other participants reported as well as exacerbation of them through microaggressions. The insidious nature of microaggressions attributed to push out in Jodie's case because after a while and after student complaints, there was a shared realization amongst employees of color of how bad things truly were. Jodie explained:

> Everybody was really friendly, very supportive, that type of thing. I think ultimately the dynamic later on as we started to ... And other staff of color got together and recognized we were having a very different experience in terms of how work was being distributed, and any types of micro aggressions that were happening, and that came about a little bit later. I don't think that people had gotten together and compared notes up until probably

> the last year I was there, and that happened to coincide with what a lot of students were expressing grievances, and then staff felt empowered to get together and talk about some of those things and we realized we were having some similar moment, similar challenges, similar stressors, and it was nice to be able to come together with people because those kinds of outlets didn't previously be there.

The seeming intentional isolation of employees of color is contributing to the amount of misogynoir and rationalizing Black women engage in. This makes it easier for Black women like Jodie not to realize the totality of the harm happening to them until it has already compounded.

That the sistas in this study experienced misogynoir and were forced to battle their own rationalizations of the harm against them is indicative of a larger flaw in U.S. culture. Since the campuses we exist within do not operate outside of this, some of what has been described in this section are attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs that begin well before the campus environment. The sistas in this study often pushed back against these norms and called attention to the ways in which campus practices were exercised differently depending upon identity.

Opt Out

Experiences leading to opt out could be understood as those things that were harmful to the sistas in the study but that did not necessarily cause immediate harm or threat but contributed to their compounding experiences. These acts were the moments that led sistas to think, plan, and strategize ways to exercise agency and dignity in their departure from the field or job change within SAHE. Within opt out sistas had to navigate what it meant to actually leave a workplace or the field and contend with the residual impact of their initial workplace trauma. The trauma associated with the workplace continued to manifest for the sistas in new positions and cultures,

and the disbelief that they actually left or could seriously exercise their agency to leave left many baffled.

Nevertheless, realizing that you have agency and can invoke strategy to leave the field or move on the next institution proved important for sistas. This was particularly salient for Troy whose institution nearly pushed her to leave when they wanted her to leave instead of in the time that she preferred. How Troy described the moments when she took control and exerted agency in her decision to leave is but one way I delineate push out from opt out. She explained of her opt out process:

> I didn't decide to leave up until maybe a week before I turned in my resignation. I had been playing with it in the back of my head as a, "fuck you." But I didn't want to do it until the intent was right. Because I actually wanted to make sure that I was leaving on my own terms. And when you leave on your own terms you get to keep your narrative and you get to retain control over it. And I really wanted to make sure that I was doing that in the right way and that also ... That doesn't mean there was a lot of risk involved. There was not a staple position. They're a lot people talking about it, a lot of people asking me to apply here and there, a lot of potential appointments. But nothing set in stone. So there was some fear. Of, "Oh what do I do, I'm on shaky ground." It's definitely some ... I couldn't allow any regret to come into the picture because I realize I that I was doing myself a favor. But if there any regret it was definitely of the sort where I was like, who is going to hold the mirror up. Without it… adversely impacting future education outcomes. 'Cause these students, the more they're spending time writing and focusing on demands, the less time they're spending studying. So I'm like, "Okay, who's going to mediate that." Then I had to make peace with the fact that I ain't here for this mess. And I did my good part of composting it but that didn't mean I had to be the one to stay there

> and farm the shit. I did my job, I had my rule and my stage in this institution's pathway. I had to cry, I had to pray. I had to be all up in Psalms 91. Psalms 51. Psalms 28. Psalms 119. I'm Buddhist also. I had to chant. "Cause I'm a Tina Turner Baptist Buddhist, Anna Mae Bullock for life." I had to turn back my South Carolinian roots and my Texan roots. And think about that good ole home, ancestral type of healing. The cleansing.

Troy continued:

> Girl, I gotta freedom playlist. The first song I played walking out was "Free" by Deniece Williams. Then the second song I played was "Nice" by Beyonce and Jay-Z AKA the Carters. Because that whole mood when she said, "Patiently waiting for my demise 'cause my success can't be quantified." She said, "If I gave two fucks, two fucks about streaming numbers would've put that shit up on Spotify." I was like, "Yo." Come at me. That whole song ... and then I started playing all these beautiful uplifting women rappers… I started playing some old school jams to soothe my spirit, like some Frankie Beverly and Maze. Some Stevie Wonder. Like I just have to love on myself for seven days. I took a vacation right before I knew I was gonna turn in my resignation letter. I didn't know if I was gonna do it that Monday or that Friday after my vacation. But I said, "Fuck it." I'mma turn in my resignation letter while I'm still on vacation. And then I'm gonna take this vacation and when I get back you're gonna have to say, "Bye."

For Troy, leaving on her on accord was a way to push back against the institutional violence and threats of violence she had been faced with. Music became a way for her to work through her experiences and for her to cleanse her spirit and being of the wrong that was done in the workplace. Though the institution would not atone for what they had done, she could engage in that for herself so that she could leave the workplace and still recognize herself and the work that she offers.

Troy's experiences align with Jodie's in the sense that while Troy strategized ways to make sure she was okay throughout her final days in the workplace, Jodie discussed what it means to be okay amidst a larger SAHE culture that does not always celebrate departures. For Jodie, strategizing or leaving on one's own accord connects with the overall culture of SAHE as there's the dual realization that a workplace is not working, *and* people will see what you go through and still want you to stay. Accepting that people who are deciding on what is best for them know well enough to make informed decisions for themselves was important for Jodie. She explained:

> I mean, across the board, I feel like decisions to leave the field need to be stigmatized less. There's a tremendous pull from people who, for whatever reason, don't want that to happen. Sometimes it needs to happen. There are too many people and they're not all going to fit towards the aspirational positions that we put on people. There are too many people that everyone's going to get to be a Dean of Students, or a Vice President, or a President. It's just not all going to fit, which means the people have to go somewhere. So, if they decided that this is not what they want to be doing, let it happen. And if they need to come back, it shouldn't penalize them either because there are people that will leave and then come back or do things a little bit differently to test it out and then kind of return. It's a type of penalty. It's not unlike, in other types of industries where women will leave to have kids and then come back and find things that are difficult. So, I would say to specifically pertains to the leave and the go piece. You kinda gotta let that happen and then see where you can find assets or hope or experience in the things that they bring with them if they decide to come back.

Jodie's realization that there is an intense culture of *stick it out* permeating SAHE is a point well made. Though the sistas in this study are working within a culture where many younger

professionals change and expect to change workplaces regularly, this reality is often at odds with the expectation that one stays no matter the personal costs. For Jodie, knowing that high level roles cannot and should not be everyone's focus in the field was a comfort in her decision to try something new. This made exercising that agency to leave easier because there was no guarantee that staying meant you'd ever hold one of those highly coveted positions.

Both strategy and self-awareness emerged as a major thread in the decision to opt out for Claudia. Claudia was able to take time to reflect on her experiences and come to the realization that she was not a good fit for the role she was in despite her skills. In her experience, it was rarely her ability to do the job functions as much as it was push back against how she did it within her Black woman body. Claudia expressed knowing it was time to leave:

> I felt I was not the right director for the college, and I feel very strongly that I'm not going to be a person that stays in a job ... Yes I need a job. We all need a job, but I feel ... this work on diversity and inclusion and equity is way too hard and I have to make certain choices, so my choice was, "Here are my values around these things." I was really clear with my staff, my students about that. I was clear with my dean, with the president, chief diversity officer, and it was clear that the college needed somebody else, somebody different. Not necessarily that my values were wrong, but my leadership wasn't a match. I was at the point where I was hating students, and hated being at work, and in a bad mood, and I was always complaining about the college, and what have you. There was a moment, I remember last winter break, where I sat down with my assistant director and said, "You know," I won't use his name, but I said, "I don't know how to come back as director next semester. I'm so checked out and done and burnt out, and just exhausted from being called out and challenged and yelled at, and letters written about me and people coming for me in email all the time, that I don't know how to show up and be a

leader in that environment." I actually tried to move through that but it was just ... I couldn't. I felt like, 'You know what. It's my time for me personally, and for this college...' And I was honest about that even in my exit with everybody, like "I'm not the right person. I'm going to do what I can to leave a good foundation, but you all need somebody else and it's not me. So, yeah.

Claudia's inability to fit became as clear to herself as it did to the people complaining about how she carried out her role. That sometimes fit is coded language and fit can represent a disconnect in values and ideas are both simultaneously true. In the case of Claudia, the latter proved to be true. However, it was the response to Claudia's departure by students that painted a sad and honest picture of just how much things were not working for her or the campus she served. Claudia explained:

> My international students were devastated. And, I think they were mostly devastated because I was the first person that fought for them on the campus. And, when I first got there, they wouldn't even talk to me. By the time I left, they were waving to me on campus, and giving me hugs and gifts, 'cause they were really grateful that I thought about them. My Students of Color, including people on my staff, to this day, have said basically nothing. When we had our very last kind of staff meeting going away party, you know, we're chatting, we're doing closing vow, whatever. And, my poor AD [(Assistant Director)], who's so sweet and green, and naïve, and I warned him, I said, "You know, George*, these students don't give a damn that I'm leaving. It's cool. No, I'm not going to have a going away party, 'cause they hate me anyway, so why should we put an effort into a party that's not even about me, it's about them. You know, let's not. Let's just have a nice dinner. We don't have to do anything flowery. Let's just be rosy, and just keep it cool." But no, he wants to a closing vow and feelings and our big moments and trying to

get them to say some things about me. And they had nothing to say. All they had to say is, "Well, who's the next director?" And, "Who gets to decide?" And, "Are we gonna be part of the process?" And, "I better have my job." And that's, you know, some of them never even said goodbye. It was pretty cold. And that hurt, 'cause even though we had challenges, I believe strongly that I did my job. I think I did my job well. They may have not liked how I did my job, but I did my job.

The entitlement of the Students of Color and lack of empathy they displayed were among the reasons Claudia was leaving in the first place but in this moment, they crystallized how violence against Black women is ongoing and pervasive from everyone including other Black people. The ability to exercise agency and take her skillset elsewhere, however, meant Claudia could do the work that she loved with a lot less headache than she was experiencing.

Whereas Troy decided to utilize her departure as a form of resistance to the institution, Claudia approached how she left with a similar degree of calculations as the announcement that she was leaving made its way around the campus. She recalled a conversation with a mentor noting, “He said to me, ‘You know, you need to think about your strategy about leaving [last campus], because how you leave [last campus] is going to matter, and you might want to figure out how to plant seeds." She went on to say, “So, before I left, before I even announced, I actually sat on my news for a good two or three weeks before I told people, because I planted seeds.” She explained:

I was also really critical that, when I, and I said this over and over, "I'm leaving, but I will do all that I can to leave a good foundation." And particularly because I knew, most likely who's going to replace me is probably a woman of color. Probably. I'm pretty certain a woman of color was going to be the next director of that space. And I did not want that person ... they're going to have enough problems and challenges with the deans

> and the students, everybody that are there. And what I didn't want to do was leave pissed off in a huff, petty, and leave things in a shambles so that person, therefore, has to have a harder time. So, I did a lot of work. I spent my last month at [last campus] writing. I wrote a director of transition binder, where I wrote her ... I'm assuming her ... I wrote that person a letter personally of, "Here are some thinking points that you ... I'm not telling you how to do your job, but here are some things to consider. Here's where you have purview to make decisions on. You're not locked into these things. Here's how things were left. Here are the people. Here's their background. Here's what my last conversation with them was about. Here are all pass-codes. Here are everything".

Claudia’s self-awareness and strategy here make it so that no one could say that she left campus in worse shape than when she arrived. There was, though, a degree of vindication for Claudia. After she was getting ready to go, people at the campus would apologize noting, "man, we really messed up, Claudia. We really should try to keep you. We really messed up by losing you." I'm like, "Yeah, you did." It is clear here that while the campus leaders may have seen the value of Claudia they routinely ignored her and created harsher working conditions for her that she had to still express grace in the face of.

Agility manifested as those opportunities and strategies sistas employed to ensure they would be able to have a career within or outside of SAHE without necessarily feeling confined. During her interview, Terry made plain how having the foresight to realize she did not want to get stuck in the SAHE career pathway is making her transition and opt out easier. She explained:

> So I purposefully have tried to set myself up in such a way where I don’t feel stuck and I still don’t feel stuck, right, I think it’s more of the just being able to get out there and to – like I've been doing this for so long, right, I think that a lot of us, People of Color in general get bamboozled into student affairs and it’s like terrible because it’s like I make

> the most money of anybody on either side of my family has ever made, has ever made, right and I am not miserable but I'm definitely not as happy as I could be and I have these other obligations and it's like, really where I'm at in my career right now is such a pivotal point, I'm finishing this doctorate and it's like, I am poised to make well over $100K a year, well over, in the next position I go to and so it's like there's a stability right there that I can't necessarily get in other places…

Terry brings back the significance of pay in experiences, but also the importance of happiness. In the time since this interview, Terry has confirmed that she is leaving her job at the end of the school year and more likely leaving the field all together because there are ways she can flex her talents to make good pay and experience better treatment elsewhere. Agility contributed to opt out for her because it makes it where she can leave SAHE when she wants, how she wants, and ultimately with or without her institutions support. More than this, for Terry, the idea that she is at one of the schools considered to be strong SA place to work and it is not working out is part of what is leading her to consider leaving the field. Terry explained:

> I would say that I mean I'm definitely at a point now where like I said I know that my next – if I'm not here at least five years I'm going to have to just leave the field because I'm at a well-known institution with a well-known program and if this shit don't rock for me I've just got to leave the field. And that's not even that I think that anybody is going to do me wrong here necessarily, like I have a great relationship with my supervisor, but it's like motherfuckers are going to look at my resume, it's like, oh, if you ain't make it there then you've got – you know something is wrong with you. When I know that's not the case, right, I know that systems and systems of oppression and shit is the case that they gave me, right. So I think that – but I think that I've always been a person who's been very involved in the field and I'm a networker, right, like I know how to use my

> cultural capital from having gone to boarding school and things of that nature to – you know to make it happen, like if nothing else, nobody know – I know nobody knows me better than I know me and I can talk about it, like I have proof, right, I try to produce tangible things that I can say, hey, look at this thing I've done, not just talk about it. And I think that has become more imperative for me as I've moved around in the field. But it’s like if I'm here, like I said for me, if I'm here at this point I'm not necessarily concerned about what other people think, I think it’s just at some point I've just got to give it up, this shit is not for me. If this doesn’t work out, if it’s not a matter of moving up, if it’s a matter of, yo, this shit has got me tired and I don’t even think – like I said, I don’t think it’s a functional area or things like that because I love residential students, I love residence life, but it is the – I think for the – this is really the first time that I was like, this shit might not be for me long term.

The realization that things may not work long term and that she has options gives Terry a degree of flexibility that sistas who experienced push out did not have. She doesn’t have to leave tomorrow because things are so horrific, she cannot stay. This is similar to how Troy reengaged what it means for her to think about work and work in student affairs when she decided not to let the campus push her out and to instead leave on her own. Troy’s departure raised questions for her at the time she walked away and proved to be a critical turning point. Troy explained:

> Really the ongoing process has been trying to figure out I guess three things. One is how do I define myself. Now having had this role and having left it in such a way, am I still a student affairs person? Am I ... I've been really thinking about what it means to now think about it. Do I even want to remain in student affairs? I know that I got into student affairs, because I was a student who was really involved as a student. Then the more that I've become aware of the limitations of student affairs and the awkward corporatization

> of the profession itself as student affairs becomes important and remains important, there's a weird way that I feel that the practice, the profession, does not reflect the practice that we hold to put forth. I had a lot of questions for myself. I think that's been something to add. I think also just kind of dealing with the stress and the trauma of do I apply to small liberal arts colleges again. Do I try to break out and go into the research university space? Is it the same? Would I face the same kinds of issues at a larger university? Those are the kinds of things that I've been thinking about, meditating on since we last talked.

She continued:

> My only goal is to impact long-lasting change and to bring equitable access solutions to communities, organizations, and strategies to People of Color and people with disabilities, and queer and trans people. In whatever format that may take. Because I'm an educator so it might happen in a classroom, it might happen in classroom adjacent. It might happen on a damn street. It might happen in an article, it might happen in a Facebook blog. But I realize that this particular institution was a springboard for me to learn and to close some of the earlier lessons that I did not learn in my earlier parts of my career. That I needed to learn this time, so that I could be successful in those next steps. Like I had to be humble. I had to learn what it meant to not be too trusting of every person in your workplace. I had to understand what it truly meant to establish boundaries. Professional and personal boundaries. Not everybody is your friend, not everybody is your homie, and not everybody is your God damn family member. All skin folk ain't kinfolk. You gotta learn now, every once in a while. And yes, you're going to have to realize that you can't trust every career white woman who has a degree in nigga-ology[(sic)]…this is not bamboozled. Am I killing you? I'm so sorry.

Here, the skills that Troy exercised serving as an assistant dean and doing diversity work are the things that underscore what she can go to do. This manifested as a point regarding agility because she realized what she wants to do is not necessarily what she has to do within a specific SAHE role. The sistas throughout this study recognized the need to be able to position themselves for future roles and employment whether that be within or outside of higher education. These moments connect with opt out because the structural systems at play in this U.S. do not allow Black women to approach the job market and changing of positions with a laissez faire attitude. Instead, they must be calculated so as to ensure they are able to become and remain gainfully employed in a society that necessitates their presence but devalues their being.

The Realities of Leaving and Next Steps. Most of the sistas in this study described the feelings associated with leaving or planning to leave SAHE. While push out and opt out get at the experiences leading up to and the decision to leave, within opt out also falls the realities of what leaving can mean for different people. Claudia emphatically said, “It's so damn liberating” of her departure. Though she transitioned from one liberal arts school to another, the sigh of relief she let out when she made this statement suggests she is in a much better space than she was at her last institution. She continued:

> But I really wish that Women of Color, and Black women in particular, could have these conversations, 'cause I think young professionals get socialized into these dynamics, and they feel like there are no other options. And I really wish there was ways to give ... I keep wondering, like what might my life have been like, back in 2008 when I left graduate school, if I had a possibility model like me. Not that I'm like so great. But if I had a possibility model that says, "You don't gotta follow these rules. Do X, Y, and Z. You don't have to keep your mouth shut." I had a lot of hard lessons, a lot of internalized oppression from other People of Color, and a lot of white supremacy that for a while I

> think made me kind of perform in a certain way to avoid the challenges that I ultimately was going to experience. And so I wish that we could have more conversations, because unfortunately the more you go up, the worse it gets. I believe that fully. The more Black women get power in higher education, the more white supremacy, the more the push out is real, the more the disrespect is real. And, we don't talk about that enough. So I wish we had ways of doing that more…

The power of being able to leave proved to offer Claudia a sense of relief that she wants other Black women to experience. The culture of silence around Black women's push out and opt out is furthered because many of these conversations or possibility models as she referred to it do not publicly exist. Where Claudia felt liberated, Ebony expressed her feelings were more so that of relief. Upon leaving, Ebony recalled:

> It felt like relief. I never felt guilt. Even if I felt any ounce of something that leaning towards guilt, I wouldn't allow myself to feel it, because again I'm no one's savior. Even my students were like, "I'm so glad you're leaving. We're sad, but we're so glad." They knew the shit that I was dealing with. They knew it. Some of them were in the support group that was confidential, so they got more of it. They knew some of ... they knew more of it, of what I was dealing with. Never felt guilt. That was like my biggest thing, "Don't feel guilty."

While Ebony may not have favored expressing guilt, there was some back and forth as she reflected on whether she actually felt like she had failed by having to leave despite the images selected for her vignette. She went on:

> But I don't feel like I failed because I – the students that I impacted, like I'm very authentic, I did a – what is it, like a – I gave a statement on Friday and I did a talk in front of my colleagues and I always am a proud north[side]* girl. And I think that rang true in

> that time because it was a very stressful time, a very trying time, however I was very authentic with my students and they – they will still – even some of them who you know I didn't tell them to go into student affairs but they still went into it or other ones who are doing like their master's program right now, they are – they're hitting me up and like, Ebony, because of you this is what it is or because of you I was able to challenge that professor who said some stuff that wasn't going to fly with me. So I don't think it was a failed mission I think I needed to gain my own voice and I've always been pretty vocal I just needed to know that it was okay to leave…So I don't feel like it was a failure, I feel like I did the best that I could, and I feel like – I don't know that it was worth it because it took a lot out of me personally, but I know that my students were worth it.

In this context, being able to leave a lasting impression was proof of the value Ebony brought to the field and could have continued to bring if not for her departure. Where the dissipation of stress and trauma of dealing with SAHE workplaces proved significant for Ebony, there is solace in her ability to continue to engage people at the traditional age a student would be. Ebony continues to engage in student affairs work without being in student affairs formal capacities. This contributes to her view that leaving was a success despite initially seeing it as a failure. Ebony explained of her new role:

> So I'm a regional admissions manager and so the age range that I work with is perfect because the people I'm getting are 18 to 25 year-olds and I'm, you know, getting them through the application process, some of them I'm like calling up, like hey, I can't even review this application until you do something with it because it's a hot mess. So being able to coach them in that way and then also our corps, that's the people we hire, we call them corps members, but I get to really like see them through, there are people who are applying for college, there are people who took semesters off, there are people who are

> like, I don't even know if I want to do college. So I do still get to mentor, I still get to kind of coach people through the process of just what it means to be corps members but also what it means to make service a part of their everyday lives.

Where Ebony can feel good about her impact on higher education through the students she did connect with in the past, she is also still impacting higher education through coaching students who are within that age range. In her current role, she often works with students who are applying for college or those who have taken gap years. This is similar to Jodie who expressed satisfaction with being able to continue connections with SAHE colleagues.

Although Jodie left SAHE, she remains engaged with and within higher education spaces. Jodie left the field, formally, to become a dynamic speaker and workshop creator. As someone engaged in SAHE adjacent work, she is often connected with people still holding formal SAHE roles on college and university campuses. In reflecting back on her process of leaving she revealed how people often think about detaching from campuses but fail to follow through. Jodie expressed:

> I talk to people about it all the time, and I would say maybe a third to a quarter of those people actually do it. Most of them just explore it, but then ultimately go back to what they were doing. I think it was a hugely nerve-wracking experience. It continues to be, and I tell people that all the time, cause I'm just an inherently worry-prone person. So, I worry about it all the time, but I also recognize that between the networks that I set up for myself during the time that I was on campuses. And that was doing conferences and through online interactions and going out into Boston, which has so many schools, I was meeting people all over the place.

Here, Jodie stands as an example of a possibility model Claudia referred to as she is connecting with SAHE people but doing work beyond institutional confines and on her own terms. She also

is an example of someone who recognizes the current design of SAHE workplaces does not match her work and work ethic—but is well aware of how she can work with students and inspire those around them. In fact, this d shift how Jodie sees her connections to the field. Given how things worked for her, she also has no intentions of going back. Jodie clarified:

> So, I would never change the decision that I made. And I also tell people, 'cause I get the question very often, "Would you go back?", it would take something extraordinary for me to go back to working on a campus. I really like the autonomy. I like the ability to apply what I'm learning in a lot of different places. I like being able to pull knowledge from a number of different places and not just things in education. So, I think as far as this path goes, barring something very, very specific, this is kind of the path that I'm on. In terms of the path out, one of the last things that I think that I did that I was very pleased for having done, is having connected with other professionals of color and recognizing that some of the experiences that we had were common ones. None of us had really made the opportunity to do that together and we found it hugely valuable, and I know that there's still staff there who do that. I know that several of those people also left for one reason or another or are looking for a way out. Sometimes it was a very difficult environment to be in. But the idea of being able to create community around that was something I think I just got in to too late. I already knew I was leaving by the time I found it.

Although Jodie may not return to the field formally, there are ways in which she continues to engage the work and practices of the field to fulfill any lasting desires or needs she has. She emphasized, though, the role of community in helping professionals in SAHE to feel less isolated and to be able to work through the trauma they experience. Troy expressed a need similar to what Ebony and Jodie are already doing. Troy explained for her next steps she can engage SAHE

work without being tied to the horrific practices promoted within the field. However, it seems Troy is still willing to give institutions a chance. Troy explained:

> Yeah. I'm definitely walking away from student affairs right now. My next three jobs are ... the ones that I'm choosing from at least are in advancement ... or other areas of the college that will allow me to build upon the student affairs type of work. Basically, I wasn't into student affairs. If I think about it. What I was into was creating culture. I was into culture work. I was into creating culture and creating and sustaining a climate. I wasn't into maintaining the affairs of students and providing programming. Like programming is a way of creating culture, that's how we do things. That's how we, right? We sustain traditions. So, when I step back and realize that oh, I'm just interested in creating inclusive cultures, what are the most powerful levers that I can do that with that. It's not student affairs 'cause student affairs is spending the money, they're not raising it. So, I wanna be in the field where I get to raise the money and tell you how to spend it. That's still being in higher education. I don't think I'll be in higher education for very much longer. (silence)

The confliction in Troy’s statement shows both a desire to inspire change and inclusion for and amongst students, and throughout institutions, but to also be able to hold onto more control. The realization that there are ways to do this beyond serving in a formal SAHE capacity act as a reminder for sistas that you can contribute without having to withstand the demands of a SAHE workplace as is. There is a sense of loss, here, though in that someone that students care so much for that they asked about her health would no longer be the person students see on a day-to-day. This brought me back to one of Michelle’s stories. Michelle recalled running into students from her former institutions and their interactions speaks to the threat push out and opt out can have.

Not only do students not get to engage with these practitioners, but the processes, practices, and operations of institutions are no longer influenced by them. Michelle explained:

> I'm so glad we're talking about this. So just last week in three days I promise you in three days I have either ran into or was contacted by previous supervisors or my supervisor's supervisor who have all – you know they just wanted to reach out. I'm thinking about you, we ran across some documents that you helped us with and you know I said let me call her now. I ran into my former supervisor's supervisor who is now the director of residence life at the institution where I worked as a resident director and ran into her in a restaurant and just to hear her tell her husband all the positive things about the things that I've done or things that she remembers I said back in 2000. That's 18 years ago and you still remember that. And she said, oh, you don't understand, you made such a great impact in our office and I still have the frame that you made me – the scrapbook frame that you made me and things of that nature. So it has – I have run into different people, of course the campus and of course Facebook is always a wonderful way to keep in contact with people or you know various means of social media but to hear people say the positive things and the things that they remember, that's affirming and I feel that if there was an opportunity and I did want to go back into higher education that I would be able to have those types of conversations with those individuals, especially those who would support me, and they would support me in terms of references and things of that nature but I also, I'll be honest, because my spirit was just torn apart in my last experience, for me to want to go back to higher education right now is very hard in my mind.

While taking a moment to look back served as a reminder for those who formerly worked with her of the competence and care that Michelle displayed, it also reveals how she was taken for

granted. This raises questions of what kinds of residual struggles sistas may have around their time in the workplace.

Residual Struggles. The sistas in this study continue to feel the weight of their time in SAHE whether they remained in the field or not. Though sistas may not regret their decision to leave or continue to resent being pushed out, Michelle expressed how she misses what a higher education workplace could be for her, particularly given the connection with students. Michelle explained:

> I miss it a lot. I do miss... especially being that I think I shared... well, maybe I didn't share. Last year I attended a wedding of one of my former students and I ran into, obviously, some more students and have been able to keep in contact with them have, you know, go out to dinner or lunch or... When I used to have Marco Polo on the phone. You know, would Marco Polo them every now and then. Let them know I was thinking about them and knowing that they were graduating school. How are things going. So on and so forth. But, the point is I do miss it however, It's... what's the word I'm looking for? It makes me a little apprehensive, nauseous, scared to try and go back because of my last experience... and, I know you're not supposed to fear things and I do believe. I'm a spiritual person and I have faith. But, my last experience, but the things that really broke me down as a person.

It is clear that Michelle still cares deeply for the impact that she has made on her students and the bonds that they built. Her confession that she is apprehensive at returning suggests that there is a degree to which higher education must atone for the wrongdoing of the sistas in this study and those who have been harmed across the board. The reality of residual struggles were not limited to Michelle. In fact, they were particularly significant for Claudia who remains in higher education.

Though Claudia has not left the field due to her experiences in her last role, there is a way in which the negativity, undermining, and harm caused to her continues to manifest at a new institution. She explained:

> I feel like every day, I feel like ... three weeks ago we had a retreat with the entire division, all the salaried staff of the division and I had a colleague of mine, "Oh yeah, we're a big family." People believe that shit for real. I'm sitting there being salty for my last job, like, "What are you talking about family. I don't know you all." I also don't have biological family, so ... they vent that in me and they were like, "I can see that you're not quite with us, what's going on?" I was like, "This is new for me. I don't trust people from the get. This is a job." They were just taken aback and I was like, "Oh dang, I got some stuff to work out." Not that I need to change who I am, but I was like, "I go a lot of ..." everybody's my enemy until they're proven otherwise. I don't trust anybody at my new job and my new job is, like many small liberal arts colleges, very insular, very shady, very gossipy, so everybody want to be in my business, my personal life. I give them nothing. Everybody wants to know what's going on in my center and wants to be involved. I'm selective. The faculty here are trying to give me advice about how to succeed at my new job and I'm not biting. I feel like, I did recognize the other day, when I was at the retreat, I'm like, "I got to find a way to let my guard down. I got to give them a chance." I don't have to build them all the way in, but it is definitely showing up that I have some baggage, and the way they're talking about my predecessor and how awful she was, and I don't know the full story of her, but I don't want that to be me... I do recognize there's a lot of trauma, but now that the students are back, something magical happens…

For Claudia, there is a real degree of trauma that is impacting her ability to connect and build relationships in her new role. Not only is she unable to let her guard down, but she may be

sending signals that she lacks collegiality with the colleagues seek to attempt to support. Michelle similarly had pain related to knowing that she was ultimately pushed out of SAHE rather than just a position. She explained:

> It was very hurtful because… I put my all – when I received my master's I worked full time and went to classes part-time. So there was an investment, there was a love, there was a passion. I loved everything I did. Didn't have the best master's experience just because I was working full time and not necessarily the most supportive experience, however it was my passion. It was hard not finding a job but it was understandable because jobs are not as plentiful in higher education administration in student affairs in August until probably the next March unless somebody leaves for whatever reason, there isn't that much out there during those times because everybody is working in their positions that they've been trained – they've been hired and trained for over the summer to start the new academic year which is in August. So that was just a very unfortunate time frame, but as I said it might be a little bit personal, might be a little bit professional, who knows at this point. I think the thing about it was I – at that time I was kind of all over the place but I knew I didn't want to just take a job just to have a job. I'm a little bit older, not too old but you know older. I want something that I can have a career that I'm passionate about, that I love, that I enjoy, that I can learn from and be an asset to... And I lived on campus. So you know it was very disheartening and as I mentioned it was the lowest part of my life next to my father's passing.

It is clear from Michelle's placement of leaving higher education as one of her life's low points next to the death of her father that the pain she experienced may never fully go away despite the feelings of it lessening. The ways she expressed the sense of loss here suggest that she not only

had to let go of working in the field but the dream and visions she had hoped to manifest for herself. Despite this recognize she went back to reframe her experience:

> I feel – honestly I wouldn't say – I want to say, honestly, I wouldn’t say I was pushed out of the field because there's always an opportunity to come back. However, it was hard to come back when you have this negative frame of mind and everything that you did was never appreciated or never affirmed, as a matter of fact, it was a very negative – my last experience was a very negative experience where I've given my all in terms of programs, in terms of being a leader, in terms of taking ownership and to have in my professional review, you didn’t anything, you didn’t bring anything new, you didn’t do this, you didn’t do this, you didn’t do this, you didn’t do this, oh, but you're a nice person. Wait, what? You know, and to hear that, it’s – it weighs on your morale...

Michelle’s questioning of how her last SAHE employer criticized her work raises significant questions for what it means to serve in SAHE without clear boundaries. How Michelle uses push out here, though, is different than how it is defined in this study, but she makes an interesting point of how might SAHE create opportunities for Black women who have been hurt and experienced trauma to return. Are the opportunities for any residual anger to be worked through?

Wellness across push out and opt out

The issue of wellness transcended the push out and opt out narratives of the sistas in this study. As such, lack of opportunities to practice self-care and wellness were often times facilitated and exacerbated by institutional acts of push out and became driving forces behind sistas’ decisions to engage in resistance and opt out. The agency sistas displayed in their decision-making process around opting out also shows up in moments where they refuse to continue neglecting their health and wellness for the sake of the campus. Ebony, Troy, Jodie, Ebony, Terry, and Michelle spoke most about issues of wellness under which health and self-

care fall, as primary situations that led to their workplace departure. Though Ebony no longer works in SAHE, it took her leaving to realize how interconnected issues of health and wellness are with workplace conditions. Ebony explained how looking back she realizes how many other fields do a better job with not only talking about self-care, health, and wellness but actually empowering employees to do better with their own. Ebony clarified:

> So I work in non-profit now for a really large international non-profit and like so basically, I'm trying to think about when we last spoke, but I was in Boston and something happened, just a lot of like insensitive comments at our conference, our summer conference, and it’s interesting because since then – I have a white male – a white like heteromale supervisor and since then any opportunity he has to take the day he does. And even like last week, I was just like, I'm not feeling it like because we have been having all of these processing phone calls and processing emails and processing work spaces and I was like, y’all, I can't keep dealing with this, it’s too much. And so when I told him that he was like, take the day, take tomorrow off, and I work in admissions so it’s just like we're so busy and I'm still trying to fill spots for this term and I'm just like – he's still just telling me, take the day off, and I'm just like, that would have never happened in student affairs.

The realization that when work is busy that she would not be able to take care of herself was, for Ebony, no longer part of her life. She was not alone in her realization that putting yourself first is something that is rare to happen in a SAHE workplace. Michelle served in the profession during 9/11 and distinctly remembers failures of self-care and wellness. Michelle felt that institutions prioritized student care because as SAHE employees and leaders, we were almost always student first. That student first model, however, can contribute to the demise of employee health.

Michelle felt like in her experiences in residence life her supervisors sometimes did a good job of allowing room for wellness but not in subsequent functional areas. She recalled:

> Back when I used to work in residential life, we take care of our students, but how do we take care of ourselves or make sure that we are supporting one another? Unfortunately, I had the unfortunate opportunity to be in res life when 9/11 happened and I lost a friend. It was also a former college roommate. Two weeks later, there was a hurricane that damaged a lot of property, my own personal belongings. And then, several weeks later I had a student commit suicide… So, with all this happening I think that, you know, my supervisor did work on trying to create a balance of work, personal support systems. And, I think me, personally, did an excellent job. You know, he did the best that he could just with supporting me. But, not everyone there is like that sometimes. It just depends on who your supervisor is. and, I also believe in resident life, because of the nature of the work that you do, there is more of that tendency to want to be there for the staff, whereas in areas that have that student affairs, so get that academic part to it. It's not as supportive to their employees as some other areas. And, I think, you know, that plays a huge part on staff satisfaction and the affirmations. So, we think about our last conversation and everything that I felt in my last position, I just didn't want to try. Because, I tried but then I didn't want to try anymore to stay over at student affairs.

Once she left residence life to become more of a student affairs generalist—or practitioner serving in broadly defined student support services, Michelle experienced a decline in opportunities to prioritize care. The experiences Michelle remembers fondly, however, of being able to care for herself in residence life is at direct odds with Terry’s current experience in campus housing.

Terry shared a series of issues around health and wellness that manifested for her while serving in residence life. For her people wanted her to care for them and neglect herself. She explained of her current role:

> In the time that I've been here, I've sat at the hospital with people on three different occasions. They call me. I've only been here a year and these people have way longer standing relationships with each other, right? But people have called me to come sit with them... People don't even know what they're doing. You know what I'm saying? The crime is in the innocence. They don't even realize the way in which they disregard me.

Terry reveals in this narrative the ways her colleagues take advantage of her kindness by asking her to support them in times of crisis. Although her peers have relationships of much longer length and stronger connections with one another, they opt to call her as her niceness and overall demeanor can make them to feel supported and cared for. There is also the sense that, as a Black woman, she may have more time to dedicate to supporting others because our stereotypes around Black women suggest Black women exist in the workplace and in life to function as care givers. The moments Terry spends worrying about others represent times she could use for her own wellness. But this space to focus on her own life is often usurped by colleagues who *need her.* Terry continued:

> I have been for the majority of my life, in my previous position and then the position before that was Georgia*, I was having I mean debilitating migraines five out of seven days a week. I got to a point where I was taking 4,000 milligrams of Tylenol each day, that’s the most that you can take of Tylenol and reasonably not suffer liver damage. I was so – my head used to hurt so fucking bad from just the stress, I mean my body used to hurt so fucking bad that I mean I remember one day having to be in a meeting and somebody looked at me and they said, Terry, are you okay? And I was like, my head

> hurts so bad and I like had my arms laying on the table and you could see my heart beat, I mean my blood pressure was that high, you could see my heart beating, and – because I was that – the stress that I was under was that palpable and I just don't think any of that is worth it, I don't want to die for this shit. I love students and I don't want to die for this shit. And now I'm at a place where in – I've only been here like – I've been here just 13 months and my – I still get migraines but I have had five migraines in the 13 months I've been here, and they've been so – my body has gotten so not used to experiencing the migraines anymore that they like take me up out of here, I just have to call off of work. I used to go to work with migraines that were so bad that I would have to take 4,000 milligrams of Tylenol a day, that's crazy. That is crazy that I got to a point where I felt like it was normal for me to live in that much pain and talk to people and still work hard, still be in a place where I have a friend who was like just last week was like, Terry, it's so crazy to watch them because they like fucking drove you out and they do everything you did, they haven't changed one thing. That's crazy.

Terry's current and previous employers all contributed to her issues with wellness, but her current employer is somewhat better. This is not to suggest she should be happy with her experience as the lesser of evils, but to highlight how common inability to practice wellness and to do so proactively have not been an integral part of her professional career. This continued experience with issues in the workplace continues to reemerge for Terry and raises questions of how, by institutional design, the field of SAHE makes it more difficult for Black women to prioritize themselves.

Like Terry and Michelle, Jodie had not had enough opportunities to ensure her own health and wellness. Jodie talked me through what it felt like to have neurological stressors that manifests as physiological pain across her body. She explained:

> I was getting really bad earaches around the time of orientation. And I could not figure out why it was happening. I thought I had an ear infection, was gonna need to go the doctor, but for two straight weeks I just didn't have time, and it just kept getting worse and worse. Then, I think, the Saturday or Sunday after that, something happened. I kind of opened my mouth and it stopped. I had been clenching my teeth hard enough that it was making my ears hurt for two weeks, and it just kept getting worse and worse. I had never had an issue with that before, and just everything that was happening and the pace that we were working, that's where it took me. So, I remember going to my boss' office that week and saying, "This wasn't happening before. I suspect they're connected. We have to do something about this." Having had that information and had those conversations about "the pace that we're on is unsustainable, this won't work," only to then find out that there was going to be more work and more stressors, and additional stressors not being recognized as impacting my capacity to work. Realizing I didn't want to then sacrifice how I was feeling and how my body was telling me to respond. So that was the first hint.

Jodie felt that her body tried to warn her about the need to make changes in order to be healthy. Where she thought there was a physical issue was actually neurological issue as her stress coping mechanisms led to her pain. The depth of her stress during her offices' busiest season shifted within her body, seemingly as way to force Jodie to take a moment to breathe and reevaluate.

Though Ebony, like Jodie, is no longer in the field, Ebony remembers clearly how mental health issues (re)emerge in the workplace. Ebony questioned the student affairs script that suggests one must *tough it out* and work to stay employed for a set amount of time even if they are hurting within their position. Ebony explained:

> I think for me the biggest things were, the mental health aspect that people ignored, and that piece of not being able to relate to white people, or not being able to engage in small talk in a certain way, that still impacts me now. So now I'm like, "It wasn't just Student Affairs. I still gotta figure this out." I think those are two of the biggest things. The mental health piece, when people are telling you not to leave something that is draining you mentally, physically, and emotionally and all those other things, that hurts in another way. So, I think just being cognizant of that and what are we telling people who want to leave? What are we telling them? What questions are we asking? I think that could be a good thing to notice. What questions are you asking someone who wants to leave? Do you really know their why? And if you tell them not to leave, what is staying really gonna do?

Ebony's commentary draws a direct connection between the decision to opt out and the lack of wellness practices in the workplace. In doing so, she tasks us with thinking critically about what it means when mental health issues are rampant in the work but there are few, if any, actions taken to combat this strain. That these mental health issues continue to permeate the SAHE workplace raises larger questions of the longevity of our institutions as it relates to Black women's employment.

Like the other sistas in the study, Troy had serious issues in her second year with managing her wellness while serving in her position. Though she had taken steps to exercise her legal rights for leave and FMLA, her health issues became an opportunity for the institution to engage in retaliation and punishment towards her. Troy recalled:

> My health issues became turned into performance review issues. This level of hostility that came at me while my supervisor out of her mouth was saying, "Weren't you always interested in film? You know I don't really feel like you should be restricting your future

pathways and your dreams because you have to take care of your mother and brother, and your grandmother. I really think that we're not always gonna be able to nurture the right talented leaders. At this institution and certainly we would want to allow you the opportunity to grow elsewhere if you felt that wasn't the best fit for you. And I would hate for you to feel as a Black, queer feeme that you are working in a predominantly white institution that is often assaulting to you and your identities." Sis, I have never had anybody take my narrative and twist it inside out and try to use it against me. In a way that robs me of the power of holding that narrative and that experience. When I realized that I was going to be the victor by walking away, I was able to walk away without any pain. I was able to walk away knowing that I would have some impairment. But I'm disabled so I understand what it means to survive, thrive, and excel with impairment. So, I had to apply a disability studies lens to this whole experience. Was that I'm gonna come out of this experience somewhat impaired, and I have to figure out how to reframe that impairment so that I can derive empowerment it. Because it taught me something. It taught me about a workplace I never hope to be in again. It taught me how to do a body compass. So that whenever I feel something in my body, if I'm entering a situation and my stomach crumbles, exit the room. I just recall one of those meetings, that I was in and how I felt in my body and where I felt it in my body. In then when I walk through the world and I feel those things again, I know that I don't need to be in that situation. So, the difficulty of being in that kind of environment was that it actually helped me to shape my compass. And to know which direction to go and which direction not to go. And that I think makes it easier. And now like everybody is like, you know you did a good job when people are coming up to you at your institution, on the day that you're leaving. My staff was fake as fuck. They ain't do nothing, they ain't speak to me, they ain't text me back.

> They mad. I don't really care. There's only one of them I fuck's with and he Black. You know you did something when the students are emailing saying they're proud of you for leaving.

In this example, not only was Troy punished for her health, but her story was twisted in a way so as to make it seem like she was ill-fitting for the institution rather than the institution posing a threat to her. Things had gotten so bad with her wellness and ability to maintain that students applauded her departure and colleagues she thought were in lock-step with her proved to value institutional loyalty over awareness of how she was wronged. These issues of health and wellness underscore the ways in which push out and opt out interconnect and together contribute to making the workplace difficult for Black women.

Across this episode, sistas describe the ways in which they had to navigate workplace cultures and tactics that undermined their abilities to be successful. Despite the situations, the sistas performed their responsibilities in the workplace until they ultimately decided to engage in resistance against the status quo. This resistance was sometimes the decision to opt out, but also times where they said no or held the line as their employers and colleagues worked to take advantage of them. These daily acts of resistance contributed to how I understood the sistas opt out decisions. Ultimately, the experiences the sistas reported here is best summarized by Troy who explained, “I felt like for all this time I had been holding my breath, waiting for this institution to recognize itself. But really the institution helped me to recognize myself. And so, I can take that lesson and be out this bitch” (sic). The decision to leave whether by choice and agency or through a campus restructure as expressed here suggests that it is important for Black women to remember how institutions may never shift in ways that are best for them and that we must take care of ourselves because no one else will.

Finale: Trust Black Women's Ways of Knowing: Opportunities and Strategies for Individuals and Institutions

"*But we still try. Try to help all y'all. Even when we get nothing. Is that admirable or ridiculous? I don't know...*"

(ABC Television Network Youtube, 2017, 0:32-0:48)

Delivered by Khandi Alexander as "Maya (Mama) Pope" on *Scandal*

Written by Shonda Rhimes, Zahir McGhee, and Michelle Lirtzman

Despite more than half of the Black women in this study leaving or planning to leave student affairs after their current position, they each offered advice and suggestions for institutions hoping to retain or support Black women. Equally as important, they offered words of encouragement and know-hows to and for Black women entering the SAHE workplace after them. This was done in hopes of minimizing harm so that Black women starting the field today may have more positive experiences than those who participated in this study. This advice and their complementing reflections border as cautionary yet realistic advice of what it takes to survive as a Black woman in the SAHE field. Three sub-themes make up this section: (1) Black Women must Work to Overcome Assumptions; (2) Protecting Your Time, Peace, and Energy Are Paramount; and, (3) I Guess, if You Really Want to Do This: Strategies for Success in SAHE. These themes come directly from the shared narratives of participants and these messages were both directly and indirectly perceived by participants.

Black women must work to overcome assumptions

Assumptions around what it means to be a Black woman at work permeated participants' lives and experiences. While the socialization and cementing of these assumptions started early, they were often crystalized when starting a new position, institution, or functional area within SAHE. Shane described the difficulties of navigating a new workplace when she was tasked with

taking over after a Black woman before her who had not done a strong job of representing for Black women in the workplace. “I felt like when I came in the room people knew about me before I said anything” reflected Shane, “I feel like that's what the vibe was people knew about me before I said anything, before I came in the room.” This feeling of overcoming assumptions was two-fold for Shane as she battled notions of what is expected of a Black woman at work in a broader U.S. context but also within an institutional memory of a Black colleague’s ill preparedness for her role. These sentiments of battling perceptions of who you are before you have had a chance to show what you can do were echoed by Ebony. Ebony recalls the messages she received around what people would think and assume of her as a professional if she left her SAHE role *too quickly*:

> My first year I wanted to leave, and I think I… I wanted to leave, I had mentors telling me, no, you won't get hired because no one leaves the first year. And so, in that I stayed another year and literally like – I talked to other people [and realized] student affairs can feel like an abusive relationship. So that first year I didn’t leave because all these people were telling me like, you won't get another job, you didn’t put enough time in, you're [young] there was all this, you, you, you like I didn’t do enough. And so that second year, as a first-generation college student because I think that’s very important especially when you look at like finances or you know – the financial situation that a lot of people are in who are first gen. So for me leaving it meant like – my parents… luckily, I have an aunt who I stay with and she charges me pretty cheap rent which is great but me leaving meant I was in control because I was not like I wasn’t asking my mentors for advice anymore, I didn’t even – like I told them I was leaving and that was it. I didn’t even – I didn’t engage in conversations, I didn’t go will you help me with my resume, none of that, because I didn’t want them to tell me that I needed to stay one more year.

It is clear here, like other Black women before her that Ebony was socialized to minimize the assumptions that might arise around her ability to perform by showing institutional loyalty even when loyalty in return was not upheld by institutional agents. Where Shane felt like she had to work double time for people to see her for who she was and not an extension of another Black woman colleague, Ebony sought for people to see her for her work and her decision to leave as a result of institutional abuse rather than a failing of her own. Ebony went on to acknowledge:

> to my students, I was able to connect with them, I was very transparent with my students in an appropriate way, I didn't tell them who said what and who did what but I told them a lot of things and that's because – specifically my Students of Color and more specifically my Women of Color because I didn't want them to go through thinking that, oh, Ebony is always happy, Ebony is going to be fine or if Ebony can do it I can do it. I don't want them to think that because that's what my mentors did to me…

If SAHE supervisors and leaders want to take seriously retaining practitioners like Shane and Ebony, we must start by seeing them, and all Black women for that matter, for who they are rather than solely for the positions they occupy and for the length of time they hold them.

The idea that there are assumptions that impact Black women at work in SAHE is not only limited to what is placed upon Black women, but also the work that Black women and SAHE professionals broadly must continue to do. Terry felt that there were assumptions that Black women and people of historically marginalized groups in general were expected to have knowledge and understanding around simply because they have experiences being minoritized. However, those experiences alone are not how we show up in the workplace. For Terry, this means SAHE professionals must be aware of how their dominance shows up and that there are identities in which every person has some form of dominance. Terry explained:

> We really gotta do the work, right? I think that focus in student affairs folks gotta do the work on their dominant identities. We understand the world from our subordinate identity, but we navigate the world from our dominant identities. That's where the work is, right? That's where the work is. If our liberation is all tied up in each other, and you mother fuckers are not doing the work on your dominant identity, well how the hell are you going to help create liberation for anybody else when you are just suddenly oppressing people every fucking day that you exist. Unknowingly. That's where the work is. That's what we gotta do in our damn student affairs program. That's where we got to shake these mother fuckers up, instead of introducing them to trigger, and they think everything is a trigger. It's like, no that's not what that word means. Everything can't be a trigger.

Here, Terry broke down not only the importance of doing self-work in a field like SAHE but that that self-work is not limited to white people, men of all races, or anyone we often deem as embodying or furthering marginalization. That, in some ways, we are all playing a role and must be aware of that even when it happens in the identities that are least salient for us. This is useful on individual and institutional levels because it can help to advance our conversations around equity and inclusion from being simply about the representational diversity to being about work that must be done by everyone. Terry continued her point, quickly calling to the table other members of the Black community noting:

> You know, that's [(dominant identities)] where the work is. How are you oppressing people? How are you because of your education privilege, right? Thinking that you're going to come in and here and you're just gonna be Iyanla and fix everybody's life. How are you showing up in your toxic masculinity when you cut me off? Anytime I try to speak, because you're excited and you can't wait your fucking turn. Or you call me a

> queen, but you don't let me be human. You know? You all are showing up and your white folk gets to be everybody, but the Black woman don't even get to be mentally ill. I gotta attitude?

Here, Terry refuses to absolve institutions and individuals of the ways they dehumanize Black women's presence while simultaneously demanding our labor. This has direct consequences for SAHE supervisors, colleagues, and leaders who feel they are doing the work of centering Black women by having command of colloquial language and pop culture phrases and by having Black women physically represented only to minimize the reach and opportunities their impact could have on the workplace.

Terry's frustrations of the larger complex ways Black women are minimized is not alone. Troy directly calls to the alter institutional ways we fail Black women at work in SAHE and thus fail our students as a result of this incompetence. Troy connects to this failure in the sense that there are ways we demand more credentialism of practitioners and leaders but those who land coveted positions of leadership either do not have what it takes to translate theory to practice or make a decision to skip positively advancing workplace culture altogether. Troy explains:

> It's an institutional issue and the more the institution refuses to address the systemic issues, that are very well and deeply related to management and leadership and the difference between the two, it's like all y'all motherfuckas got degrees but none of y'all understand organizational theory. So how are you firing all of the people who actually got a degree in it. That kind of information, that kind of analysis has to sustain me so that I can continue to tell my story and to hear the stories of others... the narratives of others and to remain affirmed. And to eventually return to student affairs and an institution that actually gives a damn about the affairs of the students. But in a way that doesn't placate them or doesn't provide them with simple opportunities to play and pretend to be adults.

> But that actually develops them into the human beings that they're asking to become after they graduate. There are way too many students who graduate and don't know how to fucking balance a checkbook. Can't negotiate a car loan. Don't know what an APR is. Couldn't tell you why their credit score was important. Haven't had a line of credit to establish. Have been working all of these jobs and have nothing to show for it on their resume.

For Troy, like Terry, there are ways in which we assume because someone shows up phenotypically representing diversity that they may be able to support and understand the diversity of student needs. But given the real-world ways in which social class, among other identities, vary, it is impossible to expect that because a practitioner is a part of the same race and gender group or racial group alone, and is doing work for diversity, that they understand the demands and needs of all students requiring diversity support services. Troy, here, reveals the problems with assuming that being a part of a group means being able to understand the totality of that group and community. These assumptions, then, flatten the nuances of experiences around identity and further dehumanizing and superwoman like tropes that lead to unrealistic expectations of how Black women can move through the workplace. This not only leads to increased frustration on the part of Black women, like those presented in this study, but also workplace demands that make it easier for Black women to fail thus advancing a cycle of Black women's push out.

Protecting your time, peace, and energy are paramount

For all of the Black women in this study, the need to protect one's time, peace, and energy proved salient for successfully navigating the SAHE workplace at some point during their professional tenure. For those who were able to last longer in SAHE and those hoping to make it a long-term career, there was awareness around energy exertion and knowing when to keep

pushing versus when to retreat for another day. Sara saw this as the "thin line [between what it means] to advocate on behalf of your students, but also as your role as a staff member." Sara continued:

> Because you still have roles and responsibilities as an employee of the university, but you also know what's not right. How students and yourself and your colleagues are being treated when it comes to inequality. That could be from race, to class, marital status, whatever. I didn't solely focus on just working at my job and that was it. When students ask me questions about what was going on or how I felt, I was authentic in how I expressed it to them. Although, I still maintained the integrity of my position in the university. I still let them know that there were somethings that I did not agree with.

Here, Sara reveals the ways the balance between being true to one's self and values and the institution as an employer can be much trickier and more precarious for people with multiple marginalizing identities. This difficulty is furthered when the degrees to which colleagues are invested or passionate can vary as much as individual awareness. "I think I expected like when I originally got into Student Affairs, I feel like I expected everybody to be engaged and passionate like I was in the work" noted Shane. But this investment does not necessarily mean a willingness to call out or call in things that may result in being labeled a trouble maker or disruptive. This is where Sara and Shane's understandings connect most. Shane acknowledged:

> I think I've always heard that term skin-folk and kin-folk, but if someone had really explained how just because you are or may share a certain affinity or identity with another professional does not mean they have the same life experiences, which I knew, but having that show up in their work and how they engage people, so you wouldn't come in with the false expectation that you will find camaraderie or other things from certain individuals.

There was almost a sense of hurt and frustration in coming to this realization for Shane. The idea that there are rights and wrongs and that there must be things as Black women we never roll over for seemed like a realistic perspective but one where both Sara and Shane forgot the human element of self-preservation. Although they could clearly delineate where their own lines were and decide when one should always be *kin-folk* as much as they are *skin-folk*, the realization of what taking those risks can really mean are cemented in Shane's words. She went on to acknowledge:

> This field is a high burnout field. There are a lot of entry-level positions, but as you go up, there's less and less positions. So, everybody's not going to be a VP of student affairs. Everybody doesn't need to get a doctorate, and that's fine…I just feel like I'm exerting more energy than what I'm getting put back into me?

Here, Shane simultaneously acknowledges the capitalistic notion that there are harsh limits to the number of positions people can hold at the top of the SAHE field. Given the realities discussed earlier in this chapter, one could infer that these roles would most likely go to the individuals and people who are less likely to demand change from the ways the current system of higher education functions. This means that even when a line is crossed there may be someone of their communities willing to overlook the issue in hopes to obtain one of those coveted positions and opportunities. This was crystallized for Ebony in her previous role as she came to realize the idea of a resolution to problems and issues may not always exist. "I always want the best for my students… I cared so much about Student Affairs. I always told my students how to get what they needed" Ebony explained. But she did not get what she needed when it came to calling out issues at work.

When faced with challenging situations at work, Ebony would often not only have *pick and choose her battles* in the fight for equity, but also endure the ramifications of *white guilt.*

Ebony's colleagues would often send messages to her about the (in)equity issues they notice but they would rarely take a stand with and alongside her. This suggests her colleagues knew something needed to be said or done but opted to take the less risky path by speaking to her rather than calling in the individuals perpetuating and engaging in acts of harm. She went on to explain:

> So they emailed me back, like, "I'm sorry you had that experience. Please talk to me if you want to." And by that time, once the emails go out and all of that you lose that momentum for it because you're trying to heal at that moment… Yeah, that was a lot of my interactions there.

Within this narrative, it is clear that Ebony's colleagues committing harm believed it was Ebony who mistook what they said and did rather than taking any blame for the harm they caused. This is another way in which white professionals minimize issues of equity and diversity as an individual issue of someone's inability to *take a joke* or understand their colleagues. The culmination of this led Ebony to feel exhaustion as the back and forth emails decreased the feelings and momentum she felt around these issues. This idea of tiring out committed employees demanding change connected with Terry's critique of how we operate when it comes to promotion and upward mobility in SAHE. Terry lamented:

> To fill high level leadership roles, we don't train people to be supervisors. We just say, "Oh, you paid your dues. You've been in the field for five years. Time to move up!" Like weirdos. You know, you can supervise already good, then surely you can supervise professional. Life doesn't work like that. It's like we're the only industry, I've actually looked at this, and I cannot find it anywhere in any other industry that we just promote people, and they don't have to go through any type of management training. Even Enterprise Rent A Car. I have twenty-eight people under me. If I went to Enterprise Rent

> A Car today to try to get a management position, they would make me go through their management training program for a whole year.

Terry’s assessment of time and dues paid as a prerequisite for hiring rather than competence is a direct critique to accepted institutional practices. When taken together with Ebony’s, Shane’s, and Sara’s criticisms, they raise questions of what it means to support and believe Black women in the workplace without first draining their energy and time. The consequences of failing to do so are not only losing competent Black women from the field, but also facing the loss of their skills that could advance SAHE workplaces. Terry’s inability to feel protected and to constantly have to negotiate managing her energy with no regard from her peers and superiors led her to imagine a future elsewhere. In these potential next steps, Terry explained:

> You know what, I'm still figuring it out. But this is my first rodeo with thinking about it. So, I think about things like going into HR and doing diversity inclusion work. Maybe being a corporate trainer. I think about, I was a teacher. I'm a teacher by training. First and foremost. That's my primary professional identity. So, I think a lot about maybe going into K12 and going back and maybe doing college access work. You know? I feel like there's more dividends at least I get to see the fruit of my labor, more immediately in the K12 sector. Just sheerly because of age, and where folks are in their development. They're a little bit more eager, a little bit more ready. So, if I go do college access work, I get to work with parents. I do have some background and first year experience. So, helping parents navigate the financial aid pieces, I mean really navigate it. How are we setting folks up. You know, helping students get a head start in thinking about what is your major? Why are you taking this? What are your life passions?

Despite being one of the more senior ranking Black women in this study in terms of title, position, and responsibilities, Terry’s inability to have her time, energy, and experience respected

have become a driving force behind her decision to consider taking her skillset elsewhere. For Black women hoping to maintain in SAHE, the examples presented here show a glimpse into what one can be expected to learn to manage in order to be successful. Given Shane's admission, "I don't know if I'm still, I'm sort of undecided on whether or not this is going to be like a career where I'll retire from, though" when taken in tandem with Terry's imagining of serving in another field, they also convey just how much Black women can be invested in SAHE and still make the decision to leave (opt out) or be forced out (push out) by institutions. The issues of navigating assumptions and protecting one's self when taken together raise questions of what Black women *should* be doing to ensure their ascension to the top of the field. These experiences offer context for the insight's participants offered in the next section.

I guess, if you really want to do this: Strategies for success in SAHE

When asked what advice they wish they had had or advice they would give to Black women entering the SAHE field, there were several nuggets of wisdom offered by the participants in this study. This advice primarily focuses on strategies Black women can employ and consider ensuring their own success in the field. Additionally, there are some suggestions for things Black women should ask of their institutions, supervisors, and campus leaders as they work their way up campus leadership. I offer this feedback here as a means to hear directly from Black women who have left or considered leaving SAHE for their advice on how to curtail opt out and push out of the field.

Things for Black women to consider for themselves. Black women are known for trying to help, support, and uplift everyone around them. This concept is so widely accepted, that there are t-shirts, memes, gifs, and other pop-culture images and references suggesting that the subtext of a Black woman's experience is the equivalent of saying "fuck it, I'll do it." The Black women in this study do not exist outside of the socialization and norms that have bred this cultural

perception and phenomena. In fact, this is so true that much of the advice presented here is a reminder that Black women must realize that they know what they know, can do what they can, and are worthy of advancement without first enduring pain and harm. Shane, for example, thought it important to let Black women know that they must not buy into the utopic view of the field that many have because that construct on its own rests upon the assumption of overburdening. Shane explained:

> I think it's important for people to not come into student affairs with this idolized utopia version of what student affairs is, versus what it actually is. I think a lot of people are bamboozled into student affairs. So when all the dysfunction happens, they don't know what had happened, because that's not what's written in the theory, a book full of theories where no one talks about that within practice, dysfunction and how it's perpetuated.

It is clear from Shane's narrative that she acknowledges better preparation for things that can and often do go wrong would be useful for Black women so as to avoid frustration and inability to move forward if and when the time comes. Shane's advice continued:

> I would give them the advice, let them know that they are worthy, that you possess the skill sets and knowledge base to leave an impact, focus on why you are there and how you can create opportunities to advocate and support students, don't get hung up on politics. Be able to learn those politics so you can play chess, not checkers, but understand and ground yourself throughout all that maneuvering you may have to do as a Black woman in Student Affairs.

From this, one can infer that Shane believes there is set of tools Black women must learn and ground themselves with so as to ensure their professional success. These tools would, then, be a way for Black women to reveal and put to use their own knowledge while simultaneously

preparing for the next level. Terry echoed similar sentiments in here desire for Black women to continue developing themselves with or without campus leaders and support. Terry suggests:

> I think take advantage of and get the skills that you feel like you need. Make a plan. Black women in particular, if your supervisor is trash, find you someone, you figure out how to create that relationship so you can at least get what you need. As far as growth, as far as professional development. Make sure people are giving you feedback. Don't let anybody call you a queen who's not treating you like any of that. Surround yourself with some other Black women who know, and who got it, and who's gonna mess you up. Find some shit to do outside of work, because they will use you and spit you all the way out. Find some things to do outside of work so it will be easier for you when it's time to say no. You ain't got to mull about it because you have plans.

Terry's advice, here, offers Black women a way to ensure their work life balance so as to allow room for both productivity and stress management. Terry went on to say, "For me, I feel confident about my ability to whenever I decide to leave the field, for me to go into another field and easily transition... I feel extremely confident about that because I have taken advantage of every opportunity, every training, every conference." Here, then, the idea of professional development is one that not only allows Black women to hone their skills, but to show institutions what skills they have to offer while simultaneously enhancing those skills for the next place. When taken together with giving Black women opportunities to say no because they are doing something productive, these forms of development can help to prevent pain and frustration that may arise later. This is especially true for Black women tasked with doing more than what is in their job description (as expressed in earlier sections) but can also be viewed as a means of self-advancement which could benefit the institution. This interest convergence, and

self-improvement, also looks good for the institution as it can allow Black women to strategically position themselves for further advancement.

Michelle's comments mirrored those of Shane and Terry as she, too, felt professional development and awareness of HR standards were paramount for Black women's success. Michelle suggested:

> I think that what I would hope for anybody that is wanting to stay in higher education or leave is making sure – or in a situation or whatever the case may be, I'm sorry, is to always look for that professional development plan of what's next and always work towards those goals and also be very aware of the human resource policies and procedures especially when it comes down to performance reviews that if you don't believe in what is on your performance review do not sign it and speak up, self-advocate for yourself because no one else is going to do it... those are some of the things that I wish I knew then that I know now that would have helped me in the long run and helped my experience...

Terry's, Shane's, and Michelle's advice is undergirded by a sense of warning that Black women must build themselves up as a means of protection and to minimize the risk of enduring pain and trauma associated with workplace norms. Michelle continued by noting the significance of networking with awareness of professional development and legal rights and offered:

> I would say definitely network on the campus across the board. So, let's just say for someone who's in an interview, definitely make sure that you're diversifying your knowledge. So, you're in student activities. Make sure you're understanding what's going on in academic affairs. Meet people who are working in counseling, so on and so forth because these are gonna be people that you can lean on…

Here, Michelle is clear that Black women will need someone beyond the scope of their position to show support and help for them. This was also echoed by Claudia who recalled:

> I really rely on my friends. I have my besties, Bianca* and Conrad* who are my Destiny's Child. I call them all times a day whenever I need something… because there's so many messages telling me that I'm not and there's so many people that try to convince me that I'm not. I just need a reminder ... I call them and say, "Am I crazy for this, did this happen? I feel a way ... is this weird." "No, you're right."

Here, Claudia's, Michelle's, and Troy's advice interconnect in that they remind Black women to be cognizant of how much of themselves they bring to their institutions but also how their institutions enact and facilitate policies with and as a result of their presence. Having friends who can help to process and call out whether something is normal or not can be crucial to holding on to who you are as you move through the SAHE ranks. Troy suggests:

> yeah, be yourself, but be strategically you. I would never encourage anybody to hide, or to be anything other than who they are, but to know the context in which they are being themselves, and to know it well. I would say to brush up on, for any Black woman, I really want to figure out a way to do this but to brush up on organizational theory, and if they haven't' had it, or haven't had access or exposure to it, I need to figure out a way to get that to folks. Knowing how these organizations work, knowing why they work a certain way, is really empowering to a certain extent because you know what you're up against... If you sense, trust your intuition, that's another big one. You can sit with it, you can even question it, but trust it, trust that first gut feeling whatever it is because you're usually right.

The idea of being yourself with an awareness of the costs associated with what it means to be one's self cannot be understated. When taken together with the suggestions of Terry and Shane,

Troy's and Michelle's words underscore the idea that Black women should not have to first withstand pain and trauma as a prerequisite to a high-level position. Nor should they have to guess about the policies their institution enacts and the current structure of their institution as an organization. This concept of advancement without enduring abuse was a primary talking point for Ebony. Ebony offered the following to Black women:

> I would tell them that they're worthy and it's not of the pain that student affairs may cause but you're worthy of being at the table and you're worthy of the position you have and you're worthy – like you deserve to be where you are but you do not deserve to be treated a certain way, like you don't – don't let that older white VP talk to you however they want, like don't let people take advantage... And also, number one, don't let people use you… especially if you're Black and woke or to some people, they will tell you – like I advised the Black Student Union, I had opened the first gender neutral residence hall, I was like doing – you know training the campus… I was used in a sense and I – and in that second year I was able to *say no* a lot more. But don't do all the department trainings, don't abuse yourself because student affairs gives you life-- make yourself available to students, but don't give yourself to student affairs because they will take, and they will drain you and they will tell you that it's also okay because one day you're going to be that – you know the chief diversity officer, one day you're going to be the VP. That's not always realistic, it's not because people become VPs when their friends are in certain positions or when they work their behinds off and have so much mental and emotional stress in order to get there. So just know that they're worthy of a good career that doesn't hurt.

The idea that a career wouldn't be easy but does not have to hurt connected with several participants. This is not to suggest that Black women are asking for an easy workplace

experience. However, we are working towards a collective understanding of a SAHE workplace that does not require a level of sacrifice that Black women will spend years working to undo. Ebony further clarified that she wants Black women to know that you can both prepare and pivot at any point. Ebony explained:

> My professors still bring me back to speak and I tell people very honestly, listen, if you are doing this, don't stay if you don't have to. Like don't allow – like I wouldn't – in a sense they were taking advantage of us, especially us Women of Color and specifically Black women, people expect that that strong Black woman, you're going to be okay even though you talk about all the things that you know bother you and hurt you and X, Y, Z, you'll still be okay because you're a Black woman.

Ebony's commentary that it is okay to leave and we will still be okay as Black women is both a nod to the historical survival of Black women in the face of inequity but also of the community and support we have in one another. Ebony's reminder suggests Black women now, more than ever, can leverage the connections we share to go on to more supportive workplaces and fields even in the moments we feel unable or incapable of doing so. Ebony's recommendation aligns with Shane's narrative around money and finance. Shane spoke candidly about her struggles with finances and social class while serving in her preferred functional capacity. This led her to suggest Black women who are having trouble advancing in their preferred functional area to consider what it might look like to do the work they want in another area. Shane moved from equity and inclusion into housing and residence life but continues to have access to diversity and inclusion work through living learning communities and committees. This was significant for her as she took on the new role and the position offered more compensation than engaging in *traditional* multicultural support work. Shane explained of her current trajectory:

> I think it [student affairs career] took a little detour, but I still think I'm going toward the same destination. I never had worked in Res Life [(Residence Life)] prior to now; however, this does have a high diversity and inclusion component, but multicultural programming, so I am eager to see how my multicultural programming background can be an asset and built upon and how I can grow in other ways.

This detour offered Shane flexibility and freedom she mentioned not otherwise having due to her social class upbringing that was exacerbated by the low-pay dynamics of her previous workspace. That is, not only was multicultural work undervalued, but it also offered few opportunities for self and personal care as there was little money left after paying for expenses associated with living for Shane. By moving into a position that allows her more stability, Shane was able to better care for herself and make use of resources that can ensure Black women's longevity in the field. This directly connects to Troy's advocacy for Black women engaging in forms of care for self that require quality health insurance. Good health insurance, Troy posited, could and should be a means of having support outside of campus and that can allow Black women do something for their own health and on their own terms. Troy suggested that Black women:

> Get a good ass therapist. That's the other thing I was saying. If you have insurance, find some really good mental health provider because it sets a model for students also. You're caring for yourself and you're telling your students, "You need to go to the counseling center." It's easier to say, "I booked with her for 3 times a week, how many times do you think you can make it to the counseling center?" As opposed to, "You need to go because it's good for you."

Here, engaging in self-care practices are a way for Black women to not only ensure their own wellness but to also be able to stand before students as an embodiment of what care might like

look. Troy's advice is, then, a means of shifting the narrative around care from one that places the onus solely on individuals but also takes into account the cultural practices and models of support that may or may not exist. Jodie's advice fell in a similar camp in that she encourages Black women considering the field to take seriously their inner voices and ways of knowing. Where Troy suggests Black women have a real space to talk it out, Jodie would advise Black women to trust and then do something with those realizations. When reflecting back to where she was ten years ago and what she envisioned for her Student Affairs career, Jodie explained:

> Okay, let's see. Ten years ago, I was 22 and I was getting ready to go to grad school, I believe. I think I would tell that version of me to pay attention. Pay attention to what you really like learning about, pay attention to what you're comfortable with, pay attention to what challenges you and kind of be committed to taking in all of that information, being attentive to it. Because I think figuring out how you're going to react to it and what you need to do in a space to succeed and to drive especially when it's difficult, I think I kind of let that drop for a while and I didn't pay attention until it became a problem, but I think I should have been looking all along.

The importance of Black women paying attention here is complementary to advice around ways to improve and build upon one's competence. Paying attention, in this context, serves as a means for Black women to take stock of what their expectations versus their realities are in the workplace. From here, Black women can make informed decisions regarding how to continue or whether they will continue in this professional context.

The bulk of this advice goes back to encouraging Black women to make strategic decisions for themselves and to do so in ways that will lessen the potential for harm that might come to them. For Troy, this meant creating opportunities to get out of your own way and one's own head by opting to "Get out of town, where is the nearest metropolitan area that has Black

people and go there. If it's a drive, cool, now you've got a road trip." For Terry it looked more like making oneself as agile as their resume. Terry went on to advise Black women to:

> Set yourself up so you don't feel like you are trapped in this shit. I listen to so many people stay in higher ed because it's like, "We have good benefits, and we have all these days off." Okay, who gives a fuck. You don't even have time to take days off.... You don't even have time. You know what I'm saying? Who gives a shit? Or when you do take your days off, you're still on. I've sat in the Islands* and did phone interviews.

It is clear that Terry could not manager her own vacation time without institutional interference. As such, Terry's advice for Black women to ensure their success must take into consideration the institutional infrastructure to implement their practice. We can advise Black women to do any number of things but if the working conditions themselves do not allow Black women to develop intentional plans of action, this advice will be for naught. For all of the Black women in this study, there is a desire to see Black women take steps to prepare themselves for the demands of a higher education workplace that has not and most likely will not center Black women's experiences. This means Black women hoping to advance in SAHE will have the added burden of being tasked with self-development, self-preservation, and self-education so as to avoid misunderstanding the institutions they may become a part of.

Opportunities for institutions and employers to support Black women. Although participants offered significant words of wisdom for fellow Black women, there was not nearly as much for institutions and employers. Based upon the interviews and feedback from participants, it is safe to assume this lack of advice is not due to Black womens' failing to have suggestions, but an exasperation with the idea of offering solutions at all whilst knowing most campuses will continue to feign ignorance of how to solve these problems. Ebony, Jodie,

Claudia, Troy, and Michelle did offer some suggestions for how to facilitate support for Black women's career advancement.

Ebony spoke of ways mentors, supervisors, and leaders can help Black women to have a better experience by sparing them of advice that they need to stay in a position for a certain length of time when it is not a good fit. Although fit can be used as an intentional exclusionary practice (Ashlee, 2019; Browning & Palmer, 2019), the women in this study understood fit to be the actual inability to mesh and acclimate to the office setting be it through one's own standards or the office customs and practices as promoted. Ebony had a hard time envisioning herself as a SAHE mentor because of her refusal to advance outdated advice for and to fellow Black women. She explained, "not that I resent them [(mentors)] for it, but I definitely never want to do that to a person and make them feel like they have to stay in a shitty situation." Here, it was important for Ebony to have advisers that could rationalize and normalize the fact that she had agency in her employment situation. However, that did not happen and created dissonance not only between her and the institution but also her and her opinions of her mentors. Claudia's experience was similar to Ebony's, but she refused to wait for permission to go. Claudia noted, "you can leave. People often told me that you can't, and you can leave whenever you want to. There are no rules about leaving. You make them on your own. You decide." Here, she reinforces that there is a degree of agency in the decision to stay or leave. However, her advice also revealed how much of a privilege it is to even have mentors or people in your corner than can be both aware and willing to offer advice that it is okay to leave. Claudia broke it down plainly noting:

> First and foremost, you got to survey if they even exist, which is a sad thing to say. Who's of color on that campus? Who are going to be your people? And who are not? Be open, because people that should be your people may not be. A small example is, there's an assistant dean who should be my person. We are the same level doing very similar jobs

> and I feel like she ... for whatever reason, she's cold to me. She's one of those people like, "Oh, let's hang out." One of those. Meanwhile, the Black Dean in residence life, is my best friend right now. He's out here creating bias interventions for me, totally ... I would've never suspected ... I had a lot of bias, oh this conservative religious Black guy, because I have a lot of tension with that in my life… And yet he's my biggest ally. We're the coolest people. I think really serving ... and white people too. Who are going to be your allies, your people? And who are not and stay open to that and to really be patient, because people will show up in a way for you initially, either to exploit you, use you, work on their own agenda and then you fall in that trap and the next thing you know, you're screwed.

In this example, Claudia acknowledges ways that having campus connections facilitated a safer and more meaningful environment for her as she was able to build with people she may not otherwise have worked with as closely. This proves significant for campus leaders because it is an example of how creating the space for folks of color to connect and be able to find each other could help to minimize feelings of alienation, isolation, and confusion which in turn could help to retain more Black women. Claudia went on to reveal this when she suggested, "It's a lot of work, a lot of emotional labor to build your posse both on the campus and off the campus to thrive, but you can't without it. You cannot do this without people, and you have to be open that sometimes that support may have to come from people that may look nothing, may have very unsimilar [(sic)] ideas than you." Claudia's revelation, here, reifies the role of partners and outside stakeholders as an opportunity not only for institutions, but also for individuals. This is further crystalized by Jodie's suggestions that campuses take seriously the need for community not only amongst Black women on campus but also Black women and people who support us.

One way, then, for institutions and employers to help Black women is to set up conditions where they are able to have someone hold a mirror up to their situations and be honest and truthful. As indicated below, Jodie suggests Black women find their people, but that institutions take a more active role in helping to facilitate this process. Creating affinity and identity groups for practitioners to connect with people outside of the work is a meaningful way to provide support for employees. Jodie suggested that Black women should:

> I would say definitely find your people. Find your people both within the profession and then find people who you can talk to about higher ed that have no idea what you do. I find those usually valuable and I think that was a big part of how I struggled with my first position, was that the only people that I knew really well through those were the people that I worked with and I needed an outlet and I didn't have one. So, I would say find that group of people that get your work, but also find that group of people that don't get your work. I would say continue to kind of learn about what you like and what you're good at. Again, in the context of your position and outside it in case you need to leave for a reason because you can tend to need a little bit more of a head start kind of pushing out and doing something new.

The importance of having people outside is critical here because there are sometimes departmental norms and standards at odds with institutional practices which can only be validated by someone with a different view of your institutional context. The same is true of people from an entirely different profession. Claudia and Jodie reveal how having allies and outside stakeholders in your corner can facilitate a better overall workplace experience. Where *dysfunction,* as Shane earlier referred to it, is normalized in higher education, people beyond the SAHE scope can offer insight into navigating the confusion. Troy furthers Jodie's suggestions for developing meaningful space for Black women by noting Black women should:

Go meet other wonderful Black professionals in the area who are not doing your work, in addition to the ones who are. There's no need for you to only be around higher ed folks talking about higher ed, because you need that other interdisciplinary conversation to soak those ideas, to keep you motivated, to help you be able to talk fluidly among audiences, or with different groups of people with different interests. For me, one of the things that I did when I got to a small town that was predominantly white, that I had never been to before, my survival technique was to isolate. I just isolated and cried, and called my mama, and was, "What the hell am I doing here?" My mentors were helpful, but all of them were...you know, mentors are helpful, but I think having a couple of root friends, a couple of branch friends, and a nice solid connection to a hobby or a passion, or a spiritual or religious practice helps. Ultimately what I am saying is, self-isolating I would warn against because sometimes the workplace feels isolating already. So, if you're isolating yourself when you get home, and you've been isolated all day at work, sometimes that when I start popping up on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter because I'm mad. Making poor decisions, things like that, because I'm frustrated and I need to vent, I need to rant. I didn't do the best job of looking for online networks that existed already, Twitter accounts I could follow, people that I could hit up that were other Black women, who had been through this. I got lucky, I had [someone] that I could turn to after a while. But not everybody has [someone].

Here, Troy reaffirms the importance of outside tools and resources. Often times, there are people working to combat issues that are happening on their very campuses, but those services are not reaching people who need them due to silos, ineffective communication, and other break downs in information sharing. Campuses can be conduits to minimizing these issues by connected scholars and practitioners to one another so that the work being done in one area is not missed by

another. Thus, to make things manageable for Black women in SAHE while ensuring they are able to maintain healthy work balance, employers could offer Black women opportunities to engage something new and meaningful that is possibly already taking place. This is further contextualized by Jodie’s awareness that there are just some things an institution cannot offer be it a result of physical location or campus social dynamics. Jodie took away important lessons from each institution she served at but could have benefitted from institutions’ being willing to support Black women to and through SAHE even if it means losing them to another campus. Jodie acknowledged:

> Like the first institution I was at, I was there for a little bit more than a year before I realized the city and the surrounding area wasn't gonna work for me and I kinda needed to be around people that I was closer to and have a deep relationship with, which I didn't have there, but I needed that to figure out where I needed to be next. And then I think some of the experiences I had at my most recent institution, I needed to have to figure out all right, in the absence of real adult supervision and being resourceful, what does that teach me? And then being an institution that sometimes made me feel either tokenized or normalized, it was depending on the day and depending on the issue was then learned from that the effect of how I treat people, how will I process information and all those things.

It is clear from Jodie’s experience that there were things she needed but could not get from an institution. The quicker campuses commit to helping employees move on the better it can be for students and employees who remain on campus as it means more time to plan for transitions as well as more opportunities to identify cultural disconnects. Ultimately, Jodie’s experiences left her feeling tokenized and unappreciated. If her campus had taken seriously a commitment to Black women, they could have taken steps to connect her with other Black women on campus,

identified community resources that could be of support for her, and made plain what (if any) commitments might be made to increasing the number of Black women employed on campus.

Although much of the advice presented here offers opportunities for Black women to reflect, it also reveals the ways in which Black women are doing the work to retain and support one another often without formalized support structures. Though there is a commitment to having connections beyond campus, the onus of building relationships within, across, and outside an institution should not fall squarely on the Black women who need them. In fact, should campuses wish to combat Black women's push out and opt out, understanding how to facilitate better community for Black women would prove integral.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I reveal the findings from this research study exploring the individual and shared narratives of Black women who exercised the agency to opt out of SAHE careers after experiencing push out of the workplace. The findings from this study reveal that sistas experienced institutional and community betrayal; were expected to navigate workplaces where trauma, violence, and policing were norm; and sistas experienced inequitable pay, resources, and differential labor expectations on account of their role as practitioners. These findings were contextualized through participant's individual stories through which vignettes reveal media, pop culture, and other visual representations can serve to best describe what it felt like to be pushed out and have to opt out of a SAHE capacity. Each participant offered advice to Black women hoping to engage in SAHE work while. Others also added suggestions for institutions hoping to retain Black women practitioners.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

"You know you did something when the students are emailing saying they're proud of you for leaving." – Troy

In this chapter, I discuss the findings revealed in Chapter Four and explicate concrete strategies institutions and individuals alike can employ to decrease the number of Black women experiencing push out and ultimately decided to opt out of SAHE. These findings are situated within the literature discussed in Chapter Two and utilize the constructs established in Chapter Three. I begin the chapter with *Yes, Us Too*, a reaffirmation of the goals for this study, complete with reflections and acknowledgement for and to the women who graciously shared their stories with me. I also include for readers the words sistas shared with me about what it meant to be a part of a research study like this. I choose to start here as part of my researcher responsibility and Black feminist praxis because I know this work, no matter how insightful, exists because of the experiences and commitment to sharing of those represented throughout these pages. I then move into a note of appreciation for the participants in this study as it is neither easy nor simple to recall moments of trauma and hurt for research purposes. The discussion of the findings and implications for higher education leaders, researchers, scholars, Black women, and allies follow to broaden the understandings gleaned from these inferences. I close with recommendations of future research exploration and concluding thoughts.

The purpose of this study was to explore Black women's experiences with push out as a contributing factor that ultimately led to their opt out of higher education workplaces. I took it upon myself to examine the experiences of Black administrative professional women, because

often Black women's stories are limited to those of students, though somewhat recently discussions of Black women faculty have become more commonplace. There is some peer review literature specifically examining Black women administrators in higher education (see: Bertrand Jones, Scott Dawkins, McClinton, & Hayden Glover, 2012; Bower & Wolverton 2009; Clayborne, 2006; Fields & Martin, 2017; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Sobers, 2014), but an overwhelming majority of the research examining Black women administrators rests in unpublished dissertation studies. Moreover, not nearly enough that examines the realities of what it means to become a Black woman advancing the ranks of higher education administration workplaces and the experiences associated with that upward trajectory. Not nearly enough literature examining what we as Black women must endure exists, and there is certainly not enough that centers Black women's ways of knowing and the counter spaces we develop.

Yes, Us Too: Black women's Experiences Deserve *Real* Examination

My dear sistas, thank you. When I set out to do this project, I wanted to reveal how Black women administrative professionals experience push out in the workplace and how it impacts our decision to opt out of higher education workplaces, and the field all together. This desire was rooted in my own experiences of having served in workplaces where within a year of being there professionally more than 80% of the Black women in campus professional positions (non-teaching) had overturned. Whether I was in the Mid-West, or in the South, the mass exodus of Black women administrators, including myself, was continuous and ongoing. This work led me to each of you and to an opportunity to write a narrative that clarifies how and why these issues continue. You all gave me everything I needed and served as a reminder that it's not just me or I'm not *tripping* as we often say in the Black community.

To keep it real, I was scared that my intentional use of "sistas," "we," "us," "our," and "I" and "me" as intentional writing choices would alienate readers or confuse people who do not

understand us. I ultimately let that go when I decided this was another way for me to center your narratives and to compliment them with my shared experiences as necessary. Even the way I chose to write this letter to you, amidst my findings, is informed by a sista (Lacy, 2017) who has reimagined what it means to center Black women's circles of being and knowledge in academe. As Black women who have self-labeled ourselves as *over-achievers*, hard-working, competent, (overly) qualified, and well prepared among a host of other descriptive terms, it was important for me to write the words that follow to you. To show honor and respect for who we are and how we show up as Black women in this world who love(d) what our time in student affairs and higher education meant for us and our students.

Throughout this research journey together you, my sistas, shared appreciation for what this project means and how it felt. I include your words here because it was in moments where I found myself upset reading through your transcripts, where your negative stories made me cry, or when the moments of good that made me sad that you may no longer work with students that I was reminded to *press my way*. More than this, I share why you, the very people whose stories make up this study, believe it to be important as a nod to the fact that this work—even if I pass a dissertation defense or my University says it is okay would be a failure without your approval and your recognition. That all of you think this study is important and that I have done right by you is what matters to me most. People reading the findings in Chapter Four will assume this work is important to me because I was the person who *wrote it*. But I would correct them and remind them that my findings are merely a way that I have recounted your stories. As such, this work is important because it includes your narratives and because you all were kind enough to share them with me so that I can share them with the world.

I was moved when Ebony articulated appreciation for having an opportunity to share her words authentically, even with *profanity*. That she could do this without hesitation appeared almost sacred when she expressed to me:

> I appreciate the space that you're also giving people because I can – I think your research is going to help the people before they have to go through all this other stuff. I think it's – I appreciate the fact that I can be authentic, I can curse a few times, my bad, but to have that authentic space of like, this was – this was real, it was traumatic, and I'm not going to say that it wasn't.

The narratives you have all shared deserve the language you used to describe them, and I would not have this any other way. I was reminded of this in my connection with Troy who connected deeply with the aims of this research as a Black woman doctoral student herself. For Troy, the significance of this work could not be understated because she knows the findings will enable us as Black women to have a resource or citation to share with Black women who emerge in the field. I cried listening to your words and reading them on the transcription—

> If I could say anything else, I would say, I really hope that your research turns into, not just one book, but a series of books that, like an edited anthology even, that we can gift to someone. That we can gift to our mentees, and our sponsees, and the future. Not as a way to burst their bubble professionally, but as a way to say, "This is real, this helps." You can be your least authentic self and it will happen, you can be your most authentic self and it will happen. How do you recover? How do you heal? That is the part that I think, not only is it part of your work, is, once this has happened to you, whether or not you chose to be great enough to leave that situation, or whether or not you had enough time behind you, what is that healing after? Did you get PTSD from that situation? How do you heal from that? What do you call that? What does that look like? What does entering

> the market look like if you feel you have been Blacklisted as that Black woman? So yeah, that's where I am at in my head, if I could add anything. I am looking forward to the way that your research will grow and expand, and hopefully we'll all just be waiting in line to get our copy signed.

That you entrusted me to use your stories and know that they are deserving of a full-length book is not lost on me. As I look back to the moment Claudia let out a deep sigh before expressing gratitude for the interview process, I realize the shared connection I have with each of you and you all have to each other is real. It was a privilege to use this interview space as an opportunity to allow Claudia to think seriously about what she experienced and to come to realizations around what it means for her to work in a new place. Hearing your voice through the words on the page was a reminder of how unique research by and between Black women can be—

> It was very cathartic. Made me very, very grateful. My current situation now, I mean, I literally was ... me and [supervisor name] went into our feelings last week, we were like, "We just love our job so much." We were both just really ... it makes me really appreciate, without any baggage and healing that I needed to do for [last campus], it was really a good start for that. Yeah, I'm good. A lot of that's behind me now.

Like the other sistas in the study, Michelle, you reminded me of what it means to nudged to consider a terminal degree. That you were enthralled to see me studying this topic despite learning the impetus for this work was my own negative experience brought me to tears. I often came back to your words in moments of trouble—

> I've had so many friends that went through the process and they say, okay, well when are you coming along? I said, that’s okay, I'm good where I'm in and unfortunately, I'll have to give up the dream of being a dean because the majority of the dean positions you need a PhD and I said, you know what, I just know who I am and I embrace that and I know

> my discipline is not going to work. So, when I saw your topic, I said, you know this is such a wonderful topic where'd she come from with it. I applaud you and I just want to say congratulations and keep your chin up and to know that you had – your first experience was negative, wow. Not cool at all. Not cool.

All of these words and all of your stories have made it possible for me to not only start but to also successfully finish this dissertation project. Because of each of you, I am a better scholar, researcher, Black woman, and friend that I ever could have imagine. I know that while the development of the findings in Chapter Four were a month's long process, that they would have proven even more difficult if not for your kindness. And because you were all generous enough to offer these words and this degree of trust into me without yet knowing where this project was headed, I offer my deepest gratitude to you.

As you know, much of the advice to women and Black people comes across as just that—suggestions for Black men and white women often leaving those of us who are *brave* to exist at the intersection of both simply sitting. Across the board, we have watched as research funding and diversity programs have targeted Black men often leaving Black women to fend for ourselves along with the expectation that we, too, show up for the men. It's unfair. As sistas who dared to serve in academe adjacent roles, who labored for students, colleagues, and institutions outside the classroom and even sometimes within, we deserve much more support than we've gotten, and your narratives presented here make that clear. Through this project I vow to never allow higher education to forget how Black women have been and continue to be treated in SAHE. I vow to share your journeys and the winding roads you've traversed as examples of how Black women remain committed to making higher education more accessible for everyone despite being placed in positions that make it hard for us ourselves to remain.

In our many *many* moments of discussion, it became clear to me that each of you took seriously what it meant as Black women growing older to care for ourselves. To put ourselves first and to prioritize self-care and wellness. No matter how people sets expectations of us to labor for them, the totality of your words and this text stand as a reminder that we can say no. That what we bring to the higher education landscape is often unmatched not only because of our brilliance, but also because we move through the world from multiple subordinated identities that gives us a unique lens. I am thankful for each and every interview moment I had with you all. For the times you said things to the effect of, *yes Brittany that bitch really did say that*, or *these muthafuckers got me fucked up* and together we knew what that meant. Though none of you interacted with each other, you will see in reading Chapter Four that your stories are intertwined. That the violence we withstood in higher education workplaces was not unique to us nor even about us—but instead an indictment and representation of what these institutions value and choose (not) to care about.

The decisions you all made to opt out inspire me. They validate that I didn't deserve to be called an "ungrateful little bitch," that it was okay to say *girl bye* to a workplace that didn't deserve me, and further clarified how none of us are required to endure pain in order to show institutional commitment or to be seen as having value. As you continue to work in #SArogue workplaces, government, non-profits, better institutions of higher education, and consider moves to K-12, know that I am beside you. That the time and energy you have invested in your higher education career path does not need to neatly fit within a Dean of Students title or need to take place within this world we call student affairs and higher education. Know that the time and energy you expended as part of this project is, too, among one of the most meaningful things I have ever done in my life. To share your stories, your wisdom, and your will to live and lead even when those paid to behind you resent you are the very things that have propelled me to

today. I exist before you a better sista, friend, scholar, woman, researcher, and aspiring ally because of your presence.

Discussion and Implications

The findings from this study revealed how eight Black women navigated instances of push out that led to their decision to opt out of higher education workplaces. These actions indicate the sistas in this study endured frustration and anger around expectations of how they show up as Black women at work, institutional and community instances of betrayal, breaking points in the decision to opt out of the workplace and concluded with sage advice for Black women currently within or aspiring to join student affairs and higher education. The culmination of these larger constructs revealed that Black women's ability to see where they were and how they were versus where they are and wished to be was particularly clear when developing images and vignettes about their higher education experiences. Moreover, the sistas in the study lacked the necessary space to care for their own wellness, negotiated demands of labor and expectations that were often counterproductive for themselves, endured issues of pay (in)equity, misogynoir in supervision and workplace dynamics, and tokenization.

Digital Communities Help, But Nevertheless, Trauma Persists

Issues with retaining Black women in student affairs are documented (Bertrand Jones, Scott Dawkins, McClinton, & Hayden Glover, 2012; Patitu & Hinton, 2003). However, digital and social media are shifting how Black women come to understand and contextualize their workplace experiences. From the hashtags *#BlackWomenatWork* to *#WeAreAllSerena*, sistas everywhere are discussing how they navigate workplace trauma and violence. The same was true of the women in this study. Across the images sistas used to describe what it felt like being pushed out of SAHE, more than half of all the women used images from popular culture. Those who did not, developed images on their own or took pictures that were reminiscent of the

language associated with the aforementioned hashtags. The realization, upon creation of their vignettes, that not only are the women in this study connected to other sistas enduring similar issues within SAHE, but also that of how we depict Black women in media and film and Black women in other industries. Black women's redefinition of what is acceptable and tolerable in the workplace is informed by our own senses of self, increased opportunities to express agency, and a shifting national public conversation around Black women at work (Cokley, 2018; Greaves, 2017; Porter, 2017). The totality of the images sistas put forth within this study begs the question: what would it look like for Black women to navigate the workplace without first experiencing trauma?

The trauma they identified was continuous and ongoing. Even as sistas left the workplaces where they endured hurt and pain, they have continued to carry these experiences as forms of emotional and social baggage, so much so that they themselves have come to realize the anguish they feel around potential enduring hardships like the positions they pushed and ultimately opted out of is impacting their ability to connect with colleagues. This was particularly salient for Claudia when she acknowledged struggling to see work as a space where one could develop familial style connections. This poses a threat for the sistas in the study given the significance of the ability to connect, feel supported, and be included with others in the workplace (Bartman 2015; Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Henry, 2010) can have serious impact on how the sistas begin to build their community, social support, and position themselves for further advancement. The sistas in this study who had opportunities to serve in workplaces outside of higher education experienced dissonance with self-care as they often came to realizations that higher education did not facilitate opportunities for self-care. For Jodie and Michelle in particular, the higher education workplaces they worked within could utilize self-care language in abstract and theoretical ways, while their workplaces outside of higher

education instituted policies and practices to actualize the concept of self-care. This gave them the space and opportunity to take time for themselves when difficult situations arrived at work—something that was not prevalent during their formal SAHE practice.

It’s Top Down and Pervasive: Struggles with Supervision and Leadership

Struggles with supervision and leadership proved salient across sistas in this study. Though there is documented research in SAHE revealing the role of *good* supervision in improving retention and outcomes (Tull, 2006, 2011), the women in this study often failed to experience it. The sistas in this study were forced to not only engage in actions of *supervising up* but also for being the point person for students, fellow staff, and external stakeholders on issues of diversity whether their role was formally a part of diversity education or another functional area. The desire to *do right by* issues of equity and internal sense of doing what is considered *right* by historically minoritized communities exacerbated the sistas struggles in the workplace. Commitment to improvement along the lines of equity and inclusion meant the women in this study overworked themselves, often in hopes for further compensation, but ultimately and almost entirely resulting in burn out.

The totality of these issues contributed to compounding feelings of institutional betrayal. Not only did the women in the study have to be everywhere for everyone, then, but they also had to do other colleagues’ work because campus leaders were uncomfortable with holding people accountable for failing to meet the demands of the workplace. This issue was not about whether the sistas in the study had the talent to do the responsibilities assigned or if they could, but rather the expectation that it was okay for white men in particular to be lazy and to fail to do their job while Black women were doing the demands of their roles of the both of them.

Feelings of isolation and tokenization were particularly prevalent. Previous scholars attributed the need for Black women seeking to advance to senior positions to understand

tokenization as part of the process (Sobers, 2014). The women in this study, however, not only named their experiences with tokenization, but called attention to ways campuses can meaningfully connect with them so as to minimize this practice. Tokenization often manifested for sistas when the campus would promote or center them when convenient, but routinely ignored their advice and suggestions. The women in the study often attended events, workshops, activities, and even were assigned additional duties particularly when they were externally facing. This meant events with press, publication, or when families and parents would arrive to campus the sistas in the study had to participate as a means of displaying greater campus representative diversity than that which is actually present on campus.

The problem of tokenization exacerbated community betrayal for the sistas in the study. Where previous research suggests collegial environments can be helpful for ensuring retention (Mullen, Malone, Denney, & Santa Dietz, 2018), many of the women in this study balanced having to respond to colleagues who would see how hard they worked and simultaneously diminish it on account of it being identity politics. More than this, there were moments where other folks of color engaged in misogynoir practices towards the women in the study making it difficult for them to do well. Many of the folks of color who engaged in egregious acts such as suggesting *picking cotton with a* smile or being *okay* with students trying to engage in violence towards them as Black women staff seemed to care more about the good of the institution than the experiences, safety, and inclusion of the sistas who participated in this study.

Forget You, Develop and Pay Me

Professional development remains important for workplace advancement (Liddell, Wilson, Pasquesi, Hirschy, & Boyle, 2014; Wilson, Liddell, Hirschy, & Pasquesi, 2016) and yet many of the women in this study reported difficulties with the ability to engage in such forms of self-improvement. These struggles were often attributed to lack of financial support by their

campuses and home institutions. Discrepancies in who receives professional development opportunities and how professional development funding is distributed limited the sistas potential for further improvement. Sistas were not able to stay abreast of emerging trends and issues in the field beyond the scope of their campus, nor could they enhance their current skillsets to facilitate upward trajectory without professional development support. These issues contributed to feelings of inadequacy for some sistas and annoyance for others. Like the lack of funding for professional development, lack of funding to live and inequitable pay were big issues for the women in this study.

The women in this study were not only underpaid for the roles they served in and institution types, but they also made less than colleagues on their very same campus who held less responsibilities than them. This concept of overworking Black women in SAHE is documented (Logan & Dudley, 2019; Marshall, Gardner, Hughes, & Lowery, 2016; Smith, 2016) but does not get at the human capital loss of such actions by campuses. Many of the women reported growing into their willingness to defend themselves and their decision making around what they would accept for salaries because of finding out how campuses treated mediocre white men, for instance. But this did not decrease the number of times Black women were tapped.

Often, campuses would make increased responsibilities seem like a reward for doing well in the workplace but would not accompany such increases with changes to salaries and titles. This meant campuses were gaining much more from the sistas who worked there than they themselves could from the work environment when accounting for overworking and burnout. Previous scholars have how that interest convergence is an almost sure way to ensure Black people, and thus Black women have a better shot at getting what they want and need within the current structures of workplaces and schools (Delgado, 2002). However, as shown from the

women in this study, such shifts and changes fail to happen and if they do, they are necessitated by their announcement of their departure more than any serious effort to try and retain them.

Prioritizing Wellness: Acts of Political and Social Resistance

Like previous wellness research on SAHE practitioners broadly (Anderson, 2015; Burke, Dye, & Hughey, 2016; Miller, 2016), the problem of self-care in the SAHE workplace was a significant point of contention for the sistas in the study, as was the expectation that they deal with acts of violence. In some cases, many of the sistas internalized feelings associated with these issues leading them to rationalize their own mistreatment even when they knew it was through no fault of their own. The sistas in this study often remarked that they effectively should have known better or lamented how it makes no sense to trust institutions, but this does not take away from the ways their mistreatment is commonplace. The women in this study said, in no uncertain terms, that they were leaving SAHE workplaces and even the field as a whole as a direct result of supervisory and colleague failures. This was also true of the expectation that they endure physical harm, alongside the emotional and mental harm they had already endured. That these women said *no more* was not only an act of self-preservation, but an engagement of political and social resistance (Stewart & Williams, 2019; Lacy & Stewart, 2019).

Stewart and Williams position decisions like those of Shane who engaged in policy breaking to prevent participating in a situation that could further bring her physical harm as a form of subversion that falls within Black activism traditions (Stewart & Williams, 2019; Lacy & Stewart, 2019). At the core of these sistas' prioritization of wellness and safety is *activism* because the ability to opt out is inherently disruptive to the imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy system that demands Black women place themselves last.

Even When Leaving, We Maintain Each Other

Though the struggles of the sistas in this study are clear and explicit, so too, is their awareness of the role of community in helping them to maintain before making decisions to transition or opt out of the workplace. This extends scholarly conversations acknowledging Black women's roles in retaining one another that exists for Black women administrators as well as faculty (Fries-Britt & Turner Kelly, 2005; Patitu & Hinton, 2003) This is equally true of the sistas awareness of and sense of commitment to Black women who will follow them and/or replace them at institutions where they have been wronged. Many of the women in this study left their campuses in better shape than they found them. This included the creation of transition documents and leaving behind contact information for others who take over their roles to reach them. As the realities of leaving sank in, they also would often connect with Black women across the field in an effort to maintain connections to make easier transitions in SAHE-adjacent work or for those who had left at all as a means of staying in touch with how things are going. It is clear, then, that the sistas in this study continue to support Black women's success even when they have made decisions to leave the field.

Opportunities and Implications

This study has both opportunities and implications for practice, research, and theory. Many of these opportunities and implications have been explicated by the sistas themselves who offer suggestions to fellow Black women as well as institutions and institutional actors. The women in this study suggested campus leaders must work to suspend personal bias, implicit and explicit, in order to support Black women individually and collectively. This was particularly significant for Shane and Ebony who battled to prove to workplace colleagues who they were and what they stood for because they were often seen as extensions of the Black women before them. Not only is it unfair to hold Black women accountable for the actions of others, but it

creates a dynamic where sistas may no longer wish to engage in the workplace because their humanity is not considered. More than this, Terry and Troy suggested institutions work to combat assumptions that Black women are to be our campus saviors to the point that they neglect themselves. The idea that a Black woman's time was owed to her workplace and not her own, even when she is off the clock, contributed to negative feelings about their respective offices and institutions for the women in this study.

The sistas in this study advised new Black women practitioners to protect their time, peace, and energy. This was particularly salient as many of the women failed to have control of their own schedules and saw this as a way for supervisors and institutional agents to exert control over how they moved through the workplace. Not only would this serve to prevent burnout but allow sistas to make decisions within their own best interest throughout the workday. The sistas continued with words of caution for Black women new to SAHE to steer clear of strong Black women tropes and stereotypes. The threat of these issues proved significant as every woman in the study expressed a degree of frustration around inconsistent expectations, the ability to take time for one's self, and to center one's individual and collective experiences within their own campuses. The insights sistas suggested offer institutions opportunities to self-correct the ways they engage and facilitate Black women's development. They also offer opportunities for individual leaders on campus who can serve to disrupt the perpetuation of harm Black women are expected to endure. In addition to the ideas presented by the women in this study, I offer additional implications for practice and research.

For practitioners. Practitioners in student affairs and SAHE whether in leadership, or not, can serve to improve working conditions for Black women. Given Critical Race Theory's critique of structural issues and intersectionality's role with drawing attention to how structures do not account for the violence Black women experience as people minoritized along the lines of

race and gender, I offer several suggestions for structural changes. The first is to support Black women with developing meaningful connections to other sistas across campus. For campuses without faculty and staff organizations designed to facilitate support across identities, developing one for and in conversation with Black women would prove useful in ensuring Black women have connections beyond their areas of focus. This can not only aid sistas with being able to remain in the SAHE workplace, but also to leverage their connections for advice, mentorship, and support without fear of retribution. Moreover, having a list of internal and external support networks could not only help the sistas hoping to remain in SAHE, but also show a concerted institutional effort to not only recruit but also to retain Black women. More than this, such groups could serve as spaces where Black women are supported and groomed for campus leadership and advancement to help contribute to the diversity of higher education leadership so that our campus leaders finally reflect the diversity of our student bodies. Though I recognize the aforementioned suggestion requires additional labor by Black women, I would recommend campuses consider including recognition for Black women's efforts through additional compensation, titles, and acknowledgment in annual evaluations. I also recognize the plethora of Black women who acknowledge that this added burden benefits intuitions but also view this work as an integral to who we are as Black women (West, 2018; West & Jones, 2019).

The necessity of external opportunities to coalesce cannot be understated. For Black women in remote locations, on campuses with smaller populations of Black women, and areas where it may be easier to identify the person who raised a concern even if someone brought it forth for them, online and digital counterspaces would prove useful (West, 2018; West & Jones, 2019). Though Terry and Troy, for example, were the only sistas in the study to identify as doctoral students as well as practitioners, campuses may wish to have a listing of resources such as *SisterPhD, First Gen Docs, Cite A Sista*, and *Black Women PhDs* to offer the Black women

practitioners on campus of which a byproduct is to also have resources for graduate students. Such resources should be compiled and made readily available by University leaders. For the women who served only in full time roles and/or already held terminal degrees, external support networks like the *Millennials in Student Affairs* community, *Cite A Sista*, and *BlkSap*, may become sources of comfort and community. Not only are these groups (inter)national, but they also offer Black women serving on campus opportunities to engage practitioners at multiple levels for professional and interpersonal advice.

Stronger partnerships with therapists and counselors of color are another way for institutions to show support to practitioners through practitioners (Burke, Dye, & Hughey, 2016). By this I mean ensuring campus leaders and supervisors are aware of the *Therapy for Black Girls* network or can at least provide resources for how to find a counselor of color on and off campus would prove helpful in supporting Black women with engaging in wellness and self-care. More than this, allowing and encouraging time for Black women to see a therapist, including during work hours after busy seasons could also show the importance of mental and emotional health in the workplace. This is not to suggest that everyone should take paid three-hour therapy appointments on a weekly basis but encouraging employees to go home early or to schedule appointments after times of high stress in the office could serve to minimize antagonism or resentment towards the office.

Practitioners and campus leaders can also serve to better support sistas in SAHE workplaces by widening conversations around employee retainment and the contributing factors to opt out across the institution (Malone, Denney, & Santa Dietz, 2018; Smith, 2016). Examining trends in turnover within specific functional areas and across campus broadly can reveal the institutional acts of push out that contribute to opt out and turnover as much as they do individual instances. Taking an introspective look at campus culture would allow campus leaders to

understand why opt out and thus turnover are happening, thereby facilitating opportunities to strategize campus specific tactics to slow and prevent further workforce reduction. Furthermore, campuses can minimize the unsustainable financial and social costs associated with hiring and retraining new Black women practitioners for the same role at each school by choosing to take seriously supporting Black women professionals in place. This is not only helpful for the sistas serving on campus but also to institutions from a human capital standpoint.

All eight of the sistas in this study reported frustrations, antagonism, racism, misogynoir, or some combination of all of these things with direct supervisors. This suggests that Black women opt out of workplaces not only because of the campus structure itself but because of the human aggregate of the campus. Because Black women experience implicit bias, discrimination, and harassment in unique ways on account of our subordinated race and gender identities (misogynoir), improving and increasing training and development for supervisors around these issues can serve to improve the human condition. More than this, training supervisors and campus leaders on the negative effects of singular identity perspectives can facilitate widening awareness around Black women's positionality and further underscore the scope of Black women's SAHE struggles on account of being both Black and woman.

More than trainings and workshops, campus leaders and supervisors can take seriously their diversity commitments by tying these issues directly to performance evaluations, merit pay increases, and other rewards associated with collegiate employment. This takes the onus off individual Black women to fit into a particular office culture that may not be welcoming and instead forces everyone to take on a role to bring them into the fold. Though it is subjective and difficult to scale diversity in performance, prohibiting the further shuffling and continued employment of supervisors who have contributed to increased turnover of specific types of people, namely Black women, could prove useful to advancing this goal.

Lastly, Black women practitioners already serving in SAHE and those who are struggling in SAHE can also work to help themselves. Many of the women in this study felt isolated and alone in their experiences, but attending conferences, engaging in digital communities, having people to rely on to ask *is it just me* could prove useful in ensuring one's development and advancement. We, as Black women, must call for institutional change and simultaneously work to invest in ourselves and one another. This means reaching out when a new Black woman is on campus as well as creating and taking up space together. We must both demand better treatment and also realize we cannot rely on institutions to serve our needs when they were not designed with us in mind. The totality of the suggestions here are both structural and interpersonal thus aligning with the core tenets of CRT, with attention to intersectionality given Black women's positionality.

For researchers. This research study offers several implications and opportunities for researchers. For one, it is easy for people to ignore Black women in the workplace by positioning the collective failures of an institution as the responsibility and problem of us as individuals. Researchers can examine trends in Black women's hiring, promotion, and movement within SAHE to offer not only data on when, where, and how often Black women leave but to also provide data driven solutions for campuses. Many campuses prioritize data and scholarship over individual stories. By examining issues associated with Black women SAHE administrators, researchers can develop literature that will serve as evidence or *proof* of the realities Black woman know to be true but go unnoticed without scholarly support. Moreover, such data could allow us as student affairs scholar practitioners to ascertain whether there are certain institution types that impact Black women in ways worse than or more than others; what types of support structures facilitate Black women's success?

Researchers can further advance awareness of Black administrative professional women's plight in SAHE through centering the experiences of Black women in scholarship. Often, research is published with small sample sizes and limited representations of Black women professionals. Making concerted efforts to include Black women in broad higher education research, but particularly things related to career trends and retention, can serve to paint a more holistic narrative around Black women's workplace navigation and journeys. This research would also have implications for Black women faculty should scholars studying problems of Black women in higher education take seriously their inclusion of Black women graduate students and emerging faculty. This means doing research with Black women, in and outside of academe, and not just on us. Or as Dr. Joan Collier described it, *"Do justice by them [Black women] or keep your hands off of them,"* as a nod to ensuring data-driven research on Black women is also mutually beneficial for Black women's advancement (Collier, 2019).

More than this, researchers should consider encouraging Black women practitioners and people who aspire to ally with Black women practitioners, or those with a vested and committed interest in our success, to produce scholarship and knowledge. It is important that we, as student affairs educators, place a value on the bodies of work Black women produce outside of tenure and tenure track positions. One way researchers can further this is to use their cultural, social, and institutional capital to provide avenues for Black women in academe-adjacent (or SAHE) roles to be able to share their narratives on their own terms, to study their narratives within their own knowledges, and to have this scholarship taken seriously.

Lastly, scholars must take seriously the knowledge production and content Black women produce. This means in addition to doing research with and centering Black women, we must also consider utilizing theories based on and for Black women as well. This is a practice I included within this study, despite the number of men gaining credit for *Critical Race Theory*,

for example, I know that Patricia Williams and Kimberle Crenshaw were as integral to our current day understandings of CRT as Derrick Bell. We must not only, then, talk about theories Black women develop about Black women, but also those Black women develop with a broader lens and scope as they often offer critiques inclusive of Black women's experiences.

Recommendations for Future Scholarship and Exploration

There are several research strands for scholars to consider based upon the findings from this study. Methodologically, researchers should consider the nature and uses of counter-narrative as a way to push against master narratives in higher education. Often, researchers lament the difficulties of trying to study phenomena that resist the current structures in place as there is often a lack of language and structure to do so. Counter-narrative offers this as both a method and methodology and should be fleshed out more explicitly in qualitative research journals. Moreover, that counter-narratives falls within the narrative research tradition, it can allow scholars to illuminate stories and ways of knowing that have been central in historically marginalized communities but long considered to not be *academic enough.* This practice not only subverts the idea of what research is but can stand to allow researchers to force academe to answer the question: for whom is research and scholarship and who gets to produce knowledge? This would prove useful across research disciplines but would be particularly useful for scholars engaging in critical and resistive commentary and projects.

Given the permeation of issues with supervision throughout this study, future scholars should consider developing a quantitative instrument designed to examine the role of *isms* (e.g., race, sex, class) in supervisory relationships and their influence on decisions to leave the workplace. Such an instrument could be used to examine supervision within and outside of higher education and allow for large scale data sets to be developed not only about Black women, but across the board. This would allow scholars to compare and contrast across identity

lines and even across age groups, institution types, and other confounding factors. The issue of institution type in such a development would prove particularly salient here as all the women in this study experienced push out and made decisions to opt out across varying campus types, but those at liberal arts institutions, for example, reported what appeared as a particular type of violence towards Black women who also identify as queer. Moreover, as the contexts and campuses vary so must the support services implemented to facilitate Black women's success. Such changes must be based in a shared understanding but also apt for further refinement based upon campus type.

Another area scholars may wish to examine are the attitudes and perceptions of Black women themselves. The concept of internalized oppression and working through such experiences and attitudes are integral in Black identity development (Cross & Frost, 2016). However, it would behoove researchers to examine internalized misperceptions around Black women's identities that are based in both a history of internalized perceptions as well as perceptions of strong Black woman stereotypes and tropes. Future research examinations should explore Black women's larger attitudes around workplaces contributions to determine what role internalized perceptions play in how Black women approach workplace burn out. Another way to examine this, particularly for sociologically and cultural studies scholars, would be exploring how Black women discuss and understand pain as a relative byproduct of serving in a workplace. This would allow researchers to better understand Black women's narratives and willingness to endure workplace mistreatment at a higher rate than others. The same research studies could, then, not only reify the existence of differential expectations as shown within the findings presented here, but also reveal how Black women place such standards and norms upon one another. Such data would also prove relevant to other Communities of Color.

Issues of health and wellness proved significant for the sistas in this study. Given this as well as the anecdotal evidence and previous discussions held at annual meetings for ACPA: College Student Educators International and NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education that Black women practitioners are dying at younger ages as they move up in the SAHE ranks, this area is deserving of examination. A closer look at how Black women's inability to care for themselves and fully engage in wellness practices may be linked to health issues that result in early onset of cardiomyopathic events and other trends that disproportionally effect Black women's expected lifespan (Allen et. al., 2018; Gee & Ford, 2011; Moore, Chaudhary, & Akinyemiju, 2017). Black women who have been in community with Black women SAHE administrators who have passed away develop different understandings of health and wellness within this field. Speaking with women coping after experiencing such losses, or near losses for women whose lives were thankfully saved, may reveal how those new understandings have taken shape. This is a complex topic—but complexity should not determine whether this work is doable.

The totality of the studies and areas for future research identified here would contribute to our overall understanding of systemic and individual acts of oppression in SAHE as much as they offer insight into specific institutional actions. Moreover, these areas of research would force institutions to confront their role as a larger factor in the development of workplace environments that do not benefit Black women. This means institutions can no longer write Black women's experiences off as being the result of individual experiences or caused by a singular person alone. There are many more areas, beyond those identified here, that deserve further inquiry related to this topic. However, those listed here align with the larger themes from this study and could contribute to immediate changes across the field of SAHE.

Study Bounds

Lacy (2017) proposed discarding language associated with *study limitations* when critically researching Black women as such a concept would dishonor participant's narratives. I utilize Lacy's (2017) language development of study bounds here out of respect to my research paradigm and personal perspectives as a Black feminist critical scholar (Collins, 1999). To say it plainly, the language of limitations was developed in a positivist, deficit lens and does not belong within this scholarly work (Lacy, 2017). However, I acknowledge this study was not inclusive of the totality of multiple intersecting identities Black women in SAHE might hold. Though I aspired to include Black trans women, none participated in this study and they remain a population deserving of further exploration. Moreover, a greater emphasis on the nationality differences amongst Black women could also prove useful in understanding how Black women navigate push out and opt out experiences and decisions. Additionally, I offer the following acknowledgements of ways I could improve upon the current study: (1) better examination of how participants perceived the impact of their sexual identities in their workplace experiences; (2) improving the data collection process by allowing prospective participants to remain under consideration for study inclusion until data collection is complete to minimize the issues associated with attrition; (3) greater exploration among institution types, regional location, and campus endowment and resource allocation could also shed light on Black women's experiences. Nevertheless, these findings offer insight into Black women's push out and opt out experiences.

Concluding Thoughts

This study utilized a counter-narrative approach to explore the experiences of Black women administrative professionals who endured push out and ultimately decided to opt out of SAHE workplaces. To examine these experiences through a critical lens, this study operationalized critical race theory and intersectionality to better understand the push out

experiences Black women endure that often lead to their decision to opt out of SAHE workplaces. These findings were further undergirded by Black Feminist Epistemology, thereby allowing me to authentically engage in a reciprocal knowledge production process with the sistas in this study. In fact, it was my undertaking of a Black feminist epistemological stance that enabled me to center Black women's communal ethos and name them as sistas as much as I label them as *participants*. This contributed to the comfort of the women in the study with sharing the reasons they opted out of higher education workplaces as well as the will to recall instances of push out they were expected to endure. Across Chapter Four, the reported data were examined through an intersectional critical race perspective inclusive of a Black feminist epistemological underpinning.

The data revealed that eight Black women made the decision to opt out as a resistive political response to institutional acts of push out that included but were not limited to issues in pay (in)equity, differential labor expectations, misogynoir in supervision and promotion, inability to prioritize wellness and health, and tokenization. Critical race theory as a structural critique proved particularly useful in the sections on institutional and community betrayal as those were often tied to institutional policy and actors on behalf of institutions. Intersectionality offered nuance throughout the findings and discussion in Chapter Five as the Black women in this study experienced further minoritization in the workplace on account of their subordinate race and gender status. Moreover, it provides context for how Black women are expected to expend labor and accept lower pay than others in the workplace reifying a stereotype that Black women should *just be happy* to have employment at all. These shared and individual narratives the sistas in this work expressed further our understanding of not only student affairs and higher education workplace conditions but also the most pressing concerns Black women have that

contribute to a SAHE workplace decrease of Black women administrators. The total impact of these findings and their implications cannot be understated

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

Push out/ opt out Experiences of Black Professional Women in SAHE

Researcher's Statement
I am asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you electronically.

Principal Investigator: *Darris R. Means*
Counseling and Human Development Services
dmeans@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to explore factors contributing to the opt out and push out of Black women from Student Affairs and Higher Education (SAHE) positions of leadership and administrative professional capacities.

Study Procedures
Participants will be asked questions about their experiences with being pushed out or opting out of a SAHE workplace.

Participants will begin by expressing interest in the study upon reviewing the flyer and associated text leading to a Qualtrics study. From there, a demographics and eligibility form will be completed (without including identifying information). Eligible participants will be scheduled for the first of two 90-minute interviews via Skype and/or in person. Upon completion of the first interview, they will be tasked with completing short vignettes regarding their push out and opt out experiences. Participants will then participate in the final interview. After each interview, participants will be sent transcripts to review for accuracy. Upon data analysis drafting, participants will receive preliminary findings to confirm emergent themes.

Risks and discomforts
Psychological risks: If you are not comfortable discussing race, gender, the intersection of the former, or potentially hurtful experience in the workplace, you may experience some discomfort or stress during the interview process. We will recommend that you seek counseling and support through your employer sponsored insurance or school should these emotions fail to subside.

Please ask to skip any question that you do not feel comfortable answering and the researcher will not probe any further.

Benefits
While there are no direct benefits to participants, there are many potential opportunities for the fields of Student Affairs and Higher Education: (1) Information gathered during this research may inform career counselors, higher education and student affairs faculty and practitioners, and multicultural affairs officers, (2) these findings may provide context for the question "what is contributing to the significant overturn among Black women in our field" often heard at annual meetings of our largest professional associations (ACPA and NASPA); and finally, (3) the knowledge gathered can inform professional praxis and standards as career development, mentorship, and leadership pipelines become a greater area of focus in higher education and student affairs.

Incentives: Participants will receive a 10.00 gift card at the completion of each (2) interview.

Audio/Video Recording
Audio recording will be used during interviews so that interviews can be transcribed afterward. Recordings will be kept in a digitally locked file. After transcription, recordings will be kept on file until the final study has been successfully defended (anticipated in March 2019). Upon defense, audio recordings will be erased and only de-identified transcriptions will remain.

Privacy/Confidentiality
Collected data will be kept confidential. Participants will choose or select a pseudonym to protect their name. Information that directly identifies participants (ex. name, email address) will be kept in confidence on a typewritten separate electronic document until 7 years after study completion. Researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law. This research involves the transmission of data over the Internet. Every reasonable effort has been taken to ensure the effective use of available technology; however, confidentiality during online communication cannot be guaranteed.

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

If you have questions
The main researcher conducting this study is Dr. Darris R. Means an Assistant Professor of College Student Affairs Administration at the University of Georgia. Brittany M. Williams, a Doctoral Student in College Student Affairs Administration will also serve as part of this study. Please ask any questions you have now—all questions are good questions. If you have questions later, you may contact Dr. Darris R. Means at DMeans@uga.edu or Brittany M. Williams at Brittany.Williams26@uga.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:
To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must electronically date and sign (type) on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form and have had all of your questions answered.

Enter your signature here:

Enter the date here:
Enter your email address here:

[check box] Check here to indicate you (1) identify as a Black woman; (2) currently or recently (within the last five years) serve(d) in a full-time student affairs and higher education capacity; (3) have served or currently served in a predominantly white work environment when the experiences contributing to their push out took place; (4) opted out or felt pushed out of a SAHE position or workplace; and, (5) are at least 21 years of age.
[If box is not checked, will skip to end saying participant does NOT qualify for the study.]

Page 2 of Qualtrics

I am pleased that you would like to contribute to this research study on the push out/ opt out experiences of Black professional women in Student Affairs. Moving forward, I will address you in emails, phone, etc. by your pseudonym (anonymous name for use in the study). Please enter that name, any name of your choice, below.
Enter name here:

[check box] Check here to indicate you (1) identify as a Black woman; (2) currently or recently (within the last five years) serve(d) in a full-time student affairs and higher education capacity; (3) have served or currently served in a predominantly white work environment when the experiences contributing to their push out took place; (4) opted out or felt pushed out of a SAHE position or workplace; and, (5) are at least 21 years of age.
[If box is not checked, will skip to end saying participant does NOT qualify for the study.]

APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

- What social identities (e.g. race, class, gender, etc.) are most salient to you and why?
- What is your age?
- What is your nationality?
- Where is your hometown?
- What is your primary language?
- How would you identify your social class?
- How would you describe your sexuality?
- What is your parent's or guardian's highest education level?
- What functional area(s) do you currently (or most recently) serve in?
- What is/was your most current student affairs/ higher education title?
- What is/was your most current student affairs/ higher education institution type?
    - E.g. Public, Private, Mid-Sized Liberal Arts, etc.
- What is your highest degree earned?
- In what field was your highest degree attained?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview One

- Tell me about your background and what led you to student affairs?
- Talk to me about your current/ most recent student affairs role—what did you do?
    - What were the dynamics of the institution you served in?
    - How would you describe the social and cultural environments of that office?
    - What identities are most represented?
- How do you perceive your social identities, namely being a Black woman, in the workplace?
- How would you describe serving at a predominantly white institution as a Black woman?
    - What types of actions are rewarded?
    - What types of behaviors are shunned?
- How did you navigate your office environment?
    - Is there a reason you navigate(d) your workspace this way?
    - How would you describe your workload?
    - What were your relationships like?
- What were the events that led up to you leaving or considering leaving your role/ the field of student affairs?
- How and why did you decide leaving the field of student affairs (or your role) was your best course of action?
    - What types of thoughts did you have about your decision to leave?
- What do you attribute to your decision to leave?
    - Describe the impact, if any, this decision had on your career, work, and professional relationships.
- What messages did you receive around your decision to leave?
    - How did you filter through the messages you received around this decision?
- What did it feel like going from thinking about leaving/ moving/ changing positions and/or jobs to actually doing it?
- Who were the people you trusted in your process to leave?
    - What made these people trustworthy?
- Is there anything else you wish to share?

Interview Two

- Is there anything you've wanted to share since we last met?
- In our last interview, you described your initial workplace expectations. Tell me how, if at all, these differed from your realities in PWI spaces?
- What would you attribute to the differences between your expectations and your reality in a PWI SAHE workplace?
- I want to shift away from the decision to leave, I'm curious about what you're doing now. Where are you currently professionally employed and what do you do?

- Is this connected to student affairs?
- Talk to me about your vignette, what led to what you shared with me?
- Based on your vignette, I noticed XXXXXX [tailored question based upon their writing responses].
- Looking back on your decision-making process, are there any things you would change or do differently?
    - Why or why not?
- If you were to offer advice to Black women currently navigating or hoping to navigate a predominantly white student affairs workspace, what advice would you offer?
- Is there anything else you wish to share?

APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Name	Age	Social Class	Functional Area(s)	Recent Title	Campus Type	Sexual Identity	Other Salient Identities
Shane	30	Lower Middle-Class	Diversity & Inclusion; Residence Life	Assistant Director; Area Coordinator	Public, Midsized	Hetero-sexual	
Sara Renee Fireball	33	Working Class	Diversity & Inclusion	Diversity and Inclusion Coordinator	Public, Large	Queer	
Troy	27	Upper Middle-Class	Diversity & Inclusion	Assistant Dean of Students and Director of Multicultural Services	Private, Midsized	Queer	Chronically Ill; Doctoral Student
Ebony Mitchell	27	Lower Class	Residence Life; Dean of Students	Residence Hall Director	Public, Midsized	Queer/Bi	Christian
Jodie	31	Middle Class	Leadership Programs	Assistant Director for Student Activities	Private, Religiously Affiliated	Hetero-sexual	Immigratio n Status
Claudia	37	Upper Middle-Class	Diversity & Inclusion	Assistant Dean of Students	Small Liberal Arts	Queer	Terminal degree holder
Terry	34	Middle Class	Residence Life	Associate Director for Residence Life	Public, Midsized	Hetero-sexual	Fat; Doctoral Student