Living, learning, and leading from the middle: African American women administrators in student affairs

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LIVING, LEARNING, AND LEADING FROM THE MIDDLE:
AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN ADMINISTRATORS IN STUDENT AFFAIRS

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Melinda R. Jones Anderson
March 2014
LIVING, LEARNING AND LEADING FROM THE MIDDLE:
AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN ADMINISTRATORS IN STUDENT AFFAIRS

by

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Approved March 2014 by

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Dedication

31 But those who wait on the Lord
Shall renew their strength;
They shall mount up with wings like eagles,
They shall run and not be weary,
They shall walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40:31
New King James Version (NKJV)

I want to first give honor and glory to God, who is my father for through Him all things are possible. This seven year journey was wrought with challenges, personally and professionally, but I was also blessed with unexpected surprises and shown love from places I could have never anticipated.

Part of me is defined by my relationships - wife, mother, daughter, sister, friend, mentor, mentee and colleague. I want to first thank my husband, Christopher Anderson, who has made this journey possible. He has given me all the love and support that I have needed and the tough love that I didn’t realize that I needed at the time. I love you, you are my best friend, a great husband and an amazing father. To Ashley and Caleb, you are the reason why I kept pushing so hard. Your mommy loves you. To my father, mother, brother and sister – Melvin, Bobby, Michael and Michelle – I love you with all my heart. You have inspired me to always be the best that I can be, pick my head up when I am down, and to always take care of myself because there is only one me. To my friends, mentors, mentee and colleagues – You mean the world to me! Thank you for praying for me, cheering me on, and keeping me in your hearts and minds whether I was in the valley or on the mountain top.
The seed for researching African American women in student affairs was planted a long time ago as I moved out of my undergraduate experiences into my graduate experiences. I have been blessed to know many dynamic African American women in student affairs that were always in the back of my mind when I decided to embark on this topic. There are two special women that I would like to thank individually. For my introduction into the field, Alicia Marbury Aroche: Thank you for giving me new life that day. You listened to my heart and showed me how to fly. My first supervisor Felicia Keelen: Thank you for empowering me with a strength I didn’t know I had and for the reminder to always be who I am. Blessedly, but unfortunately, there are too many to name individually but I have been blessed by all of those I have come in contact with, not just women or African Americans, but all who are extraordinary student affairs professionals. Thank you, thank you, and thank you.

Lastly, I want to thank those members of my family who are always with me in my heart. My family roots grow deep in the south – Florida and Mississippi – even though I am born and raised in the Commonwealth of Virginia. I know who I am because I know who you are. I love you.
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Abstract

This qualitative study examined the career progression of African American women mid-level administrators in student affairs. A conceptual framework that integrated Career Advancement Factors (Coleman, 2002) and Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) was used to analyze the narratives of nine participants. The major findings of this study are that African American women mid-level administrators in student affairs are negotiating their careers by developing mentoring relationships, developing a professional skill set, earning a doctoral degree and navigating institutional politics. They believe their career progression has been impacted by their race and gender albeit in varying degrees. Race was perceived to be a factor by all women whereas gender was perceived to be more of a factor based on their student affairs area. Not all women were actively trying to move up to a senior-level administrative role and were content with their current position. There was a notable difference between the new mid-level administrators (5-10 years in student affairs) and the seasoned mid-level administrators (11 years or more). Seasoned mid-level administrators had a greater level of self-awareness that was used to make important decisions about the future of their career. These findings have implications for practice and for considerations for future research.

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"The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any."

- Alice Walker
African Americans have historically seen education as a pathway to elevate one's status in American society (Jones, Dawkins, McClinton, & Glover, 2012). African Americans, particularly women, have viewed education as a vehicle to change their station in life by increasing occupational choices and improving their overall economic opportunities. By increasing financial security, African American women provide for their families and secure a future for their children. Despite the barriers of racism, sexism and classism, three significant forms of oppression, African American women continue to move forward and are steadfast in the struggle for racial and gender equality (Collins, 2001; Glover, 2012). Black women in the U.S. continue to display their courage, strength and resilience by taking advantage of educational opportunities. Black women’s enrollment and degree completion rates have continued to increase since the early 1900s (DeSousa, 2001).

Researchers have argued that institutional cultures and campus climates at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) are perceived to be more welcoming to students of color than Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) (Brown & Davis, 2001; Hurtado, Milem, and Clayton-Pedersen, 1999). HBCU’s missions are dedicated to serving marginalized groups; however, the majority of students of color are attending PWIs. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2004) approximately 84% of African American students attend PWIs. When compared to their White peers, African American students are more likely to perceive a racially hostile climate on campus (Baber, 2012). Institutional leadership in PWIs can address concerns regarding
culture and climate which are critical to supporting retention and persistence of African American students, especially African American women.

African American women's enrollment and completion rates in higher education continue to increase (DeSousa, 2001) creating a pool of applicants who have an opportunity to compete for leadership positions in higher education administration. For example, in 1990 Black women represented 7% of all students who completed a bachelor's degree and this number has increased to almost 12% in 2010 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2011). African American women who hold leadership positions within higher education have helped to increase enrollment and persistence of Black women, especially in predominately White institutions (PWIs) by serving as role models, advocates and mentors (Jones, 2001; Paitu & Hinton, 2003).

Even in light of increasing enrollments for African American women at PWIs, establishing relationships and engaging within the campus community can present challenges when trying to assimilate into their campus environments (Barber, 2012). These challenges can result in isolation and disconnection from the institutions which can adversely affect retention and persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The presence of African Americans in leadership roles, to include faculty, administrators and staff, in higher education institutions has been connected to increasing retention and persistence of all African American students (Tinto, 1975; 1993).

Despite increases to the applicant pool because of more qualified candidates, African American women have struggled to ascend to senior-levels of leadership in higher education administration (Jones, 2001). Exploring the career progression of African American women in mid-level positions can shed more insight on the issues,
challenges, and opportunities that may support or prevent African American women from ascending into senior-level administrative positions. Mid-level management was targeted because this level is often the role administrators serve in prior to ascending to senior-level administration. This qualitative study examined the career progression of African American women mid-level administrators in student affairs.

**Statement of the Problem**

Limited research exists on African American women's career progression in student affairs, especially at the mid-level positions (Blimling, 2002; Dadonna, Cooper & Dunn, 2006; Engstrom, McIntosh, Ridizi & Kruger, 2006; Jackson, 2003; Jackson & O’Callaghan, 2009; Taub & McEwen, 2006). Unlike academic affairs, administrative career paths in student affairs remain unclear. With no defined career path to senior-level administration, student affairs professionals are often left to navigate this course on their own (Young, 1990). This lack of well-defined career paths becomes problematic because it can be difficult to identify opportunities or make informed decisions that positively influence career progression.

Konrad & Pfeffer (1991) stated African American women are frequently hired into mid-level management positions but not as often into senior-level management positions. Konrad & Pfeffer (1991) have highlighted an issue, moving from a mid-level administrative role to a senior-level role that needs to be explored. Senior-level administration is where many institutional policies and practices are created and a greater level of influence remains. This is an important implication because research has identified that the presence of African Americans in leadership roles aids in the retention and persistence of African American students (Tinto, 1975; 1993). Lack of diversity
within the top levels of leadership can have a direct impact student success because of its influence on policies, procedures, culture and climate.

Institutions that lack diversity in senior-level administrative positions run the risk of neglecting or underserving their stakeholders who benefit from the perspectives inclusion and diversity can bring. Organizational theory and business models helps to create an argument for inclusionary practices. The theory of representative bureaucracy suggests that organizations function more efficiently and effectively if the characteristics of leadership reflect their constituents (Jackson, 2004). From a strategic imperative perspective, diversity within higher education institutions helps to attract students and workers from increasingly diverse and competitive markets (Miller & Toma, 2011). These frameworks have been used to highlight the importance of having administrators reflective of the student body demographics, particularly in supporting Black undergraduates toward graduation.

The National Center for Educational Statistics (2011) reported that Black student enrollment from 1979 to 2010 has increased from 9% to 14%, but degree completion has not made the same gains. The percentage of Black students completing bachelor degrees in 1999 – 2000 was 9% and only increased to 10.2 % by 2009 - 2010. These numbers suggest that retention and persistence issues are still a challenge and higher education institutions need to continue considering additional strategies and opportunities to increase retention of African American students. Understanding the career paths of African American women administrators can bolster efforts to increase the number of professionals who can aid in supporting student success.
Previous research studies on African American administrators in higher education have focused on recruitment, preparation, and hiring of practices in order to understand the challenges and opportunities in the profession (Engstrom et al., 2006; Jackson & O’Callaghan, 2009; Taub & McKwen, 2006) but do not fully address pathways to senior-level administration in student affairs. Little research has been conducted on understanding career progression of African American women in student affairs, especially those seeking to pursue senior-level management positions in student affairs (Gardner, 2008; Hernandez, 2010). There is a substantial amount of literature on administrators of color in academic arenas (Jacobs, Cintron, & Canton, 2002; Perna, Gerald, Baum & Milem, 2007), but there is limited research available that specifically addresses career progression in student affairs administration especially at the mid-level (Diggs, Garrison-Wade, Estrada, and Galindo, 2009; Taub & McKwen, 2006). Current research does not fully address career progression of administrators of color who have achieved Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO) positions (Biddix, 2011).

Likewise, the research literature does not adequately address race and gender factors that create dynamics that can be challenging for African American women who have a desire to progress to senior-level administrative positions. Qualitative approaches to understanding this problem provide an opportunity to reveal more information about the personal experiences of African American woman administrators in students affairs while lending their voices to the growing body of literature as researchers attempt to better understand the complex nature of career progression.
Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the career progression of African American women mid-level administrators in student affairs at 4-year, predominately White institutions (PWIs). The central focus is to better understand how and why African American women continue to negotiate their careers in student affairs and to comprehend their perceptions of the impact that race and gender have on their career progression. The term negotiate is defined by Merriam-Webster to mean to get over, though, or around (something) successfully. This study is looking to see what actions or behaviors are being used to successfully move through the mid-level position to advance to a senior-level position.

Career development includes elements that are outside of the scope of this study as the goal is to understand how African American women are advancing in their current career path and not how they have selected and managed their career decision throughout their adult lives. Sargaria & Johnsrud (1988) define career progression as the advancement of an individual into employment positions with increased responsibilities. Career development is a holistic approach to understanding individual’s career choice and management of their career decisions embedded in their life span (Farmers & Associates, 1997). The decision to explore career progression over career development allowed the opportunity to focus solely on the participants’ experiences as they have moved forward in their chosen career path.
Significance of the Study

Increasing diversity is the aim of many institutions of higher education (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006). Many positive benefits of diversity in higher education have been frequently identified (Konrad & Pfeffer, 1991; Gurin, Lehman & Lewis, 2004). Scholars in defense of diversity and support of racial equality in higher education frame their support on the idea that diversity is a core value in higher education as it has societal and individual benefits (Gurin et al., 2004; Miller & Toma, 2011). A more diverse student body often results in greater gains in learning, especially for social outcomes such as citizenship and working well with others from different backgrounds (King, 2011).

Providing direction and strategy for institutional leadership in higher education as it relates to the recruitment and retention of people of color in significant leadership roles at colleges and universities can make an impact. Another noteworthy trend in higher education provides significance for this study; as retirements increase in higher education, the demographics of senior leadership will change. Doyle (2008) wrote that in 1988, 35% of tenured faculty in public comprehensive institutions were older than 55 and by 2004 the figure increased to 46%. Based on this trend, today’s 2014 figure has likely increased, and little has been written on the true impact of retiring senior leadership in student affairs. Ensuring stability in top-level administration is essential in meeting the challenges of student affairs work. This changing of the guard provides an opportunity to make strides for institutional leadership to reflect the diversity found within their student body, staff and faculty.

This research adds to the literature for career progression, mid-level administration and African American women leadership development in student affairs.
The complexity of moving from mid-level to senior-level management (Young, 1990) was explored in addition to delving into the intersectionality of gender and race. Collins (2000) writes "Through the lived experiences gained within their extended families and communities, individual African American women fashioned their own ideas about the meaning of Black womanhood" (p.13). Collins (2000) statement highlights the importance of African American women perceptions of themselves within the world. These perspectives are critical to the study.

The stories of African American women administrators who are living, learning and leading from the middle adds a small yet significant piece of the puzzle in understanding how African American women perceive the impact of their gender and race on their career progression. How the participants see and understand themselves in relationship to how the world sees them is an important contribution to scholarship. By providing an opportunity to redefine known challenges or discover new ones that may persist in the pipeline to senior-level administration, other women who are living in similar situation can learn from their experiences and lead themselves in a new directions.

The next section provides context to better understand the development and evolution of the student affairs profession. Student Affairs is in constant partnership with academic affairs and has become essential to providing the support necessary for student success. The role student affairs' plays in the overall student experience are vital to maintain desired performance measures (retention, persistence) which are highly valued by higher education institutions.

**Background.** The student affairs profession was born under the philosophy that higher education institutions have an obligation to consider the whole student (Lloyd-
Jones, 1938; NASPA, 1983). These philosophical underpinnings address the physical, emotional, social, vocational and moral development of a student (Young, 2003). During the colonial era, faculty taught, lived and disciplined their students (Nuss, 2003). The co-curricular activities of students began to blossom leading to more administrative support during a time where American higher education was being influenced by a German university model (Nuss, 2003). This shift in focus led faculty to withdraw from matters outside of the classroom to perform more research in their respective disciplines (Rudolph, 1962).

Institutions responded to these changes by appointing other administrators to oversee issues related to students (Rudolph, 1962). The Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 were important legislation as it led to an increase in the participation of women and minorities in higher education which helped to solidify the development of the student affairs profession (Nuss, 2003). The need for a Dean of Women's role to guide young women who were entering higher education was an essential position that assisted in the development and support of women and provided opportunities for women in administration.

In 1926, the American Council on Education (ACE) sponsored a study on the personnel practices in college and universities creating the Student Personnel Point of View (1937). The Student Personnel Point of View listed 23 aims that support students affairs functions currently found on most colleges and universities to include orienting students to their educational environments, administering student discipline, providing adequate housing and food services, assisting students with finding employment, and carrying out evaluation and assessment to improve these functions and services. The
Student Personnel Point of View (1937) provided solidarity about how these services should be coordinated, improved and advanced for the future.

As today's campuses continue to become more diverse, student affairs leadership is critical to growing and sustaining student success and cannot be left up to chance but rather dictated as a result of strategic efforts. Student affairs units are critical to the support and development of all students who attend higher education institutions but especially those populations (women, people of color) who have historically been excluded, marginalized and oppressed in American society. By being intentional with growing leadership, institutional leaders can ensure that student affairs leadership will continue to meet the needs of its students. Student affairs leadership implements practices that support the essential tasks student services units provides (NASPA, 1983).

**African American women in student affairs.** As more American higher education institutions became racially integrated, the presence of African American women student affairs professionals at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) was welcomed as their presence provided a support system for students of color who might characterize their institutions as having *chilly climates* (Glover, 2012). Many Black students were introduced to the profession based on their interactions and influences with these administrative positions (Glover, 2012). Student Affairs programs and events are important to the retention and persistence of students in higher education, especially to those populations who are at-risk for early departure (Freeman, 1997; Howard-Hamilton, Phelps & Torres, 1998; Hughes, 2001). Current student affairs practices support diversity and inclusion on campus and are essential to institutionalizing culture that is accepting of all aspects of student, faculty and staff diversity (American Council Personnel
Association [ACPA], 2012). Student Affairs professionals are aware of the benefits of a
diverse workforce based upon their unique position and scope of responsibilities within
higher education (Pope, Mueller, & Reynolds, 2009). Endorsing diversity within student
affairs is in line with the ethical principles of the student affairs profession (ACPA,
2012). Student affairs departments play an important role in addressing multicultural
issues to include cultural centers, women’s centers and diversity workshops (Pope,
Mueller, & Reynolds, 2009).

**Career progression in student affairs.** Mid-level management is one of the most
important yet least respected levels in student affairs administration (Young, 1990).
Rosser (2004) writes that mid-level leaders are often unsung because “their contributions
to the academic enterprise are rarely recognized” (p. 317) despite their level of training
and commitment to excellence and high standards in their areas of expertise. Mid-level
management is often thought of as nebulous and difficult to define (Young, 1990) as
these positions are not uniformly captured by specific titles and can exist in different
levels of hierarchy. For the purposes of this study mid-level management will be defined
as follows: an administrator who manages professional staff and one or more student
affairs functional areas. The mid-level position is not one which a professional would be
qualified for without professional experience and a Master’s degree. A mid-level position
is not an executive or cabinet-level position such as a Senior Student Affairs Officer
(Young, 1990).

This study focused on mid-level administration for three distinct reasons. Mid-
level administrators are often overlooked as a group to study which is typically the step
prior to senior-level administration. Understanding the dynamics of mid-level
administration is important when considering issues related to retention and upward mobility. Mid-level administrators are generally dedicated to their career in student affairs (Young, 1990) and have acquired a lot of practitioner knowledge and skills that may leave if their aspirations and goals are not realized (Rosser, 2004). This is also a point where some administrators fail to move forward for a variety of reasons (Young, 1990). The third reason is related to the critical nature of this level of administration because the majority of student services are implemented from this level of leadership. The program and services in student affairs are essential to maintaining retention, persistence and academic integration required for student success.

Career literature in student affairs focuses largely on entry-level administrators and senior-level administrators. Mid-level administrators are often overlooked but are the largest group in student affairs administration (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Mid-level positions are challenging because they are neither institutional leaders nor serve on the front lines (Mather, Bryan, & Faulkner, 2009). The research questions that guided this study were designed to explore the dynamics of African American women negotiating mid-level administration in student affairs and to capture the perceived impact race and gender have on their career progression.

**Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following questions:

1) How do mid-level African American women administrators in student affairs negotiate their career progression?

2) How do mid-level African American women administrators in student affairs perceive the impact that their race and gender affect their career, if any?
The first question addressed the process or behaviors that mid-level administrators employed as they progressed in their careers. This approach was helpful by not assuming that a professional’s goal was to advance and allowed the participant to identify their reasons to persist or not persist to a senior-level position. The second question highlighted any perceptions that African American women had about the impact of their race and gender on career progression.

**Positionality.** African-American women administrators in student affairs have inspired my passion and commitment to this field. Many of them recognized something within me and encouraged me to grow and become a leader in whatever area that would be a fit for me. I have journeyed through different areas in student and academic affairs. Over my 13 years in higher education I have served in academic advising, student activities, housing and residence education, and most recently academic advising again. I have worked in different academic institutions to include a large four-year urban research, community college, and a small public liberal arts school. My desire to grow and become a model administrator has not been met with leadership opportunities that I assumed I would have had based on my time in the field.

Early in my own career progression, I thought perhaps higher education was not for me and I left to work in the private sector. I quickly realized how much I missed being on a college campus and reached out to colleagues for help finding a position to return to student affairs. After a few more years of wanting to grow into new leadership roles with unsuccessful results, I considered that maybe I do not have what it takes. Finally, one night I realized that my new journey should take me back to graduate school because I felt there I would have an opportunity to learn about more about higher
education administration, leadership and planning. As I pursued my doctoral degree I have realized that my classroom experiences have had a positive impact on my professional development. I dove into the literature on African Americans in higher education administration to find strategies and to understand challenges and found my story and those of my mentors who held mid-level management positions were absent.

The literature focused on faculty, academic administrators and senior-level student affairs administrators but what about mid-level administrators in student affairs like me? Do we all feel trapped? Is there something about being Black and female that provide different leadership challenges that I need to overcome? Have I misunderstood the path to senior-level administration in student affairs? This study’s focus on mid-level administration will provide guidance to myself and others about challenges moving through the middle and provide reassurance to those who felt lost like I did and questioned their ability to advance in the promising field of student affairs.

I recognize that I will have my own personal biases while conducting this proposed study. I kept a researcher journal to check for my biases, assumptions and acknowledge those subjectivities while conducting my research (Ortlipp, 2008). This allows me to come back and make sense of my interpretations at a later time. The study will use several key terms that can be defined differently based on how someone has come understanding them through their various experiences. By defining the terms and describing how they are operationalized in the study, the chances for misinterpretation will be reduced. The interpretations of key terminology used in this study are provided below.
Definitions of Key Terms. The following definitions are listed below to provide context on how they are operationalized in this study.

**African American or Black** – represent those persons of color who identify as Black, African American, African, Caribbean, or mixed race persons who identify as Black and currently reside and work in the United States.

**Career Development** – holistic approach to understanding individual’s career choice and management of their career decisions embedded in their life span (Farmers & Associates, 1997).

**Career Progression or Advancement** – progress of an individual into employment positions with increased responsibilities and/or compensation (Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1991).

**Entry-level student affairs professional** – college or university employee with frequent, direct student contact and are usually responsible for student programming and usually have no supervisory responsibility for full-time professional and/or support staff (Burkard, Cole, Ott, & Stoflet, 2004).

**Mid-level student affairs administrator** – college or university employee who has supervisory responsibilities for full-time professional and/or support staff in one or more functional departments. Position titles include Assistant/Associate Director, Director, Assistant/Associate Dean, or Dean (Young, 1990).

**Negotiate** - defined by Merriam-Webster to mean to get over, through, or around (something) successfully.
Professional Development – formal or informal activities, programs and events designed to increase your skill set and professional competencies for your current position or the next stage in your career trajectory (Young, 1990).

Senior-level student affairs administrator or Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO) – a college or university employee who is the highest ranking student affairs administrator who is responsible for managing the student affairs division and is primary advocate for students, oversees programs and services, and policies for students that supports the educational mission of the institution (Sandeen, 1991). Position titles include Vice President or Associate Vice President.

The key terms listed above are defined to clarify how they will be operationalized in this proposed study. The conceptual framework guiding the study and directed the analysis of the findings are explained in the following section.

Conceptual Framework

Two concepts contributed to the framework of this study and served as a tool for analysis of the findings: Career Progression and Black Feminist Thought. Coleman (2002) developed an assessment that found seven factors that influenced career progression of African American women in student affairs in colleges and universities in Alabama. The second, Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) will be used as a lens to further explore and analyze issues of gender and race in the career progression of African American women in mid-level student affairs positions. The term Black Feminist Thought is used instead of Black Feminist Theory because this is the specific name used by Patricia Hill Collins (2000).
Career Progression.

Coleman (2002) developed an instrument that identified 27 Likert scale items that addressed career progression factors for African American student affairs administrators in Alabama. This survey was given to administrators serving in PWIs in addition to HBCUs. Coleman’s (2002) study identified the following areas that were perceived to be barriers for African American women career progression: lack of overall networking opportunities, lack of mentor opportunities by other African American women, education credentials, isolation, gender bias, and how society perceived African American women. Coleman’s (2002) quantitative research efforts have informed my qualitative design and provided a framework in which to analyze the results of my interviews. Her research will be discussed in greater detail in the methodology section of Chapter Three.

Black Feminist Thought

The conceptual framework is also guided by the tenets of Black Feminist Thought authored by Patricia Hill Collins (2000). Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) is an ideology focused on U.S. Black women’s experiences and brings attention to the racism, sexism, and classism that they encounter in society. Scholarship produced by methods informed by Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) is centered on African American women as intellectuals (Collins, 2000; Harris, 2007) and is ultimately concerned with creating an environment and capacity for significant change and social justice advocacy.

Born out of the feelings of exclusion that Black women faced in early feminist movement, Black Feminist Theory (Collins, 2000) and methodology provides analytical tools, theories and methods that address the complexity of Black women’s lives and places it at the center of an academic agenda (Banks, 2009). Intersectionality, often
discussed in conjunction with Black Feminist Thought (Banks, 2009), provides a framework for analyzing all forms of identity impact social, economic, and political life that are theoretical facets of Black Feminist Thought (Banks, 2009; Crenshaw, 1991). Concepts of class, race and gender intersectionality engages identity (Banks, 2009). In considering Black Feminist Thought and intersectionality as lenses for this study the following considerations were made.

Black Feminist Thought is a better lens for this proposed study due to the desired approach to analyze findings. Intersectional analysis recognizes socially constructed spaces with biological connections but does not essentialize identity markers such as gender and race (Banks, 2009). Intersectional analysis assumes there are lived consequences for personifying particular biological features however understanding Black and women as socially constructed spaces with changing contexts (Banks, 2009) is essential to the production of Black Feminist scholarship which empowers the Black women’s voice that this proposed study is trying to accomplish.

An additional issue that makes intersectionality problematic as a lens is due to the current debate amongst Black feminist scholarship. Alexander-Floyd (2012) wrote about how intersectionality works to marginalize Black women as producers of scholarship because postmodern feminist approaches to understanding identity suggests that everyone has ruptured identities and fragmented bodies (Gillman, 2010). This approach threatens Black women’s authority on Black women’s subjectivity as intersectionality de-legitimizes the study of racism, sexism, and structural bases of inequality (Alexander-Floyd, 2012). Due to the challenging position that intersectionality takes on in
scholarship by being perceived as subjecting the power of Black women’s voices, I made the decision to use tenets from Black Feminist Thought.

Together economic, political and ideological forces have worked effectively together to suppress the ideas of Black women intellectuals. Denying African American women credentials to become literate during slavery has slowed the progress of Black women as a group from holding positions as scholars, teachers, and authors contributing to their inability to lead such organizations that validate knowledge in social institutions like college and universities Collins (2000). Compounding factors (economics, politics, and controlling images) that have worked to oppress Black women in America will inform the analysis to be used to understand the oppression felt by the participants in this proposed study.

Economic oppression is connected to the exploitation of Black women’s work when enslaved that supported the southern economy (Collins, 2000). Historical exclusion from intellectual work has unnaturally tipped the balanced resulting in high numbers of Black women who have been relegated to work outside of intellectual realms into impoverish situations (Collins, 2000). Political dimensions of oppression stem from historical actions when African American women did not have the right and privileges extended to White males like the ability to vote, hold public office, or receive equitable and fair treatment from the judicial system (Collins, 2000). Controlling images like mammies, jezebels and breeder women—originated during the slave era—continue to contribute to the oppression of Black women as sometimes the very nature of their being is looked down upon in society (Collins, 2000). Black Feminist Thought’s tenants will be used to analyze any evidence of oppression that participants may feel in their experiences
and to ascertain and evaluate the perceptions African American women may have about how their gender and race impact their career progression.

Many African American women in higher education tend to struggle with isolation, insecurity, and feelings of invisibility and believe that they have no voice among their colleagues (Hughes & Hamilton, 2003). This feeling of being an “outsider-within” by Collins (2000) encourages African American women to seek support networks and friendships whenever possible. While these strategies may work for some, it is important that Black women’s experiences in mid-level administrative positions in student affairs be examined based on intersections of race and gender in order to further develop more strategies that help to remove feelings of isolation, replacing them instead with a spirit of empowerment. Career progression factors address movement through careers but do not fully address the undercurrents that become complicated with gender and race. Together both concepts create a holistic approach to comprehending the career progression of African American women in mid-level administration in student affairs. My conceptual framework is illustrated by the model below:

Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework

Conclusion

My study examined the experiences that African American women in mid-level administrator positions in student affairs to determine how they are moving forward in
their careers. By exploring this topic with a qualitative research approach, their voices are contributing to the research by filling the gaps that quantitative methods cannot. The research questions provided an opportunity for rich dialogue and the conceptual framework was designed to keep African American women the focus of the study. The purpose and significance of this study will fill in an importance piece to the puzzle of career progression in student affairs and African American women's perceptions of race and gender. Chapter Two provides additional background and details about African American women in the U.S. and their connections to the history, developments and current trends of higher education in America. The literature review includes sections on careers in student affairs with a particular focus on mid-level administration.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to examine the career progression of African American women mid-level administrators in student affairs at 4-year, predominately White institutions (PWIs). To provide additional background, context and richness to the areas being studied the literature reviewed will draw from four broad categories: African American women in the United States, African American women in higher education, career progression within student affairs, and mid-level administration. The literature critiqued in the aforementioned areas will help shape the scope and perspective. This chapter will review the pertinent literature within each area to discuss major themes, findings and identify gaps and areas where further research is needed.

African American Women in America


“It is a peculiar sensation, this *double-consciousness*, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (p. 5).

This *double-consciousness* permeates through the experiences of Black Americans and serves as a reminder that being Black in the U.S. creates a dimension that is hidden from those who do not share the same reality. In addition to these challenges, African
American women juggle another dynamic: being both female and Black (Zinn, Hondagneu-Sotelo & Messner, 2000; Collins, 2001). By carrying the burdens of both their race and gender African American women in the U.S. deal with unique certain circumstances in that they are members of two minority groups that are subject to oppression from both majority groups that dominant American society. Intersectionality is a concept that captures the dynamics between gender, race, and other categories of differences that can be embodied in the lives, social practices, institutional cultures and ideologies found in society (Davis, 2008).

White (1985) wrote that few scholars who study Black women fail to mention the double oppression that they face. White (1985) stated that the consequence of this "double jeopardy and powerlessness" (p.23) is their invisibility. Only when the activities of the Black women involved the dominant groups in America, meaning either White or male, were they deemed as important (White, 1985). Black women also silenced themselves as a coping mechanism during slavery. Slave women “understood the value of silence and secrecy” (White, 1985, p.24) and pretended not to grieve when they experienced loss or hurt when they experienced pain. In order to remove this cloak of invisibility on Black women’s lives and their lived experiences Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) and intersectionality are two sociological concepts that specifically take race and gender dynamics of Black women into account. Black Feminist Thought seeks to develop a body of work that is emancipatory and reflective of Black women’s lives in order to provide support against oppression felt in their daily lives (Collins, 1991). Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) seeks to explain how multiple dimensions of race, gender, class, and other social categories can intersect and create a system of oppression
that reflects the linked social constructs. Crenshaw (1991) addresses how Black women cannot escape their gender or race when facing discrimination and oppression in society. Methodological approaches informed by Black Feminist Thought and intersectionality provide different directions in investigating Black women’s oppression as they connect social constructs of gender, race, sexism and class. However, as mentioned previous in Chapter One, Black Feminist Thought was the most appropriate concept to apply to this study.

The residual psychological impact of silence used as a strategy by Black women during days of enslavement to preserve and protect their lives can be hard to undo and continues to impact future generations. African American women still feel disconnected and alone in their struggle for progress for various reasons. African American women’s voices need to be heard and shared among all of those who stand to benefit from their failures and successes. In challenging main stream scholarship about the value of African American women’s experiences, all women, especially women of color, benefit from hearing about the stories that are not currently being shared. Documenting Black women’s experiences through research and scholarship inherently creates value and can empower women to continue to challenge the oppression that they face while following in the footsteps of those who came before them.

African American Women in Higher Education

Women, especially African American women, were absent from the formative years of American higher education. The education of White women in the United States during eighteenth and nineteenth centuries varied by socioeconomic class and the majority of White women were limited to the basics of reading and writing as a woman’s
place was to be head of domestic matters of the home (Glover, 2012). Prior to the Civil War it was illegal to educate an enslaved person of African descent (Douglass, 1845/2010). Many men and women slaves learned how to read and write in secret with the help of abolitionists, religious leaders, freed Blacks and compassionate slave owners (Glover, 2012). By the end of the Civil War many educated Blacks traveled south to help educate former slaves in order to assist with their new transitions into American society as freed men and women. Schools were created to provide basic academic skills and religious teachings to Blacks to assist them with becoming productive members of society (Wolfman, 1997).

The curriculum focused on moral development, social and cultural refinement and home economics (Collins, 2001). This trend benefited African American women, as the movement to build an educated society evolved, and it became more acceptable to teach African Americans to read and write (Glover, 2012). Christian ministries and White women helped to establish schools for African American women in hopes that their education and other skills would pass down to their children. Eventually these "grooming" schools gave way to a desire to pursue advance study.

Oberlin College (Ohio) was the first institution of higher education to award a Black woman, Lucy Sessions, with the literary degree received from completing a literary course program in 1850 (Glover, 2012). The literary degree was considered to be a degreed program even though completion of the program did not result in a bachelor's degree (Garner, 2013). Oberlin College was also the first institution to award the first bachelor's degree to Mary Jane Patterson in 1862. African American woman who witnessed or heard of these triumphs increased their hope and desire to pursue higher
education. As the number of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) grew, so did the opportunities for African American women. Wilberforce University (1856), Fisk University (1866) and Howard University (1867) were co-educational institutions. Spelman College (1881) and Bennett College (1973) were founded for women only soon thereafter (Glover, 2012).

As African American women earned degrees and made commitments to improving their communities, teaching at segregated elementary and secondary schools became a natural transition. Teaching was an acceptable profession for African American women and provided an opportunity to help develop future generations (Collins, 2001). Eventually teaching careers led to administration opportunities at the secondary level and African American women began filling teaching and administrative roles at the collegiate level (Wolfman, 1997) to assist with the preparation of future educators at HBCUs.

Although African American women had more opportunities they still faced tremendous hardships. Institutions had limited resources; African American women endured marginalization in the classroom, and even received criticism and disrespect from African American men and women who did not believe that women should be pursuing this kind of advanced study (Wolfman, 1997). Career prospects in higher education administration opened new doors for African American women and as opportunities for administration and management grew for so did their challenges.

**Careers in Higher Education Administration**

Significant legislation passed in the 1960s and 1970s helped to increase the numbers of African American women pursuing positions in administration leadership. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 made discrimination on the basis of race in public places illegal,
allowed for the integration of schools and banned employment discrimination (U.S. National Archives). Executive Order 11246, also known as affirmation action, was established to correct the past and present effects of discrimination. These efforts together created greater employment opportunities for African American women as now they could work in PWIs in addition the HBCUs.

The Higher Education Act of 1965 provided increased financial assistance to students pursuing advanced degrees in higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 2010) increasing the number of African American women who could afford to attend school and be exposed to career opportunities in higher education. Title IX (1972) was specifically passed to provide additional protection to women regulating hiring practices, with the intention of protecting them from discrimination based on gender. The culmination of the legislative acts coupled with the increase of African American women into higher education created an influx into the pipeline of African American women working in higher education in academic and student affairs. The table below provides a snapshot of historical trends comparing Black and White men and women over a forty year period.

Table 2.1 Historical trends of Enrollment for Black and White Men and Women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Black Women</strong></td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Black Men</strong></td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>White Women</strong></td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>White Men</strong></td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NCES, 2011, Table 8
For example, accordingly to NCES (2011) in 1970 approximately six percent of Black women 25 and older completed bachelor's degree or higher and by 2011 this rate increased to 21 percent. This is in comparison to approximately nine percent in 1970 and 33 percent in 2011 for White women (NCES, 2011). The gap between White men and White women is closing with African American men falling behind in the past decade.

Employment opportunities in higher education administration for African Americans have increased significantly over the years. Over a 20 year period (1983 – 2003) the number for full-time administrative positions increased by 51 percent (McCurtis, Jackson & O’Callaghan, 2009). This means that groups who have increased more than 51 percent kept pace with the growth in the market. The number of Whites in administrative roles remains high yet their overall percentage did not keep pace with the market meaning that the majority of new positions went to people of color. However, African Americans did keep pace with the market changes yet they are still the lowest in overall percent change when compared with other ethnic groups.

Table 2.2 Number of Full-Time Administrators in Higher Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>1983</th>
<th>1993</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>%Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>8,362</td>
<td>12,232</td>
<td>17,228</td>
<td>106%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanics</td>
<td>2,040</td>
<td>3,580</td>
<td>7,006</td>
<td>243%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Americans</td>
<td>1,234</td>
<td>2,243</td>
<td>4,813</td>
<td>290%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whites</td>
<td>105,420</td>
<td>118,651</td>
<td>147,613</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(McCurtis et al., 2009)

The number of Black women administrators have increased from 2003 to 2010 but when compared to White women these numbers are quite low, especially when
considering the large increases of Black women entering into higher education.

According to NCES (2010) there were 13,394 Black women who held executive, administrative and managerial positions in higher education in comparison to 95,641 White women. Issues of engagement, retention and advancement of African American women have been explored in the literature (Jackson & O’Callaghan, 2009; Jones, 2001). Current research identifies barriers and strategies to assist with African American women’s career progression (Conklin & Robbins-McNeish, 2006; Jackson & O’Callaghan, 2009; Jones, 2001). For example, Jones (2001) identified existing pathways, leadership skills, work life balance considerations and mentorship strategies to assist with African American women administrators’ career progression. Despite the growth in number of African American women serving in administrative roles, few studies have been conducted on student affairs administrators to better understand their roles at their institutions and the career paths that led them to their current positions (Glover, 2012).

Student affairs represents the heart of higher education institutions and encompasses the areas that address student life, career exploration, residential and shared community spaces, student health and co-curricular activities that contribute to the holistic development of students. Student affairs administration and leadership influence policies, procedures and practices within higher education institutions. It is important to review the literature examining career progression in student affairs because the impact these positions have on student success, retention and persistence is certain.

Career Progression in Student Affairs
Student affairs units represent areas of service and support in higher education. Administration and governance in higher education is divided into three specialty areas: academic affairs, administrative affairs, and student affairs (Sagaria, 1988). Academic affairs include positions such as president, academic deans, and vice president or provost. Administrative affairs include functional areas such as director of alumni affairs, vice president of development (Jackson, 2001). Student affairs leadership positions include vice president for student affairs, dean of students, director residential life and housing. (Jackson, 2001). Student Affairs can be defined as a division of support services in higher education designed to enhance and assist in the growth and development of students (ACPA, 2012; NASPA, 2012). Student Affairs areas include residence life and housing, student activities, fraternity and sorority life, clubs and organizations, counseling, student health, recreational sports, career development and sometimes academic support such as academic advising and tutoring.

Career literature in student affairs focuses largely on graduate school preparation, professional development, career paths, and retention issues of entry-level administrators and senior-level administrators. Mid-level administrators comprise the largest group in student affairs administration (Winston & Creamer, 1997) but very little research exists on mid-level administrators as compared to entry-level and senior-level administration. This group is often overlooked because mid-level positions are nebulous and hard to identify. Their roles are often described as being in the middle of the leadership structure and as they are not institutional leaders but do not serve on the front lines (Mather, Bryan, & Faulkner, 2009).

**Graduate School Preparation**
Research on graduates and new professionals in student affairs focused on a few areas. It acknowledged that there is not a defined pathway to enter the profession (Taub & McEwen, 2006). Research on graduate and new professionals’ development identified core competencies needed to navigate the profession (Burkard, Cole, Ott, Stoflet, 2005; Roberts, 2005) and discussed reasons why professionals leave the field (Bender, 1980, Burns, 1982).

Taub and McEwen’s (2006) study identified factors that influenced graduate students to enter master’s programs to pursue careers in student affairs. The graduate students in their study became aware of the student affairs profession as late as their junior or senior year in college and discovered career opportunities in student affairs from conversations with student affairs professionals on their campus. Most participants were influenced to consider student affairs as a career choice by someone on their campus and most reported a high level of confidence in selecting student affairs as a career. This is an important implication because student affairs as a career choice is decided later in a student’s academic journey and is largely connected to developing a relationship with a professional in the field.

The number of participants who identified as minorities was so small that Taub and McEwen (2006) could not compare findings based on race. This area of study could provide areas of opportunity to understand how students of color are influenced to enter and represents a gap in the field. This shortcoming is disappointing because diversity in the profession is a known issue (Komives & Kuh, 1988; Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1991), but the random sampling methods like the one used in Taub and McEwen’s (2006) are unlikely to yield the desired diversity in the participant pool that studies such as mine are
striving to achieve. Therefore, this proposed study specifically targets African American women in order to collect the information desired for this population.

Another research study focused on the impact of doctoral programs on career progression and found that a majority of student affairs professionals remained in their positions or went from part-time to full-time in the same position after the completion of their programs (Daddona, Cooper & Dunn, 2006). This career entry opportunity is an important point to mention because the majority of people pursuing doctorates in student affairs or higher education do so with the intention of advancing their careers (Daddona et al., 2006). Daddona et al. (2006) identified that new doctoral graduates obtained positions at a lower level than expected. The implications from this study address graduate programs and the expectations and career goals students have when planning to enroll in doctoral programs. Discussion of career goals and plans are recommended to be discussed throughout a student’s course of study (Daddona et. al, 2006). Daddona et al. (2006) do not specifically target how women, or more specifically Black women, use graduate education as an opportunity for advancement in their careers. This information would be helpful in providing guidance to African American women mid-level administrators to determine if degree attainment makes an impact on career progression.

A multi-faceted skill set is critical for new student affairs professionals to develop and increase their longevity in a student affairs career (Young, 1990). Burkard, Cole, Ott, and Stoflet (2005) identified human relations, administrative/management, technology and research competencies are important for entry-level practice. Entry-level professionals are expected to have counseling skills and personal attributes to include flexibility, interpersonal relations, analytical skills, critical thinking, problem solving,
creativity, and assertiveness. Burkard et al. (2005) encourage graduate programs to re-examine the competencies that they are graduating their student with as employers are looking for skill sets not currently taught in professional programs designed to place graduates into student affairs positions.

There were some notable differences found between men and women who pursue student affairs as a career in Bender’s (1980) study. Women were less satisfied with their current positions than men and Holmes, Verrier and Chisholm (1983) found that 90% of women compared to 60% of men left the profession within seven years of graduating from their master’s program. This study did not focus specifically on African American women, or identify areas in that a well-rounded skill set should have that can prepare them for opportunities of advancement. Attrition in the field (Holmes et al., 1983) has not been explored solely with African American, or more specifically African American women.

Turrentine and Conley’s (2001) study described the labor pool of entry-level student affairs administrators. Turrentine and Conley (2001) found that most degrees awarded in 1997-98 were in counseling areas as opposed to administration and student personnel programs (12,500 to 500). The Northeast region granted the most degrees and women made up the majority of graduates in administration, counseling and student personnel degrees. African American represented 10.8% of degrees in administration, 11.6% in counseling and 9.7% in student personnel. Turretine and Conley (2001) identified minorities to make up 18-24% of the labor pool and women overall made up 67-68%. This information can be used by institutional leaders to determine possible markets to recruit from especially if they are trying to diversify their labor pools.
These studies highlight important considerations as retention and success of African American women students is connected to the presence of African American faculty, administrators and staff (Banks, 2009). The percentage of women enrolling and completing undergraduate degrees is increasing (NCES, 2011) putting more Black women in the pipeline to enter the profession. If Black women are making the decision to enter the profession later in their collegiate careers then the presence of Black women administrators in student affairs is important not only for their persistence, but to encourage other Black women to consider student affairs as a career choice. Additional information provided by this proposed study can help identify strategies to encourage and support Black women entering the profession, aid in their preparation and help stem attrition from student affairs.

Professional development, in addition to graduate level preparation, is an important consideration for Black women aspiring to leadership roles. The literature on professional development illustrates the need for staff development, models and recommendations for best practices to help student affairs professionals advance in their careers (Creamer & Winston, 1997; Sermersheim & Keim, 2005). Sermersheim and Keim (2005) identified skills sets and professional competencies that would be needed for advancement. Sermersheim and Keim (2005) identified fiscal management, research and evaluation, leadership, personnel management and communication. Sermersherim & Keim (2005) recommend that graduate preparation programs should place additional emphasis on fiscal management, research and evaluation as these areas of professional growth are essential to advance in the profession. Again these studies help inform practitioners in student affairs but do not provide specific guidance to Black women in
student affairs administrative positions. Professional development can contribute to career progression by creating a skill set and knowledge base that is required in order to advance in the profession. Networking opportunities and exposure are other ways the professional development can influence career progression.

The career paths of professionals who have obtained senior-level positions (Biddix, 2011; Blimling, 2002) have been explored to determine best practices and methods to pursue senior-level positions. Blimling (2002) identified several themes with his study on Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs), including working with students as a reason why SSAOs entered the profession, but that they struggled with the moral dilemmas of work-life balance. SSAOs often regret not making better decisions between family life and the responsibilities of their position. Yet, Blimling (2002) also found that SSAOs struggled with the choice to stay in their current role or move into another position to create more work-life balance as longevity in these positions is decreasing in an age of accountability. This research suggests that there are internal battles that need to be addressed by anyone who desires to work in a senior-level administrative position.

Biddix (2011) explored African-American career paths to a SSAO position and found that the most common positions held prior to a SSAO position was dean of students, residential life and housing, multicultural student services and student activities. Biddix (2011) discussed five themes that emerged from participant interviews: advancing as a person of color, identifying and valuing mentors, getting noticed and known, gaining experience and building a resume and considering the next opportunity. Participants stated that they were aware of the impact their race may have had on their ability to lead in their departments and spoke often of how important it was to have a mentor to guide
and support them in their work (Biddix, 2011). Biddix (2011) stated that a limitation of his study was the small sample size and he encouraged additional research to be conducted on other members of underrepresented groups. This study highlights the career paths of African Americans but does not focus attention solely on women which may look different than men. The path to leadership in student affairs is not linear although barriers and strategies to advancing in administration in higher education have been identified. Little research exists that focuses specifically on African American women in student affairs administration encouraging the need for additional research better understand how to support career progression for this specific population.

The demographics of current senior-level administrators can be achieved through the use of salary surveys. The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) collects compensation related data from its members and helps colleges and universities with benchmarking and comparison of common student affairs positions found in their schools with others. Engstrom, McIntosh, Ridzi and Kruger (2006) conducted a study on Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) gathered through the NASPA 2001-02 salary survey.

Table 2.3 NASPA 2001-02 Salary Survey Demographics Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>46-55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>55+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td></td>
<td>55+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Engstrom et al., 2006

The intention of the survey was to collect and disseminate salary information but it also provided an opportunity to understand the individuals who currently held SSAO
positions as the survey captures other demographic information to include the
participants, race, gender and institutional characteristics found below. A significant find
in this study was the ages of the current SSAOs in 2001-02 (Engstrom et al., 2006). The
largest groups represented the baby boomer generation, a term given to those born
between 1946 – 1968, (Werner, 2011). As these groups near retirement age there will be
serious implications for leadership as most higher education institutions do not participate
in succession planning which would identify new leadership in light of impending
retirements.

The literature regarding upward mobility of mid-level professionals (Young,
1990) states that mid-level administrators should expect to change positions outside of
their institutions to move through the pipeline into a senior-level administrative role.
Institutional leaders in student affairs divisions need to reconsider how their current talent
pools for senior-level leadership should be fostered in order to produce leadership that
will be needed immediate future. Institutional leadership should invest in mid-level
administrator’s career development if their desired career path will lead to a senior-level
position, before positions become vacant when current leadership beings to retire.

Mid-level administration in Student Affairs

As defined earlier, mid-level administrators are defined in this proposed study as
a college or university employee who has supervisory responsibilities for full-time
professional and/or support staff in one or more functional departments. Mid-level
administration literature in higher education is limited and has focused on defining the
role of mid-level administration, attrition in the field, and work life balance. Previous
research highlights mid-level management challenges and opportunities and professional
development strategies were offered (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Young, 2009). Rosser (2004) identified mid-level administrators of color to have lower morale than Caucasians which has a greater impact on retention of administrators of color. Rosser (2004) identified work life issues, career support, recognition for competence, external relationships, perceptions of discrimination, work conditions impacted their moral and satisfaction in their positions. Johnsrud, Heck & Rosser (2000) encouraged institutions to identify work-life issues important to their employees that impact moral. Johnsrud et al., (2000) stated that morale is based largely upon individual perceptions which are reflected upon the values and norms of the organization. This study captured information about morale and work-life issues that impact African American women in mid-level student affairs administration.

Scott (1980) described mid-level administrators to be dean or directors of support services who report to an office at the vice presidential level. While admitting that titles can differ Scott (1980) argued that mid-level administrators have a high degree of specialization but little authority in the ultimate decision making process at within their institutions. Scott (1980) noted that mid-level administrators are frustrated that they are not taken seriously, receive little acknowledgement for their accomplishments, lack authority that comes with their responsibilities. Scott (1980), however, did not specifically address African American mid-level administrators in his work.

Young’s (1990) *The Invisible Leaders: Student Affairs Mid-Managers* addressed the positive aspects of the mid-level professional. Young’s (1990) edited volume continues to explore the complexity of the mid-level administrators. Mid-level administrators are warned that mobility in the profession will most likely be obtained by
taking on new positions outside of their current institution in order to advance in their career. Career issues for mid-level administrators were identified to include limited upward mobility within the organizational structure of their institution, ability to adapt to changes in their role and responsibilities and identifying the transferability of their skills (Young, 1990). Professional development opportunities were noted to be important and exist for mid-level administrators within professional organizations for student affairs (Scott, 1980) or by building professional competencies within your current position to elevate and transition into a new role (Young, 1990). Again there was no specific mention of African Americans or African America women in Young’s (1990) and Scott’s (1980) work.

Studies focusing on minorities and specifically African Americans addressed compensation, power and structure of higher education institutions. Rosser (2000) reported that 20% of staff positions are held by minority members with African Americans accounting for 11%. Minorities were reported to have the lowest salary meaning that they remain underrepresented and underpaid by national comparisons (Rosser, 2000). Rosser (2000) stated mid-level administrators make up the largest administrative group in university systems and can easily affect the tone, manner and efficiency of the entire organization. This conclusion is different than Scott (1980) and Young (1990) who wrote about how mid-level administrators were often undervalued and lacked power that mid-level administrators have in their units. Rosser (2000) completed their study by emphasizing the need to research moral, retention, and work-life balance but failed to specifically address the need to understand how African American women can navigate their careers and emerge from mid-level administrative roles.
Clayborne and Hamrick’s (2007) study on African American women in mid-level administrative roles focused on approaches to leadership and not pathways to senior-level administrative roles. Clayborne and Hamrick (2007) reinforced the role of networks in addressing professional concerns and to garner support and assist when African American women are faced with the isolation caused by the outsider-within status (Collins, 2000) felt at PWIs. The need for effective mentoring was highlighted and a reminder that exploration and analysis of African American women’s experiences is needed. Using the theoretical lens of Black Feminist Theory (Collins, 2000) for analysis of their findings Clayborne and Hamrick (2007) highlighted issues expressed by participants to include controlling images, validating the truth of Black women’s lived experiences and use of support structures as outlined by Collins (2000).

The literature presented in this chapter gave context to understand the complexity and the amalgamation of issues that are being studied in this dissertation. African American women in the U.S. have continued to move forward in hopes of capitalizing on the opportunities that education can bring. As labor pools increase for African American women who desire to move into administrative roles in higher education, this research adds to understanding how different career pathways can assist them in reaching their ultimate goal. The paucity of research specifically on African American women administrators in student affairs prevents an in-depth analysis of challenges and opportunities. Mid-level administrator’s feelings of invisibility increases with the lack of efficacy they feel to control their work environments while juggling the demands for their time from their supervisors, staff and students (Young, 1990). This implication is important because double-consciousness and the double jeopardy that African American
woman experience in their daily lives impacts their perceptions of their ability to advance in the profession. Lack of diversity within institutional leadership can impact student success and persistence for students of color. This dissertation conducted a micro-level analysis on the lives and the lived experiences of African American women mid-level administrators in order to learn more about their career progression in student affairs.
Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter describes the research methods used in this study. The purpose of this study was to examine the career progression of African American women mid-level administrators in student affairs at four-year, predominately White institutions (PWIs). Perceptions of the participants’ career progression was explored by analyzing participant interviews, conducting document analyses of their resume or curriculum vitae, and work calendar. The research design and sampling methods of this study are detailed in this chapter, include the conceptual framework, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, limitations and scope.

Research Design

Qualitative methodologies allow inquiry into selected issues in great depth with special attention to “detail, context and nuance” (Patton, 2002, p. 14). Creswell (2012) affirms the use of a qualitative methodology as the best approach to explore a phenomenon of interest. An instrumental collective case study approach as defined by Stake (2000) was used to explore the phenomenon of career progression in student affairs as an African American women in a mid-level administrative position. Instrumental describes a case that is being investigated to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization (Stake, 2000). Investigating multiple cases together allows for a better investigation of a phenomenon being studied (Stake, 2000). Analyzing multiple cases also provides an opportunity for deeper understanding of the complexities within the cases and can provide powerful explanations (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Ideal case studies are holistic and context sensitive and can encompass individuals, groups, programs, cultures, or regions (Patton, 2002). The cases in this study are the individual
participants. Collectively they will be compared by the length of time in the field of student affairs. One group represented new mid-level administrators who have been in the field from five to ten years while the other, seasoned mid-level group of administrators, have been in the profession 11 – 21 years.

A case study methodology is ideal when examining “contemporary events, but when relevant behavior cannot be manipulated” (Yin, 2009, p. 11). A case study is unique in that it can encompass many different components such as documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations (Stake, 2000). Case studies are generalizable to theoretical propositions and findings can be applicable to other cases that share in the phenomenon (Yin, 2009). Case study methods provide a product as well as process to analyze the phenomenon of career progression for administrators of color (Patton, 2002). A critical feature of case study methodology is to bound the case, which means to define and describe the limits of the case to be analyzed (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009). Bounding the case is essential to conceptualizing the object to be studied. Each participant represents a case in this study. Each case includes demographic information to include age range, institutional type, and functional area in student affairs, time in profession, highest degree attainment and location in the U.S. The participant’s narrative includes a brief history of their career progression, professional and personal obligations that impact their lives and perceptions of race and gender. Creating separate cases allowed an opportunity to compare cases to identify similarities, shared experiences and differences that assisted in gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

Research Questions
The following research questions focused on two aspects of their lived experiences as mid-level administrators in student affairs. As explained in Chapter One, this study asked the following questions:

1. How do mid-level African American women administrators in student affairs negotiate their career progression?

2. How do mid-level African American women administrators in student affairs perceive the impact that their race and gender affects their career, if any?

The research questions guided the development the interview protocol (Appendix D) and framework for my data analysis.

Participants

The population for this study included individuals who identify as African American women and work as mid-level administrators in student affairs areas at four-year predominately White institutions (PWIs). African American is defined as Americans who are from Black African descent. National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) defines student affairs administrators to include the following functional areas “vice president and dean for student life, as well as professionals working within housing and residence life, student unions, student activities, counseling, career development, orientation, enrollment management, racial and ethnic minority support services, and retention and assessment” (NASPA, 2013, p. 1). This definition allowed a more universal approach in selecting participants instead of relying upon the higher education institutions to define the role of their services and programs.

Mid-level student affairs administrators are defined as professionals who manage professional staff and one or more functional areas in student affairs (Young, 2009). Penn
(2009) provides examples of positions that can be identified with mid-level administrators to include directors, associate or assistant deans, program directors, assistant directors and coordinators. The institutional environment for PWIs was selected as the majority of African American women in student affairs work at this type of institution given the large percentage when compared to historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Four year institutions were selected over two year institutions in order to minimize the cultural differences in how student affairs areas operate in the different institutional environments.

**Sampling Method**

Purposive and snowball sampling methods (Patton, 2002) were used to achieve maximum variation of the participants in the study. To aid in the selection of participants a survey was used to collect information that identified participants who fit the sample criteria: African American women who hold mid-level administrative positions in student affairs areas at four-year predominately White institutions. A call for participation, Appendix A, was emailed to knowledge communities focused on African Americans within professional organizations for student affairs administrators to include American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA). The email contained a link to a survey created for interested participants to complete, Appendix B. An additional sampling method, snowball (Creswell, 2012), was used to widen the search by helping to identify cases from people who knew of others who might be interested in participating. This method was employed by sending a call for participation to colleagues who were connected with individuals
who fit the participant criteria of the study. A total of 53 participants responded to the call for participants through the use of these methods.

Creswell (2013) suggests four to six cases when using a case study approach. Due to the number of responses, the decision was made to use more than the recommended amount to include many different facets of student affairs and a variety of institutional types in different regional locations. Nine participants were selected by utilizing criterion sampling, a type of purposeful sampling technique. Criterion sampling allows the researcher to pick cases that meet a certain criteria of the phenomenon being explored (Patton, 2002). Selecting cases that meet a certain criteria are more likely to be “information rich” as they highlight issues that are attempting to be addressed in the study (Patton, 2002, p. 238). Creswell (2012) believes that purposive sampling provides an opportunity to deliberately select individuals who could provide the most information about the phenomenon being studied.

Data Generation

Semi-structured interviews were used to generate the data. This approach required the interview questions to be fully formed prior to the interview in order to ensure consistency, efficiency, and analysis becomes streamlined because responses are easy to find in order to make comparisons (Patton, 2002). Semi-structured interviews, Appendix D, provided an opportunity to cover a list of topics common to all respondents while allowing an opportunity to ask follow-up questions and probe for deeper answers to capture the full experiences of the participants (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2011). This interviewing technique works best when trying to identify differences and commonalities across a group on one or more topics (Lapan et al., 2011). The interview protocol
 consisted of 17 questions and the interview session lasted anywhere between 45 minutes to one hour.

Interviews were conducted in three different ways. One interview was in person, seven were held on the phone and two were held using an internet based technology called Skype. All interviews were recorded. Video interviews were preferred over phone interviews as they allow researchers to read non-verbal behavior (Fontana & Fey, 2005) but a majority of participants preferred to just conduct the interview over the phone.

Participants signed a consent form, Appendix C, granting me permission to record the interview for the purposes of the study. Creswell (2012) cautions researchers to be aware of possible challenges in interpreting participants’ responses by the aid of technology; however, this was outweighed by being able to provide a low cost option to include interview participants regardless of geographic location. Also, by using technology to conduct the interviews I was able to limit the financial costs required when traveling to interview all participants face to face. Interviews were transcribed by a paid service as well as myself in order to quickly produce the transcribed interviews for member checking.

Document analysis can provide researchers with a rich source of information (Creswell, 2012; White, 1992; Yin, 2009). By collecting each participant’s resume or curriculum vitae, I was able to determine commonalities or differences in their varied career paths. Exploring career paths provided additional information about their career progression that was not shared in the interview session. Analysis of the participants work calendars provided more information about how participants negotiated the professional and personal demands on their time and the decision making processes for
competing priorities. Document analysis allows a more in-depth picture of the case being studied and assisted me in finding information, insights and meanings significant to the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013; Whitt, 1992). Ethical considerations for the participants in the study were considered. Every effort to protect their identity to minimize risks associated with their involvement was taken. Appreciation of access to private spaces in order to study the phenomenon in question was greatly appreciated and respected. Pseudonyms for participants’ names and careful descriptions of their work environments was used in the study.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework was informed by Coleman’s (2002) work on career advancement factors that she found to impact career advancement for Black women administrators in higher education institutions in Alabama. Career progression is defined as a process of an individual moving into employment positions with increased responsibility and compensation (Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1991) which was the main interest of this study. The framework was also informed by Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) and this concept was used as a lens in which to explore and analyze issues of gender and race in the career progression of African American women in mid-level student affairs positions.

As detailed in Chapter One, career progression and career development are two related yet distinct ideas. Career progression refers to the progress of an individual into employment positions with increased responsibilities (Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1991). Career development is a holistic approach to understanding individual’s career choice and management of their career decisions embedded in their life span (Farmers & Associates,
A brief description of analysis based on the proposed study’s conceptual framework follows.

**Career Progression Factors**

A framework to address career advancement factors was informed by Coleman (2002) who identified 27 career advancement factors that impacted career advancement for African American women in student affairs administrative positions at 4-year colleges and universities in Alabama. This instrument was designed to capture the experiences of African American administrators in both Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Predominately White Institutions in order to highlight differences and similarities relevant to their career experiences. The differences, or factors, were narrowed down into the following seven categories: opportunities, competence, attitude, exclusion, isolation, position and position requirements (Coleman, 2002). I found connections to these categories within Coleman’s (2002) study in codes and themes in the analysis of the participants’ interviews.

**Black Feminist Thought**

The conceptual framework is guided by the tenets of Black Feminist Thought authored by Patricia Hill Collins (2000). Black Feminism argues that sexism, racism, and class oppression are bound in a way that they cannot be separated (Collins, 2000). Black Feminist Thought assumes that Black women’s intersecting oppressions (Black and female) produce commonalities among individual Black women. Collins (2000) describes oppression as an unjust situation where systematically over a long period of time, one group denies another group access to resources of society. Race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, age, and ethnicity are major categories of oppression in the US. The
convergence of race, class and gender oppression are remnants of U.S. slavery and shapes relationships that women of African descent had within Black American families and communities (Collins, 2000). African American women’s oppression has encompassed three interdependent dimensions – economic, political, and ideological.

Data Analysis

Personal Interviews

Case study analysis dictated a specific way to collect, organize, and analyze data. By gathering “comprehensive, systematic and in-depth information” a case record can be developed (Patton, 2002, p.449). Case records can be examined for patterns, themes, and content analysis revealing core meanings that can be used to make cross-case comparisons. Categorical aggregation looks for a collection of instances from the data and makes issue-relevant meanings, and if patterns emerge, categories can be compared across cases (Creswell, 2013). Information from the participant’s interview was coded, analyzed and organized based on the research question and conceptual framework that guides the proposed study. Codes were determined in the first interview and then subsequent codes were added or notations made if the code re-emerged in another participant’s interview. A comparative analysis of all cases was conducted. A matrix, Appendix E, helped organize the information to assist with quickly finding the similarities and differences among the cases (Yin, 2009). Qualitative data analysis (QDA) software helps to store and organize qualitative data; Nvivo was used to code, annotate and compare segments of information (Creswell, 2013).

Aspects of life story, a form of narrative inquiry, was used to relay the stories of the participants in order to document aspects of their lives that are shared through the
The interview process (Atkin, 1998). The life story narrative is an effective means for gaining understanding of how the self evolves over a specific period of time which will cover the undergraduate experiences to present day of the participants. Life story method supports the use of narrative inquiry to bring voice to women and members of culturally diverse groups to understand the difference found in their lives (Atkin, 1998). Pulling together the “central elements, events, and beliefs in a person’s life and ingrate them into a whole, make sense of them, learn from them” (Atkin, 1998, p.19) was the goal of the analysis of their experiences.

**Document Analysis**

Documents can provide rich sources of information for qualitative studies (Whitt, 1992). Resumes or curriculum vitae of the participants was analyzed in a similar way as described by the case analysis above. Each position held by the participant was documented in a table to determine if the position advanced them forward and to maintain the same level of responsibility. Key words in the job description will generate codes in order to determine similarities or differences in the positions held by each participant. The calendars of the participants were collected and analyzed to learn more about their professional and personal obligations. Information about how participants negotiate the demands of their time and who they are connected to in order to perform their duties was important in understanding the tensions of mid-level management. A table was created in order to analyze their resume or curriculum vitae and calendar.

**Trustworthiness**

Triangulation is a process of using multiple methods, sources and theories to corroborate evidence (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). Member checking was
used to gather respondent validation. This process entailed presenting a summary of the transcribed interview to participants within two weeks of the interview being conducted via e-mail. Methods of respondent validation (Creswell, 2012) confirmed findings. Participants reviewed the information and noted any misrepresentations or add any additional comments they wanted to expand on their statements. Member checks as a means of confirming the findings allowed participants to confirm the accuracy of their verbatim quotes and while obtaining approval for the use of their statements by using a pseudonym to protect their identity. Participants reviewed their narratives once they were completed in order to provide additional validation of my interpretations of their career progression and perceptions of race and gender based on the interview and document analysis of their resume and calendar. Any discrepancies were corrected and sent back to the participant until they gave confirmation of their satisfaction of the narrative via email.

Peer debriefing will provide an additional external check of the research process (Creswell, 2013). Two peers selected in consultation with the dissertation committee chair met individually with me to provide feedback on the methods, meaning and interpretations of the research by asking poignant questions that generated reflection and sharpened focus on the analysis. Peer reviewers were not compensated due to lack of funding for this proposed study. Barber and Walczak (2009) recommend the following best practices when using peer debriefing: preparing the debriefer for their roles in reviewing by sharing research questions in addition to the data, meeting face to face to for discussions of the research, and having at least 20 – 25% of the data reviewed. Literature and relevant studies also served to validate or invalidate data gathered through
interviews. As mentioned in Chapter One, a researcher journal was used to capture thoughts, ideas and questions as the study was conducted.

Limitations and Scope of the Study

As with all research, this study had limitations. I anticipated issues with the sampling process. My original goal was to send out a call for participation through the following professional associations, American College Personnel Association (ACPA), National Orientation Directors Association (NODA), National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), Association of College and University Housing Officers-International (ACHUO-I). All organizations required a paid membership to send out a call which was not financially possible. In deciding to select one, NASPA, due to financial constraints, but then I was informed that the information that I would be given was going to be mailed to me and would not differentiate race but only gender because their databases had become corrupt and they could not sort the data based on all of my needs. Fortunately, I was able to rely on using knowledge communities with, NASPA, ACPA and a snowball sampling method in order to send out the call and was able to generate a good number of responses.

I had an opportunity to interview two participants via Skype and it was a great opportunity to see their visual or non-verbal cues through the aid of technology. Participants’ level of comfort with technology and technical issues could possibly impact the interview process (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Fortunately, the two participants were comfortable with technology and it did not impact our ability to conduct a solid interview. However, sometimes the connection would slow and I would not hear their
statements correctly and they had to repeat their statements. Member checking was essential in verifying their statements for completeness.

The profile of my participants targeted mid-level professionals in 4-year private and public predominately White institutions. Again, as mentioned in Chapter One I did not include 2-year institutions as the culture and environments for women and minorities are different than what is found in four-year institutions. This study is not generalizable to the experiences of African American women mid-level administrators in student affairs who work in various type of higher education institutions.

**Conclusion**

The methodological approaches explained in this chapter was designed to capture and authenticate the experiences of African American women mid-level administrators in student affairs. The case study methods provides a comprehensive approach to examine their stories taking into account all of the pieces that provide a comprehensive portrait of each participant. The research protocol provided an opportunity to consistently broach the same topics of career discovery, progression and thoughts on the future of their careers. The number of responses to participate in this study allowed an opportunity to capture many different areas of student affairs while taking into account the different types of institutions and their locations in the U.S. The conceptual framework that guided the analysis of the narratives, resumes, curriculum vitae, and work calendars allowed for a deeper level of analysis than one concept could have performed separately. Chapter Four beings with the participants’ demographic data to give context before the narratives begin.
Chapter Four: Participant Narratives

The purpose of this study is to examine the career progression of African American women mid-level administrators in student affairs at 4-year, predominately White institutions (PWIs). The central focus is to better understand how and why African American women continue to negotiate their careers in student affairs and to comprehend their perceptions of the impact race and gender has on their career progression. As stated in Chapter Three, participant information was collected in semi-structured interviews and due to the location of the participants three different interviewing approaches were used. Femme Forte’s interview was held in person due to her close proximity to my campus. Simone Davis and Destiny’s interviews were conducted via Skype video-conferencing due to their comfort level with the technology while the remaining six interviews were conducted on the phone. Document analysis of their resumes or curriculum vitas and their calendar activities also contributed to the development of their participant profiles. This chapter begins by presenting the demographic information of the nine participants in this study.

Participants’ Demographic Data

The participants’ demographic data are presented in nine tables to provide a summary of the characteristics of the participants of the study (Tables 4.1-4.9). The first table presented the following information: participant’s pseudonyms, highest degree earned, years in student affairs and years in current position (See Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Highest Degree</th>
<th>Years in SA</th>
<th>Years in Current Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Mommy</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>M.S.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Paige Watts 20-29 M.Ed. 7 2.5  
Daphney Smith 20-29 M.S.Ed. 8 3  
Femme Forte 30-39 M.Ed. 8.5 5  
Simone Davis 30-39 Ph.D. 9 2  
Ann Jones 30-39 Ph.D. 15 2  
Minnie Mouse 40-49 Ph.D. 15 3  
Destiny 40-49 Ph.D. 16 3  
L.V. 40-49 Ph.D. 21 6  

Note: Pseudonyms replaced the names of participants. SA = Students Affairs  

Five of the nine participants have earned a Ph.D. as their highest degree. The remaining four participants have a master’s degree (See Table 4.2). Out of the four participants with a master’s degree, one participant is currently pursuing her doctoral degree, one participant is currently researching doctoral programs and plans to pursue it in the following year and the remaining two do not have a current desire to seek a doctoral degree. All of the highest earned degrees were in the higher education or student affairs field with the exception of one doctoral degree in psychology and one master’s degree in health and physical education.  

Table 4.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.Ed.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.S. Ed.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.S.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Totals of percentages are 100 for every characteristic because of rounding.

The majority of participants work at private institutions, while the remaining four worked at public institutions (See Table 4.3). The location of the institutions varied across the United States, with the majority of institutions being in the Midwest (Indiana, Ohio and Illinois). One institution is located in the Northeast (Pennsylvania) and the
remaining three institutions are located in south (Virginia and North Carolina) (See Table
4.4).

Table 4.3

*Higher Education Institution Type (N=9)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Institutions</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Totals of percentages are 100 for every characteristic because of rounding.

Table 4.4

*Location of Current Higher Education Institution (N=9)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location of Institution</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Totals of percentages are 100 for every characteristic because of rounding.

According to The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education,
three institutions represented Research Universities (very high research activity), two
represented Baccalaureate Colleges – Diverse Fields, and the remaining institutions
represented Baccalaureate Colleges, Doctoral/Research Universities, Master’s Colleges
and Universities (larger programs) and Master’s Colleges and Universities (smaller
programs) (See Table 4.5).

Table 4.5

*Carnegie Classifications for Current Institution Type (N=9)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Carnegie Classifications</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bac/Diverse: Baccalaureate Colleges--Diverse Fields</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baccalaureate Colleges</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRU: Doctoral/Research Universities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's L: Master's Colleges and Universities (larger programs)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's S: Master's Colleges and Universities (smaller programs)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The number of years in student affairs varied. The criteria for participation in the study required at least five years of experience in student affairs and the majority of the participants had from five to 10 years of experience. Four participants had over 14 years of experience in student affairs as outlined below (See Table 4.6).

Table 4.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Number of Years in Student Affairs (N=9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years in Student Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-13 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 or more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Totals of percentages are 100 for every characteristic because of rounding.

The following table highlights the number of years each participant has spent in their current mid-level administrative role at their current institution. The majority of participants have spent three or less years in their current professional role while the others have been in their role for five or six years at the most (See Table 4.7).

Table 4.7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Number of Years in Student Affairs (N=9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years in Current Student Affairs Mid-level Position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-9 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Totals of percentages are 100 for every characteristic because of rounding.

The type of institution where the majority of participants received their highest earned degree was public, Predominately White Institution (PWI), one participant received her doctoral degree from a private PWI while another earned her master's
degree from an institution categorized as a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) (See Table 4.8).

Table 4.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Institution Most Degree Earned (N=9)</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Predominately White Institution (Public)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predominately White Institution (Private)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historically Black College and University (Public)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Totals of percentages are 100 for every characteristic because of rounding.

The professional associations to which the majority of participants belong are affiliated with work in student affairs and include the following: Association of Student Conduct Administrators (ASCA), National Association of Academic Advisors (NACADA), National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics (N4A), and Virginia Network of Women in Higher Education. Three participants belong to American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and another participant holds membership in National Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA). One participant holds no membership in a national organization due to the time commitment and restraints of her current position. (See Table 4.9).

Table 4.9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Organizations Memberships (N=9)</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American College Personnel Association (ACPA)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No membership</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Totals of percentages are 100 for every characteristic because of rounding.
The majority of participants are not married, 55% and do not have any children, 66%. One participant is divorced and she is currently single at this time. Out of the participants who are single, they did express a desire to get married and have a family of their own in the future. One participant, Ann Jones, who is married, expressed that she did not have a desire to have a family in the future. (See Table 4.10, 4.11, and 4.12).

Table 4.10

Participant Martial and Parental Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Mommy</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paige Watts</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daphney Smith</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Femme Forte</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simone Davis</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann Jones</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnie Mouse</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destiny</td>
<td>40-49</td>
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<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.V.</td>
<td>40-49</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.11

Personal Relationship Status (N=9)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Personal Relationship Status</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: Totals of percentages are 100 for every characteristic because of rounding.

Table 4.12

Participant Parental Status (N=9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Parental Status</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
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<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Children</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Totals of percentages are 100 for every characteristic because of rounding.
Calendar Data

The participants’ work calendars were collected to understand how they negotiated their professional and personal demands of their time. Each participant was asked to provide at least one week of her work calendar that best represented a typical workweek for analysis. Participants provided information from different times of the year with spring being the most popular season provided. The commonalities each calendar shared were a mixture of student appointments, staff meetings, student group meetings and events. Administrative tasks as well as reminders were noted in all of the participants’ calendars. All participants had events that ran into the later evening hours and they typically included student meetings, banquets or recognition ceremonies or volunteer events. Weekend events listed were of a personal nature to include sorority events, salon appointments or events for friends and family.

The notable differences on the calendars that relate to the negotiation of time include designating a lunch break, tasks related to search committee duties, religious functions, and school activities. Five out of nine participants designated a mid-day lunch break while the other four did not. Instead regular lunch times were replaced with lunch meetings, staff meetings or student appointments. Only one participant designated free time in their calendar. The analysis of the work calendars show that the participants of this study use their calendars to keep track of their events, meetings, administrative tasks and their personal activities outside of work. The absence of free time in the majority of calendars demonstrates that their workdays and some nights are filled with activity and can lead to issues of work life balance. These challenges were echoed in their interviews and are presented along with their profiles.
The richness of this study lies within the participant's stories. The courage and the compassion that was shared with me while conducting this research is a powerful testament to their strength and resiliency. They all share a passion and commitment to student success which has encouraged them to continue to stay in their respective student affairs areas. Nine different perspectives on career advancement, race and gender offers a small piece to the larger puzzle of African American woman advancing into senior level administration in higher education.

**Participant Profiles**

Case study methodology encourages the details of a case to be presented in order to identify the complexity of key issues being analyzed (Creswell, 2012). The staging of each case then allows for cross-case analysis of the key issues. The participant profiles are presented in order of their years of experience in student affairs from the least to greatest. This sequence allows the reader an opportunity to see how depth and richness of their experiences transform mid-level administrator's perspectives as the length of time in their careers has increased. The goal of this section is to introduce the participants and their stories prior to the analysis of the findings. This provides an opportunity to hear their voices and to deeply connect to them individually prior to understanding them collectively as a group.

The process for writing the narratives began with reviewing member checked transcripts and that were coded for themes. Resumes or curriculum vitas were consulted in order to create a fuller picture of the participants' career progression to fill any gaps in the timeline. Analyzing the resumes and curriculum vitas also provided additional information about their respective college or university setting. Calendar activities were
not included in the participant profiles because the information collected did not contribute to the details of their career progression but merely reflected their current day-to-day activities. The participants' narratives are organized into two groups based on their years of experience. The first group is called the new mid-level administrators, which reflect five to 10 years in the field and the second group is called seasoned mid-level administrators, which reflects 11 to 21 years of experience. I begin with Professional Mommy, who has the least number of years in student affairs.

"A bird doesn't sing because it has an answer, it sings because it has a song."
— Maya Angelou

New Mid-Level Administrators

Professional Mommy. Professional Mommy works in a small private institution in the South and was introduced to the student affairs profession later in her professional faculty career. She is the only participant in this study who earned both her bachelor’s and master’s degree at a historically Black college. Both degrees in education were earned at the same institution. Her intentions were to teach in middle school and coach basketball but her career plans changed once she was introduced to academic advising. In graduate school she advised student athletes in her assistantship and fell in love with the academic advising profession. This area appealed to Professional Mommy because of her undergraduate experiences as a student athlete.

When I was an undergrad, I played basketball, and so that's how I got into academic advising. It was sort of, like, oh, you play basketball, you can help athletes...I didn’t seek advising as a profession I was just looking for a grad intern. So my eyes were opened to the profession of academic advising and how
instrumental and how important it is in the development of a student… I had an advisor in undergrad, but you would have never looked at that person as that’s their job. It’s just someone who cared about you, someone who was there for you. So when I started interacting with students as a professional, it has opened my eyes up to how I can have an influence on those students. And so I was able to share my experience as an athlete and relate to them, because I was a scholar athlete, and so I was able to give them tips and suggestion and encouragement, I was able to preach, quote/unquote, time management from a different perspective because I understood what they were.

Professional Mommy’s introduction to the field was based her experiences as an undergraduate student. Her ability to connect with students and help them reach their academic goals encouraged her to move forward with academic advising as a career.

**Career Progression.** After graduating she became a professional faculty member in the advising center at her alma mater. After four years, she left this role to take on another academic advisor position at her current institution as a coordinator for academic support services. Four years later she was promoted to her current position as director. In this time her academic advising unit moved from under academic affairs to student affairs with a reporting line directly to the Vice President of Student Affairs. She explained the benefits of her department’s transition from academic to student affairs.

When I transitioned to [my institution] as an academic advisor, advising was still under academic affairs, but about two years after I got here, we moved to student affairs and we started thinking more about supporting the student holistically, not
just academically, not just about advising, but how can we support them when
they are outside of the classroom.

Professional Mommy credits two mentors in helping her navigate the profession.
Her mentors are both African American, but her former supervisor from her alma mater
was female and her current supervisor is male. Her first mentor is an assistant director in
the unit at her former institution. She credits her with helping her develop a professional
skill set and supporting her as she transitioned from academic affairs to student affairs.
Her second mentor, a current supervisor, has helped her come into her own as a mid-level
administrator and supervisor. She explained her leadership challenges due in part to the
institutional culture on her campus.

I don’t always receive the respect from my colleagues that I feel is warranted just
from the position. An example of that is if I make a decision and it’s an
institutional decision, something that the institution will adopt, then instead of just
taking it and going, they have to check with [my supervisor], who already said she
has the authority and the power to make the decisions and whatever she says goes.
So I think sometimes as a female and as an African American female, I’m not as
respected as – and that is challenging to me, because that can get – it can get
discouraging, you know, when you’re always having to fight that battle.
She continued by acknowledging her supervisor’s influence on her ability to lead her unit
was directly related to his expressed support of her decisions. For example, if someone
approached him about a decision she made he would re-direct her colleague back to her.
His encouragement and support of her as she grows professionally has become very
important to her development. She continues to build upon her understanding of student
affairs through her collaborative partnerships with other areas of student affairs at her institution.

He has definitely pulled out and highlighted some things to me that I didn’t see before and he has given me, like, the encouragement and just the confidence in myself. But I like student affairs because in [my unit], we do a lot more collaboration with different departments than we did when we were in academic affairs. So now we’re sitting at the table with student activities, we’re sitting at the table with internship and career services. We’re sitting at the table with the dining hall and security, and so we are able to really plan and implement programs that really support students outside the classroom, because we are hearing and respond about students’ needs when they are in their offices or their facilities, so we can respond with programming...So I just think student affairs, it helps us get the best of both worlds. It really does, because, you know, we are in the higher education institution, we are naturally concerned about the students’ academics, so we are going to support them in their academics, but now being in student affairs, it opens our eyes up to other areas of development that are important for students to be successful so that personal development, maturation, development as a professional, understanding [of] linking your career to your major. And so those – my eyes have just been opened on the student affairs side, how important those things are.

Professional Mommy had aspirations to remain in a small college environment similar to her current institution and eventually assume a senior mid-level position. She also shared other personal goals that extend beyond her work in a higher education
setting. She was active in her church ministry, speaks at women’s conferences and wrote a book to help inspire professional women who are juggling demands of work and the responsibility of family. She expressed how this calling on her life gives her energy to help others, especially women, as they work hard to balance their professional duties while supporting their families.

**Reflections on Race and Gender.** Professional Mommy believed that her race has had an impact on her career progression. She thought that her institution’s culture has had an effect on how she was previously supported in her role prior to her promotion. She stated that an African American supervisor has made a difference in how she has been able to progress in her career.

I think that here where I am now, it has been a blessing to have a [supervisor] who supports me... I’ve had two prior VPs that did not acknowledge – they would not acknowledge and they were of another race. They did not acknowledge it [her talents and abilities] at all. So I think with the area that I’m in, the institution I’m in, my race has – it could have been a hindrance to my promotion. But the right people were in the right places at the right time, and I think that opened doors for me that probably would not have been opened before.

Her responses about gender were similar to her comments about race.

I hate to sound like a broken record. I think where I am, and it could be unique to my institution, as a female, you don’t see many females in senior positions. And actually, I think our president’s council, we don’t have any females at all... I’ve been here for eight years. So I’ve seen a change within the last three years, when we have increased the number of female directors. So before it probably would
have kept me from walking into some opportunities, but now I think with just the change in our president’s cabinet makeup, that now it probably wouldn’t be a hindrance as a female.

Professional Mommy continued by explaining that the leadership on the presidential council is made up by a majority of men who have not grown up in the South where her college is located. Their perspective on minorities and women in leadership roles is less conservative than those who have grown up in this particular area of the South.

You can see the disparity in the area where races are predominant. So you can see the difference between where the predominantly Black side of town, predominantly White side of town. So just in [my city] that is very apparent, which, you know, seems like we are in a time warp. Like, we just need to come out. Before, the individuals in those positions were from this area, so Caucasian males with a southern mentality. They [current leadership] are more open to females being in leadership, and I think the VPs that we have now, I can see them just looking for proven successes. So I could see that change, and they are not from the good old boy network. So even though our president, I think he still operates on that, he is not directly responsible for hiring the individuals.

Professional Mommy acknowledged that the cultural norms that were prevalent on her campus are slowly changing. These dynamics are changing with the new senior leadership that was recently hired. These men think and act differently about the institution and are directly responsible for bring in entry-level and mid-level professionals that has changed the landscape of her institution’s leadership on various levels. She has seen positive changes on her campus in relation to African American
women. She acknowledged an increase in hiring African American women in mid-level administrative positions on her campus. She equates these hiring decisions to the new leadership that are more focused on the quality of the candidate and the effectiveness of their work. She believes that these changes in her institution’s culture will positively impact her career progression in the future.

**Paige Watts.** Paige Watts coordinates academic support services for student athletes at a large public institution located in the Mid-west. In her role as Assistant Athletic Director in a Division I athletic program, she works specifically with the men’s football team. She is currently pursuing her doctoral degree in higher education administration while working full-time. She is currently working on her dissertation proposal, which places her a little more than halfway done in her program. Paige was introduced to student affairs through her interactions with fraternity and sorority life as an undergraduate student. She recalled the moment she discovered student affairs as a profession.

Once I realize[d] that I didn’t want to do it [teach] in a high school setting and then a friend of mine literally said ‘why don’t you do what you do know with Greek life in real life’. I said I never thought about the fact that you can do this for the rest of your life. And so that is what made me decide to go to grad school and it has kind of have been different experiences guiding me since then.

Paige’s undergraduate experiences exposed her to different opportunities in higher education. Her talents, skills and abilities allowed for a natural transition into student affairs work.
Career Progression. Paige has worked in several different student affairs areas that provided her with numerous experiences that prepared her for her role in athletic academic support services. Her initial graduate assistantship was as an advisor to student organizations but in wanting more of a challenge she took on another assistantship as a hall director over three residence halls. Eventually this assistantship lead to a full-time position as a residence hall director which included responsibility of serving as an academic advisor to all first-year students in her building, which included the athletes who lived there.

...I ended up working residence life, and that position got me my first full-time position as a hall director back at my alma mater, my undergrad institution, and the unique thing about that position was that I was a hall director and I was a first-year advisor to any students that live in the residence hall, I was essentially their college advisor until the second semester so basically our university’s way of transitioning our first-year students. I also had student athletes in my building so that’s what gave me the experience of working with them in that capacity. Basically living with them and seeing how that transition was very unique for them and how tight their time was and so later I ended up coming to [my current institution] as a full-time student and landed this position mainly because I understood the experiences and although I didn’t have the eligibility knowledge that was something that was very trainable so all of that prepared me for where I am now.

Paige initially was assigned to both football and men’s basketball teams as an academic counselor and in three years she was promoted to Assistant Athletic Director.
She manages academic support services for all student athletes at her institution and described some of her work related challenges in more detail.

...working in athletics there is no such things as a 45 hour week job here. We have a lot of weekends, a lot of long hours. Initially it was balancing that with the fact that I was a full-time student because my course load was anywhere between six and twelve hours, so balance was difficult but also the fact that this is a very male dominated area. I have the teams I initially worked with, [which] were men’s basketball and football, making sure that I got the respect that I got but also that they [coaches and players] knew that I knew what I was doing without perpetuating that stereotypical angry Black woman role.

The challenge of earning respect from student athletes, coaches and upper level administration without “perpetuating that stereotypical angry Black woman role” is a balancing act for Paige. She explained that she had to be creative in establishing authority within her role by not being too timid or shy without going over to the other side of the spectrum of being perceived as aggressive or angry. She attributed mentorship to helping her navigate these experiences.

...there was a lot of venting and getting advice from my mentor because she has developed this area [athletic student services] and even though she doesn’t work here in this department anymore, she’s the one who started our academic area. So she was the only one who worked on academics and now there are four of us. So really leaning on her and getting advice on how do I handle these various situations without breaking down, or without coming off in any rude way. She was very helpful with that.
Paige’s current mentor identifies as a White woman and she also served as her professor for an athletic administration course she took in her doctoral program. She credits her mentor with support and encouragement to move forward in this particular area of student affairs. Paige reflected on the racial differences between her and her mentor and commented positively on her mentor’s guidance and support of her career.

So even though she did not understand directly what is was like for me [being a Black woman], she did have a lot of others [women in athletics] she had worked with in the field that she confided in and had shared stories with her and showed [me] that she was able to have very candid conversations with me.

When asked why she continued to move forward in the student affairs profession, Paige began her answer by providing her thoughts about the culture of athletic administration intertwined with the dynamics of the student affairs profession.

Athletics [does not] see themselves as student affairs, [and] student affairs doesn’t see us [athletics] as student affairs either. So that is the most annoying thing about someone who is so ingrained in student affairs coming into this [athletics] and bringing that [perspective] with me. The rest of my colleagues no longer seeing me as one of them was a difficult transition. As far as what keeps me going, is the fact that I love the connections I have with my students. I love making as many opportunities and changes in support and really helping them. The type of students that I work with now are probably the most at risk students I’ve ever worked with in my career. To be able to support them, help them and see them through proves a lot of people wrong who say “Oh this kid is only coming here to play ball”. And then four years later he is walking and getting his degree means
the world to me because growing up I had a lot of those, “You’ll never do this, you’ll never do that” and my favorite thing was proving them wrong. So inadvertently that is the same thing that keeps me going in athletics as well. I think there almost one in the same. I love the fact that when it comes to athletics there is this challenge of ‘you’re a female working with football’ and honestly that is rare and I’ve actually had colleagues of mine say that coaches have told them that there is no way they’ll ever work with a woman. No matter what area it is. So I’ve been blessed to have coaches fully support me and let my work speak for itself and support that.

Paige’s strong desire to support students in their academic careers and her ability to develop and maintain positive working relationships allowed her to quickly move into an Assistant Athletic Director role after only serving as two years in her previous position. The position was created for her and recognized the influence and positive impact that she was having over the entire department. This acknowledgment of her efforts and her ability to impact her career progression has influenced her approach to move into a senior-level administrative role.

I do think networking is important but also taking initiative. I’ve learned that when it comes to athletics, sometimes when positions aren’t there they get created. So mine was created...It’s one of those [situations] where I realized you have to ask for your promotion but you have to put in the work before you even ask to make sure it gets there. I’m looking for those opportunities to expand and looking for the areas where you can either get on committees or you see that there
is a gap in something and you volunteer to be a part of those things so that you have the experience to get bumped up again.

Paige’s work in athletics has opened up other career choices to include senior-level positions within and outside of higher education because of opportunities to work with professional athletes. These non-traditional educational roles can vary within professional sport team organizations but ultimately they assist professional athletes with accomplishing their educational goals. She currently has no desire to become an Athletic Director because she perceived the primary role to be a fundraiser, which is of no interest to her.

Paige’s career progression has moved at an accelerated pace and her current professional success has built up a level of confidence that continues to motivate her to move forward in fulfilling additional career and educational goals she has set for herself.

I do see myself moving up faster then what might be expected to have reached an assistant AD position at 29 already kind of has my eye on the prize. I have a lot more colleagues from my previous positions that have told me that there is no way that I am going to get into the Ph.D. program at such a young age and I did. I can see graduation on the horizon so I guess my dreams are so big. I see it happening, but I see it happening faster than I even imagine.

Paige is excited about her future as she finishes up her doctoral program. Her ability to set big goals and achieve them has played a big part in building her confidence about the direction of her career.

Reflections on Race and Gender. Paige’s perceptions of the impact her race has made on her career progression varies based on the area of student affairs.
... I wondered if they [her former institution] were doing it for a quota, if that makes any sense. Where the rest of them [other positions she has held] benefited from [me] being a minority because they want so many minority hall directors or something like that. Then there were times like in this position I don’t think that matters at all.

However, in her current position within athletics she believes her gender has had more of an impact within the field of athletics.

Honestly, I think more of me being a women worked against me, so the fact that I’m here is always a positive thing because it’s rare. But I would say race, in the beginning [of her career] a little bit, but in the end not as much. Other than the fact that sometimes it’s nice that some areas want to build diversity and they feel that I’m a good person they can do it with, if that makes any sense.

As far as being a woman, I have had a lot of female dominated positions. Hall directors are usually women, advisors are usually women, even though I am in athletics working on the academic side, it is still typically female. The type of teams we have, they usually aren’t [female sports teams] so I think I have traditionally, up until this point, flowed and did things that are common for a woman. I don’t think that it has affected it at all. Other than now I feel that it [my gender] helps me to impress people. If she can hold her own with football, men’s basketball by herself then there is other things that she can do. So I think it just proves that my backbone is stronger, where if I was a man it wouldn’t have been as significant.
Paige’s story captures an interesting dynamic in her area of student affairs. Athletics is a male-dominated area and in finding success in athletics as a woman has boosted her confidence in her ability to move forward in her chosen career field and elicits respect from other colleagues who view her role to be difficult because of the sport culture found in athletics. However, comment on how her age and race have greatly influenced her experiences in her role.

As far as progression, I think it [age] made things harder. I feel I have a lot more to prove. My students, I have had to make it a point to, I want to say up the ante on my professionalism, significantly because they see me as their peer at times, if I’m not careful. So that actually forced me to be much more professional then any of my colleagues. I think maybe my race had something to do with that too because I felt like I had to prove myself that much more and make sure that I earned my respect without being rude or mean to get it. I don’t want people to fear me, I just want you to respect me and let me be myself but my best professional self is probably what I am trying to portray. I feel it has definitely increased that part of me that much more because even in other positions [that she has held] they mention that. They often say, “You don’t have to be that way, you don’t have to dress up as much”. No. I do it because my students see me as a little older and mature then they are.

Paige’s awareness of how she is viewed by students, coaches and other administrators directs her actions even if they appear to be extreme to her colleagues. She is sensitive to how others see her age as a factor in her ability to be successful in her role.
The changes for African American women in student affairs are overall positive from Paige’s perspective but she does acknowledge that they can be influenced by institutional culture.

The entire landscape I would say, it’s nice to see the population of African American women growing. When I go to conferences I see more of us and it’s always a phenomenal thing. The institutional pieces of it, [pause] I think it depends. I think [my institution] for example is very progressive in building that network for African American men and woman and minorities in general to really set a standard and add their footprint to whatever it is we [her institution] are trying to offer. However, I’ve been to other institutions where that’s not the case so much. I wish I could say that it is a department thing, I wish I could narrow it down, but I really think it is an institutional culture that I can’t quite put my finger on what makes it quite so different from one place to the other. Overall I would say we have progressed quite a bit.

Paige feels that the outlook for African American woman in student affairs is positive in that more opportunities are becoming available for them to pursue roles that will lead to experiences necessary to move towards a senior-level administrative position. Paige is hopeful about moving up in her career and once she completes her doctoral degree she feels confident that she will have added an important requirement to her skill set that is necessary for her to advance to that level.

**Daphney Smith.** Daphney Smith works in Residential Life and Housing in a medium size private institution in the South. She recently moved into housing operations and is responsible for managing housing assignments and business matters, which is
unlike the work performed on the residence education side two years ago. Daphney has only worked in Residential Life and Housing her entire student affairs career. In eight years she has worked at two very different institutions. Her former institution is her alma mater and is a large public institution located in a different state. She served as a hall director for three years until she left for her current institution, a small private highly selective school, where she quickly went from Assistant Director of Residential Life to Associate Director of Operations in two years.

Daphney discovered student affairs as a profession during her undergraduate education when she was a resident assistant and while working part-time in the alumni affairs development office. Despite her exposure to the profession, she attributes her desire to go into field from her graduate assistantship in Residential Life. She explained, I had a really positive experience as a grad student so I saw myself doing [it] as a career. I can imagine if I hadn’t had a positive experience I would have felt differently so I really think that is what encouraged me to keep going [into the field].

Daphney makes an important point by stating because of her previous positive experiences in student affairs, she was encouraged to continue and move forward in the profession.

Career Progression. After graduating with her master’s degree, Daphney took on a position with her current institution that she found through ACPA’s career fair which is also called the placement exchange. She was excited to work as a full-time professional in student affairs and spoke about what motivated her to move forward in her career.
The main thing is that I can fulfill my goal of helping students that way I was helped… but also I had a good relationship with my co-workers and my supervisor. So all of those things. Those are the things I wanted to have in a job. I wanted to be happy going to work every day and that is the feeling that I had.

Daphney’s statement about “helping students the way I was helped…” is in reference to one of her professional relationships while pursuing her undergraduate degree. She was fortunate to have a supervisor who became one of her mentors and helped her navigate the unchartered waters of her college career. As an African American woman, Daphney attributed a lot of emotional support and professional guidance to her mentor, who was also an African American woman. She recalled how her mentor made a difference.

She really taught me a lot about just being a young African American professional woman. I’m a first generation student so I really didn’t know what I was doing… We would just have regular meetings and she would tell me that I was doing a great job but if I wanted to be competitive with my peers I needed to have certain experiences and she helped me do that.

Daphney shared how her current mentor, the Dean of her college, has helped her navigate the profession. She discussed how her current mentor, who identifies as a White woman, has helped her with understanding the political dynamics of her institution even though they do not share the same racial background. She attributed the longevity in her current role to have huge influence in dealing with the conflicts that a mid-level administrator can have when managing up and down the leadership structure. She believes that because she has been the in her department longer than other employee
many people look to her leadership and trust her judgment. She mentioned a particular challenge at her institution because she is a young African American woman in an institution where that is not the norm. She explained how her organization’s culture and the historical perception of the leadership structure impact her ability to operate within her mid-level role.

When you look at [my institution], especially in our senior staff there are a lot of older White men and when you look at the entry level staff, people who they interact first with are a lot of younger White women, and so I think they’re just shocked that I am the person who is ultimately going to give them a yes or a no answer.

Despite challenges that may stem from others’ perception of her leadership, she viewed her impact on her organization to be positive. Daphney described how her presence at her institution for five years allows people to trust her and follow her direction but acknowledged that the privilege that her students and parents enjoy does influence policy. Daphney explained how parents can push senior leadership who sit above her to overturn her decisions but she does not think that changes how people see her influence within her role.

Being one of the younger participants, I asked Daphney specifically about how her age has impacted her career progression. She elaborated on how her age may impact the next steps of her career progression.

Because I did move up so quickly when I was only two years out of grad school, I don’t know if this will help or hurt me because if my director ever left [my institution], I definitely know that I could do her job and I know that I could do it
well. But I don’t know if people will take me seriously because of my age even though I would probably be the top candidate...

She concluded her response by asking the following questions.

Am I going to have to do a lateral position before I can be a director because I look younger even though I have had five years of post-grad experience? And I have had three of those years in a midlevel position...I know I am competent and able to do a director position.

Daphney has quickly moved up her projected career ladder but feels that her age may prevent her from moving forward as fast as she would like. When asked specifically about the future of her career, she responded hesitantly.

I am not 100 percent sure about that [her career]. I have always said I was going to be a Vice President of Student Affairs and so I definitely think that that is something I still aspire to do so I guess that means I will be going back to school to get my Ph.D. at some point.

In following up with questions about what she thought was required to advance to a senior-level position she suggested the following, “I think years of experience, so I definitely would need to be in the field probably 5-10 more years.”

When asked specifically about how her race has affected her work experiences, she responded with the following statement.

I think I have had to, work a little bit harder, to get the same respect as my White colleagues. I can give you a perfect example, when I first started this position, I had a White male colleague who was my direct counterpart so there would be times when people would come into the office and have questions about things he
knew nothing about, things that were my direct job and they would ask him. Or they would look at him as if sure he knew more than I knew because he’s a White male and I’m a Black woman. I really had to interject myself and say “No, I’m his supervisor, I’m the associate director so let me answer your question.” I definitely have had to make sure that I have mentors because I have definitely have noticed that opportunities would just come to some of my White colleagues that don’t necessarily come to me unless I ask.”

Another example Daphney provided describes a situation where one of her White male colleagues was offered an opportunity to travel abroad with a group of students. She acknowledged that his relationship with the faculty member made it possible for her colleague to participate in such an amazing opportunity. At that point, she realized that in order to make things happen she needed to branch out and build her own relationships. She accepted that she had to work harder than her peers to have these same opportunities but admits that despite her hard work she still gets overlooked.

Social activities outside of work that involve co-workers can prove to be difficult because of the cultural differences that permeate different social activities. Daphney shared another story about a country fair visit that had an event that allowed participants to pick cotton from fields. Picking cotton as an activity is thought to be culturally insensitive to African Americans because of the historical connections to slavery. However, when her White colleagues asked her to join them Daphney found it difficult to raise the question of inappropriateness, as they saw nothing wrong with the activity. As Daphney realized the importance of building relationship with other colleagues on campus, social activities in and outside of work became important to cultivating
relationships and developing trust between her and her colleagues. These networks are critical to providing professional opportunities across the University. The tensions that she experiences in her daily work either by being snubbed by a parent or student or by being overlooked by faculty or other administrators go unnoticed by a majority of her colleagues and she sometimes remains silent because she does not want to make a big deal out of something that could have her labeled as someone who is extremely sensitive to racial issues.

**Reflections on Race and Gender.** Her responses to issues specifically around gender garnered a different type of response. Daphney explained that because the majority of professionals in housing are women, she did not perceive any barriers but did notice that women have to operate differently in comparison to their male peers.

> I think there are times that I am in meeting and a man will say something that is completely rude and I know it’s rude, it’s just not said very professionally. I know that if I said it like that it would be an issue but I think that that has more to do with life more so than just [my institution]. So I’ve gone through that a couple of times where I know that as a woman, what I am saying, [has to be] very thoughtful and [I] have to add a lot of fluff for it not to come across as bitchy.

Whereas my male counterparts just don’t even think about that.

Daphney’s reflection on race was immediately connected to her ability to perform well in her position but when considering issues around gender, her perspective of how she is engendered in her role is not perceived in the same manner. When asked to recall any changes she has seen in African American women in student affairs she admits that her limited time in the field does not allow her to provide much perspective.
I don’t think so. But I know that that is just my experience because I am one of your younger participants. I think if you ask someone who has been in the field 20-30 years they are going to have a different answer. But for me I’ve always seen African American women in VP roles in Assistant to the President roles, in higher-level roles and I see that now. So for me there hasn’t been much of a change in five years.

Daphney’s eight-year tenure in student affairs has provided her with a breath of experiences that have shaped the way she perceives her career progression. Her current institution’s culture has made her consider barriers to her race more so than her gender. She did acknowledge that gender often dictates how she operates within her roles but she does not perceive these constraints to impact her ability to move forward in her career. The dynamics surrounding her age have given her some concern about her ability to move forward in her career as she is unsure of the next steps to move in that direction.

The next participant to be discussed is also in residence life and she has had similar experiences in student affairs that have helped to shape her perceptions of her career development.

**Femme Forte.** “You know what I am learning as I mature professionally is that I’ll never live long enough to learn everything from one person” is the guidance that Femme Forte offers and captures her wisdom and spirit. Her connection to the profession was early in her undergraduate educational experience. Femme Forte works in a small private institution in the South and has grown up professionally in Residential Life and Housing.
Career Progression. Femme Forte has served in all of the various leadership roles in residence life to include resident assistant, head resident, graduate resident director, and area coordinator. She left her small liberal arts undergraduate institution for a larger research institution to complete her master’s degree in college student affairs administration. She then took on an area coordinator position at her current institution, left for one year to serve in a similar role in another institution, and now has returned as an Associate Dean. She recalled the events that took place that introduced her to residence education.

I was actually introduced as an undergrad student by a mentor, actually a Caucasian woman. I was really involved in student life and was asked the question as a naïve freshmen, “would you get paid to do this?” to come hang out with us. The rest is kind of history. She took me under her wing, I ended up attending her alma mater, and she really introduced me to the field and encouraged me to kind of get involved but also to look into it as a career path.

Femme Forte’s motivation to move into the student affairs profession was inspired by her own undergraduate experiences at her alma mater, a small (less than 3,000) public institution in the deep South. She explained in the following statement.

... the Vice President of Student Affairs [at her undergraduate institution] was not very supportive of the organizations that I really valued and had been life changing for me. I do think it was about race and gender. So for me, kind of figuring that out as I matured was very hurtful, but it helped me understand there needs to be more people like me who understand the process [and] who can educate others because I thought a big part of it was just his ignorance in not
understanding the importance. The positives were people like my mentor, who said, "you should do this, this is important, you have a voice that isn’t always heard and you need to be there to offer your experiences". So that is how I kind of got to this point. So positives and negatives.

In considering all who have served as mentor in some capacity she specifically mentioned two student affairs professionals that have really supported her. One is an African American male who also works in a similar role in residence education and the other is an African American woman who serves in senior-level administrator role at her current institution. Together they have helped to serve as a sounding board and provided guidance throughout her professional journey.

Femme Forte believes she is someone who values the bigger picture and she is here to help all students. Even when she is feeling frustrated in her position, she remembers the influence she does have even if it not a lot. The desire to impact other’s lives continues to be a driving force in moving Femme Forte in the field despite the challenges she meets in her current position. She explained in the following statement.

I think the challenges just for me have been the institutional politics, and just understanding that as a mature professional it’s not really about me. It’s about other people, there lack of willingness to change, maybe. That just other peoples issues and not making them my own and it’s just institutional politics and the way things have always been. So that’s been a bit hard for me.

She credits her mentor who currently works at the same institution to support her in helping her understand the institutional politics. She provided a few examples of the nature of her challenges.
So one of my main challenges was that people [were] still viewing me in [a former] role, from the area coordinator to an associate dean. ... Some people unintentionally would say, "Oh I forgot you made that transition". You know very professional, while others would intentionally be like "You can’t make that decision." I was like "Uh, yes I can. I am the Associate Dean and I’ve made that decision so we are moving forward." So some people unintentionally others intentionally. I think for me it was a big challenge because it was the same university and we’re small. So I think that’s the challenge of working at a smaller school sometimes.

She continued to reflect on her inter-personal challenges within her unit but understands the positive impact it can have on her growth as a professional.

So there was some bullying that happened, some inappropriate comments, just a plethora of things. So much so that I had the nerve to document it. Didn’t move forward with it but I would have liked to. I was driving to work and I had an epiphany. As epiphanies come, just driving. I was like "they are never going to fire him" and I continued driving and the epiphany came "you know, they are not going to fire me either". So why am I sitting around getting grey hairs, worrying about this. They aren’t going to fire him but they are not going to fire me. So, for me, as simple as that may seem, it was really life changing ...

Her ability to accept the dynamics of her work environment has allowed her to move on and respond to these kinds of challenges differently, which has lessened some of the stress in her immediate work environment. However, Femme Forte’s institutional culture
is heavily influenced by the affluent nature of the student body and those dynamics produce a different impact all on their own.

I think that the ones that become difficult to navigate are working with students and parents. It hasn’t happened as much, but students and parents with large amounts of privilege are used to getting what they want and I work in a position such that if I say move in is on August 21 at 9 AM I really don’t want to let you in at 7 AM but their just like “It’s residence life” It’s not all glamour. There are times where they just know, “No, we are not doing that,” or “yes you punched a hole in the wall and you must pay these fines.” So that’s an example. But I think that because of the amount of privilege that’s there and how someone is privilege directly relates to how they may give right? Because they chart this stuff in the advancement office, how they may give 20 years from now. The university is very careful about saying no to the daughter of this person or saying, “[You] need to make that happen. I know this is backwards but you need to make it happen anyway.” So I get a little bit of that. My supervisors are very protective of that so I give her credit for saying “No, I’ll handle that.” She just kinds of takes it and I never hear about it again.

Despite the challenges that she experiences, she aspires to move towards upper-level leadership roles within student affairs. When asked directly about the future of her career, she admitted that she has thought often about where her goals will lead her to in the profession. She sees one of her next steps to be a Dean of Students at a small private university. Femme Forte’s perspective on what it takes to make it to senior-level
administrative position included the following factors: a doctoral degree, understanding of institutional goals in relation to her values and additional professional experiences.

_Reflections on Race and Gender._ In response to how her race has impacted her career progression, Femme Forte, acknowledges that her race will have an impact on her ability to move through her career ladder.

Yes, I think if I were white I would be Vice President. I am very goal orientated. I just think that because of other people’s bias and I would let other people’s bias affect me but I think I have matured past that point. I am from the deep South and most of my career trajectory has been in the deep South or [here]...I think it would have been easier if my gender and race would have been different. I think I would have been viewed differently. I think there were assumptions made about my intelligence and my ability to do the work. And I think that it has happened on every level that I have been. I go in meeting all the time on my campus and I am the only person who is of color and I am the only woman. And I just sit in there and say “wow, do I have to do this again”. And do I have to be the one that has to bring up the issues of the underrepresented student population. Sometimes I don’t mind, sometimes I’m aggravated. It just depends on what day of the week it is and what the issue is.

When encouraged to discuss her frustration about being the sole voice in the room she offered the following statement.

I am [alone]. I feel very strongly that I am and I try not to speak for everyone but I understand that when I think about my institutional politics often I am at the table, if I don’t say something who will. I don’t know these other peoples’ thought
processes. Well, sometimes I do, or at least I think I do, but I feel like if I don’t
who will? Of course that depends on the context and what not.

Her supervisor identifies as a White woman and Femme Forte recognized that she does
offer some acknowledgement of her isolation but Femme Forte feels that she can only
empathize and cannot fully understand the full impact of the institutional culture in which
she operates.

She thinks she does, she’s a White woman, who I think considers herself a liberal
and very supportive. I think it’s hard to explain the challenges that exist around
gender and race in an environment where the majority of people who are in
decision-making positions are men who are White. And so I think she understands
the feminist perspective, coming at it from a woman. She tries to understand the
race piece. I think it’s just difficult if you haven’t been through it but I definitely
see the empathy from her in that area.

In considering the impact that gender has made on her career she was able to tease out
her identity as a woman from her identity as an African American.

…the interesting part is that I have done a lot of research around gender because I
work at a women’s college so yeah I can separate the two. I think what’s
interesting for me is that I think people view both of them together. At least that’s
my perception or maybe that’s my own internal bias. I think people are like “oh
you’re Black and you’re a woman”. But I think [about my] gender [and] maybe I
wouldn’t have been as quick to do residence life. When I was looking for jobs I
really wanted a good fit so I can remember being on an interview and feeling like
hmm…this is interesting, this is not about my race, it felt like it was more about
my gender and expectations around, for example, work life balance. [for example]

“Actually for this job you must be in at 8 AM and you must leave at 5 PM and yes we are residence life so you must attend all staff meetings.” I thought, well in some ways this seems misogynistic. You’re not equating for family planning or things like that so I just remember feeling hmm…

She believes race, especially at her current institution, has more of an impact than her gender. She discussed how her current institution is working hard on incorporating diversity in their institutional practices. Her work in residence education sits within a college for undergraduate women only and her entire staff is made up of woman. She has a strong interest in woman studies and has incorporated feminist theory in her practices. However she does recognized that there is a toll to be paid on a woman’s career especially when considering the time commitment to certain student affairs areas, specifically residential life.

Femme Forte is currently researching Ph.D. programs in order to prepare for advancing in her career. She hopes to move to a leadership position in the next two or three years. Her current institution allows her to work collaboratively across departments to create opportunities for people of color on her campus so she does feel as if the institution is supportive of embracing diversity at various levels.

Simone Davis. Simone Davis decided to pursue student affairs as a career after choosing not to attend law school. She explored student affairs as a profession when she came across a degree program that prepared professionals to work in higher education.

I was your typical overly active student, very involved in different clubs and organizations and my bachelor’s degree – my major was political science. So I
was nearing graduation and had no idea what I was going do next, was looking at jobs in government and really not finding anything that my awesome political science degree really qualified me for. My original plan was to go to law school and be a lawyer, but I kind of figured out along the way that that really was not going to sustain me …so I was trying to find a different degree in something, some master’s degree in something ‘cause I couldn’t find a job and I came across college student affairs as a degree program and when I read about it I was like, “Oh my gosh. I could stay in school? I can get a job just being in college. That’s amazing.” So that’s really what got me interested in it and when I pursued it I ended up finding that same degree program on my campus because I didn’t know anything about it…because I was so involved on campus there were lots of people around, lots of administrators around who were happy to keep me around and like, “Oh, yeah. You can come back.” I got a verbal acceptance into the program before I even applied to it. So it was kind of that nepotism type of thing, but once I got in it I really felt like it was a place where I could make a difference. I could feel that – or feel the need of being needed or feeling important because you’re working with students who are on a journey that I was at that point just completing. So I thought – oh yeah. That’s what got me into it. Once I knew that it existed and really got involved with the more career aspect of it, like the student development theory and beyond just the activity planning I really began to respect it as a career.

Simone’s natural inclination to get involved with campus programming and activities turned out to be a natural fit for a career in student affairs. After coming into her master’s
program she had the opportunity to learn more about how instrumental student affairs work can be to improving the lives of students.

*Career Progression.* Simone's entrance into student affairs may have been unplanned but she quickly connected to the field by completing a master's degree at her alma mater that is a very large urban research institution in the deep South. She took on graduate assistantships in student conduct and in student activities. Once she discovered literature about the profession and comprehensive student development theories that she could apply to practices in the field she understood that this profession could really become her career. During her assistantship in student activities she was asked to apply for the assistant director position at a different institution and was elevated to that role prior to completing her master's degree. Within one year she elevated to an assistant director position in the division of student affairs. She then left this position to take on a role as director of student affairs.

Simone currently works in a small institution in the Mid-west where she oversees multiple areas to include financial aid, student life, career services, academic resource center and disability services while serving as the university Ombudsman. This institutional environment is quite the opposite from her undergraduate and graduate experience but she left to take on this new position in a very different environment because she wanted a different challenge and this position afforded her an opportunity to take on a larger managerial role. She also felt overlooked when she applied for a position at her former institution and was encouraged to look elsewhere for a mid-level position even if that took her away from her home state. She expressed her motivation to move forward in her career is through her own sheer will.
I'm 100 percent self-motivated. The idea that others may not have seen the value of my work or may not have trusted that I was a team player or whatever, it just made me decide to go somewhere where I would be appreciated. My personal goal is to be a university president and I'm not going to stay in one – at one institution or get down because I get denied an opportunity. I'm going to look for more opportunities. So the thing that pressed me forward is just me. I want to be the best that I can be and I'm not easily dissuaded.

Simone described how she applied for a director position at her former institution, one of her alma maters. She felt as if she was being groomed for the position but when she applied for the position she was not offered the role. Shocked and dismayed, she sought answers for why she was not selected and was surprised to find out that she did not have a strong network of support, as she believed she had in her role as assistant director. However, now that she is in her new role, she can see the positive aspect of not getting that role.

Now, I was very frustrated when I didn’t get that job, but it turned out that not getting that job – they always say everything happens for a reason. This particular job that I’m in has given me a lot stronger skill set and given me an opportunity to do a lot more things because that would have been director of one office. This job is a director overseeing five offices. So it’s better for me in the long run, but that still doesn’t change the fact that I felt like I was overlooked and unappreciated.

Simone’s disappointment turned out to be a blessing in disguise because she was able to move into a position that allowed her to develop a more robust skill set necessary to
move forward into a senior-level positions that she would not have been able to do in the role that she was originally seeking. She recognized that the position in the Mid-West was a perfect opportunity for her.

**Reflections on Race and Gender.** Simone’s mentors in the profession are all male. At her former institution she did not have a formal mentor but took advice from colleagues when needed. At her current institution her mentors are her immediate past supervisor, Executive Director of Enrollment Management, who identifies as a White man, and her Vice Chancellor, who is a Muslim man. She has connected with other Black women who have comparable roles in student affairs.

There are Black women, just as a circle of support, some in student affairs, some faculty who encourage me and tell me I can do it...I’ve only interacted with one Black woman who is in a position similar to the trajectory I want to go and she has given me advice and encouraged me, told me to read different books, but it [their ability to communicate] has not been as consistent as the other individuals I have mentioned.

Simone explained that in her experiences she has come to understand more about the stereotypes that are placed on Black women in leadership positions. She talks about the cultural influences that have forced her to operate one way at work versus the way she would operate in her personal life. She expressed her thought process in the following statement.

I think – this word has been in my – this phrase has been in my head a lot for the last couple of weeks. So I don’t mean it as seriously as it sounds, but code switching. I think was something that I had not really effectively developed until I
got here, because I – in my previous positions if I interacted with a person that I
didn’t trust or that I thought was fake or phony or who I thought was too
interested in my personal life I would just stop talking to them. Like I would –
that is not how I was raised to share all of my personal business that I would work
for or to trust people who quote, unquote, “do me dirty” at work. So I would just
100 percent disengage from the people that I was working with and I would even
create networks of other Black women who were going through the same things
that I was going through.

Simone’s purpose was to create a work environment that creates a positive experience for
her and other colleagues of color but in the end she found out that her goal to assimilate
into her work environment inadvertently compromised her ability to be promoted.

I would send out the e-mails and I would get us together for potlucks and all kinds
of things so that I would feel comfortable on campus, but when it came time to be
promoted I was not... I was told that I was – the whole time I was working there I
was told I was being groomed to take her position, but once she retired they hired
in someone else with less education and less experience and that is what opened
my eyes to what all of my coping mechanisms had really done because they had
basically created a barrier between me and anyone in a position to help me from
knowing who I was, what I could do, that they could trust me with their
information, whatever the case may be. So I would say in my current position
that’s something that I’ve been working very intentionally on.

When prompted for more information about how she is breaking down barriers and trying
not to be so isolated, Simone provided more details.
I’m doing things in this position that I probably would never have done in my previous position and I’m seeing the benefits of doing that, which is what a lot of my findings on my research on the Black female experience ended up circling back around to. Just selfishly I wanted to know if other women were being treated – mistreated the way I was mistreated and the answer was, “Yes”, but there were also some other answers within that that there is mistreatment going on, but there is also – there are also things that we can do to try to combat some of that mistreatment. It’s not going to change the fact that people have opinions of us, but if we’re starting out and this – I guess this is what I found. We are starting out with these assumptions and stereotypes being placed on us and if we don’t do anything to change that, if I’m not interacting with you, I’m not letting you get to know who I am, then I’m basically letting you believe that I am the stereotype. So I’m trying to not to do that anymore.

Her willingness to break the cycle as she sees it is based off her findings about stereotypes that help to typecast African American women in their workspaces. Simone explained some of the stereotypes of African American women in the following narrative.

A lot of them focused on the emotional aspect, Black women being angry, hard to work with. And there were some that I was not expecting to find. There were some associated with the way we dress, that we try too hard like we think we’re going to a fashion show, which I didn’t – I would never have guessed that collectively that was a stereotype of Black women. I know that a lot of the Black women I know do dress nice and I know that in comparison to some of the other
people we work with it could look like we dress better, but for me that is not an indication of what we’re doing wrong. To me that’s an indication of other people not caring enough about the place that they’re going, but for everyone else I guess we look different. It looks like we’re trying too hard and then the associations that they make with that, that we are more likely to be in debt because we care so much about appearance and different things like that, which those are leaps I never would have made, but these are actually things that people were reporting that they either thought themselves or they knew people who thought these things...So little things like that. Also, that we have no – that we are antisocial, that we have no desire to interact with people at work. I think that’s a misconception. For most of the Black women I know it’s not being antisocial, it is being very uncomfortable with the level of information that people want from us from our personal lives. Like for me my personal life and my work life is – I would prefer that they be completely separate. I am learning that they can’t be and I’m trying to bridge the gap between sharing information I’m comfortable with sharing and telling people to stay out of my business.

Simone reflected on what is required to advance to senior-level administration. She believes that ambition and drive are important elements for success. She believes that there is no room for mediocrity and that you have to be excellent. She continues with a story about the diversity on her campus to illustrate how she is developing a welcoming and comfortable environment on campus with other African American colleagues but has grown professionally to trust herself to reveal more of who she is to them.
Here all the Black [people] – we call ourselves “the Black caucus.” There are four Black people who work on our campus. We go to lunch together and we laugh about how all the Black people at our school can fit in one car, so in this environment one would think that I would be less comfortable and it would be more difficult, but it has proven to be a lot easier simply because I made the effort to be more personable. So I guess that would be the advice and to get over wanting it to be fair.

When asked directly about the impact her race has had on her career progression, Simone believes that her gender has made more of an impact than her race. Her gender has been more of a factor because of her work personality. She comes across very confident and direct which is not assumed to be a traditional female trait in response to conflict and challenges in the work place. She explained by sharing an example of a conflict she had with a faculty member in the following narrative.

.....the combination of race and gender together, I think Black female is just scary for a lot of people. It is intimidating. Girly girl or not, it is – people have that fear that you’re going to snap or you’re going to be angry or you’re so aggressive or when you’re just responding to them. I had this one faculty member. I sent an e-mail to all the faculty asking them to bring their students to our Martin Luther King Day program. She replied to all the faculty and basically said that she didn’t think it was a worthwhile program and she wanted to know who the experts were who were going to validate the claims of the program....So we had a program where we watched the inauguration and we said we’re going to talk about the progress America has made [by] electing a Black president, but also the
regression with the spike in hate crimes and different things like that and she was challenging whether or not that was accurate. So I replied to the entire faculty. I made a public reply to her public reply just letting them know, “Oh, no. We vetted the people who were going to be on the panel. It’s going to be a great discussion. Here is some information for you to look at in advanced if you don’t believe this is actually happening.” Here is the news so you know that this is actually happening. When I saw her in the hallway [later] I was like, “Did my reply help you understand what we’re trying to do?” She’s like, “Well, I was offended that you publically chastised me.” I was like, “You were offended by my public reply to your public reply?” And she’s like, “Yes.” I was just like, “Oh, okay.”

Simone’s story provides an example of how her race and gender combined becomes a magnet for tension when conflict is introduced. Her colleagues comforted her about the exchange but in doing so she felt that the idea of the angry Black female was expected and therefore was being perpetuated.

... even though she was way more antagonistic, when I talked to other faculty or staff on campus who saw it their response about her was, “Well, that’s just [her]. That’s just who she is,” but they were trying to tell me, “Oh, calm down. Don’t worry about it. Don’t be upset.” “No. You’re talking to the wrong person. You should be talking to her because I did not start anything with her, but I really felt like that was the whole stereotype of angry Black woman, them coming to me trying to calm me down. “No. I’m not the one who needs to be calm right now.” So I think the combination it’s really hard to separate.
The changes for African American women in student affairs are thought to be very small according to Simone. She believes that African American men have made larger strides in levels of senior administration than women.

... I’ve also noticed, like in the time we’re talking about these poor Black men who aren’t graduating from college, we’ve seen an increase in Black men being vice-president of student affairs, Black men being presidents of colleges. So it looks like Black men have gone – and even in the research that I did, the Black men, when all things were equal, meaning they had the same level of professional experience and the terminal degree, Black men were doing better than all other groups. So I think there has definitely been positive growth for Black men, but I have not seen a true change for Black women other than we’re speaking up. We’re starting to tell our own story. So I guess that would be a change that I’ve seen, more publications from Black women about Black women in higher – specifically in higher education.

Simone’s professional journey to a university president is unchartered waters for her. She continues to capitalize on the opportunities for growth and development in her area. She already has a Ph.D. and is looking for additional experiences to demonstrate her ability to lead at a higher level that will shape the outlook and operations of a university. Deepening professional relationships, securing mentorship, and seeking sponsors, people who will advocate for her when she is not around, are three critically important pieces to her ability to develop reciprocating relationships that can impact her ability to move forward. She continues to work hard while embracing areas of opportunity that can ultimately prepare her for senior-level administration.
Seasoned Mid-Level Administrators

"Knowledge without wisdom is like water in the sand"

-Guinean Proverb

Ann Jones. Ann Jones works at a small private institution in the Mid-west as the Assistant Dean of Students and Director of Multicultural Programs. As an undergraduate she was aware of differences between academic and student affairs although she couldn’t define them as such at the time. Her interest in student affairs was further developed when she became an admissions counselor at her alma mater. Once she worked in admissions she was able to draw deeper connections between academic and student affairs. What continues to motivate her moving forward was what she discovered while working in admissions.

I enjoy working with students. I enjoy helping students to navigate higher education, especially first-generation students, especially students of color. I think because most of my experience has been at predominately white institutions, and understanding what that means for students of color at predominately white institutions, and sometimes not having an ally… I think that that’s one of the main reasons why I continue staying in student affairs.

Two mentors initially supported Ann’s navigation of the profession, a colleague in admissions who identifies as an African American man and her supervisor at that time who identifies as a White woman. She credits both with helping to guide her as a new professional in assisting her with understanding the structure of higher education and making sense of her experiences in admissions.
**Career Progression.** Ann's professional experiences in admissions for two years eventually lead to her becoming an academic advisor. She noticed that many students of color would struggle academically, financially and have issues acclimating to the campus culture. As she counseled students, especially students of color, she wanted to do more to support and advocate for them than she was able to do in her role in admissions. While serving as an advisor she took advantage of an opportunity to go to school part-time while completing her master's degree in College Student Affairs.

As she grew professionally, Ann connected with two additional mentors who were professors in her master's program. They identify as a White man and a White woman. Both encouraged her to continue her education and pursue a Ph.D. She explained how their encouragement of continuing on her educational journey was inextricably linked to her race and her success as a professional.

I always remember the conversations that they had with me individually about the importance of me being African American and getting my Ph.D. I thought it was really funny, especially when my mentor, who was a White woman, was like, "You know it's very important as an African American woman and as a woman that you have a Ph.D... people really don't want to hear what you have to say unless you have the credential behind it." She was like, "You know it's going to be extra hard for you as a Black woman." So I kind of respected her honesty in that. Then [my other] mentor, told me it would be a disservice to the field if I didn't get my Ph.D. So they were really instrumental in me getting my doctorate.

After six years as an academic advisor, her next position took her to a community college where she worked for two years to support diversity initiatives and intercultural
relations. This work eventually lead to her current position as Director of Multicultural Student Affairs and Assistant Dean of Students. She has been in this position for three years.

Ann feels that one of her challenges in this position is that she is often called upon to serve as a chief diversity officer. She is called upon to complete tasks that are often outside of her role in student affairs. She provided examples of being asked to give a presentation to the president's advisory council to discuss the state of diversity in the institution. She is leading a multicultural council which presides over the entire institution and she even provided examples of how staff come to her as an advocate when there are issues or concerns that involve human resources. When asked about her obligation to operate outside of the scope of her responsibilities, Ann replied, "...in a way I do. I do because I know that it won't get done. I know that that's now become—because I can do it, it's become an expectation." Although it can be burdensome at times, Ann strongly believes that this is what she is supposed to do as a social justice advocate and that she is needed within her institution.

Moving deeper as a professional in student affairs has allowed her to work differently but she is still hesitant on seeing a long-term future in student affairs. She enjoys certain aspects of the profession but she misses opportunities to write and conduct research as her current position does not allow her to time to engage in these types of academic enterprises. As she operates within her mid-level position she is starting to understand more of what she likes and does not like to do in her daily work.

I see myself being more in academic affairs, perhaps moving into an association dean role or, in some respect, more on the academic side of the house. I enjoy
certain aspects of student affairs, but I don’t know that student affairs is a good fit for who I am as a professional. The last two positions that I have had have, I think, helped me to realize that and help me to understand myself better, of who I am and where I want to be...So I’m finding that while there are aspects of it that I like, there are aspects of academic affairs I like just as well. I probably will be in academic affairs in the next couple years. I don’t necessarily see myself being in student affairs.

Ann enjoys helping students which is what led her into student affairs work. However, as she moves continues to move forward her idea of “fit” has changed to include activities found in academic affairs.

_Reflections of Race and Gender._ As the conversation turned to discussion surrounding the perceptions of race, Ann described how race has impacted her career progression. She believes that it is easier for people to advance her because of her work with multicultural programs but at the same time she is pigeonholed because of the work that she does with diversity on campus. She finds it hard for people to conceptualize the transferable skills that are accumulated when working in multicultural student affairs. She stated, “It’s always interesting to me how that’s what people want to default to or put me into category, although I have a wide variety of other experiences.” Through her work in social justice she gets to see many different dynamics within her institution and has come to have a different understanding of her institution’s culture because of the different conversations that she has across campus. Ann gave the following example of how she sees other professionals moving forward in their careers, which includes how people are compensated for the work that they perform.
It's hard to articulate when it [racism] hasn't been overt type stuff. There are things that you know just from how people are questioning or speaking with you, and just because of what you see and what you notice, and how you see other people moving forward and how that's very different from the way that you're moving forward or not moving, and it's very different in terms of the expectations that people have of you, and if what you're being paid is matching that [your job] or if your title is matching and how you see it's not the same for other people, if that makes sense.

In discussing how gender has impacted her career progression, Ann believes that both identities are so intertwined that it is often hard to determine the impact of one without the other.

...I don't know that I can – I mean in terms of how I see the politics or how I see other things with other people, in some ways I can, especially in my current institution, some things that come to mind immediately when I see that there are some White women who have the same education, perhaps in some instances even less or equal amount of experience, and I see the titles that they have and the advancements that they have in terms of title and salary. Then in that sense, yes. But then I also see that in terms of the position of power of White men in my institution as well and how their power is distributed, and then with White men who don't have my education or my title. I see them called on to represent or to do things, and I know it's because they are male and because they're White. I've been placed in a box, so to speak, because of what people think about how they have limited me based on what they think they know about me.
Another example Ann offers is her experience on a research committee where she was asked if she understood qualitative research. In holding a Ph.D. she was upset and frustrated at the assumption that she would not understand the differences between qualitative or quantitative research.

...we were talking about action research and she said, “Now you do know what qualitative research is, right?” I looked at her and I said, “I have a Ph.D like everybody else at this table. I know what qualitative research is.” She was like, “No, no. I didn’t mean it like that.” I said, “I know exactly how you meant it.” Afterwards she tracks me down, her and another person, after I was leaving the meeting. She was like, “I just wanted you to know that that’s not what I meant.” She said, “I know that you have a doctorate, but not every PhD program goes over qualitative research.” I was like, ”I don’t know of a PhD program that doesn’t cover some type of qualitative research.” I know what you think. You’re just wanting to cover your tracks. Don’t speak to me like I’m a child and don’t speak to me like I don’t have a Ph.D.

Ann’s frustration in having to always prove herself in various interactions across campus is clear in that example. However, she does believe that there are positive changes in regards to African American women in the field overall. She notices that there are more women in senior-level positions and that they are coming into areas that do not pigeon hole themselves into areas of diversity or in titles of chief diversity officer.

In considering regional differences based on where she has worked she highlighted some differences between the Mid-west and the South. She found that in the South, professional opportunities for African American women were not as strong as in
the Mid-west. She provided an example of how an African American woman, who was a dean, was demoted because she did not follow the party line.

I saw the way that things worked when I was in Georgia and I was very disgusted by how things were. That's one of the reasons why we left, because it was very difficult if you were an African American woman, especially if you were not from the South, to be able to advance. People wanted to keep you in that box. So I definitely see a difference in the Mid-west.

Ann is experiencing the disconnection that mid-level administrators may feel as they reach a mid-career point when they do not see a defined pathway in front of them. Ann feels more connected to educational research and administrative support that is more suited for her academic affairs interest. She continues to explore her career options while supporting diversity initiatives within her institution and championing multicultural programming on campus. Her desire to support students, faculty and staff on campus through her work in multicultural affairs inspires her work and moves her forward.

**Minnie Mouse.** As the Director of the Counseling Center, Minnie is a professional psychologist on her small, highly selective, mid-size campus in the South. As an undergraduate student the idea of pursuing student affairs as a career choice was not considered because she had planned on pursuing psychology at the graduate level. She was introduced to the concept of student affairs through a position in the Dean’s office while assisting with research on student affairs issues. Counseling college-age clients led her back into student affairs because the field espoused the values that were in line with how she wanted to practice as a psychologist. Her mentor was an African
American woman who helped her develop a deeper understanding of higher education, research and other areas of professionalism.

**Career Progression.** What continues to drive Minnie in pursuing her career in student affairs is her connection with the people she works with and the professional fulfillment she has in her job. She explained the role mentors have played in developing her leadership opportunities.

So all along my path, I have had mentors who were directors of counseling centers or vice presidents, who have encouraged me to continue to look for leadership roles and to take on additional leadership roles, as well as different kinds of activities within my work that will put me in a position to take on management and leadership roles...And so I always had close relationships with my supervisors and mentors and they have always either created opportunities for me or encouraged me to get involved in different ways that have allowed me to move forward.

Her mentors have been majority White females but she has had some White men and African American women serve in this capacity. She explains that the nature of the clinical psychology profession is majority White although she has tried to reach out and build relationships with African Americans when she can. She illustrated this point and the differences in what each mentor was able to provide based on their race and gender identity in the following explanation.

I certainly have been fortunate enough to have African American mentors in my field as well. Mainly because I sought them out through professional organizations and in my training experiences where I had choices. I think each
had their own benefit. So, for example, the White males that I worked for, because of the way they are positioned with their organization and the kind of voice that they have, were able to directly put my name forward and say this is somebody who should rise to a leadership position and that be honored within an institution because of the level of influence they have. And at the same time, I think working for an African American female and another White female who came from a very feminist perspective, they were able to help me navigate my own identity within the institution by being able to talk with me very directly about what it means to be an African American female or a female in a male power structure. So I think all of them had something very valuable to offer, and it looked different.

Minnie offers a deeper insight to moving into senior-level administrative role by taking into account the different identities that one assumes when moving into different levels of leadership. Her identity as a psychologists is also melded into being a student affairs professional. She offered an interesting perspective on how these identities continue to become splintered as you move into different leadership roles.

... as I look at people who have reached the level of vice president, very often their investment is much more solid in the institution than it is in their own profession, like whatever degree path they may have taken to get there. Oftentimes, you know, their work has deviated from that at some point and they really become more associated with kind of the institutional goals and institutional ideals of higher education. And so the challenge for somebody in my position is that in some ways I have to make decisions about whether I’m ready to
give up my identity as a clinical psychologist. I spend a lot of time and effort and energy training because this was my passion in life, and I realized enough to move beyond no matter where I am, in a lot of ways I’ll have to give up that identity. And so that will be a huge choice for me, to be able to give up my professional identity as a psychologist to become, you know, maybe a vice president or an associate vice president in another division that is not associated with counseling, because very often there aren’t – there isn’t a step beyond this that allows me to retain that part of my identity.

In considering type skill set required to move to a senior-level administrative role, Minnie believes that political tact, understanding how to influence political matters, and understanding that often people are selected because of the professional reputation. She strongly believes that people are selected for these roles based on the perception of competence or being the “right person” to take on such a role. This perception encourages others to work with you and move institutional goals forward, which directly impacts your ability to be effective. Minnie’s next steps for her career are being carefully considered, as she is quite content and satisfied in her current role. Her career goals are being influenced by her family goals because she wants to create a strong affiliation where they are living now for her child. Early on in her career she shifted to different positions based on training or professional opportunities available that she was trying to capture. Minnie finished by explaining, “I think I have now shifted into more of a place in my life where personal concerns outweigh much of that and my career path will be dependent on what is best for my family.”
**Reflections on Race and Gender.** Minnie's insight about how her race has impacted her career is influenced by how she grew up. She lived in the deep South and grew up in a racially conscious environment where she always reflected on how her race colored her understanding of who she was and how she saw herself in the world. Minnie found it difficult to compartmentalize how her career would be if she did not consider race to be a factor. She found it easier to discuss the impact of her gender because she came into understanding feminist perspectives in graduate school. Once she started thinking of herself differently from this perspective she was able to analyze her experiences not only from a racial perspective but also from a feminist perspective. She acknowledged that how she views herself and how other perceive her as an African American woman can impact her career progression. She described these dynamics as they relate to the profession.

…it's been crucial to my development to be able to have conversations about career progression and next steps in taking on work in the context of who I am and how people will perceive that and, you know, what kinds of skills and knowledge I have that will help or hold me back in different areas.

She continued to illustrate her point by providing an example of how understanding this feminist perspective is essential to African American woman understanding their whole self. She conducted research with faculty and staff and was asked very specific questions based on feminist literature in conjunction with racial identity literature. It was at that moment that she realized she had not considered feminist questions on a conscious level.
I think, you know, in some ways that is an artifact of how we think about African American women, in that we have not by and large in this culture haven’t been acknowledged as gendered beings in some way.

The biggest change Minnie has seen in relation to African American women has moved along a historical continuum that really took off during the civil rights era. She explained how in the 1980s the field of student affairs was seen as being very accessible to African Americans. However, the backlash to affirmative action strategies in higher education has some institutions re-evaluating their aims for diversity. She feels that the greatest loss in ushering the changes in strategy to influence diversity and opportunity is the absence of the conversation around race and equality that are not happening on campus anymore. When these points are no longer debated or explored the value of diversity and the goals to have administration reflect its populations get lost which ultimately have a greater impact on students because they are not encouraged to think critically and engage in this kind of dialogue.

... to have those dialogue[s], still about, you know, what is the makeup of our division and who are the people that we should be seeking out at this point based on race or ethnicity. And in some ways, you know, people see it as progress. In a lot of ways for me, I see it as a loss that we no longer can handle conversations about what people’s identity represents in terms of an educational environment. And I think that is definitely something that has been kind of an outgrowth of, you know, some of the Supreme Court rulings around affirmative action and things like that, that may have taken that dialogue and put it back in the closet, that
people don't feel comfortable talking about what our division looks like and what that means to students.

Minnie’s southern roots remained prominent even when moving out to other parts of the country to continue her professional education. In the Mid-west she continued to notice what she called, “[the] vestiges of slavery and oppression.” She remembered working with high school students in the Mid-west and realized through her interactions how race played into students were treated. For example, students of color would report that they were counseled to go into the military regardless of the intellectual capacities the student demonstrated or the resources available to help them pursue a college education. Her ability to analyze experiences from a gender perspective was harder than race based on how she grew up.

I have always been trained to see race, whereas growing up, the dialogue was never there about as a woman and my gender and how that will play out. And I think those have been the places where I’ve been more challenged, in terms of particularly working for male supervisors and knowing how to respond to some of the gender based experiences that I had with males in a male environment, until I got out of graduate school and really further understood kind of the feminist literature and what that process looked like.

Minnie’s ability to see race separate from gender is largely due to her professional experiences teaching women’s studies within her various professional roles in higher education. In growing up the dynamics of her race and gender influences her experiences were hard to separate. However, as she grew professionally, her ability to analyze work her environment and to understand challenges from a feminist perspective became
stronger. Minnie’s strong familial ties to her current home and contentment in her current position has encouraged her to not seek a position at the next level. Her current work environment allows her to connect with students, colleagues and faculty while maintaining her identity as a psychologist whose work is embedded in the field of student affairs.

**Destiny.** Destiny directs leadership and student development in small private liberal arts college in the Northeast. She discovered the student affairs profession through her undergraduate experiences because she was an active student leader in many different organizations. She was highly involved and eventually she was encouraged to consider it as a profession by the Dean of Students. However, at the time she was reluctant to move forward in the profession and went into the business field as an accountant. After she realized that she was not happy or fulfilled in that role she entered the field of student affairs.

**Career Progression.** Destiny has the most varied experiences in student affairs of all the participants in this study. She initially worked in career services at a large private institution for five years and then was promoted to associate director of multicultural student affairs in the same institution. While in that role for two years she also served as a House Director with one of the campus Sororities before she left to become the Director of Student Development at a mid-size regional public institution. While operating as Director of Student Development she took on additional responsibilities as interim Director of Student Activities and Fraternity and Sorority affairs. She left the Director of Student Development position in order to pursue doctoral studies full-time. After completing the degree she assumed her current position as Executive Director of
Leadership and Student Development at a small private institution in the Northeast. She has been in this role for three years and oversees career planning, community services, student activities and commuter life.

Destiny did not have mentors or role models while in undergraduate or graduate school. However as a young professional in the field, she quickly found career role models in a faculty member, an African American woman, who shared her same sorority and her supervisor while at the institution she received her Master’s degree who identifies as an Irish American man. She believes that they were very instrumental in helping her navigate the political environment of higher education for the five to seven years after completing her graduate education. She has continued to move forward in student affairs because she is an advocate for all students but especially those who are students of color. For example, when she worked at a previous institution, in her role as associate director for multicultural student affairs, she was called upon to help settle a major racial conflict between African American students and the college administration who were embroiled in heated discussions over a racially insensitive incident that put the institution in the national news. She was instrumental in helping to improve the learning environment for the African American and other students of color. She continues to be an advocate for social justice for the betterment of all students.

Destiny mentioned several times that she has struggled to manage the political culture within her institutions, which she feels has slowed her career progression. She expressed that she should be further along in her professional career at this point in time. She has informal networks within her institution that are helping to pull her out of her shell to develop skills that will help her learn better ways to navigate the political
environment and achieve the professional successes she is striving to reach. The challenges she faces working in her current environment at a women’s college can be frustrating.

In my experience all the people who have pulled [me] up in the past were White men. I’ve had great success under them. I’m currently under a full female board and [if] they don’t like [you] they try to destroy you. They come down [on you] hard and it’s just not [that] you didn’t do this right; it’s you’re an idiot; [they attack you personally] I’m like really?! You’ve got to be ready [because] you can’t quit every time they get in your face [with mean-spirited nonsense].

She continues by sharing a story about her university president, who identifies as an African American woman. She believes that her president deliberately goes out her way to make sure that she does not show any favoritism to other African Americans because she does not want people to think it is because of their shared racial background.

But my president is of the old school mindset [that many professional African-American face in believing that they must distance themselves from “unacceptable” Black people] I can’t be seen with the Black people here, because it’s going to look as if I’m [playing]… favorites. So, instead of helping, [me, she] has been part of the problem that I experience personally. So it’s been rough not having [or any] support… I think if you get past race and say let me put the most qualified in you may have a very diverse staff.

Destiny has been in the field for 15 years and has not been able to operate above a senior mid-level role, which she currently holds. She felt that she was doing what she was supposed to do by earning advanced degrees while developing varied experiences in
different student affairs areas. Unfortunately, she discovered that her actions have created a negative perception when she applied for positions and she found that many of her peers have moved ahead of her with fewer administrative experiences.

I was at the top of my game with my master’s, I got the Ph.D. and I dropped back down to the bottom, and I haven’t figured out how to negotiate the waters as well. But I believe my years of experience have actually hurt me because my colleagues who were younger with less experience, but got Ph.D.’s are all in positions and salaries over me right now. It’s not for lack of trying on my part; some of them are political so that helps them a little bit, but it’s also this – “I don’t have to pay them as much or I can put them in this little position and beat them up a little bit”, [which] has then positioned them for [the success] that I haven’t been able to get positioned for.

When discussing what is required to move forward Destiny believes that you prepare for the senior-level as you prepared for the mid-level. She believes you have to be resourceful, remain flexible, and remember that sometimes institutional problems are bigger than your scope of influence but you have to stay diligent in your work. She did add that at the senior-level knowledge of assessment and educational research are huge factors that will make the difference in how senior-level administrators are asked to work these days in addition to strong communication skills and political savvy.

Destiny’s future career goals include becoming a vice president of student affairs for a smaller mid-size (10,000-12,000) school. She believes that in three to four years she will be an assistant or associate vice president in a smaller midsize college or university.
She will continue to build her professional skills and knowledge and is working hard to position herself for success.

**Reflections of Race and Gender.** When discussions turned to the impact race has had on her career she explained how its influence is hard to deny when she has seen how her White peers have been able to move forward to senior-level roles even when they were not qualified to operate in that capacity. She courageously provides an emotional example of how this situation played out with one of her peers that she graduated with from her doctoral program.

It has certainly; race and gender has been, oh my gosh, now you’re going to get me out here crying; I’m not going to cry; I’m going to try not to anyway. I think it’s been…it’s huge. I have a colleague who I adore, White male, when he got his Ph.D., [he’s] book smart; got his Ph.D. he had no experience in higher education and was then working as a sexual assault counselor. I came in with 12 years of experience; he was immediately hired as an associate dean in a position he had no idea how to do it, and ultimately got fired a year later, and continues to ask me for help. Yet here you have the title and more money, no experience, and yet [the feedback given is that I] don’t have enough experience…I went into career services, I did student activities, I did Greek life and I tried to make [my experiences] as well-rounded [as] I could, [so I could] be a generalist, someone who could understand [the entire system]. I’m being told that [my varied experiences] hurt me, because every time I looked for a dean [position] [I was told that they] want three or four years [experience] in one area, [despite the fact that they were] looking for a generalist [that does] not even making sense, so
basically you're just saying you don't want to hire me. So when I [had] the
master's [I was told that I needed] the doctorate, now I have the doctorate it's like
we don't want you.

Destiny continued by explaining that her former supervisor, an African American
woman, tried to express to her that she came across “too Black.” She noted that she does
wear a headscarf but she is still professionally dressed when she comes to work. She
realized that people in key positions can still consider superficial attributes as negative
when it comes to recognizing and supporting her in her work. She feels trapped and her
influence and scope of responsibilities are limited within her current institution.

So when she’s in a key position to help and she understands where I want to go
[professionally] and where I’m trying to position myself, and you have the power
to [help] that and you won’t because of my skin color that bothers me. Then to
know I should be able to go anywhere else, but now I’m being limited to here so I
can’t go far here, but I can’t get out, because of some of those experiences so I’m
almost trapped and no one’s willing to step out to help me. I personally believe
it’s because I’m an African-American woman, but the other piece is that politics.
I speak a different way so until I learn how...until others learn how to accept me
as I am, and that I can still get results even though I speak differently I still get
discriminated against. So right now I’m being “Blackified,” I’m just making that
up, but now it’s...I’m struggling. Because I’m born and raised in the inner city, I
speak well... Yes I’m intelligent, but intelligence is just not enough. So until I
learn how to not be so direct with my communication, which I have been learning,
and learn how to put a positive spin on everything, which it was never my way of doing things I feel I’m trapped.

Her perspectives about how African American women are progressing in student affairs remained positive in light of her own experiences. She noted that she has seen more African American women in senior-level administrative positions since she entered higher education in the 1980s. She expanded on her thoughts about the challenges African American women face through her analysis of the dynamics of mid-level administration. She asserted that the research shows that most professionals in higher education leave at this level, because the challenges become too hard and your mentors are too few. She noticed that when she initially entered the field other professionals were eager to mentor her but as she gained experience there were few who were willing to invest in her as a mid-level professional.

Her faith has helped her stay encouraged and move forward in the profession and she admits that she probably would have left a long time ago without it. She discussed how operating at the mid-level career point encourages some professionals to become dysfunctional in order to function within the system and to that end they become part of the problem. She acknowledged that her impact as a student affairs professional may not be as influential as she initially thought when she entered the field; yet she continues to stay encouraged as her professional maturity develops. She has taken on a few writing projects, motivational speaking engagements and serves as a consultant because in this moment she knows she is really close to considering leaving the field. However, she remains ambivalent to the thought of leaving because she truly enjoys working in student affairs.
L.V. L.V.'s career in student affairs has developed in institutions only located in the Mid-west. Her family is from this area and she felt compelled to stay close to them. Her Master's degree is in guidance and counseling but she fell in love with the college environment and enjoyed working with college-aged students during her assistantship in residential life and housing.

**Career Development.** She grew up professionally in residential life and housing for two years and worked in admissions and recruitment at a community college for seven years before returning back to residence life for an additional four years. She then assumed a position for two years coordinating enrichment programs for minorities interested in teaching before transitioning into student conduct where she has been for the past six years. She was an assistant director for five years before being promoted to associate director. She could not specifically name a particular person who has served as a mentor to guide her in the field but she has had an opportunity to work with great supervisors and co-workers who have lent their support and guidance when needed.

She [her immediate supervisor during her first two years in residential life] was just extremely helpful as well as the assistant director of residence life; they were two people that helped me along and really showed me the ropes because I came in fresh not having any housing experience...So they just kind of helped me in getting acclimated and learning some of the things that came along with that, so, I would say that I had really good people that I worked with but not necessarily someone I would call a mentor in the actual area of student affairs.

L.V. relied heavily on her African American colleagues for support and guidance as she continued to move forward in her student affairs career. One colleague she mentioned
specifically is also in her sorority and they have known each other for 26 years. L.V. discussed how she has served as a source of inspiration in and outside of the field of student affairs.

....she's been a real inspiration to me. Knowing how to maybe navigate through some of the waters then knowing how to approach certain situations. And she's also been that listening ear so that when I did need to vent about something or either run something by her, I could say, “What are your thoughts on this?” She's really been a person that has helped me through that. So she's been a good support for me.

L.V. is motivated to keep moving forward in her career because of the connection she builds with students. She has earned her doctorate degree to learn more about higher education.

I thoroughly enjoy working with the students, learning more about the area of student affairs and higher education in general, so that is really what keeps me going. ...I learned a lot about the structure of the university setting and that there is upward mobility for some of the things that I want to do.

L.V.'s career goals include moving into a dean of students position and ultimately into a vice president of student affairs role. When asked about what is required to move to the senior-level position, L.V. shared her insights. She understands that moving up the leadership ladder cannot be simply boiled down to what your job descriptions details but your ability to influence through your role.

Getting a well-rounded experience I think is important. Also, demonstrating that there has been some level of progression in your career path, and I would say that
the other thing would be showing that you have made an impact in the positions that you had... And what you were able to contribute to that institution that maybe wasn’t there or that maybe you were able to enhance while you were there and I think that’s something that would help if someone is going to look forward to progressing into more of a senior level administrative position. The biggest thing I think has been or would be, experience, but it also doesn’t hurt to have an advanced degree. So I think the doctorate degree helps tremendously.

L.V.’s insight to moving forward to senior-level administration has created a formula that she has followed.

**Reflections of Race and Gender.** As L.V. reflected on how race has impacted her career progression, she believed the influence to be positive because higher education institutions were looking for diverse and qualified applicants, which is an ideal environment for her to thrive in. In becoming a more experienced candidate, through her education and professional experiences, she knows that this will create ideal conditions for her to achieve her ultimate career goals. She did not feel as if her race has a negative impact on her ability to assume a position. She did express that at times she applied for positions that she was under qualified for and political dynamics existed within that particular institution.

... I was probably applying for some jobs that were a little, for lack of a better word, too senior administrative, where I needed to have a little more experience under my belt in some of those areas, so I think that’s one of the things that hindered me from applying or getting some of the jobs that I applied for. The other thing, I do know was that there are some positions I applied for that some
internal candidates were hired for those positions, so I think that was part of it.

That was a hindrance, if you will, from getting those positions and then I think the other one was I do believe in fate. I do believe that God places us in different places and I think some of those positions I was applying for all the wrong reasons. And they really weren't jobs that would be progressive in my career, they were jobs that were going to keep me in a particular area or space as opposed to contributing to my growth professionally and I didn't get any of those positions. Which now I realize that was probably a good thing because I would have probably still be in those positions that had me at a coordinator level or at the very least maybe at the assistant director level versus where I am now.

When considering the impact her gender has made she does not believe she has ever been at a disadvantage but she does recognize that a majority of women hold mid-level positions and a majority of the senior-level roles are men at her institution. She believes that gender may play a role because the leadership hierarchy is male dominated. She believes that this could be a factor in the future because she does not see very many women at that level of leadership to think that it may be a possibility for her at her current institution.

The differences in African American women in the field from L.V.'s perspective is not entirely positive when she compares PWI institutions to HBCU institutions to determine career pathways for senior-level administration for African American Women. She explained her point of view in the following statement.

I do think that, of course, you will find it in some areas, more so than others, of course if you are looking at popular institutions, [and] you know HBCUs, you'll
see it a little bit more. But, I think it is still something that we are striving for in some of our predominately White institutions that I still don’t see as many, but I see more than when I entered the field many years ago.

L.V.’s positive spirit about moving forward is driving her to build up additional professional experiences that she believes will be required to move forward to a Dean of Students position. She recognizes that she is limiting herself based on her regional ties but she is content in her current position until the ideal opportunity presents itself.
Chapter Five: Analysis

The participant profiles in Chapter Four provided a foundation for this chapter by creating portraits of each participant. Their narratives paint a picture of their lived experiences and connect with the reader because of the honesty, sincerity and courage that it took to share their stories. This chapter explores the participants’ stories in depth by taking a deeper look into the meanings and connections of their experiences as they relate to the questions that are driving the study. The findings of this study, to be presented in this chapter, will provide direction and guidance for implications and future directions for research in Chapter Six.

The conceptual framework for the analysis of the findings builds upon two ideas. As defined in Chapter Three, the combination of career advancement factors (Coleman, 2002) and Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) provides a powerful framework to analyze data. Career advancement factors include opportunities, competence, attitude, exclusion, isolation, position and position requirements (Coleman, 2002). Black Feminist Thought supposes that racism, sexism and class oppression are bound in such a way that they cannot be separated (Collins, 2000) and assumes that the intersections of these three dynamics produce commonalities within the experiences of Black women in the U.S. This conceptual framework, a combination of career advancement factors and Black Feminist Thought, examined the stories of the participants to address the following research questions:

1. How do mid-level African American women administrators in student affairs negotiate their career progression?
2. How do mid-level African American women administrators in student affairs perceive the impact that their race and gender has on their career?

Analysis Process

As described in Chapter Three, the strategy used to analyze the case study data required the use of two matrices, found in Appendix E, which were comprised of the major elements of the conceptual framework that guided the study. The first matrix was used to examine career advancement factors in Coleman's (2002) study that were found to impact the perceptions of career progression for African American women. The second matrix was used to explore perceptions of race and gender using Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000).

Coleman’s (2002) seven factors include attitude, competence, exclusion, isolation, opportunities, position, and position requirements. The areas, first discussed in Chapter One, are defined here to provide additional context for the analysis process. Attitude captured any emotions participants had about how they were perceived by others. Competence refers to the knowledge and ability to successfully operate in your administrative role. Exclusion and isolation are defined as any experience or perception of environmental factors that created dynamics in which the participant felt alone in their work. Opportunities include the perception of being able to engage in professional activities that provided experiences needed to advance within the profession. Position and position requirements represent the knowledge or awareness the participants had in understanding the knowledge, skills and practices required to operate in a senior-level administrative role.
To determine the participants’ perceptions of the impact their race and gender has on their career progression, Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) was used as a lens for analysis. The Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) categories include outsider-within, controlling images, intersections between race and gender, socio-economic factors, and shared experiences. Again, these areas are briefly defined to provide additional context for the analysis process. Outsider-within speaks to the concept of being caught in between different groups of that have varying levels of power. Controlling images are stereotypes that can dictate certain opinions of African American women. Intersections between race and gender highlight any relationship that the participant described about the impact of both being African American and female. Socio-economic factors speak to any financial impacts the participants discussed. Finally, shared experiences describe the commonalities that all the participants shared due to the dynamic of their race and gender.

Each participant profile, or case, was examined to determine if the participant’s experience could be captured in any of the matrix categories. Once initial analysis was completed, all profiles were evaluated for similarities and differences in a cross-case analysis approach (Creswell, 2013). The cases were compared against each other in the by years in student affairs and regional differences.

**Career Advancement Factors**

Mid-level African American women administrators in this study are *negotiating* their career progression by developing mentor relationships, building a professional skill set to include an advance educational degree, and working hard to navigate their institution’s culture. As defined in Chapter One, negotiate means to get over, though, or
around (something) successfully. The findings in this section are organized by the four common themes shared by all participant related to career advancement factors. The table below (Table 5.2) provides a summary of how the findings align within the career advancement factors.

Table 5.1. Major Findings connected to Career Advancement Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Findings of the Study</th>
<th>Career Advancement Factors (Coleman, 2002)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentorship</td>
<td>Attitude, Exclusion, Isolation, Opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Skill Set</td>
<td>Competence, Position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral Degree</td>
<td>Position Requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>Exclusion, Isolation, Opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Awareness and competing priorities*</td>
<td>No category connected to self-awareness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Seasoned Mid-level Administrators only

Coleman’s (2002) seven factors are addressed in each area of the findings as they served as a guide for analysis. The seven factors are attitude, competence, exclusion, isolation, opportunities, position and position requirements (Coleman, 2002). The findings of this study (a) mentorship, (b) professional skill set and (c) earning a doctoral degree and (d) managing institutional politics are very important to navigating a career in student affairs. These four areas were expressed as important by all nine participants and were common themes that were integrated throughout Coleman’s (2002) seven factors. Participants discussed reconciling their individual identities with the culture of their institution. Their campus climates created challenges as well as opportunities for growth as the participants developed professionally within their career in student affairs.

Using case study analysis, I looked for descriptions of behaviors that were enacted or being considered by the participants in order to move forward in their careers. Two of the nine participants were not actively seeking opportunities to move forward in
their careers, but still spoke about the importance of mentorship, education, professional skill set and navigating institutional politics. The analysis begins next with the new mid-level administrators (those who have between five and 10 years of experience in student affairs). This group includes Daphney Smith, Paige Watts, Femme Forte, Professional Mommy and Simone Davis.

**New Mid-level Administrators.**

*Mentorship.* Coleman (2002) found that there was a lack of networking opportunities within and outside of the participants’ institutions, however, four women in this study expressed that they have the opportunity to participate in national or international professional organizations. One participant, Daphney Smith, explained that she has not been able to participate in professional organizations because of the demands of her position, but the other new mid-level administrators are involved in their respective organizations. National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and American College Personnel Association (ACPA) were the two organizations to which the majority of the woman belonged. However, each professional organization provided a different level of resources and support. Femme summed it nicely, “I like ACPA because I always feel welcome there and I like NASPA because I think they really value research in ways that I haven’t seen in ACPA.” Paige’s organization, the National Association for Academic Advisors for Athletics (NAAAA), helped her with understanding best practices for athletic student services and can assist her with seeking new career opportunities when she is ready to find another position. She shared,

I think it was, not necessarily, the people I met, but what I learned from those individuals that helped me see what I could improve on, how I can grow, what I
can do, that helped me to prove to those that I am working with now that I was the person for this promotion and this position... They can either tell me about a position or I can get a position with them. I think that is probably the best way, those areas and the people I meet there will help me.

Professional associations like NASPA and ACPA, along with specialized groups like the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) for academic advising, and state-based professional organizations have done well to provide outlets for mentorship, networking, and other professional development opportunities such as giving presentations or conducting research. However, mentorship through either a colleague or supervisor on campus has proven to be useful for the attention and support that they participants felt they needed.

Coleman's (2002) study did not reference supervisors or colleagues as potential mentors, but did recognize that African American woman felt that there was a lack of opportunity in their institutions to capitalize on mentoring opportunities. The new mid-level administrators discussed at length the benefits and the importance of having a mentor. Daphney stated, "I have a great supervisor who is helping me prepare for the next role. So that is a great opportunity." Femme agreed with Daphney’s sentiment when she stated “...I feel happy in my position because of my direct supervisor and I don’t know if everybody has that.” Femme’s comments also recognize that not everybody has the privilege of working with a supportive supervisor. Paige, Professional Mommy, and Simone all expressed how their supervisors have been tremendous in helping them navigate their institutional cultures while helping to boost their confidence in their current positions despite the challenges they have experienced. Professional Mommy in
particular spoke volumes of how her supervisor has helped her not only understand the student affairs profession, but has helped her see things in her that she had not seen in herself. She explained, "He has definitely pulled out and highlighted some things to me that I didn’t see before and he has given me the encouragement and just the confidence in myself.” The supervisor role has especially proven to be a very powerful connection for these women who are looking to advance within the field while professional organizations have helped to provide information to be better practitioners in the field. Mentors and supervisors provide the personalized attention and support needed for the daily challenges participants’ encounter on their campuses.

*Professional skill set and doctoral degree.* All nine participants expressed that an advanced degree and additional experience in the field were key components in moving forward with their professional goals. All five new mid-level participants added different components to what they considered to be a well-rounded professional skill set. Daphney believed that it takes hard work, strategic building of relationships, in addition to a degree and experience. Simone said that, “women need to have ambition and be excellent because there is no room for mediocrity.” Paige added to this list by mentioning how important it was to take initiative within your professional role and fill any gaps in your organization by volunteering your time and energy to new projects that will help to grow your experiences. Similarly to Paige, Professional Mommy expressed that proven successes are critical to moving forward. Femme included the importance of understanding the institution’s goals.

I would consider the institution’s goals, the person that they have hired to implement these goals, and try to evaluate whether or not my beliefs and values
professional fit with the institutions and the person's working style that they have hired. So am I aligned with what the President wants to see happen in student affairs?...that's what I would say to anybody before trying to move forward.

The advice offered by the participants gives insight to their perceptions of what it takes to lead at a higher level. New mid-level administrators believe that hard work, ambition, innovation, proven track record of success and being a visionary is required in addition to experience, education and growing your professional network.

**Politics.** Coleman (2002) found African American women to feel as if they were excluded, isolated and often placed in positions with no real power, held to higher professional standards than White men and women, and expected to work harder to be seen as competent as their White peers. This study found those thoughts and sentiments captured in a context not specifically discussed by Coleman: managing institutional politics. Navigating institutional culture created challenges for all five new mid-level administrators, many of which were described in detail in their personal profiles in Chapter Four. Simone provided additional insight on how she has come to think about managing the political environments within her institution.

I would say definitely get comfortable being uncomfortable. That's what [reality television show personal trainer] Jillian Michaels says. Open up, become friends, guarded friends, with the people that you work with. Accept the fact that different cultures do it differently and even though it's not — let go of what's fair and not fair because it's just not fair. It not fair that other people can more easily maneuver through politics just because they look a certain way or because they
know a certain persons and you might be more skilled, but skill is not what gets people promoted. It’s the personal relationship. It is the ability to trust. The ability to establish trusting relationships has proven to help Simone move forward in her career. By getting comfortable with being in new spaces and adapting new behaviors to facilitate these relationships in their workspaces, African American women can greatly improve their ability to navigate the political environments and avoid the isolation and exclusion that they may find on their campuses.

All five of the participants acknowledged that navigating their institutional politics is the area that they struggle with the most. Professional Mommy believes that her institution’s culture is influenced by the region of the U.S. where her school is located. For example, she feels that because of the “southern mentality” that can influence the behavior of the White men in leadership roles at her school, women and minorities have had a difficult time being supported. Southern mentality, sometimes called plantation mentality, is a Southern ethos that supports the idea of White male superiority over women and Blacks.

Daphney and Femme work in private institutions, but their institutions have highly privileged students. The dynamics of race and class create additional challenges within their respective institutions. Paige acknowledged that her area within athletics is heavily dominated by men and because of her relationship with coaches and other administrators she has been successful in her position. Relationships, perseverance and ambition are driving these women forward to achieve their professional goals. Their awareness of how to mitigate their challenges and capitalize on their successes is proving to be invaluable as they develop professionally in the field. Again, Coleman’s (2002)
work found factors that contribute to institutional culture and politics that impact African American woman’s perception of career progression. The participants’ narratives give voice to the details and how these obstacles manifest themselves in their work spaces.

**Seasoned Mid-level Administrators.**

Ann Jones, Minnie, Destiny and L.V. each had between 15 and 21 years of experience in student affairs. These women were negotiating their career progression carefully in consideration of the other priorities that they have in their lives. Similarly to the new mid-level administrators they believed (a) mentorship, (b) professional skill set, (c) an advanced degree and (d) managing institutional politics were essential to being able to move forward. However, seasoned mid-level administrators acknowledged that moving up the career ladder required a different type of commitment to the profession that was not discussed by any of the new mid-level professionals. This shared theme of (e) self-awareness and competing priorities were not captured in the career advancement factors by Coleman (2002) but is still an important finding because it was a critical factor to the seasoned mid-level administrators as they made decisions that impacted their career progression. The seasoned mid-level professionals presented a longitudinal perspective in this study that took into account their years of experience in the field coupled with a level of self-awareness not as pronounced in the new mid-level administrators’ narratives. This level of consciousness coupled with a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities in the profession has led some of them to think deeply about pursuing their career in student affairs while the others come to realize that have achieved a level of satisfaction in their current position.
Mentorship. Again, Coleman's (2002) research supports the importance of mentorship opportunities for African American women. All four seasoned mid-level administrators have found mentorship to be essential to understanding how to navigate institutional politics. Two participants, Minnie and Destiny, offered additional insight on how mentorship opportunities change based on their professional needs and their time in the field. For example, Minnie felt her mentors helped her develop as a psychologist but not so much as a manager while Destiny talked specifically about how mentoring opportunities changed as she stayed on in the profession.

...the mentors that you have as a new professional are great and numerous, and as you get into the mid-level positions you don't have mentors anymore in the same way. Some of the same people who would talk to me for hours, not real hours, but for long periods of time I can barely get their time now because they're busy on one hand, but on the other hand you've got to figure this [how to navigate in the field] out for yourself.

Destiny recognized that as she grew in the field, she needed a different level of support that was not always available to her. As mid-level administrators move up the career ladder they are going to require a different level of guidance that comes from senior-level colleagues. Competing for senior-level administrator's time against the demands at the institutional level could leave mid-level administrators without the nurturing and support that they grew accustomed to when they first entered the field.

The supervisor's role in the development of the seasoned mid-level administrators was different than the supportive supervisors described by the new mid-level administrators. Supervisors of the seasoned administrators ranged from non-existent to
adversarial at times. L.V. did not mention any influence that her supervisor had on her career trajectory. Similarly, Minnie did not specifically mention her current supervisor’s influence, but did acknowledge her previous supervisor provided her with leadership opportunities that allowed her to grow tremendously as a psychologist. Minnie’s ability to strengthen her skill set allowed her to seek a new position as director, which she currently holds. Ann’s decision to not seek a senior-level administrative position in student affairs grants her the freedom to challenge the political dynamics that exist at the senior leadership levels of her institution. She described a conversation about institutional politics with the dean of students who is her current supervisor.

One of the things we had a conversation about, she’s like, “I admire that you’re going to say what you have to say. You say things that I sometimes I want to say, but that I can’t because of the role that I’m in.” I told her I’ve gotten to a certain point in my life that there are certain things I’m just not going to take. I said, “And I don’t aspire to be a VP,” and maybe that’s why, because I don’t feel like I need to be political to be a VP. Her track and my track are very different. I’m more concerned about I’m not going to be disrespected. If that means that you don’t want me to be a VP one day well, hey, that’s fine. … I just feel like it’s more important to me to be true to who I am than to be worried about advancing. If that means that I stay in an assistant dean of student’s position then I’m fine with that. If that’s what it means to be able to progress, there are certain things that I’m just not going to be quiet about.

Ann’s statement is a powerful reminder about how power and authority is not captured in administrative titles. Ann’s concerns about being disrespected outweigh her desire to
move forward in a role where she feels that she may have to compromise who she is in order to operate and govern within that position. To be political is perceived as being harmful and potentially destructive to oneself. Coleman’s (2002) research found that African American women perceived that they were placed in roles that held no real power, isolated and marginalized them, or offered titles of associate and assistant instead of the top administrative title like Director or Dean. Ann’s statement expressed how she wants to be perceived as a leader in that she values transparency and direct communication. If forced to operate within an institutional culture that compromised what she valued the most she was willing to forgo the role. By electing to stay within a mid-level administrative role, she has given herself an opportunity to be true to herself, manage what she can control, and support students to the best of her ability.

Unlike Ann, Destiny’s current supervisor was brand new to her institution. She described how she was trying to work with her new supervisor, who identifies as a White woman, but expressed her frustration with the situation.

I’m in a predicament right now where I’ve got to have a conversation with my boss. She is not...her intentions are right, I know they are, but she’s new and she’s not listening. Even though I know I’m right and the decision she is currently making are counter to what she said she wanted. I can see this, but yet I have to be critical, I have to be wise in how I communicate and be able to let her see that I’m on board with you for this change. Let me help you understand this culture, and so while I’m not saying let’s not do this, I’m saying here are some things we need to put in place to make it happen.
Destiny is working with her supervisor to create harmony while she transitions into a new work environment. Destiny’s statement demonstrates that she is aware of how important it is to work with her supervisor and within the culture of her school in order to achieve desired results. She remains cautious about how to communicate effectively with her supervisor in order to maintain a productive working relationship.

As a whole, seasoned mid-level professionals did not see their current supervisor’s role to be one that would help them develop in order to move forward to the next level of leadership. The relationships with their supervisors have created different dynamics from opportunities for open and honest dialogue to even distress. Case in point, Destiny had to manage opposing viewpoints between herself and her new supervisor. Although the seasoned mid-level administrators recognized that having mentorship and support was essential, they all pinpointed people who worked outside of their departments and institutions to be their pillars of support.

Again, Coleman’s (2002) findings were not supported in that seasoned professionals did feel as if they had opportunities to connect with professional associations that addressed their student affairs interests. The majority of the seasoned mid-level professional networks belonged to NASPA, followed by ACPA and also included specialized organizations for psychologists, the Association of Student Conduct Administrators for student conduct professionals, and various state affiliated organizations. These professional networks provided information and resources about their professional interests while providing opportunities for professional activities at conferences. None of their professional associations have produced a mentor or relationship that has helped them progress in their career.
Professional skill set and doctoral degree. In addition to having extensive experience in the field and a doctoral degree to advance to a senior-level position, seasoned mid-level administrators gave the following advice. They believed it was essential to demonstrate your impact on the organization within your current role, establish a desire to take on the identity of the institution in which you are leading, remain flexible and get comfortable with creating solutions to problems using minimal resources, and have an operational understanding of assessment and research. The seasoned mid-level administrators believe that leadership at the senior-level requires a deeper level of integration within the university, being solution oriented, adapting quickly to change and performing at a high level in an age of fewer resources while balancing higher levels of accountability.

Politics. Maneuvering through institutional politics is more of an art than a science. Many of the political challenges experienced by the seasoned mid-level administrators were detailed in their profiles in Chapter Four. All of the seasoned professionals relied on colleagues to help with support and guidance when faced with challenges brought on by institutional politics. Destiny shared more details about how her colleague from another institution is helping her to grow professionally in this area.

I have another [colleague] a VP, she’s an African-American woman over at a neighboring college who’s been helping me a little bit [to] understand how I got here. Because I’m more introverted and shy, I’m extroverted, but I’m more on the lower end. I don’t want to mingle; I don’t want to do all that unless it’s for business. Because then I can do it, I can do it with energy, but other than that I shut down. She’s trying to help me understand I can’t keep doing that; so she’s
been pulling me out of my shell and making me go. She’s putting me on the board in the area, she’s making me come to more events where alum and donors are. So she’s been helping me in that particular way.

Destiny recognized how important it is to have a support network that can help challenge you to be your best self. Unlike Coleman’s (2002) findings of a lack of opportunities for African Americans to network with each other, this study found that all of the seasoned mid-level women had connected to another colleague who was able to support them as they grew professionally in their respective roles.

**Self-awareness and competing priorities: Professional fit, lack of opportunity and family obligations.** The self-awareness factor is key to the seasoned professional’s negotiation of their career progression. The new mid-level professional group does not have a broad perspective on their career simply because they have had a limited amount of time to consider how their career goals will factor into their other life goals. This next section will look closely at the competing priorities of the seasoned mid-level administrators to better understand the additional considerations that each woman has had to manage in addition to their responsibilities as professionals.

Ann was considering leaving the profession because she has realized that she prefers to work differently than her various roles in student affairs has allowed. Although she enjoys her job assisting students she admits that she would prefer to engage in other professional activities.

I see myself being more in academic affairs, perhaps moving into an associate dean role or in some respect more on the academic side of the house. I enjoy certain aspects of student affairs, but I don’t know that student affairs is a good fit
for who I am as a professional. The last two positions that I have had, I think, helped me to realize that and help me to understand myself better, of who I am and where I want to be. My boss even says, “In my heart you’re an academic, you really are an academic at heart.”

As Ann has moved forward in her career, she recognized that what she truly enjoys to do professionally and how she prefers to work falls more in line with positions in academic affairs.

Like Ann, Destiny also questioned her future in student affairs but not because of a professional fit. Destiny’s hesitation about staying in the field at this point in her career was because of her frustration with the struggles of operating in a mid-level role.

If I didn’t have [my Christian] faith grounding me, I would have left this field a long time ago, particularly at the mid-level, because of the constant pull you’re in. So it’s hard, but it is the area where most people just say - I’m done. I’m out of here, you folks are crazy - because they are. I laugh with my staff when they get a little [pause] because they’re under me and they get a little high strung. I do too, I just don’t show it to them but you have to learn to function in a dysfunction, and the scary part is once you learn how to function you’re like what’s wrong with me, I’m part of the problem. So again there’s a whole paradigm shifting that’s happening right now that I can’t say that I was actually prepared for because no one could have told me...so the balloon’s deflated and I’m just slowly pressing forward in a different kind of way. Because I don’t want to leave the field necessarily, but I’ve recognized I’m at a very sensitive time and I may very well do just that.
All of the seasoned mid-level administrators have earned doctoral degrees. However, Destiny’s level of frustration was heightened because even though she completed her doctoral degree four years ago she has yet to advance into a senior-level position. She explained how she sought the degree to move forward but she feels that her time the field had actually become a negative when seeking a senior-level administrative position.

I was at the top of my game with my master’s, I got the Ph.D. and I dropped back down to the bottom, and I haven’t figured out how to negotiate the waters as well. But I believe my years of experience have actually hurt me because my colleagues who were younger with less experience, but got Ph.D.’s are all in positions and salaries over me right now. It’s [moving forward in her career] not for lack of trying on my part; some of them are political so that helps them a little bit, but it’s also this – their institutions don’t have to pay them as much or I can put them in this little position and beat them up a little bit – [that] has then positioned them for greatness that I haven’t been able to get positioned for.

Destiny perceived her career progression to have slowed down despite earning the doctorate and having various experiences in student affairs. She has followed a formula that should have positioned her to move up. Her frustration in trying to understand how to “position” herself has led to doubts about continuing in student affairs.

Minnie and L.V.’s career plans are influenced by their families’ needs and currently they do not have plans of leaving the profession. Their family obligations are different, but both very strong. Minnie’s family obligations are centered on providing a consistent home environment for her daughter while L.V. wants to remain close to her parents as they grow older. Minnie is not actively looking to advance into a senior-level
role as she is currently satisfied in her current position. Her priorities lie with providing a steady and consistent home life for her family. She is comfortable in her current role and can see herself staying in that position at her current institution or in a similar role at another institution in the same area where she currently lives. Her family’s goals have taken priority over her professional goals.

...my goals at this point in my life are much more tied to my personal life, my family having roots and being in the same place and having my daughter grow up in a place, you know, that she calls home, that I identify as home...I think I have now shifted into more of a place in my life where personal concerns outweigh much of that and my career path will be dependent on what is best for my family.

Earlier in her career, Minnie moved frequently in order to gain the experience she needed to become a fully licensed psychologist. After she discovered counseling in a collegiate environment she has committed to working exclusively with a college-age population. Like Minnie, L.V. recognized that her commitment to stay close to her family would come with challenges. She has limited her ability to work to a specific geographic location in the U.S. She is only willing to move to two states in the Mid-west in order to be close to her family.

...I haven’t branched out [of the Mid-west] which has presented a challenge because it has stunted my upward mobility in being able to progress in some of the positions in what I would aspire to be because here at the university there isn’t a structure where there is a dean of students. You go straight from a director to a VP, so there is not a lot of room for upward mobility [at my] particular institution so that’s been my challenge, which has been self-imposed because I haven’t
branched out of these two states if you will to seek other positions at this time... It is related to personal factors. I do love the institution that I work with now. I love the students that I work with so that’s a part of it that keeps me here. But then there are other personal factors with parents who are older so I want to stay within driving distance of them.

L.V. chose to stay close to her parents as they get older and her decision has dictated where she is able to work. Her current institution’s leadership structure does not provide room for advancement but because she is satisfied in her current role and can be there for her parents she is not actively seeking to move into a senior-level position.

**Black Feminist Thought**

Black feminism is an important ideology to understand because it explains how oppression manifests in the lives of Black women in the U.S. “Being Black and female in the U.S. continues to expose African American women to certain common experiences” (Collins, 2000, p. 27). These common experiences were collected through the stories shared by the participants in this study. Black Feminist Thought as a critical lens provides an opportunity to understand how the participants perceived the impact of their race and gender on their career progression. U.S. Black women’s subordination within society is based on the intersection of their race, class, gender, and sexuality (Collins, 2000). These constructs were used to define the conceptual framework that guided the analysis of this study. New and seasoned mid-level administrators are analyzed separately to determine if there is a difference based up the longevity in the field and then collectively to determine their shared experiences.
New Mid-level Administrators.

The following five concepts found within the principles of Black Feminist Thought were used in the analysis matrix: (a) outsider-within, (b) controlling images, (c) intersections between gender and race, (d) socio-economic factors and (e) shared experiences. All five new mid-level professionals did believe that their race and gender impacted their career progression albeit in varying levels. Some participants felt that their gender was more of a factor than their race based on their area of student affairs and one participant felt that the combination of the two made more of an impact.

Outsider-within. New mid-level professionals demonstrated the concept of outsider-within by expressing the loneliness or isolation in their work environments. Femme describes this concept when she is asked if her supervisor, who identifies as a White woman, understands how she often has to represent the Black and female perspective when she is in meetings.

I think it's hard to explain the challenges that exist around gender and race in an environment where the majority of people who are in decision-making positions are men who are White. And so I think she understands the feminist perspective, coming at it from a woman. She tries to understand the race piece. I think it's just difficult if you haven't been through it but I definitely see the empathy from her in that area.

Unlike Femme, Daphney's supervisor is an African American woman who better understands the dynamics of being the lone voice in the room. She described managing these challenges differently as explains her experiences within her institution. She
discussed her realization that she needed to work differently than her White colleagues in order to earn the same respect.

It was definitely me noticing things in our department. We had White men start their job and opportunities that they were getting from day one. I had been there for two years before I had gotten those same opportunities. It’s hard to have those types of conversations at work, especially when you work with a bunch of White people because they don’t get it. And sometimes I know explaining and giving examples help. And I hate to say that, but it’s just kind of true.

The isolation within their work environments is hard to express even when there are colleagues who are sympathetic to their circumstances. The inability to explain their position with no opportunity to change cultural norms renders them silent and often alone in managing the political undercurrents of their institution.

Controlling images. Controlling images based on stereotypes influence society’s perceptions of Black women and justifies their oppression. By “manipulating ideas of Black womanhood” (Collins, 2000, p. 76) controlling images are designed to make racism, sexism, and other forms of social injustice appear to be normal and natural extensions of everyday life (Collins, 2000). Controlling images of mammies, jezebels and sapphires are the most common stereotypes placed upon Black woman. The image of Mammy developed in the south during slavery and represents the loyal, obedient and nurturing domestic servant who sacrifices her own needs and desires in order to support the White family serves (Collins, 2000; West, 1995). The perception has led to African American woman being perceived as selfless, agreeable, non-threatening, and supportive (West, 1995). Embodying this stereotype may lead to African American woman being
loyal, overly supportive and self-sacrificing at their own expense why presenting a front of being strong.

The image of Sapphire represents the sassy, loud, angry Black woman stereotype. Sapphire, a character from the Amos and Andy radio show in the 1940’s and 1950’s, popularized the idea of the nagging, emasculating, obnoxious and hostile Black woman (Thomas, Witherspoon, and Speight, 2004). Sapphire’s image is the opposite of Mammy’s because she is seen as aggressive, controlling, and never satisfied which is often associated with Black women who display these behaviors (West, 1995). African American woman may struggle with assertiveness, competition and expressing their angry for fear of being stereotyped in this fashion. Jezebel, or the “bad Black girl” image represents immorality, promiscuity or hyper-sexuality (West, 1995, p.462). Although biblical accounts define Jezebel to be a wicked and manipulative woman, this image in relationship to Black woman has taken on sexualized imagery. Sapphire is perceived as being seductive, devious and unable to control her sexual desires (Thomas et al., 2004). This depiction of Black women justified sexual relations with enslaved women (Thomas et al., 2004) and is still used rationalize derogatory and violent sexual behavior towards Black woman (Collins, 2000).

Not all of the five early career women mention controlling images when they discussed their perceptions of race and gender. However, for the two participants who did reference a controlling image, it was Sapphire (the angry Black woman) who was the mentioned most frequently. Paige said, “I had to be really creative in [managing] how do you get the respect without coming off as if you are angry, but [also] not as if you are timid” when recounting how she navigates her male dominated work environment. Paige
often worries about coming off too strong and alienating her coaches, students and other faculty while trying not to be too passive which would not allow her to do her job effectively. She teeters between these two sides in order to create balance because she is aware of how she could be perceived in her work environment. Similarly to Paige, Simone believes that the perception of others can become Black women’s reality so she is careful on how she interacts with others. Simone acknowledges that people’s opinion about you can dictate how people anticipate interactions with you. She explains,

I think Black female is just scary for a lot of people. It is intimidating. Girly girl or not it is – people have that fear that you’re going to snap or you’re going to be angry or you’re so aggressive or when you’re just responding to them.

In addition to the controlling image of Sapphire, Simone also experienced other encounters that were connected to the Jezebel image and these interactions have influenced her professional and personal relationships.

I think there are the people on campus who see me dressed nice – I call it “dressed nice,” who knows what they call it – and they might think that – I have had a couple of people tell me that I dress suggestively. I’m like, “Well, I don’t agree with you,” but I still – I pay attention because if one person says it then I feel like five other people have thought it or had a conversation. And the thing is I’m curvy. So I have a larger chest, small waist, and hips, so typical Black bombshell, right? So I think just sometimes the way my clothes fit there’s nothing – there’s no way – unless I start wearing sweatpants and sweatshirts there’s really no way to hide what I’m working with. So for some people they might think that – ‘cause I’ve had married men hit on me and different things like that. So I think for them
they think that I’m the good time girl and I let them know that that’s not who I am...

These controlling images have played a role in how the new mid-level professionals have operated on their perspective campuses. The participants work to address the stereotypes by being aware of how others can perceive their actions and make sure that these images do not impact their ability to build trust and develop relationships on campus.

**Intersections of race and gender.** The perceptions of the intersections of race and gender varied based on the participants’ experiences within their institutional culture. Daphney felt that her race was more of a factor than her gender because residential life and housing is predominately led by women. She did mention that she felt there were higher standards for behavior for women than men but largely she felt her race was more of a factor in her institution. In contrast to Daphney, Paige felt that her gender was more of a factor than her race because athletics is predominately a White male-dominated area. Paige works exclusively with male teams, specifically football and basketball, so she feels she is at a slight disadvantage in being a female in moving forward in the field. Femme felt that her race and gender were both factors in operating with her position because she was often the only Black and female voice when she went to meetings on her campus.

I go into meetings all the time on my campus and I am the only person who is of color and I am the only woman. And I just sit in there and say “wow, do I have to do this again?” And do I have to be the one that has to bring up the issues of the underrepresented student population. Sometimes I don’t mind, sometimes I’m aggravated. It just depends on what day of the week it is and what the issue is.
Femme's frustration in being the only Black and female voice at the table is a burden that she takes on because she believes it is important for the underrepresented student voice to be heard. Likewise, Professional Mommy felt that her race and gender have the same impact on her ability to move forward because of her institutional culture, influenced by the Southern mentality, at a small private school in the South.

I think with the area that I'm in, the institution I'm in, my race has – it could have been a hindrance to my promotion. But the right people were in the right places at the right time, and I think that opened doors for me that probably would not have been opened before.

By contrast, Simone preferred gender in her interpretation. She commented that both her race and gender have made an impact, but reflected that if she had to pick one over the other, it would be her gender because of her leadership and management style is thought to be masculine.

I don't know that race has impacted my career progression in a silo. I think race and gender together have made an impact, but just race, I don’t think it has. Gender more so than race. If I had to put one – if I had to separate them I would say gender has been a bigger issue because I am one of those women who is very direct and very confident, so – which is not traditionally female traits. So I think in interacting with men and women I seem out of place as a woman.

Simone perceives her managerial style, which is typically considered to have masculine traits, to be a bigger influence than her race alone. However, the direct nature of her managerial style could be connected to the Sapphire controlling image, which could circle back to perceptions of her race.
Socio-economic factors. Daphney was the only new mid-level professional who specifically mentioned socio-economic factors or compensation in her role as a problem. Daphney’s work in a small private institution in the South and the affluent student body reminds her of the economic forces at play when she noticed that the students were driving more expensive cars than the faculty and staff.

The [dynamics of] socio-economic status is definitely something that I notice. I am not saying that we [do not] pay well, what I am saying is that we are not [pause] I think if you were to look at my salary and you were to look at someone else’s salary at another institution doing the same job with the same amount of students we have on campus they would get paid a lot more than I do. But because we have so many affluent students and families we are still, I think, [are] expected to act and dress and be very [pause] I can’t find the word that I’m looking for…we are expected to be able to relate very well to our parents and our students even though we may not be compensated in a way that would allow us to do that. I’m trying to give you a specific example. Our students are very affluent and drive nice cars and they dress really well. We are expected as an institution always be dressed sharp. Not that you have to be rich to dress sharp. There is an image we are expected to give off. Even though that may be counter to how we are compensated.

Daphney believes that her institutional culture encourages her to reflect the affluent nature of her campus. This pressure to look or dress a certain part impacts how she is perceived within her role. Her comments about the differences in compensation with relationship to other institutions is an interesting point, but she did not elaborate if she
perceived the compensation to be lower based on her institutional culture, the nature of residence life, or a reflection of her race and gender. Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) described in length the impact socio-economic issues can have on Black woman in the U.S. and therefore it was surprising to find that issues with compensation or concerns about fairness with their salary were only mentioned by one of the five women new to mid-level administration.

*Shared experiences.* There were not many commonalities shared by new mid-level administrators. The only two themes found were the awareness of stereotypes and negative impressions that exist for Black women and the belief that race and gender did impacted their career progression. Shared commonalities from a more positive perspective may not have been readily shared because the encouraging aspects of being African American on a predominately white campus such as diversity, cultural awareness, and retention of students of color, were not mentioned because the methodology of this study did not focus on their interactions with students but on how they felt about their careers within their institutions. This focus on their perceptions of their career progression had them think deeply about their challenges and opportunities for advancement more so than the positive attributes associated with being an African American woman on a predominately white campus. Simone offers a perspective on how Black woman may perceive their work environments when she discussed the need for Black woman to work on building relationships in the workplace despite how they might be indoctrinated to not trust White people.

I can’t speak for all Black women, but I know when I say this in a room full of Black women I get the nod and the smile. We are told not to trust people we
work with. We're told that they are not going to treat us fairly. They're not going
to look at us as if – they're going to look at us as if we're stupid. They're going
to hate us. They're not going to respect us. We are told all these things. We're
never told that we can trust them or that we should try to make friends with them.

This statement echoes a warning to African American woman to be careful about who
they trust because the wrong person can be detrimental to your success. The implication
of such a message is that African American woman may not trust anybody which leads to
a limitation of their ability to advance because career ladders are often dependent on
mentorship, the ability to influence others and a respected reputation in their profession.

The five new mid-level professionals believe that their race and gender had
varying levels of influences on them moving forward in their careers. When considering
the area of student affairs, for example athletic student services, barriers due to gender
became more of a factor. When institutional cultures were influenced by region of the
U.S., like the South, or due to socio-economic factors at private institutions, race played a
bigger role. Ultimately, all five participants perceived challenges to their leadership and
felt overlooked in their role on campus because of their race and gender.

Seasoned Mid-level Administrators.

Similar to the five new mid-level administrators described above, all four
seasoned mid-level administrators believed that their race and gender impacted their
career progression. However, significant differences were apparent in how the seasoned
professionals experienced these factors in their careers. For example, Destiny did not
have the support of her supervisor to navigate some of these challenges and L.V. was the
only participant that spoke positively about how her race impacted her career
progression. Next, I use the concepts of Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) to analyze the experiences of the seasoned mid-level administrators in the study.

**Outsider-within.** Outsider-within was illustrated through the challenges experienced by Ann and Destiny within their positions. Ann shares a story that gives an example of how she was “overlooked” and was not chosen to deliver a speech on behalf of her supervisor at a high profile sporting event for her school. Although she outranked the White man who was selected, he was given the opportunity because he held a director title and was an alum of her current institution.

So she [my supervisor] was saying – “You could have asked. We have an assistant dean of students who is a doctor, who has these credentials that you should have asked, as opposed to the director of student involvement.” So I was like, “Oh. I didn’t even have the idea.” So she was upset about that, and for me it was a matter of that I wasn’t even thought of as a possibility of a person who could do this, even though my title is higher than him. My education and experience is higher than him. I wasn’t even thought of as a person who could do this.

Ann felt that despite her level of authority within her department, she was not even considered to be someone who should have been included in this event. Her supervisor, an African American woman, stood up on her behalf and brought this issue to their Vice President for Student Affairs’ attention so that it would never happen again.

However, Destiny, unlike Ann, does not have a supportive environment with a supervisor who is prepared to stand up on her behalf. Her former supervisor was an African American woman and was let go from the institution last fall. Her current
supervisor is a White woman who was recently hired and is trying to get acclimated to the institution. Destiny believes she has often found herself on the outside looking in and she perceives that her race and gender have held her back from progressing forward.

...if I was a White male right now with my track record of success I would be so much further than I am right now; so I personally believe my race..... even my boss said to me before she left...I’m too Black. So I had a head scarf on my head and I came to work, make up on, nails done, still professional; [but] I was too Black. So when she’s in a key position to help and she understands where I want to go and where I’m trying to position myself, and you have the power to do that and you won’t because of my skin color that bothers me. Then to know I should be able to go anywhere else, but now I’m being limited to here so I can’t go far [from] here, but I can’t get out, because of some of those [negative] experiences so I’m almost trapped and no one’s willing to step out to help me. I personally believe it’s because I’m an African-American woman, but the other piece is that politics.

Destiny’s former supervisor comment’s about her being “too Black” only adds to the level of frustration in her work environment. Her former supervisor’s inability to stand up and support her leaves her feeling alone despite the fact that they are both African American females. Destiny’s comments wind down with her feeling “trapped” and unable to leave her current work situation adding to the belief that her gender and race have limited her ability to move forward.

**Controlling images.** The only controlling images found in the statement of the season mid-level administrators were of Sapphire, presented in Destiny’s narrative. She
believed her direct style of communication played substantial role in limiting her ability to move forward in the profession.

I speak a different way so until I learn how...[or] until others learn how to accept me as I am, and that I can still get results even though I speak differently I still get discriminated against.... I speak well... Yes I’m intelligent, but intelligence is just not enough. So until I learn how to not be so direct with my communication, which I have been learning, and learn how to put a positive spin on everything, which it was never my way of doing things I feel I’m trapped.

Destiny believes that the direct nature of her communication style can be perceived as aggressive, evoking the negative connotations associated with Sapphire. She feels that this stereotype of being controlling and argumentative makes it difficult to communicate effectively. She states that it is not enough to be intelligent but the ability to connect with others across the campus is critical to being successful at the next level of leadership. Evidence of other controlling images was not expressed by the other three seasoned mid-level women. They did not speak of any experiences where stereotypes or perceptions that affected their actions in their respective roles on campus.

**Intersections of race and gender.** Ann found intersections of race and gender to be melded and seamless in terms of their impact on her career progression. Minnie’s deep southern roots have heightened her sensitivity to race, but her work experiences and training have helped her to see the influences of gender. Destiny believes both her race and gender combined has provided varying levels of challenge while L.V. found race to be a benefit but her gender to be a challenge based on her institution’s culture.
Ann believes that her race and gender together have provided different challenges to her career progression. She offers insight on how each has made a different impact and how it is sometimes difficult to be able to separate one from the other.

Now that my salient identity is being a woman and being African American, I don't know that I can – I mean in terms of how I see the politics or how I see other things with other people, in some ways I can, especially in my current institution, some things that come to mind immediately when I see that there are some White women who have the same education, perhaps in some instances even less or equal amount of experience, and I see the titles that they have and the advancements that they have in terms of title and salary. Then in that sense, yes. But then I also see that in terms of the position of power of White men in my institution as well and how their power is distributed, and then with White men who don't have my education or my title. I see them called on to represent or to do things, and I know it's because they are male and because they're White. I've been placed in a box, so to speak, because of what people think about how they have limited me based on what they think they know about me.

Ann believes that her position in multicultural student affairs often places her within a box because of the nature of her work. Through her work as an unofficial "Chief Diversity Officer" for her institution, she has become aware and sensitive to the fact that some White woman and White men at her institution are being granted titles and more compensation in comparison to those who have the same level of education and leadership roles within her institution.

Unlike the other three women, L.V. believes she has positively benefited by being
African American because the institutions she worked for wanted to find ways to increase diversity on their campuses. However, she does agree with Ann in that she sees a majority of men in leadership roles on her campus and perceives that being a woman might work against her ability to advance.

I think [race] may have affected it [her career progression] in a positive way because I think in all the institutions I applied for diversity is something that there are always striving to achieve and so any time I think someone comes in who can bring that diversity and bring that background, I think that it's always been a plus for me. I wouldn't say that it hasn't hindered it, I would say that it has enhanced in some areas. If it has hindered me in positions that I applied for and did not get, I didn't feel that this was what hindered me...I think that many of the areas that I worked in have been pretty heavily dominated by females but what I have noticed is that some of the senior level positions have been more male dominated and so gender could have played a role in some of those positions because in some institutions I think there is a hierarchy that is male dominated and you may see one or two females senior administrators. So gender could have played a part in some of those ...That could possibly hinder me in the future, as I said, you don't see a lot of senior administrators that are women in a lot of institutions. I know my own institution is very male heavy when it comes from the senior level administrators from our president to our vice president.

L.V. provides a different perspective on how her race can be seen as a positive attribute. She explains that she brings different experiences and new perspective to institutions that are looking to incorporate diversity into their campus cultures. However, she
acknowledges that gender may be a limiting factor. L. V. explained that she does not see many women in senior leadership roles and thinks that gender could be a factor in how these institutions determine who would make a good fit at the senior-level administrative level.

Minnie grew up in the Deep South and was conscious of the dynamics of her race and gender while growing up. She sees them connected and came to think the aspects of her gender in graduate school. She explained,

"Being a person who grew up in a very racially conscious environment, where my understanding of myself as an African American woman has always been present for me, it is hard for me to talk about how race has impacted me, because it’s almost like it’s difficult for me to compartmentalize that and to think about what my career would have been like without that aspect. It’s almost easier for me to talk about how my gender has impacted me, because gender and understanding of feminist thought and feminism in the workplace was not something that I really came to on a conscious level until much later in my career, in graduate school."

Minnie’s ability to separate her gender from race is due to the influences of graduate school and it is still an area that she continues to work in through her current role. Three women in this study, Femme Forte, Minnie and Destiny, came to understand feminist thought, ideals and beliefs while in graduate school. This is an interesting point to note because this level of understanding or knowledge of feminist literature is not coming from how they were raised at home or even while in undergraduate school. This has implications for how women develop and how their perception of self can change when they come into contact with feminist and Black feminist ideals.
Destiny perceives both her race and gender to be factors in preventing her from moving forward. In Chapter Four, her narrative described how her White peers from her doctoral program were earning more money in higher level positions. She believes that her years of experience have hurt her going back into the job market after completing her degree because she had too much experience for a lower mid-level position but not enough progressive experience in one area of student affairs to move into a senior-level administrative position. She has been trying to re-position herself to move into a senior-level administrative roles by seeking opportunities to grow her leadership skills, refine her communication skills and make new connections in the profession.

... I'm thinking maybe within three to four years I should be an assistant or an associate VP somewhere. I just...right now it's difficult; I've been trying to reposition myself. So right now I'm going to do some more repositioning to get some of the things I need and want that's helpful to me ...you've got to know how to reposition your situation, because things will change around you [and] if you don't you'll get caught in that wave.

Destiny believes by adding to your professional skill set, developing new relationships and building upon your professional reputation you can reposition yourself to move forward in your career.

_Socio-economic factors_. The socio-economic factors the seasoned mid-level administrators mentioned did not personally address their lack of compensation but more so addressed the lack of resources provided by their institutions even though the demands of their position had grown. Ann’s role in multicultural student affairs has often been expanded to serve as the chief diversity officer at her institution.
I think oftentimes as a mid-level person you’re trying to do the work that you’re supposed to be doing as a mid-level professional in student affairs, in multicultural programs, but because, for whatever reason, whether the institution just isn’t committed to diversity or whatever you find yourself being thrust into the role of what a senior-level person would be doing. You often don’t have the support. You’re not being paid for that role either. You don’t have, really, the support of the institution the way that you need to do that work, and in some cases the people who are in those roles are not qualified to do that. In my case I am, but for some people they’re not qualified to do that. So that can be a struggle as well.

Destiny expressed her frustration with the limited resources but increased demands on her campus.

My situation has been saying no good reward goes unpunished, you get more and more work. You get no more money, you get no more staff, but you’re still expected...to get into these positions you have to be prepared that whether they give you the right resources or not you are still expected to produce the same product. That is very difficult when you have nothing and you’re told to make something out of nothing, and you do not have the staff or money is no longer an excuse.

L.V. and Minnie did not mention any challenges related to finances personally or professionally. Ann and Destiny have seen how socio-economic forces influenced their perception of what is required to advance in the profession. The pressure to perform based on institutional demands has forced them to take on additional duties and responsibilities without adequate compensation. No one from this group shared thoughts
about any economic pressures stemming from their campus environments. Perhaps because no one in this group comes from a highly selective institution and all but Destiny works in public institution.

**Shared experiences.** The commonalities that the seasoned mid-level administrators shared were very few. Similar to the new mid-level administrators, the seasoned mid-level administrators believed that their race and gender has and will continue to influence their career progression. L.V. believes that race would have a positive impact while Ann, Minnie and Destiny believe differently. L.V. also saw gender as a significant factor that would negatively influence her career progression because there was a lack of women holding senior-level administrative positions in her institutions. Again, two of these women, Minnie and L.V., have no current desire to move forward to senior-level positions but can still recognized the potential challenges that they could encounter if they decide to move forward. On the other hand Ann and Destiny are looking for ways to move forward and recognize the impact that their race and gender can have on their journey.

Black Feminist Thought as a critical lens provides insight to how the participants viewed the impact that race and gender (and the intersection of the two) had on their career progression. All nine women believe that race and gender did influence their career progression, albeit to varying degrees. Most participants were not able to separate their race from their gender in determining which area had the greatest influence. The area of student affairs did not influence how the participants viewed the impact of their race or gender and regional differences in the U.S. did not increase these dynamics. Outsider-within, controlling images, intersections between race and gender, socio-
economic factors, and shared experiences provided a systematic approach to understanding how race and gender’s influence can impact career progression.

**Balancing Work and Personal Life**

The analysis of the participants’ work calendars in Chapter Four described how time for their work activities and personal obligations were allocated. This information was collected in order to determine how mid-level administrators managed competing priorities in their work. The calendars also provide an opportunity to discuss how work life balance is managed in their respective roles. This next discussion will capture the participant’s perspective on how they managed their professional and personal time commitments given the demands of their job.

**New Mid-level Administrators.**

In the new mid-level professional group, both Daphney and Professional Mommy were married and had young children. Daphney described how becoming a mom changed her perspective on her career.

I just had a baby a year ago. So for me, the best advice I ever got from a mentor that there are times that your career will be more important and there are times that your family will be more important and I will say up until a year ago my career was not only important but the only thing. I mean, I was in the office 12 hours a day. I was so focused on wanting to prove that I am competent and that I could do a good job that I put my career and my job above everything. Over the last year that has changed a little bit. Now definitely, work is definitely up there, but I also have to think about my family more and so luckily I work at an institution that is very understanding and very accommodating towards women
who want to work and have children because most of the people in my division are actually women. So fortunately I’ve been able to do both and now that I have a full time staff member helping me and I don’t have to stay in the office 12 hours a day, every day, I still do sometimes, but not every day. That has really helped my work life balance.

Daphney’s journey into motherhood has given her perspective on how she allocates her time. Her desire to prove herself was poured into the hours she spent at her job. Given her new responsibilities as a mom, she has put her work into perspective although she still sees her job responsibilities as a high priority. Like Daphney, Professional Mommy has a supportive work environment that allows her to bring balance into her life. She explains, ...

one thing I can say about [my institution] is that they value family. We are a small institution. We pride ourselves on family. So I have been fortunate to have a vice president who values family, and so working late and working on weekends, I know ahead of time, so nothing is ever a surprise or sprung on me, so I am able to communicate that to my family and we are able to plan for it. Now, I can say on my end I have had to improve communication when it comes to my husband, communicating things to my husband, and arranging for child care for the children, if I have a schedule conflict. So I could say I’ve had to be more organized at home and here at the job, but it hasn’t impacted me in any way. It hasn’t put any stress on my family or pressure.

Institutional culture has proven to be critical to helping Daphney and Professional Mommy balance family and work. Their need to be available to their families and manage their professional responsibilities is met because they both have supportive
institutional cultures that are flexible and accommodating to the demands of their personal lives. Without their supervisor and institutional support, their ability to manage their professional responsibilities would prove to be difficult and may not allow them to continue in their current position.

Paige, Simone, and Femme Forte are currently single with no children, but they have also had to work hard in order to bring balance back into their lives based on the nature of their positions and their desire to excel in their respective roles. Paige speaks openly about her challenges to bring a sense of balance into her life.

I’m going to be honest. I didn’t have work life balance until up to a year and a half ago. It just didn’t exist. And it impacted a variety of areas in my life. I think because a lot of us how are interested in student affairs because we were overly involved in student affairs or we met someone and got super involved, most of my classmates were the over achiever that were a part of about five organizations and had a part time job and was taking 21 hours like I was. So, the nature is for us to be busy bees and for us to grab hold of everything and then there is a lot of grad programs that encourage us and force us to get involved and get as many internships as possible because this is the one time that you will be able to dibble dabble in various areas before you get your first full time position. Even though when you get a full time position, it’s very concentrated and all the time you spend in a bunch of areas is not concentrated into one, you still have that mentality to fill out the space so by nature we are overworked. We don’t take the time to step back, it can be detrimental to other areas of your life in general. For one it took me figuring out my job, two it took a number of support systems that I
needed to be put into place for me to be successful before I do burn out so for my colleagues to support me in that and also for me to just put my foot down and saying that, not trying to be funny, but I am not 20 years old anymore so I cannot operate off of four hours of sleep anymore like I use to. I’m in school, I have this job, I want to do great, but I am not going to spend my entire life here. So learning how to say no takes time and I feel like I am finally getting some balance again.

Paige’s comments about naturally being involved is important to note because all of the women in this study came into student affairs wanting to make a difference in the lives of students. Naturally the collegiate environment, especially student affairs, will demand professionals to work longer hours and to become more involved than the typical 9 to 5 position. It took Paige a year to feel comfortable before she vocalized to her supervisor that she need more assistance in order to manage the demands of her position. She was eventually able to put certain support systems in place professionally and personally. Professional support systems included additional staff members to assist her with the workload. Her personal support system was strengthened when she made the decision to only connect with positive and supportive people when she needed to be encouraged.

Paige was also very open about how one of her personal relationships had changed while she progressed in her career. She shared the following details about her marriage.

I will be very candid and honest. I was married when I first started the job and now I am divorced. One, I think not having that time and having that balance or even, having someone who is willing to understand the difference. I think it takes
two. It takes the person who is busy, so for those of us in student affairs, especially if our spouse doesn’t not work in student affairs and doesn’t necessarily doesn’t get it or understand, making sure that that is there. But then on the flip side it’s important that someone can support that, especially for me it was difficult because [pause] and it got worse when I was in athletics because I am around men all the time and having someone who can trust that and be ok with that was difficult. So that was definitely a challenge. I will say the lack of time I had contributed to opening doors for other things to get into our marriage. So that’s what pretty much brought it to an end. If I wasn’t in school and I had a different job and everything was perfect, I can’t say that either but I will say that I know it was the topic of many of our conversations. So even though I am in a new relationship now, he understands but that is because he is a coach at another institutions. So I think it’s difficult when you come in a relationship if someone doesn’t take the time to understand and if you don’t know how to balance it, so yeah it can affect that significantly.

Paige’s honesty about the nature of managing relationships was especially important to those who were not aware of the demands of their time in various roles in student affairs. She did not completely blame her career for the challenges in her marriage, but did believe that the nature student affairs work did contribute to some of the difficulties that she experienced. Femme Forte agreed with Paige about how relationships can be influenced by the nature of their work. Femme Forte said her work’s impact on her relationships provides a strong reason to consider leaving residence education because of the 24 hour commitment required in her position.
I think it is hard sometimes to maintain friendships or other relationships as well. Romantic relationships during those busy times of the year. So I’m on call 24/7, so it’s just awkward at 2AM to get a call and have to explain to somebody, “actually I’m leaving because… and not it’s not shady. I really have to go.” To someone who is outside of the profession, I find it difficult to explain “Why can’t they take care of that?” [or] “They are at the hospital so why do you need to go?” So explaining that is challenging but I intentionally look for someone who can respect that and understand that and who doesn’t have a problem with it…I think for me, long term, I don’t see myself in residence life for that reason. And when I meet people and I’m considering and, I am thinking more about romantic relationships when I’m thinking about that, when I meet people and it’s getting serious I have a conversation about that because I don’t want it to ever be something that they don’t understand and be frustrated by it.

Femme Forte’s statement reinforces the importance of including people in your life that can understand the nature of her profession. On a positive note, she also addressed how supportive her institution was about managing work-life balance of their employees. She said,

I happen to work for someone who really believes in work life balance. So thank goodness. I will add, you asked the question earlier about satisfaction level, basically, and I think that’s a big part of it in student affairs. If you cannot find somebody or an institution can’t support your work life balance I don’t think you can stay in student affairs and be healthy. So I take comp days often and we just have an ebb and flow like most people. I know that August is going to be super
busy. I’m taking the first week of this month off. I’m encouraged to come to work as needed basically in the summer. I am a twelve month employee but I am encouraged kind of get there when I get there and leave when I feel like my work is done, so that’s been very helpful. I feel supported in that.

Femme believed that in order to enjoy your work in student affairs, you need to be able to balance her life your life with the demands of the job. All five new mid-level administrators spoke specifically about how their institutions did support their needs for balance which allowed them to attend to their personal and family needs. However, Simone offered a different perspective on her work-life balance. She shared that he loved working and admitted that she spent a lot of time at work but did not feel unbalanced. She explained in the statement below.

I am a single Black female, no man, no kids. So I don’t know that there has really been an opportunity for my work life to get in the way. I would say – I don’t think – I don’t have a problem with the whole work, life balance piece. I really enjoy working. I love – my staff, they get frustrated with me because I will say that I’m going to take a day off and I’m going to tell them that I’m not there or that I won’t be at work, but then I’ll come in anyway. And they’re always telling me, “Oh, you should take a day off. You should take a day off.” So I just I really do like working.

Simone continued by sharing her hopes for a family in the future and continues to reflect on the idea of balance in her life.

I do want to be married. I want to have kids. So I’m not trying to pretend like it’s not something that I hope for, but it’s not – I don’t see how – I don’t feel like I’m
out of balance. I don’t feel like I work too much. I don’t feel like I do too much community service. I feel like I don’t date enough, but I don’t – there’s time for that because I do go on dates and I do have – currently I have a significant other and we spend a lot of time together and there’s time to spend more time together and my job does not interfere with that. So I don’t feel out of balance. I don’t feel that stress.

All five new mid-level administrators believe that work balance is important in their ability to do their jobs. Daphney and Professional Mommy embrace the support of their institutions to balance their professional and work lives while Paige, Femme, and Simone understand the need to remain balance despite not have similar external demands on their time. Daphney and Professional Mommy spoke to the importance of their institutional culture in their ability to be there for their personal responsibilities to their family while managing their professional commitments at work. Femme and Paige’s comments on the importance of having someone in their life understand the demands of their job was key to them maintaining health relationships. Simone’s position provides her a level of fulfillment and she does not feel as if she is overwhelmed in her work and has not experienced any negative impacts on her relationships. Overall, the new mid-level administrators are handling their professional and personal commitments based on the demands of their time, using the resources available to them while recognizing the importance of maintaining equilibrium in their lives.

Seasoned Mid-level Administrators.

In the seasoned mid-level group, Ann and Minnie are married, but only Minnie had a child. L.V. and Destiny are single but they did express a desire to get married and
have a family in the future. The seasoned mid-level administrators are still working to incorporate balance in their lives just like the new mid-level administrators. Like Paige, Ann struggles with work life balance.

It has been a struggle. I think about my role in enrollment management and academic affairs and then transitioning to student affairs. I definitely had more of a work-life balance when I was in enrollment management or academic affairs, even as a recruiter. I felt like I had more work-life balance than I do in student affairs, which is funny because I think the profession is always talking about health and wellness, and we definitely don’t practice what we preach. It sounds good, but the expectation that student affairs has for its professionals does not lend itself to you having a real work-life balance. I think as a profession we need to work at that a little bit better, but it is a struggle to have that [balance]. It also depends on the institution that you’re at.

Ann admits that she has to work differently in student affairs and often finds herself not practicing what she preaches. She does suggest that it also depends on the institution you are in to find support with maintaining this idea of balance. Minnie’s comments echo Anne’s remarks about institutional support. The nature of her work, as a psychologist, lends itself to an 8 to 5 setting in a collegiate environment. She finds her work to be flexible and can balance her work commitments with her responsibilities at home. She explained,

I have really had to be thoughtful about how to be present for my family as well and to understand the boundaries that I have to set around work and home. So it has challenged me in some ways of doing that. At the same time, I think student
affairs is also probably one of the most flexible parts of the field, in terms of psychology, particularly college counseling, because we’re kind of an 8:00 to 5:00 shop. And while there is evening and weekend work, that can be very planful, as opposed to, you know, projects that just kind of sprout out of the air and I need to work after hours in order to generate income. So in that way, I think it has been both a good fit and a challenge, but I’ve been able to make that work.

The nature of Minnie’s work allowed her to maintain boundaries between work and home, giving her the flexibility to take care of work while fulfilling obligations at home. Similarly to Minnie, L.V.’s work in student conduct allowed her to have a more regimented work schedule and therefore to manage her time better.

Right now, it really hasn’t impacted me in my current position because, it’s pretty much that I can leave the office at the designated time at 4:30. And I don’t really have to take it home with me. I think working in certain areas of student affairs it did impact my life. When I worked in housing I was in an all call situation. I was on call certain nights of the week or for a week at a time. And it did impacted some other things that I wanted to do because I was kind of confined to a particular area or getting called at any point in time and not being able to commit to a lot of things and so lately I don’t think it has contributed to anything that I do outside of my job right now. I think it’s affording me a lot of flexibility which is one of the things I love about higher ed. There is a lot of flexibility there with being able to do some things outside of the typical jobs or getting involved with some collateral assignments and things of that nature. So I don’t think that it’s really hindered me outside of that.
L.V. was able to balance her work and personal life better once she moved out of residence life. Moving into student conduct provided her more flexibility to get involved in other areas of student affairs. This was significant because the ability to enhance your professional skill set is perceived to be a major factor influencing career progression. If you can allot more time to take on additional projects and opportunities you increase the likelihood of taking on collateral assignments that are outside of the nature of your work.

Like Simone, Destiny loved her job. She worked hard to move up professionally, and earn a doctoral degree, but delayed marriage and family while she was in school. Further, the demands of her job have kept her from pursuing serious relationships. She explains,

I’m 42 and I want to be married, I want to have kids, but I love my job. I spent the first two years when I was at [my former institution] after my master’s focusing on getting my career together. That hurt me because eventually I got into a situation where I was working so hard I didn’t have the time for anybody, and so the social skills I used to have....they went away because I became too addicted to my job and being successful. Now I want to have children and be in a relationship [and] it’s very difficult, not impossible, but very difficult. You almost raise your kids on campus from the things I’ve seen where people around me. I don’t believe any more in the work life balance...there is no such thing for me as balance. Like I tell my students you can do it all, you just can’t do it all at the same time.

Destiny acknowledged that working hard to become successful in her job took priority over her personal relationships. She admitted that she still wants to be married and have a
family although she believes it will be difficult. Her admission of not having balance in her life was a source of frustration for her. She continued,

    I want to have a relationship, but how do you make time for that... So I’m probably more of a loner than I want to be, but at times that’s what I need to be because it just takes so much energy at work that when I go home I just want to read a book and sit around and have a glass of tea or a glass or wine; so that’s me. But its work-life balance in higher education I think it’s so blended now, it’s really your life. To carve out something [time] that’s not always [there] causes some kind of distress because the students want you there for the events in the evening, the faculty wants you around for whenever they can be around, [and] then you’ve got staff who [have] recruitment issues, and then you’ve got retention [issues]; it’s a seven day a week job.

The demands in Destiny’s current position became so challenging that she found it hard to find the time she needed in her personal life to maintain the balance she desired. She found peaceful moments in her Christian faith and made it a priority to spend time in church on Sunday, despite the guilt she may feel by missing out on an event at work.

The work-life balance dynamics for both the new and seasoned mid-level administrators are different based on their personal lives and how long they have worked in student affairs. Recognition of how the profession can do a better job in supporting work-life balance for their professionals is important for those who are interesting in pursuing this line of work. The nature of your institution and your area of student affairs directly impacts many of the work-life balance components that are necessary for a balanced life style. For example, Daphney’s work in residence life operations was
flexible enough to transition and accommodate the new demands in her life when she became a mom. However, Femme, who also works in Residence Life but on the residence education side, recognizes that her on-call schedule impacts her personal relationships. Femme is very transparent with family, friends and romantic interests about how her work influences how she manages her time. In contrast to the nature of student affairs work, Minnie's work as a psychologist provides her a work environment that is very 9-5 with limited work on the weekends and evenings. Institutional culture made a difference for Paige who initially was overwhelmed in her role but was allowed to change her administrative structure and bring in additional personnel to support the demands of her position in Athletics.

In summary, work-life balance is important to all nine women and they work hard to make sure that they maintain it while fulfilling the obligations of their work. Family, friends, partners and spouses have helped to remind the participants about the importance of understanding who they are outside of their job as they work to define who they are in their career.

Conclusion

The major findings of this study addresses how the participants are negotiating their career progression and how they perceive the impact of their gender and race. All participants are negotiating by developing mentoring relationships, building a professional skill set, earning doctoral degrees, and navigating institutional politics. Seasoned mid-level administrators demonstrated another factor, which is described as self-awareness.
Participants understand that they need to connect with others in the field who have access to information, a strong reputation, and relationships with others that can benefit them professionally. Mentors are seen as persons who have significant experiences and knowledge that can impact their career growth. Participants found mentorship in different places based on their longevity in the field, but all agreed that a relationship with a mentor was necessary. The majority of new mid-level administrators found that their supervisors were the ones who provided them the most support and they perceived them to be a mentor. The majority of seasoned mid-level administrators found others, either within or outside of their unit or institution, to provide mentor support. The level of complexity that is involved with understanding mentor relationships was deepened in understanding how both the new and seasoned mid-level administrator used the terminology of mentor to capture different dynamics and nuances in their respective relationships.

Building a professional skill set was important to not only understanding how to operate within their current role but also included what should be learned to operate at a senior administrative level. New mid-level administrators believed a professional skill set should include ambition, innovation, proven track record and being a visionary. They believe that hard work is required to being successful. Seasoned mid-level administrators believe that a professional skill set should include remaining flexible, solution oriented, a strong proficiency in assessment strategies and research and an ability to operate with minimal resources and demonstrate your impact on your organization. One participant, a seasoned mid-level administrator, also mentioned that you have to be willing to take on the identity of the institution in which you are a leader.
The difference in how the participants see a professional skill set is telling based on their longevity in the field. The new mid-level administrators believe your skill set should help you advance to the next level and get you noticed by senior leadership. By successfully completing the tasks required professionals could prove themselves worthy of the position by demonstrating their ability to earn the position. Seasoned mid-level administrators described a professional skill set that will help a professional manage the level of complexity within the functions of the job. Their skill set description speaks strongly to helping a professional persist and survive within the position. The seasoned mid-level administrators’ longevity in the field has influenced their idea of what is required to successfully operate within an administrative role.

Managing institutional politics was difficult for both new and seasoned mid-level administrators. Managing politics came down to building and maintaining relationships for all mid-level administrators. They were working hard to understand the political dynamics that influence the culture and climate found within their respective institutions. By establishing strong relationships with their mentors, they were learning how to manage and address situations at day-to-day in their department, while learning how to influence leadership, policies and practices within their larger institutions.

Self-awareness was demonstrated in seasoned mid-level administrators based on how well they were able they were able to articulate their professional and career goals in relationship to the demands on their personal and professional lives. Ann and Destiny were reconsidering their desires to pursue a career in student affairs. Ann felt as if her career goals are more in line with word found in academic affairs and Destiny was discouraged with her inability to move forward up her projected career ladder despite her
time in the field and her doctoral degree. Minnie and L.V. have determined that senior
level administration is not the goal for them at this time because of their family
commitments. Minnie wants to focus on her daughter and L.V. has a responsibility to
take care of her aging parents. This level of awareness is prevalent in the seasoned mid-
level administrators due to the ability to reflect on career goals in addition to their deeper
understanding of what is required to move forward to senior level administration. The
level of self-awareness has developed over the time in their professional careers, which
range in this group from 11 to 21 years.

Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) was used to determine the impact the
participants felt race and gender had on their career progression. In all cases, the
participants believed that their race and gender did have an impact, albeit in varying
levels based on their area of student affairs and their institutional culture. Again, the
factors for Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) that helped to analyze their
perceptions of their gender and race included: outsider-within, controlling images,
intersections of gender and race, socio-economic factors, and shared experiences.

Outsider-within was realized as a lack of respect felt by the participants for those
who challenged their ability to do their jobs or overlooked them and their value to the
organization. For example, Ann felt disrespected when she was overlooked for a role to
represent her office at a highly publicized sporting event in favor of a White man who
was below her title within the office. Daphney spoke of times when her subordinate, a
White man, was sought to address questions in her office that only she had the authority
to answer. This lack of respect for them in their positions reflects the dynamics of being
seen as an outsider within their organizations. The tension of operating within an
organization that recognizes a certain level of authority but does not grant the same level of deference evolved into feelings of frustration and disappointment. The participants used their mentors and relationships across their institutions to help manage these types of challenges.

The most common controlling image mentioned for participants was Sapphire. Comments around the apprehension of being the angry Black woman were mentioned specifically in three participant interviews. This uneasiness of being labeled an angry Black woman controlled how the participants operated within their institutions. One participate, Paige, spoke of how she tried to balance this image, but recognized that she cannot function in her job in the Athletic Department if she is perceived as being to meek and mild mannered. She worked primarily with men, including student athletes, coaches and administrators, and she found herself needing to be assertive at times in order to manage her work. Simone mentioned another controlling image, Jezebel, generally used to describe a women who influences with her feminine wiles. She addressed how this image dictated how she dresses when she comes to work as to not appear too voluptuous and is very careful to not mix her personal and professional life by dating anyone at work. Controlling images are acknowledged in order to address and combat any prejudgments that may impede their ability to build relationships and operate effectively in their role within their institution.

Intersections of gender and race were integrated in their salient identity that the participants found it hard to determine which area was more influential in dictating their career progression. Exceptions to this finding were based on the area of student affairs and institutional culture. For example, gender was found to be more of a factor in
athletics because of the number of men that were prevalent in that area of student affairs work. Race was more of a factor in residence life because the majority of professionals are women. However, institutional culture played a factor in gender being more influential than race when men, as in L.V.'s situation, dominated the leadership structure. Similarly to L.V., Professional Mommy felt that a southern mentality, the notion that White men were fit to lead over women and minorities, dictated her ability to move forward in her career. Despite these few exceptions the majority of participants could not separate the nature of their identity, being Black and female, to be able to determine which identity made the most impact.

A majority of the participants did not discuss socio-economic factors. Two participants, Daphney and Ann, mentioned issues about compensation in relationship to the level of support that their institutions did not provide. Daphney believed that she was paid lower than other professionals who performed her same job function within the same type of institution. Ann felt that her institution wanted her to perform tasks, such as serving as the Chief Diversity Officer, but without sufficient compensation or resources. The socio-economic factors mentioned by these two participants really hone in on their feelings of their work being undervalued by their institutions as determined by the level of compensation that they feel is fair for the work that is expected to them.

Shared experiences in this study for all participants can be connected back to the nature of their institution's culture and climate. The participants work environment dictated their professional and personal experiences. All participants discussed the impact of their mentorship opportunities, the development of their professional skill set, and navigating the political dynamics on their campus. New mid-level administrators found
their environments to be challenging yet they remained positive because of their mentors. Seasoned mid-level administrators had mentorship but it was not connected directly to how they were managing their current position but more directly connected to negotiating institutional politics. Their feelings of career progression were intertwined with certain levels of self-awareness that dictated the direction that they wanted to pursue in their careers.

Examining the participants' stories through the conceptual framework of career advancement factors (Coleman, 2002) and Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) addressed the questions that the study sought to answer, and exposed the complexity of race and gender as they affect Black women mid-level administrators. The participants' narratives in Chapter Four, coupled with the analysis of their stories in this chapter, provide a fuller picture of the complexities surrounding their perceptions of their career progression.

Career Advancement Factors (Coleman, 2002) and Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) work together to create a complex portrayal the dynamics that the women in this study have encountered in their current positions. Together, these two concepts create an opportunity for deeper exploration of the perceptions of African American women's career progression that neither one could do as well separately. The next and final chapter will explore implications from the findings of this study and discuss recommendations for future research that considers the challenges and hidden opportunities of African American woman mid-level administrator's career progression.
Chapter 6: The Ties that Bind, Implications, and Final Thoughts

“I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood.”

-Audre Lorde

Audre Lorde described herself as a Black, lesbian, mother, warrior and poet. Her words from the essay, “Transformation of Silence into Language and Action”, in *Sister Outsider* (1984, p.40) speak to the heart of this dissertation by expressing the following sentiment: what is important, *African American women’s stories*, must be shared even at the possibility of *our truth* being misinterpreted. This chapter provides an opportunity to clarify the significance of this study and discuss implications based on findings.

Strategies to assist and support the career progression of African American women in mid-level positions and updates on the participants in the study are shared. Lastly, final thoughts are given in the hopes of inspiring future researchers to continue this very important work which is necessary to give a voice to all who stand to be transformed, moved and even inspired by the participants’ stories.

**Bounded Framework**

Qualitative research methods provide an opportunity to investigate a phenomenon of interest while honoring approaches that are credible, respected and provide integrity to the process. The conceptual framework developed for this study linked two concepts together in order to fully understand the experiences of the participants. The integration of the two concepts into one framework was not too difficult because the career advancement factors (Coleman, 2002) veiled underlying issues that were more pronounced in the Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000). The seven career advancement factors – attitude, competence, exclusion, isolation, position and position
requirements – were factors because they contributed to either circumventing exclusionary practices, enhanced relationships, and prepared African American women for being able to perform competently in their position.

The integrated conceptual framework model, or tree metaphor, Figure 6.1, was carefully created to illustrate how the features of each concept worked together to create a holistic portrayal of career advancement and the impact of the perceptions of gender and race. In analyzing the participants’ stories, it became clear how the career advancements factors fed into their consciousness of race and gender. By blending both concepts to explain the phenomenon experienced by the participants, implications for practice was generated to respond to both dynamics experienced: career progression and the impact of the intersectionality of race and gender.

Figure 6.1 Integrated Conceptual Framework Model
The integrated conceptual framework model provides a visual means to understand how the conceptual framework for this study worked. Five parts: soil, elements, roots, tree, and environment represent the integrated framework of African American women, Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000), and Career Advancement Factors (Coleman, 2002). Four parts (soil, elements, roots, environment) work together to contribute to the development and growth of the tree, which represents African American women mid-level administrators.

Career advancement factors, as represented above by the elements, are needed to develop the professional growth of the African American women. Coleman’s (2002) study provided a structure to examine the opportunities and challenges connected to advancing in one’s career. Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) shown above as the soil, represents the foundation that grounds African American women’s perceptions of their reality in their lived experiences. Both concepts are inextricably linked in this study, represented by the roots, because one concept cannot fully tell the story without the other.

The image above conveys how both ideas, Career Advancement Factors and Black Feminist Thought, work together to interpret the experiences of the women in this study. The tree represents the participants who are planted in the soil, which provides structure, support and provides a sense of history and identity. The roots from the tree are entrenched allowing the transfer of essential nutrients. These nutrients, represent the elements necessary to cultivate and nurture the growth of the tree to include sun, air, and water.
Other environmental considerations include climate and location which are represented by the circle. The institutional environment where African American women operate also influences growth and development. If career progression is impeded by environmental factors such as being frozen out due to a chilly institutional climate, it can be devastating to the growth and development of the professional, even if some supports are in place. Context matters, and consideration of location and environment should be taken into account in addition to the elements and strong foundational support described above.

Together the soil and the elements work hard to develop a healthy, strong and productive tree. Growth and development could not happen without one or the other. The vitality and health of the tree can be negatively impacted if the soil or essential elements are lacking in ways that are detrimental to productive and fruitful growth. The conceptual framework for this study operated the same way.

Just as the soil and elements come together to nourish the tree, a combination of career advancement factors (Coleman, 2002) and Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000), provided a distinct opportunity to understand mid-level administrators career development in the context of the intersections of their race and gender. African American women surveyed in Coleman’s (2002) study believed the following seven career advancement factors impacted their ability to advance in their careers: attitude, competency, exclusion, isolation, opportunities, position, and position requirements. In understanding these factors, strategies can be developed to negotiate and overcome challenges while capitalizing on opportunities for growth.
Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) describes the experiences of Black women in the U.S. based on the intersections of their gender and race. Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) tells the story of pain, strength, anger, and joy and celebrates intellectual scholarship that helps others to understand the complexity of the African American woman identity. Additionally, Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) encourages Black woman to empower themselves by understanding the perceptions of the world but not letting them stop you from being who they are in the world.

Controlling images are especially important to understand because they are potentially harmful to an African American women’s career progression if they are not understood and managed carefully. The controlling image of Sapphire was mentioned most by the participants in this study. By understanding how this image in particular, impacts perceptions on campus, African American women can be proactive in dispelling these negative connotations to this image or work to deepen their relationships that could be impacted. These controlling images can be thought of as weeds, to stay in line with the metaphor, and impact growth by absorbing nutrients that should benefit the roots. By managing the perceptions of controlling images, African American women put themselves in a position to control perceptions and help to address institutional culture and climate on their campus while helping others who are also impacted by these negative images.

When combining these two practical outcomes, strategies and empowerment, this study is able to address the complex issues that African American women may experiences as they move through their careers. The framework also tempers the assumption that all African American women in mid-level administration have an
expressed desire to move forward as neither concept makes the assumption that leadership or advancing to a higher level of leadership is the goals or an outcome that is highly desired. Again, the research questions that guided this study were designed to examine the experiences of African American women negotiating mid-level administration in student affairs and to better understand their perceptions any impact their race and gender may have on their career progression. The following sections below discuss the impacts of these findings and how they can inform implications for practices and future research.

**Negotiating Career Progression**

Mid-level administrators are negotiating, or getting through or around something successfully, in their careers by building mentoring relationships, enhancing their professional skill sets, bolstering their academic credentials, and navigating their institutional politics. Mid-level management is complicated because the demands are coming from above by their superiors and below from their subordinates. Managing others’ priorities while trying to implement your own is compounded by navigating through their institutional culture, examining professional identity (self-awareness), and juggling competing priorities in their personal lives. Career advancement factors, represented in the figure by the elements, help to develop and nurture the growth of African American women mid-level administrators.

Student affairs work can be challenging based on the nature of area. For example, the participants in this study who worked in residence education had different experiences from those who worked in student conduct and multicultural student affairs. The work environment in athletics, typically a male dominated area, is expected to be
different than operating in a female dominated department. African American women need to consider the nature of their work in conjunction with a level of self-awareness that should be considered when navigating their career path to senior-level administration.

Another important point is that there should not be an assumption that the goal of mid-level management in student affairs is to move forward quickly to a senior-level administrative position. Two seasoned mid-level administrators in this study, Minnie and L.V., did not have a desire to move forward because of their family priorities. Mid-level management is a stepping stone to senior-level administration, but advancement should not be seen as the only reason why a professional would want to operate at this level. Mid-level management typically provides an opportunity to contribute to the vision and mission of your unit, freedom to influence practices within your unit and chance to mentor to new professionals who have entered the field of student affairs. This level of management provides the freedom of choice in that professionals can learn a skill set that can move them forward to another level of administration or they can maintain at this level so long as they chose.

African American women mid-level administrators in this study perceived that their race and gender impacted their career progression. A majority of participants felt that their race was more of a factor than their gender. An exception was Paige who worked in athletics, a male dominated environment. Race was perceived as a factor when they felt as if they were overlooked, undervalued or ignored. Institutional culture played a huge role in how diversity was respected within their schools. Professional Mommy felt that the region where her school was located played an important role in how she was
perceived to be a leader because of her race and the fact that she was a women. Ann felt overlooked when she was not selected to represent her area for a significant school event in favor of a White man who held a position below her title. These perceptions are the reality of the African American women mid-level administrators in this study. Black Feminist Thought, represented by the soil in Figure 6.1, helps to ground them in their identities as they reconcile who they are professionally within their area of student affairs. This next section addresses implications for practice based on the findings of this study. These strategies are recommend in an effort to raise awareness of the existing challenges and potential obstacles for African American women mid-level administrators in student affairs while providing approaches that can help to positively influence their career progression if they so desire.

**Implications for Practice**

This section provides a space in the dissertation for the researcher to share their perspective on how to address the problems or issues that are defined in the study. Based on the narratives and analysis of the participants' stories, there are a number of recommendations that I believe will help manage some of the challenges and highlight opportunities that can be capitalized on to help African American mid-level administrators achieve their desired professional goals.

**Managing controlling images.** Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) described several controlling images that influence how Black women in the U.S. are perceived. The controlling images discussed in Chapter Five were Mammy, Sapphire and Jezebel. Not every participant described an experience with controlling images, but their importance should not be overlooked in terms of evaluating their impact in this study.
Other controlling images discussed by Collins (2000) include the Black Lady, Matriarch, and Welfare mother. These images reflect the evolution of Mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebel as American society moved forward from the period of time when African Americans were enslaved to present time.

The Black Lady is the controlling image that initially appears as most benign, but in effect she is perceived to be the modern Mammy. She works hard, twice as hard as every else, is well-educated, and typically holds a position that has her so consumed that she has no time for relationships so she is often alone (Collins, 2000).

The Matriarch, an evolved image of Sapphire, represents the single Black mother and she is criticized because she assumes masculine characteristics in order to manage and maintain her household. She is perceived to be not only assertive but aggressive. This reasoning is often used to explain why she is unmarried because men find these traits to be undesirable (Collins, 2000).

Finally, the Welfare Mother, an evolved image of Jezebel, is seen as lazy and is characterized to be an unwed mother living in poverty through no fault but her own (Collins, 2000).

These controlling images are relevant to my findings because on the surface these controlling images are generally perceived to be negative. The nature of “controlling” is to be restrictive, and the term “image” suggests only the appearance of truth. Upon closer inspection of these controlling images they reveal positive characteristics that African American women have used in order to survive and thrive, despite their circumstances. Mammy’s smile was often a mask to hide her pain as she endured her trials and tribulations. Sapphire used words and her tenacious spirit to protect herself. Jezebel, tired
of being sexualized for the benefit of others, used her feminine wiles to create opportunities and escape from oppressive circumstances. All of these images project an idea of how Black women are perceived, but only Black women themselves can tell who they truly are. There is power in who controls the images.

In understanding how these controlling images may impact their ability to operate within their professional spaces, African American women need to be aware of how they may impact their career progression. New mid-level administrator Paige spoke of the fear of being the “angry Black woman” but the reality is that anger, aggression, frustration can impact the ability to communicate and develop meaningful professional relationships. Another new mid-level administrator Simone commented on being a “Black bombshell” and how perceptions within the office environment dictate how you dress, date, and operate within social spaces at work. African American women can speak into the lives of other African American women who might be challenged by (or even unaware of) these controlling images. Mentors can help African American women address these obstacles, but more importantly, allies can help address institutional cultures by acknowledging these controlling images and dispelling falsely held beliefs that are not supported by the behaviors or actions of African American women.

Enhancing self-awareness. The new and seasoned mid-level administrators negotiated their career progression by forming mentoring relationships, developing professional and educational skills set while navigating institutional politics. The difference between the two groups was the level of self-awareness that the seasoned mid-level administrators had as they gained perspective on their careers as their time in the profession increased. This self-awareness factor for seasoned mid-level administrators
was demonstrated in their ability to understand who they were professional and manage the competing priorities in their professional and personal lives. This level of self-awareness is critical for mid-level administrators who are aspiring to the senior-level administrative position.

Mentorship and professional development that focused on mid-level administrator’s level of self-awareness would be helpful as they determine if they want to move forward in their career. Career paths in student affairs are not linear and all areas build skill sets that are transferable into different areas of student affairs administration. Mid-level administrators would benefit from being aware of how their skill sets transfer into other areas. Mentors, allies and supporters are critical to helping mid-level administrators become aware of how they can work differently in student affairs and in higher education. The goal for mid-level administrators is to become empowered by seeking new opportunities but more importantly by gaining exposure to different professional areas so they will not feel powerless to change their circumstances if they feel they need to operate differently due to changes in their personal lives or because their professional interests have changed.

Enlisting ally support. African American women mid-level administrators need the advocacy, encouragement and guidance that can come from allies. Allies are different from mentors in that personal connections and formal relationship structures are not required in order to see the benefits. African American women benefit from having allies in their corner because they can help support them within their institutions. A majority of participants in this study felt that there supervisors helped them navigate their institutional politics. Having the support of allies across campus is ideal because they can
speak on behalf of African American women as someone outside of their department which lends more legitimacy to vocalizing their support. Allies can provide opportunities that help to increase African American visibility on campus, increase their networks and help them identify areas of their professional skill set that need to be enhanced. Institutional leaders, supervisors, informal campus leaders should be challenged to become allies and inspire others to do the same. White men and women who serve in influential positions either as administrators or faculty can serve as allies and support African American women who can benefit from exposure to opportunities, access information, and increase their networks to include professionals who work in different areas of the institution and operate in different level of administration.

**Utilizing student affairs professional organizations.** The participants in this study did not find mentor support, to include peer mentors, from their professional organizations. Although they did not find solid mentor relationships many of them did find information and resources that supported them in their work. Despite these findings, professional organizations should not be overlooked in providing support for those who are aspiring to move into senior-level administration. Mid-level administrator institutes are available in organizations like the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA). Other professional organizations, such as the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), have mentorship programs that are designed to connect members with others senior level administrators who are serving in the capacity that they hope to aspire to in the future. Programs like these provide a formal structure, expertise, and connection
with professionals outside of their respective campus walls. This allows them the freedom to confidentially communicate their issues and concerns about their workspace. Unfortunately, institutes and conferences cost a considerable amount of money. For instance, The Donna M. Bourassa Mid-level Management Institution sponsored by ACPA costs $875, not inclusive of lodging and transportation. Also, a majority of these institutes required a letter of support from a direct supervisor; if you are not supported by your institution or supervisor, you are not eligible to apply. Likewise, if your institution cannot afford the fees, mid-level professionals are on their own to finance the expense. A table comparing the cost for NASPA and ACPA is below.

Table 6.1. Fee Comparisons for Mid-level Institutes and National Conferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>NASPA Registration Fee</th>
<th>ACPA Registration Fee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mid-level Institute</td>
<td>$650</td>
<td>$875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Conference</td>
<td>$410</td>
<td>$499</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Costs reflect the member price

Mid-level management institutes provide an opportunity to learn more about how to manage the dynamics of mid-level administration, increase professional networks and provide a vehicle to enhance your level of self-awareness as you learn more about the leading at the next level. However, these opportunities are limited to those who have the resources to take advantage of them. NASPA and ACPA do offer more affordable professional development opportunities such as regional and national conferences that can benefit mid-level administrators, but these lack the mentoring and networking of the smaller institutes. New student affairs professionals as well as mid-level administrators should be encouraged to set aside personal funds in order to support their professional development as these opportunities are critical to their professional development.
Supplementing doctoral program support. Doctoral programs in student affairs and higher education administration should consider providing modules or seminars to provide additional support and guidance for topics related to career development. Networking, professionalism, and navigating institutional politics create well-rounded skill sets needed to advance to upper levels of management. The participants in this study pursued their doctoral programs in an effort to move up in responsibilities and management within administration. Offering coursework, co-curricular activities, alumni gatherings, professional development events and opportunities for doctoral students will help them practice and learn these skills while operating in a low stakes environment.

Implications for Research: Future Opportunities

This study generated several ideas that would be ideal for follow up studies. One issues that was not fully investigated was around the socio-economic concerns that are addressed in Collins's (2002) work. Only one participant, Daphney Smith, discussed how she perceived her level of compensation to be lower than her other colleagues at different institutions. None of the seasoned administrators mentioned negatives issues around being compensated. Salary and compensation issues would be an interesting study to conduct because the Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2002) addresses the inequities of Black women being compensated for their work and the challenges that they face in the labor market.

Another future research opportunity can address institutional culture found in different regions of the U.S. The study did not provide an opportunity to fully compare different regions as the study only included the Mid-west, Northeast and South. It would be interesting to see if there were any differences in the Southwest and West regions of
the U.S. when you consider the differences in culture, diversity, and politics in the
demographic areas of the Southwest and Western region of the U.S.

In responding to controlling images, African American women take on one of
three approaches. The first approach is to resist and become more determined to move
beyond the constraints of the controlling image. The second is to emerge from their
circumstance by finding ways to be empowered to rise above the controlling image. The
last approach is that of the assimilated women. Her approach is to deny the existence of
controlling images and believes that she is not like the others and that these images does
not apply to them.

The idea of the “assimilated women” (Collins, 2000, p.103) is an interesting
concept to examine. Collins (2000) wrote, “Some African American women reject
connection to other Black women and demand special treatment for themselves” (p.103).
Destiny’s narrative shared the story about being told that she was “too Black” and that
her own university president (who was also African American) preferred not to socialize
with “too many” Black people in an effort to not appear biased. This exclusion or
isolation from other African Americans, especially within the same workspaces, is
alarming and may appear to be quite unbelievable but unfortunately her story is not the
first one and it will not be the last. African American women who believe that they are in
better company with others who do not look like them is an interesting phenomenon for
future study. Exploring how African American women build professional relationships
with other African American women would be a fascinating concept to study because the
challenges and barriers found with controlling images may impact these associations.
Final suggestions emerging from this dissertation study include comparing the career progression of White women and women of color (to include but not limited to Hispanic, Asian American, and Native American) mid-level administrators with the career progression of Black women. Exploring the impact of sexuality in addition to gender and race is another future direction. Many African American communities are perceived to be religious and socially conservative and Black gays and lesbians may not find welcoming environments even within their own African American communities. Sexuality is another aspect that ties into Black Feminist Thought and Black lesbians may develop relationships and professional connections differently than from the African American women discussed in this study.

Epilogue

This study began almost a year ago, in April 2013. Throughout this time many of my participants experienced changes in their personal and professional lives. In member-checking narratives throughout the fall and winter, I had an opportunity to receive updates from some of the participants. Updates from two of the participants appear below.

Professional Mommy. Professional Mommy was promoted to an Associate Dean position but she still oversees academic advising services. This additional responsibility still operates organizationally as a mid-level administrator but she has more opportunities to be at the table when developing policy, procedures and programming geared to promoting the success of students. She is excited about moving forward in this new direction and will continue to climb the higher education ladder.
Destiny. Destiny has left student affairs administration and is no longer working on a college campus because she feels as if her previous campus environment was not friendly to how she identifies – an African American female, with a strong Christian faith and a direct communication style that was not appreciated in her former work environment. She is currently seeking legal counsel to determine if she has a case based on a number of factors not limited to, workplace bullying, racial discrimination, and hostile work environment. She has decided to work in educational policy which she feels is a better fit for her at this time.

Conclusion

How do African American women in student affairs negotiate their career progression? Negotiate was defined earlier in this study to mean to get over, though, or around (something) successfully. Chapter Four detailed the participants’ narratives, in which they described their successes and challenges of their career progression. They also shared their frustrations and disappointments they experienced due to the dynamics of their gender and race. Chapter Five provided a rich level of analysis that revealed the intersections of the career advancement factors (Coleman, 2002) and Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000). Coupled with the personal stories about their family and relationships and how they work hard to achieve balance, the term negotiate has evolved in this study to mean more than just moving forward in their careers. This term now captures how the participants are managing their professional and personal lives day-to-day. Negotiating career progression involves a level of complexity that focuses on both the present day experiences while understanding what strategies are required for the future.
In summary, if they choose to move forward, they are doing so by building relationships, seeking additional education and professional experience while maneuvering through the political environments on their campuses. As their career grows in student affairs, they become more aware of who they are professionally and determine if they want to move forward to senior levels of administration. The management of competing priorities often controlled their career decisions which were based on the needs of their families.

How do they perceive the impact of race and gender on their career progression? In short, they believe race and gender had a significant impact on their ability to move forward in varying degrees. The conceptual framework in this study provided a comprehensive approach to understanding how African American women mid-level administrator’s career advancement factors are connected to their perceptions of the race and gender. The tree (African American women) can only grow strong when both elements (career advancement factors) and soil (Black Feminist Thought) work together (roots) to the benefit of its development based its location and environment.

This study examined the career progression of African American women in higher education who specifically work in student affairs. Student affairs professionals provide services, opportunities, challenges, and support for all students who enter higher education seeking to earn an education to improve their lives. Senior-level leadership in student affairs influence policy, procedures, and advocate on behalf of their constituents. Mid-level administrators are in the best position to be prepared to take on senior-level leadership roles. It is imperative for mentors, allies, higher education institutions, graduate programs, professional organizations, and more importantly African American
women, to know what is necessary to move to the next level. The retention and persistence literature (Tinto, 1975; 1993) has shown that when students of color see themselves in others who serve in leadership roles to include instructional faculty, administrators and staff, that retention and persistence increase. African American women who aspire to move into senior-level administrative roles should understand how their race and gender may impact them in their workspaces but have to remain steadfast in their commitment to developing themselves in areas that will increase their capacity and talents to lead at the next level if they so choose.
Appendix A

Call for Participation

Hello,

My name is Melinda Anderson. I am a doctoral student currently working on my dissertation in the Educational Policy, Planning and Leadership program at the College of William and Mary. I would like to seek your assistance in my current research study. The purpose of my study is to learn more about African American women mid-level administrators in student affairs at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). I would like to interview participants to better understand their career progression in student affairs while working at a PWI. Your experiences would be a great addition to the limited research on this topic. You were identified as a possible participant for this research through your association with a student affairs professional organization or by another student affairs professional that thought you might be interested in participating.

Please feel free to forward this email on to others that might be interested in participating. Your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any time. If you are interested please fill out the following survey form indicating your interest - https://wmsurveys.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_9mlViBTdQcMYdMx.

You will be contacted within the next four weeks as I complete the selection process. If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me at (804) 536-4126.mjande@email.wm.edu, or my advisor, Dr. James Barber, (757) 221-6208, jpbarber@wm.edu.

I appreciate you taking the time to consider assisting me in this research.

Sincerely,

Melinda J. Anderson

THIS PROJECT WAS FOUND TO COMPLY WITH APPROPRIATE ETHICAL STANDARDS AND WAS EXEMPTED FROM THE NEED FOR FORMAL REVIEW BY THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (Phone 757-221-3966) ON 2013-05-06 AND EXPIRES ON 2014-05-06.
Appendix B

On-line participant solicitation questionnaire
African American women mid-level administrators in student affairs

Thank you for your willingness to complete this initial survey designed to collection
information for possible participants of this study. This questionnaire has 19 questions
and will take approximately 5-8 minutes to complete. The focus of this study is to
understand the career progression of African American women in mid-level
administrative positions in student affairs.

Respondents who meet the criteria of the study will be contacted and may be invited to
participate. Thank you

1. Name
2. Preferred Email address
3. Age
4. Ethnicity
   a. African American
   b. Asian American
   c. Caucasian
   d. Hispanic
   e. Pacific Islander
   f. Other – please identify
5. Highest Degree Earned
6. Date Highest Degree was Earned
7. Current Professional Title
8. Supervisor’s Title
9. Do you currently supervise other professional staff member? (Yes/No)
10. If yes, how many do you supervise?
    a. 1 – 3; 4 – 7; 8 +
11. Do you consider yourself a mid-level administrator (defined as a holding a role
    that is neither entry-level nor senior-level at your current institution) (Yes/No)
12. Do you work full-time (40+ hours a week)? (Yes/No)
13. Institutional Type: Degree granting type (How would you define your current
    institution)
    a. Associate’s Colleges degrees
    b. Baccalaureate Colleges
    c. Master’s Colleges and Universities
    d. Doctorate-granting Universities
14. Institutional Type:
    a. Community Colleges
b. Historically Black Colleges and Universities

c. Hispanic Serving Institutions

d. Tribal Colleges

e. None

15. Number of years in current position

16. Number of years in student affairs profession (Not to include time in graduate school)

17. Current student affairs area
   a. Academic Advising
   b. Admissions
   c. Counseling
   d. Career Services
   e. Fraternity and Sorority Life
   f. Housing and Residence Education
   g. Financial Aid
   h. Judicial Affairs
   i. Orientation
   j. Student Activities
   k. Other – please identify

18. Are you available and willing to be interviewed during the 2013 spring/summer semester (approximately an hour)? (Yes/No)

19. Are you willing to provide a copy of your resume or curriculum vitae for document analysis purposes only? (Yes/No)
Appendix C

Consent Form for Participation

_African American women mid-level administrators in student affairs_

I, __________________________, agree to participate in a case study dissertation research involving African American women mid-level administrators in student affairs at four-year predominately White higher education institutions. The purpose of this study is to examine the career progression of African American women in mid-level administrative roles.

I will be expected to participate in one interview lasting no more than one hour with a follow-up interview lasting up to thirty minutes, if needed, which will be related to my experiences regarding my career progression. I also understand that I will be expected to provide my resume and/or curriculum vitae that will be used for career progression analysis only. I understand that the honesty and accuracy of my responses are important for this research. I also understand that I do not have to answer every question asked of me and I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in this study at any time by informing the researcher. I agree that I will read and review summaries of the information that are generated during the interviews for accuracy.

I have been informed that any information obtained in this study will be recorded with a pseudonym of my choosing that will allow only the researcher to determine my identity. At the conclusion of this study, the key linking me with the pseudonym will be destroyed. I also acknowledge that both interviews will be audio taped to ensure accuracy of information presented. These recordings will be stored on digital devices that will be password protected. The recordings will be erased after transcription and will no longer be available for use. All efforts will be made to conceal my identity in this study and to keep my personal information confidential.

I understand there are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study. By participating in this research, I understand that a possible benefit is an increased awareness of African American women mid-level administrators in student affairs' career progression.

If I have any questions or concerns in connection to my participation in this study, I should contact: Melinda Anderson, the principal investigator, at 804-536-4126 (mjande@email.wm.edu); James P Barber (jpbarber@wm.edu), Assistant Professor, Doctoral Committee Chair; Dr. Thomas Ward, Chair of the School of Education Internal Review Committee (EDIRC-L) at 757-221-2358 (EDIRC-L@wm.edu); or Dr. Kirkpatrick, Chair of the Protection of Human Subjects Committee (PHSC) at 757-221-3997 (PHSC-L@wm.edu) at the College of William and Mary.

I am choosing to assign myself the following pseudonym:

I am choosing to assign my home institution the following pseudonym:
My signature below certifies that I am at least 18 years of age, I have received a copy of this consent form, and I consent to participating in the tasks outlined above.

Date

Signature of Participant

Printed Name

Date

Signature of the Investigator

THIS PROJECT WAS FOUND TO COMPLY WITH APPROPRIATE ETHICAL STANDARDS AND WAS EXEMPTED FROM THE NEED FOR FORMAL REVIEW BY THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (Phone 757-221-3966) ON 2013-05-06 AND EXPIRES ON 2014-05-06.
Appendix D

Interview Protocol

Background experiences related to the profession
1. How were you introduced to field of student affairs? Was there a mentor or role model?
2. What were the undergraduate and graduate academic experiences that have impacted your career progression?

Experiences related to career progression
3. Describe your career progression from the end of your undergraduate experiences to current position.
4. What encouraged you to continue moving forward in student affairs as a career?
5. How have your professional experiences prepared you for your current position?
6. How do you view your role as a mid-level administrator in terms of your impact on the organization?
7. Can you describe any challenges that you might have had as you progressed to your current position?
8. Who has helped you navigate the profession (if anyone)?

Career Advance Factors
9. What do you think is required to move toward a senior-level administrative position?
10. What kinds of professional development experiences have you had that have impacted your career development?
11. What networks are you connected to and how has your association impacted your career progression?
12. What advice would you give to someone who is looking to aspire to your current position?
13. How would you describe your career trajectory? (draw an image)
14. If you were to look into your future, how do you see your career unfolding?

Experience related to race and gender
15. How has your race impacted your career progression, if at all?
16. How has your gender impacted your career progression, if at all?
17. Can you tell me about a time that you noticed any changes as it relates to African American women in the field of student affairs?

What differences do you see in a division meeting or retreat from when you first started in your position until now?
Appendix E

Example of Matrix Worksheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career Advancement Factors (Coleman, 2002)</th>
<th>Participant Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position Requirements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Feminist Thought (Hill-Collins, 2000)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outsider-Within</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling Images</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections between Race and Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppression/Socio-economic factors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Vita

Birthdate: August 15, 1977

Birthplace: Fairfax, Virginia

Education: 2007 – 2014 The College of William and Mary
          Williamsburg, VA
          Doctorate of Education

          2000 – 2002 Virginia Commonwealth University
           Richmond, VA
           Master of Education: Higher Education

          1995 – 1999 Virginia Commonwealth University
           Richmond, VA
           Bachelor of Science: Mass Communications

She is currently the Director of Pre-Health and Pre-Law Advising at Virginia Commonwealth University and continues to encourage and support students and professionals, advocate for resources, and politic on behalf of all students and higher education professionals.