INTERNALIZING GENDERIZATION: WOMEN'S NAVIGATION OF POWER DYNAMICS IN SENIOR-LEVEL STUDENT AFFAIRS ROLES

by

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ABSTRACT

EMILY LAURION JENSEN WHEELER. Internalizing genderization: women's navigation of power dynamics in senior-level student affairs roles. (Under the direction of DR. RYAN A. MILLER)

While women have attained higher-level roles and greater representation in higher education administrator roles, the concept of *the higher, the fewer* (Nidiffer, 2002) represents the "gendered prestige hierarchies" (Allan, 2011, p. 58) that limit women's representation at more prestigious institutions while bolstering representation at institutions of greater access. In student affairs, women represent a majority of all professionals in the field, though representation in senior student affairs officer roles has not increased significantly since the 1980s (Blackhurst, 2000), with women more likely to advance at institutions with fewer than 1,000 students (Rickard, 1985a). While extensive research exists that illustrates the disparities for women in higher education and academic affairs, little comparable research exists for women in student affairs.

This qualitative study sought to understand how women in senior-level student affairs positions have navigated their experiences and career paths in order to advance to their current roles. Using critical and post-structural feminist perspectives of power, the researcher utilized a critical phenomenological approach to consider how nine women in senior-level student affairs positions in large, public institutions understood their career advancement. Participants completed two semi-structured interviews. The resulting themes include an encompassing theme of *genderization,* as well as four embedded themes: *the person on the path, achieving through and with others, conflicting messages of competence and value,* and *overtasked and alone.* Implications of the study require that policy, practice, and research all examine the ways that genderization perpetuates

masculine-centered norms and power dynamics that penalize women for deviating from those norms. For current or aspiring student affairs leaders, organizational constructs must be dismantled in order to disrupt internalized genderization by women.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to my children – the curious, kind, loving, intelligent soul showing me the world through your eyes, and the life sprouting inside of me, becoming more resilient, present, and whole each day. I promise to learn alongside you both every day of my life.

And to my partner, my love, for building time and space for my hopes and dreams. Every part of me is better because of you.

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To the women who shared their stories and souls with me – I am forever changed by the gifts you provided me through your time, perspective, honesty, and integrity. I will forever be connected to your stories and will strive to learn from each of you through the rest of my career.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Chapter One: Introduction to Study

Introduction and Statement of Problem

While the roles and representation of women in higher education administrator positions have evolved with the expansion of education in the United States, the concept of *the higher, the fewer* (Nidiffer, 2002) still rings true for women's representation in senior-level leadership. Within a higher education context, Johnson (2017) described the concept of *the higher, the fewer* as representing the idea that women hold fewer "positions with high faculty rank, salary, or prestige" (p. 6), despite having higher levels of educational degree attainment than men. Generally, across all types of institutions, women administrators account for 45% of all senior positions, but "gendered prestige hierarchies" (Allan, 2011, p. 58), or more women at institutions of greater access and fewer women at more prestigious institutions, are present at all levels of positions.

A critical feminist approach allows us to ask questions about women's representation within higher education, as illustrated by positional attainment challenges for women in faculty. Women are overrepresented in roles with lower-ranking titles (Glazer-Raymo, 2008), holding only 32% of all full-professor positions across all institutional types (Johnson, 2017). This disparity becomes clearer as institutional type is considered, as two-year institution faculty is comprised of 55% women, master's degree-granting institutions and four-year institutions have 41% of all faculty as women, and research institutions have just 31% of faculty roles held by women (Glazer-Raymo, 2008). The dichotomy of representation of women by institutional type directly translates to women's representation in academic leadership, as the representation of women in

chief academic officer (CAO) roles at public, doctoral degree-granting institutions dropped from 40% in 2008 to 25.3% in 2013 (Johnson, 2017), signaling that women are facing greater barriers to their career advancement.

In the field of student affairs, "gendered prestige hierarchies" (Allan, 2011, p. 58) exist as women are more likely to advance at smaller institutions (Rickard, 1985a) and hold chief student affairs officer (CSAO) roles at more private than public institutions (Tull & Freeman, 2008), which tend to have smaller enrollment. Additionally, women advance to senior student affairs officer (SSAO) roles less frequently than men (Earwood-Smith, Jordan-Cox, Hudson, & Smith[1], 1990; Rickard, 1985b). For women who do advance into CSAO roles, they are more likely to do so at institutions with 1,000 or fewer students (Rickard, 1985a). Estimates also show that women's representation in SSAO roles was stagnant from the 1980s to the early 2000s, despite women representing a majority of all student affairs professional roles in that time period (Blackhurst, 2000). Represented in this cursory data on women's representation in SSAO roles is little information that disaggregates institutional type, intersecting identities, salaries, titles, and overall experiences to understand how women are able to successfully navigate career advancement into senior roles. Though disaggregated data does not exist, the disparity of women's representation is clear, making it critical to examine the systemic barriers that limit women's promotion to senior-level roles.

The disparity of women's representation in senior-level student affairs roles affects the greater field of student affairs as well. Two student affairs professional

[1] As much of the research on women's experiences in higher education was conducted by women, all author names are cited throughout the paper as an act of amplifying women's voices and promoting the work of all involved authors.

organizations, College Student Educators International (ACPA) and Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) established competency areas as guidelines for the professional practice of all student affairs administrators (ACPA & NASPA, 2010). Competencies were expanded in 2015 to include social justice and inclusion, and defined this as both a "process and a goal" that "foster equitable participation of all groups while seeking to address and acknowledge issues of oppression, privilege, and power" (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p. 14). While framed as an approach to working with students and meeting the needs of campuses, an advanced outcome of this competency is for administrators to take responsibility for dismantling the ways in which their institution is perpetuating oppression. To extend this competency one step further, it can be argued that student affairs professionals have a responsibility to acknowledge the systemic oppression of women through barriers to career advancement, and actively research and implement ways to successfully dismantle practices, policies, and cultural norms that reinforce gendered opportunities.

When women do not have a literal seat at the table, institutions are limiting the ways that leadership is practiced. From a leadership perspective, women are more likely to effectively practice transformational leadership (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & Van Engen, 2003) including participatory and democratic leadership practices (Van Engen & Willemsen, 2004). Transformational leadership is also a more favorable practice for women, as it allows for more authentic community-building approaches and challenges negatively-associated authoritative practices (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & Van Engen, 2003). However, higher educational systems perpetuate dichotomized gendered leadership norms, reinforcing learned behaviors to be practiced by both men and women

within leadership roles (Glazer-Raymo, 1999). Unless leadership norms are identified, examined, and dismantled within divisions of student affairs, systemic exclusion of women and their leadership practices will continue to be normalized.

The lack of women in senior-level roles also means a lack of women available to mentor the next generation of student affairs leaders. Mentors play a critical role for women's career advancement opportunities (Allan, 2011; Ballenger, 2010; Turner, Norwood, & Noe, 2013), as internal and external mentoring networks allow for women to be tapped for advancement in positions and responsibilities (Fochtman, 2011). Formalized mentoring programs also require student affairs leaders to consider whether multiple individuals from marginalized identities are represented at every level of the division, demonstrating the advanced outcome of the leadership competency and organizational and human resource competency (ACPA & NASPA, 2015).

For these reasons, this critical study examined the experiences of women who have successfully navigated the genderized barriers within higher education and student affairs to successfully reach senior-level roles. Participants have the unique experience of making meaning of their own career decisions, challenges, successes, leadership practices, and personal demands as they have advanced in their careers. Whether or not participants were aware of the systemic barriers that impacted their opportunities for advancement, understanding their experiences informs the ways that future women leaders identify opportunities and limitations for advancement, the ways that future student affairs leaders shape divisional opportunities, and the research that illuminates inconsistencies of practice within professional competencies.

Current research centers around women's career advancement into senior-level student affairs roles, including transitioning to SSAO roles (Dahlvig & Longman, 2010; Dungy, 2011; Enke, 2014; Gordon, Iverson, & Allan, 2010; Hecht, 2016), the critical need of mentors (Blackhurst, 2000; Burke & Carter, 2015; Fochtman, 2011), the myth of work-life balance (Beeny, Guthrie, Rhodes, & Terrell, 2005; Collins, 2009; Fochtman, 2011; Nobbe & Manning, 1997; Spurlock, 2009), the lack of data on women's representation across student affairs roles (Allan, 2011; Blackhurst, 2000; Earwood-Smith, Jordan-Cox, Hudson, & Smith, 1990; NCES, 2017; Pritchard & McChesney, 2018; Reason, Walker, & Robinson, 2002; Rickard, 1985a, 1985b; Tull & Freeman, 2008), the need for advancement (Burke & Carter, 2015; Earwood-Smith, Jordan-Cox, Hudson, & Smith, 1990; Nobbe & Manning, 1997), and experiencing the SSAO role (Spurlock, 2009). In addition to providing historical context of the literature, this chapter introduces the purpose of the study, research questions, theoretical framework, methodological overview, significance of the study, delimitations and assumptions, and definition of terms.

Purpose of Study

This research study sought to understand how women in senior-level student affairs positions have navigated their experiences and career paths in order to advance to their current role. As women represent a majority of staff in the student affairs field but are clustered at the assistant, associate, and director-level roles (Jones & Komives, 2001), this study sought to understand the experiences that moved women beyond these titled roles into senior-level leadership positions in the field. Additionally, women are least represented in SSAO roles at larger and/or more prestigious institutional types and are

more likely to serve in CSAO roles at private institutions than public (Tull & Freeman, 2008). For those women who were able to advance to a CSAO role, they were more likely to do so at small institutions with 1,000 or fewer students (Rickard, 1985a). As the institutional types with the fewest women in senior and chief student affairs roles are large institutions and public institutions, there is the most opportunity to deconstruct the gendered prestige hierarchies that limit women's advancement by studying women who are successfully in senior-level roles at these institutions.

Research Questions

This study was centered on two research questions: (1) How do women in student affairs at large, public institutions in the United States understand their career advancement to senior-level positions? and (2) How have gendered institutional norms shaped women's experiences in their career progression?

Conceptual Framework

As power shapes the experiences of women (Patton, 2015), analyzing power is a critical act within feminist research, as it allows for the deconstruction of systems of power, privilege, and oppression. Concepts of critical feminism and post-structural feminism were utilized to consider the ways that power was both enacted upon women through hierarchical structures, as well as how power was enacted by women in expansive ways. By framing this study through both concepts of feminism, I considered how power was utilized and practiced within relationships, organizational structure, decision-making, and how resistance was practiced.

Research that does not specifically and intentionally examine women's experience inherently oppresses women, therefore it is critical for feminist research to

understand how research and policies consider and oppress women (Ezzy, 2002). This is also critical as research is often presented from a white, "masculinist" perspective (McLennan, 1995, p. 392), requiring feminist research to disrupt the sociopolitical power dynamics presented as universal truths. In order to disrupt systems of power in a way that aligned with critical and post-structural feminism, I critiqued the ways that women's experiences were presented through research, literature, and practice in student affairs. To do this, I used the conceptual framework of power to examine the hierarchical and relational dynamics of power (Gannon & Davies, 2012), considered the context of participants' experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), challenged binaries that are perpetuated in society (Gannon & Davies, 2012; Okun & Jones, 2001), and considered how women's narratives are presented through norms of femininity (Gannon & Davies, 2012).

A detailed explanation of power will be presented in chapter two. Additionally, in chapter three, the positionality of the researcher is presented to understand the ways that my personal and socially-constructed identities informed and influenced the relationships with participants and data.

Methodology

This qualitative study was developed in a critical epistemological framework and sought to understand the lived experiences of participants through a phenomenological approach. Qualitative research is conducted to understand the ways that people make meaning of their lived experiences by constantly constructing knowledge (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and utilizes an analytical approach of gathering verbal data, turning it into written data, reading and sorting data, and then organizing the data to find themes

(Giorgi, 1997). While there is a need to research the number of women who hold senior-level student affairs positions at various institutional types, I chose a qualitative study design to understand how women successfully navigated their careers and experienced senior-level student affairs roles, through their own voices and meaning-making.

This study utilized a phenomenological methodology in order to understand the "lived experience" (Patton, 2015, p. 115) of study participants. Grounded in philosophy, phenomenology seeks to understand the "meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience" (Patton, 2015, p. 98) of those being studied. As a reflective form of study, each participant uses this practice to understand their own experience (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), and thereby treats a phenomenon as something to be understood within itself. Phenomenology provides the opportunity to study how women in senior-level student affairs roles make meaning of their lived experiences.

Purposive and snowball sampling was used to recruit nine women in senior-level student affairs roles at large, public institutions with enrollment greater than 10,000 total students. Each participant completed a demographic form prior to participation in two semi-structured interviews, ranging from 60 to 90 minutes each. Each interview was transcribed, read line by line, and coded to identify themes. Themes were then analyzed by the researcher to find the "essence of shared experience" (Patton, 2015, p. 115) of participants.

Significance

Literature shows that women make up a majority of the field of student affairs (Blackhurst, 2000), but do not advance into senior roles at the same rate as men in the field (Earwood-Smith, Jordan-Cox, Hudson, & Smith, 1990; Rickard, 1985b). For

women who do advance to the senior-level role in student affairs, they have to manage obstacles including work-life balance (Fochtman, 2011), work demands (Beeny, Guthrie, Rhodes, & Terrell, 2005), and barriers presented by having families (Dominici, Fried, & Zeger, 2009), among others. Though this literature shows that there is a crisis of women's advancement in the field of student affairs, it does not identify how and why women persist into senior-level roles so that systemic changes can be made to promote equity in advancement. As a result, this study provides information on how women understood their career progression and the experiences that contributed to their career advancement in an effort to lay the foundation for future research.

From a critical feminist perspective, by understanding the experiences that women have in navigating their career advancement, women-centered systemic change can occur. While this study does not produce findings that represent all women's experiences in the field, it presents data that illustrates experiences, knowledge, and factors that have allowed women to apply for and move into senior roles and recommends systemic changes that would expand opportunities for women's career advancement in student affairs.

Delimitations and Assumptions

This study focused on women who were currently holding senior-level student affairs roles at large, public institutions, with enrollment greater than 10,000 students. As such, the study did not consider the ways that women in entry, mid, or director-level roles might experience their career progression, nor did it study men in similarly positioned roles in order to compare their experiences. The study was intentionally designed this way, so that women's experiences and voices could be placed at the center of the

narrative, rather than positioning their experiences from the perspective of an ‘other’ and perpetuating the assumption that men’s experiences are the norm.

Additionally, as the study looked only at women’s experiences at large, public institutions of higher education, findings may not represent the experiences of women at private, faith-related, two-year, tribal, or other institutional types, including medium or small institutions. While the findings of this study may relate to women’s experiences at these institutional types, challenges of representation do not exist to the same extent as at large, public institutions, and therefore offer different political and systemic context. Finally, in considering the data, findings may be transferable to women who hold similar positions and thus may have had similar experiences.

Two assumptions framed the study as well. First, it was assumed that gender affected participants’ experiences in their careers, regardless of whether the participant had concluded that herself or not. With that, the assumption that each participant would discuss her experiences openly and provide honest and thoughtful reflection framed the ways that interviews were conducted.

Definition of Terms

Definitions around socially-constructed identities can evolve and change with time and environmental influence, but the following concepts have been defined in order to provide common language with which to frame this study. While informed by the literature, the operational definitions below are crafted in my own language.

Chief student affairs officer. The top executive position within a student affairs division, unit, or function at an institution. This officer is responsible for the visioning

and leadership of student affairs functions on their campus and may hold the title of vice president, vice chancellor, vice provost, dean of students, or other comparable title.

Cisgender/cis. A person who "exclusively identifies as their sex assigned at birth" (Trans Student Educational Resources, 2019).

Female. A biological distinction of sex attributed to people that are born with vaginas and/or ovaries.

Gender. A socially-constructed, fluid spectrum that may include roles expectations, and norms of masculinity, femininity, neither, or both.

Gender identity. The way that one defines their individual gender or the way that one knows their internal identity to be (National Center for Transgender Equality [NCTE], 2016).

Gender expression. The way by which one presents their gender to others, which might include physical attributes, attire, appearance, behavior, voice, or other characteristics (NCTE, 2016).

Genderization. The dichotomization of systems, structures, functions, and power based within a man-woman gender binary. While this term has been used to examine the relationships between space and gender (Knowlton, 2006), this term does not have prior context in higher education.

Intersecting identities. The interactions of various identities, where marginalization is magnified for those with multiple minoritized identities.

Intersectionality. A theory utilized to deploy transformative social justice research through "a critical analytic lens to interrogate racial, ethnic, class, ability, age, sexuality,

and gender disparities and to contest existing ways of looking at these structures of inequality" (Thornton-Dill & Zambrana, 2009, p. 1; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991).

Man. One who self-identifies their gender as a man. This gender identity is one of many. The experience of gender is individual and, therefore, it is impossible to assign characteristics that would encompass the complexity of this identity.

Male. A biological distinction of sex attributed to people born with penises and/or testes.

Senior student affairs officer. This person is the "number two" leader within the division, unit, or function of student affairs at their institution. This officer reports to the chief student affairs officer and/or oversees multiple functional areas within student affairs.

Sex. Sex designation is often assigned based on the presentation of genitalia at birth; either the presence of or absence of a penis. While in the United States, there are three classifications of sex assigned at birth: male, female, and intersex, there are numerous combinations of chromosomal composition outside of XX and XY.

Transgender/trans. Includes the gender identities of individuals who do not identify with the sex assigned to them at birth (Trans Student Educational Resources, 2019).

Woman. One who self-identifies their gender as being a woman. This gender identity is one of many. The experience of gender is individual and, therefore, it is impossible to assign characteristics that would encompass the complexity of this identity.

Summary

This chapter introduced the study of women's experiences navigating career advancement into senior-level student affairs roles at large, public institutions. The problem statement, purpose of study, and research questions were presented prior to the delimitations, significance of the study and operational definitions. Chapter two will synthesize relevant literature on women's influence in higher education and experiences in the field of student affairs, including the roles and competencies for those in senior and chief student affairs officer roles. Chapter three will outline the methodology, researcher's positionality and role, data collection and analysis procedures, and quality measures for the study. Chapter four will present results, including a participant summary, as well as themes and findings that arose from the data. Chapter five will summarize and present a discussion of the findings, as well as limitations and implications for student affairs practice and organizational considerations. Recommendations for future research will be presented prior to the final conclusions and summary of the study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Institutions of higher education were founded by and for white, wealthy men (Cohen & Kisker, 2010), laying a foundation for the prolific exclusion of women in ranks as students, faculty, staff, administrators, and senior-level leaders for decades. While women's access to higher education has expanded over the past two centuries, "gendered prestige hierarchies" (Allan, 2011, p. 58) still perpetuate dichotomized representation with fewer women at more prestigious institutions and more women at institutions of greater access. Though there is significant research on the barriers to and facilitators of women's career advancement in academic affairs (Armenti, 2004; Dominici, Fried, & Zeger, 2009; Eddy, 2002; Fochtman, 2011; Johnson, 2017; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004), little research illustrates comparable information about women in student affairs.

This chapter introduces the conceptual framework of power in order to contextualize the ways that the literature is both understood and presented. The early part of the chapter presents relevant literature on women's influence on higher education, including women's access to higher education and foundations of student affairs, introduces the genderization of higher education through the lens of academic affairs and presidency roles, and presents research on women's advancement. The later part of the chapter focuses on literature around women in senior student affairs roles, including women's transition into these roles, the roles of mentorship and work-life balance, the lack of data on women's representation, and concludes with information on women's experiences in the SSAO role.

Table 1

Women in Higher Education and Student Affairs: Recurring Themes

Theme	Sources
	Women's Influence on Higher Education
Creating education for women	Allan, 2011; Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Henning, 2002; Introcaso, 2001; Nidiffer, 2002, 2003; Solomon, 1985
Laying the foundation for student affairs	Herdlein, 2004; Hevel, 2016; Hine, 2005; Miller & Pruitt-Logan, 2012; Nidiffer, 2002, 2003
Establishing the student affairs professions	ACPA, 2019; American Council on Education, 1937; Hevel, 2016; NASPA, 2019
The gendered history of student affairs	Greer, 1999; Hevel, 2016; Miller & Pruitt-Logan, 2012; Nidiffer, 2000, 2001; Rosser, 2012; Schwartz, 2010
The systemic genderization of higher education	Eagly, 2005; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & VanEngen, 2003; Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonskly, 1992; Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006; Glazer-Raymo, 1999; Gordon, Iverson, & Allan, 2010; Helgesen, 1995; Van Engen & Willemsen, 2004
Representation of women in higher education administration	Allan, 2011; Dominici, Fried, & Zeger, 2009; Glazer-Raymo, 2008; Johnson, 2017; Walton & McDade, 2001
Disparities in career progression	Armenti, 2004; Dominici, Fried, & Zeger, 2009; Eddy, 2002; Fochtman, 2011; Johnson, 2017; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004
Advancing women in higher education	Allan, 2011; Ballenger, 2010; Blackhurst, 2000; Fochtman, 2011; Niskodé-Dossett, Pasque, & Nicholson, 2011; Turner, Norwood, & Noe, 2013
	Women as Senior Student Affairs Officers
Transitioning to SSAO roles	Dahlvig & Longman, 2010; Dungy, 2011; Enke, 2014; Gordon, Iverson, & Allan, 2010; Hecht, 2016
Critical need of mentors	Blackhurst, 2000; Burke & Carter, 2015; Fochtman, 2011
The myth of work-life balance	Beeny, Guthrie, Rhodes, & Terrell, 2005; Collins, 2009; Fochtman, 2011; Nobbe & Manning, 1997; Spurlock, 2009

The question of representation	Allan, 2011; Blackhurst, 2000; Earwood-Smith, Jordan-Cox, Hudson, & Smith, 1990; NCES, 2017; Pritchard & McChesney, 2018; Reason, Walker, & Robinson, 2002; Rickard, 1985a, 1985b; Tull & Freeman, 2008
The need for advancement	Burke & Carter, 2015; Earwood-Smith, Jordan-Cox, Hudson, & Smith, 1990; Nobbe & Manning, 1997
Experiencing the SSAO role	Spurlock, 2009

Conceptual Framework

Power as a Concept

Power dynamics shape the conditions of the experiences (Patton, 2015) that women have, therefore an analysis of power is central to feminist research. Power is also inherent in the act of research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and therefore must be acknowledged and understood in order to deconstruct systems of power, privilege, and oppression. Critical feminism paved a path for post-structural feminist thought, though the two concepts paint differing perspectives about power dynamics. While critical feminism centers on power as something that one group enacts upon another group, post-structural feminist thought argues that power is not hierarchical, but instead is expansive in all directions (Gannon & Davies, 2012). Though there are differences between the two feminist perspectives, each has valid perspective in considering the ways women understand their lived experiences. Rather than perpetuating either/or perspectives in selecting a critical or post-structural framework, I chose to utilize both perspectives in this study. In order to truly understand how women experience their senior-level student affairs roles, this study considered the ways that power was enacted *upon* women, as well as the ways that power was enacted *by* women.

Consistent with critical feminism, I explored how the hierarchical organizational structures of higher education and student affairs oppressed and limited opportunities for women. Critical feminism also challenged me to consider how women's social identities created power hierarchies that advantaged some women over others. In analyzing women's experiences, I had a responsibility to consider how race, gender, religion, class, ability, and other social identities privileged some participants over others, and how women who advanced into senior-level leadership roles held power over other women in their organizations.

From a post-structural perspective, power is expansive and available to be claimed by all (Gannon & Davies, 2012). This can be seen and understood in considering the ways that women shared power horizontally with colleagues, peers, and others in their organizations. This was also analyzed by the examples women shared of opportunities where they claimed power or challenged power dynamics in their professional experiences. As power is a complex concept, post-structuralism encouraged me to focus on relationships around power and how it was practiced between individuals and systems in order to provide opportunities for resistance through discourse (Gannon & Davies, 2012). Finally, critical feminist perspective challenged me to answer questions around problems in decision-making and practices of patriarchal higher education structures, and frame gender-consciousness as a practice of fairness (Bensimon & Marshall, 2003).

Centering Women

By deploying research that critically examines participants' experiences through the lens of white, patriarchal social constructs and systems of oppression, opportunities

arise for women-centered change in student affairs. For this reason, this study was framed by critical and post-structural feminist theories and research perspectives in order to challenge traditional gendered power dynamics and center women's experiences.

Feminist research perspectives center gender as a lived experience (Ezzy, 2002) and acknowledge research can oppress women if their experiences are not specifically and intentionally examined. Ezzy (2002) explained, "if women's experience is analysed using only theories and observations from the standpoint of men, the resulting theories oppress women" (p. 23). Feminist research, then, must center women's experiences in order to understand how research approaches and policies oppress women (Ezzy, 2002). McLennan (1995) argued that research perspectives are painted from a white, masculine lens and that there is a need to understand the feminist perspective. As a response to the traditionally "masculinist" (McLennan, 1995, p. 392) perspective, feminist research has bridged sociopolitical power dynamics with women's experiences.

Feminist research, therefore, advocated that I be "in the same critical plane" as the people that I researched (Harding, 1987, p. 184) and that I value participatory, co-constructed knowledge (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012). Feminist research constructs knowledge through a collaborative, relational, and reflective process centered on dialogue between the researcher and participant (Collins, 2000; DeVault, 1990; Mies, 1983). This also meant that I had a responsibility to continuously examine my positionality and interrogate the power dynamics of the study (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012). Feminist perspective also challenges and innovates traditional research paradigms and methodological approaches, which allowed for me to center participant experiences and reflexive practices (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012). While there are many branches of

feminist thought and practice, an integrated critical and post-structural feminist perspective framed this study.

Critique as an Act of Disruption

In order to illuminate systems of power and the ways that it is oppressive, hierarchical, and expansive, it was my responsibility to critique the ways that gender has been researched, presented, and understood in student affairs. Because of this, I analyzed literature and research practices through the lens of power dynamics in the following ways:

- Examined the ways that power was seen as both oppressive and hierarchical as well as how it was enacted by one group over another (Gannon & Davies, 2012).
- Examined the ways that power was practiced between individuals and systems, and the opportunities that discourse provided in resisting power dynamics (Gannon & Davies, 2012).
- Focused on the context of each participant's experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), including the institutions, organizations, and student affairs field in order to understand the ways that women made meaning of their career advancement, whether conscious or not of the role power played in their advancement.
- Sought to challenge the binaries that control our understandings of society and ourselves (Gannon & Davies, 2012) while disrupting understandings of power.
- Disrupted binary perspectives that perpetuated either/or thinking (Okun & Jones, 2001) in research and literature and instead considered both/and perspectives (Gannon & Davies, 2012).

- Identified the ways "influential discourses related to femininity, heterosexuality, fertility, and maternity have structured the conditions of women's lives" (Gannon & Davies, 2012, p. 74).

Importantly, in considering the ways that research has illustrated how gender dynamics differ in higher education and student affairs, gender is singularly presented from a binary perspective of women as compared to men. Literature has been evasive to how those professionals within the trans community have experienced power dynamics within their roles. While I present literature that was conducted and reported from a gender binary perspective, this was not done as an endorsement or perpetuation of the notion that only cisgender women and men work in higher education or that the experiences of cisgender women are the same as that of trans women. Similarly, while I use *male* and *female* language throughout this chapter, this was only done when such language was presented in the literature so as to preserve the spirit of the research and illuminate the frequent use of sex descriptors rather than gender. Additionally, while research in this chapter often references women, I assume that these were primarily cisgender women and that trans women experience compounded oppression beyond what is presented from past research.

Women's Influence on Higher Education

While women were initially excluded from higher education (Cohen & Kisker, 2010), the expansion to include women has perpetuated genderized norms and experiences. In this section, I will discuss influential women who laid the foundation for educational, administrative, and professional opportunities for future women (Henning, 2002; Introcaso, 2001; Nidiffer, 2002; Solomon, 1985). Additionally, I will describe the ways in which women played a critical role in creating the field of student affairs

(Herdlein 2004; Nidiffer, 2002, 2003). Finally, I will present the disparity in women's representation in ranked faculty and senior-level administrative roles as it illustrates continued challenges for women in higher education (Allan, 2011; Glazer-Raymo, 1999, 2008; Johnson, 2017).

Creating Education for Women

As the United States shifted from British colonies to a nation, higher education institutions reflected the colonization of the Americas, as they initially served only white, wealthy men (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). The exclusive intention upon which higher education was founded was not accepted by all. During the American Revolution, Abigail Adams, Mercy Otis Warren, Judith Murray, and Mary Wollstonecraft advocated for educational opportunities and political participation for women, but this dream was not realized until the 1830s, during the first women's movement (Solomon, 1985).

In advocating for women's educational opportunities, several women took it upon themselves to challenge the systems and structures that prevented women from gaining college-level education. In 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft published *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, a radical attack on male-dominated society, and advocated for women's education (Solomon, 1985). In 1818, Emma Scott Willard published a plan for women's higher education, titled "An Address to the Public: Particularly to the Members of the Legislature of New York, Proposing a Plan for Improving Female Education," also known as the Willard Plan (Henning, 2002). Willard then opened the Troy Seminary in New York, providing an early opportunity for women's education, with curriculum taught exclusively by women (Introcaso, 2001). In 1835, Marianne Parker Dascom was

appointed as the lady principal of the Female Department at Oberlin College and was responsible for mothering students and monitoring their moral behaviors (Nidiffer, 2002).

Both women's colleges and coeducational institutions made strides toward educational equality in 1837. Mount Holyoke College, founded that year, was the first of the Seven Sisters women's colleges and opened the door for white women in faculty and administrative roles to serve in professionalized capacities beyond the supervision of female students (Nidiffer, 2003). That same year, Oberlin College in Ohio admitted women with full collegiate permissions, becoming the first coeducational institution of higher education (Introcaso, 2001). These institutions paved an important pathway to access for women seeking to learn, teach, or work at institutions of higher education, though this only held true for wealthy, white elite women.

In 1848, the *Declaration of Sentiments* advocated for women's education as an essential component of women's equality at the Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, NY (Allan, 2011). The advocacy for women's education, paired with the bold moves of Mount Holyoke and Oberlin Colleges, led to a surge of opportunities for white women in the 1850s. Educational institutions began admitting these women into normal schools for teaching, as well as ladies studies programs (Nidiffer, 2002), resulting in over 40 colleges for women by the end of the decade (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Though women's opportunities for education expanded, they still faced discrimination and mistrust (Cohen & Kisker, 2010) and were expected to fulfill their primary duties of wife and mother (Solomon, 1985). While women's advancement in higher education was slow, influential women created change that permeated an exclusive system made for men.

Laying the Foundation for Student Affairs

The need for women to serve in administrative roles expanded parallel to the educational opportunities available to students. The first woman administrator, Marianne Parker Dascom, was appointed as the head of the Female Department at Oberlin College in 1835 (Nidiffer, 2002). As women gained access to professional and faculty roles, these positions were primarily in women's studies or deans of women positions (Nidiffer, 2003). The first dean of women, Alice Freeman Palmer, was appointed in 1892 at the University of Chicago, as the institution opened to men and women (Schwartz & Stewart, 2017). Professional roles evolved at the start of the 20th century by founding formal, professional organizations. In 1902, the first meeting of the Deans of Women occurred at Northwestern University (Nidiffer, 2002) and was hosted by Marion Talbot, Alice Freeman Palmer's successor at the University of Chicago (Schwartz & Stewart, 2017). In 1905, the Conference of Deans and Advisors of Women in State Universities organization was formed and a mission was created (Nidiffer, 2002). By 1911, a survey of 55 institutions shared that 80% had a dean of women position (Miller & Pruitt-Logan, 2012), which pre-dated the dean of men role by almost two decades (Hevel, 2016). Many women accepted deans of women roles as a result of exclusion from faculty positions, but often gained a faculty appointment with their dean title (Nidiffer, 2000). Though this practice sounded promising, it was directly opposite of men's paths, which often started through academic appointments and expanded to include administrative duties (Hevel, 2016). In 1915, *The Dean of Women* was published as the first book to introduce and encourage women aspiring to enter this professional role (Nidiffer, 2003).

In 1919, Thyrsa Wealtheow Amos was appointed as the first dean of women at the University of Pittsburgh and played a significant role in shaping the position for future women leaders. One of the first responsibilities that Amos had in serving as the dean of women was creating a similar position that would help to rectify the concerning behaviors that had occurred over the years with student activities and practices, leading Amos to propose a dean of men position in 1922. This act, in proposing and securing a male counterpart, provided Amos with unheard of power in a time when women were not given equal voice (Herdlein, 2004). Amos established programs around four principles, including the development of students' social, emotional, physical, and spiritual health, engagement outside of the classroom, work with peers, and the equal importance of staff to faculty in developing students (Herdlein, 2004). These tenets ultimately laid the foundation for work in student affairs and led to Amos' role as president of the National Association of Deans of Women in 1929 (Herdlein, 2004).

While the field had expanded to include white women, it was not inclusive of women with minoritized racial identities. In 1922, Lucy Diggs Slowe, the first African American dean of women at Howard University, also became the first African American woman to join the National Association of Deans of Women, but was treated poorly by hotel staff at the Association meeting, leading her to separate from the group and create the Association of Deans of Women and Advisers to Girls in Negro Schools (Nidiffer, 2003). While Slowe's legacy is broad in higher education leadership, as a founder of the first Black sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha, and the founder of the National Council of Negro Women (Hine, 2005), the exclusive and segregated nature of the emerging student

affairs field reinforced the notion that higher education was still primarily for white students and staff.

It was also through the establishment of the dean of women role that tension between gender essentialism and gender construction was embedded in the field, persisting into contemporary student affairs. Though Thyrsa Wealtheow Amos developed the role to combat the narrative that women were lesser than men, the role that she created centered caretaking tendencies often associated with a gender essentialist perspective that womanhood is situated through the biological experiences of women. By associating womanhood with childbearing (Rosser, 2012), an extension of womanhood becomes caretaking for children at home and, in the case of student affairs, caretaking for students on campus. It can be argued that while Amos' intent was reflective of modern gender constructionism by seeking to free women from stereotypically prescribed gender roles (Greer, 1999), the creation of the position reinforced perceived biological sex-based differences for women that instead reinforced gender stereotypes.

Establishing the Student Affairs Profession

By the 1930s, deans of women roles actively sought to ease the scarcity of adults willing to oversee college students through preparation programs that trained women to live in housing, Greek organizations, and other campus residences to provide students with support (Hevel, 2016). As women experienced the dean role, they began to challenge the ways that students were being watched and disciplined, and instead felt a need to provide mentoring and guidance to students (Hevel, 2016). This shift to a developmental perspective was pivotal in framing the current student affairs field today.

Thyrsa Wealtheow Amos, in partnership with others, published *The Student Personnel Point of View* in 1937, which served as a guiding document in student development practices and student affairs work (American Council on Education, 1937). The field itself was professionalized in 1918, through the Conference of Deans and Advisors of Men, now known as the organization of Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, or NASPA (NASPA, 2019). NASPA did not expand its membership to include women until 1951, and elected its first woman president of the organization in 1976 (NASPA, 2019).

In 1924, May Cheney founded the National Association of Appointment Secretaries to support women who helped students find jobs after graduation. The organization expanded to promote student learning through the education and advancement of student affairs professionals and is currently known as College Student Educators, or ACPA (ACPA, 2019). Each organization's population for which it was founded is reflected in the history of past presidents; ACPA has had 34 women serve as president in its 78 years (ACPA, 2019), while NASPA has had only 22 women presidents in its 100 years (NASPA, 2019).

The Gendered History of Student Affairs

As the number of deans of men and women expanded across the country, the disparity between the two roles grew as well. Women deans were not paid equitably to other campus administrators (Miller & Pruitt-Logan, 2012; Schwartz, 2010), were given limited budget structures, and were expected to live on campus more often than deans of men (Miller & Pruitt-Logan, 2012). As the first Black dean of women, Lucy Diggs Slowe was significantly ostracized by campus leadership. The president of Howard University,

Mordecai Johnson, excluded Lucy from deans' meetings, reduced her budget, limited her responsibilities, and attempted to relocate her residence to a house near a landfill (Miller & Pruitt-Logan, 2012).

Women deans found that their responsibilities included the confrontation of sexism in higher education. As such, deans of women found that they had to fight for women's value in the classroom, including for instructors to teach them generally, and in the same classes as men. Additionally, deans of women created traditions for women, helped women develop skills and competencies, and fought for career opportunities for their students (Hevel, 2016). As higher education moved to condense dean of women and dean of men roles into a centralized dean of students position, few women advanced into the role as the position was given largely to men (Hevel, 2016).

Deans of women played critical roles in challenging intersecting systems of oppression as well. For Lucy Diggs Slowe, advocacy for Women of Color at Howard made her an influential resource for other deans of women, for whom she provided guidance on integrating campuses and housing for students (Hevel, 2016). Despite the work of Lucy and others, many white deans of women contributed to the segregation of Black women students through the 1940s (Hevel, 2016), promoting the notion that higher education was still only for white people, albeit cisgender women and men. Deans of women also influenced campus culture around LGBTQ+ identities, as women often cohabitated with other women, prompting rumors that they were lesbians (Nidiffer, 2000, 2001). Though important, there is little research that extends more broadly into the intersecting ways that deans of women combatted racism and homophobia in the formation of the student affairs field.

The Systemic Genderization of Higher Education

While student affairs has evolved as a profession, it is only one component of a larger higher education ecosystem. As higher education has evolved to include women in all facets of the organizations, systemic bias still influences the perceptions of women within senior administrative roles and presents barriers for women's advancement. Glazer-Raymo (1999) found that higher educational systems, across all institutional types, perpetuate dichotomized gender leadership norms, reinforcing the practice of learned behaviors by both men and women within leadership roles. Additionally, women's performance is often judged by traditionally masculine standards within these hierarchical structures (Gordon, Iverson, & Allan, 2010), while norms around white male leadership continue to permeate the culture, encouraging hierarchical, traditionally masculine approaches (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006). For women who embody traditionally masculine leadership attributes, including assertiveness and decisiveness, they are often viewed as disruptive and challenging, but for women who embody traditionally feminine leadership approaches, they are described as being motherly and vulnerable, which are perceived as negative characteristics from a leader (Gordon, Iverson, & Allan, 2010).

Power dynamics also influence women's ability to lead an organization. An influential model of women's leadership emerged in the 1990s, as women were gaining representation in political and business leadership. Helgesen (1995) found that women were more likely to lead through "webs of inclusion" (p. 10), or by putting themselves at the center of an organization rather than structuring their power through hierarchical, top-down structures. Helgesen (1995) argued that hierarchical structure and control are

designed to exclude individuals and limit information, while sharing power promotes political influence that meets the needs of the organization and limits competition for power and resources. Within the context of higher education leadership, men were more likely to describe their leadership practice with them at the center of influence, while women described themselves as the person taking action to accomplish tasks (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006). Women demonstrated more participatory and democratic leadership than men (Van Engen & Willemsen, 2004) and were more likely to effectively practice transformational leadership (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & Van Engen, 2003). Transformational leadership practices are also favorable for women in higher education, as the community-building components of the approach may help women leaders overcome negative assumptions about their authority and ability to lead (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & Van Engen, 2003).

Because institutions promote hierarchical structures that inherently reflect a traditionally masculine leadership dynamic, women are systemically prevented from advancing into senior-level administrative roles. For organizations that define and value masculine leadership characteristics, leaders within those organizations are disproportionately male, regardless of the gender identities their followers hold (Eagly, 2005). Women were also evaluated more negatively when using autocratic leadership approaches; women who adhered to stereotypical leadership approaches were rated more favorably than those who were more directive and autocratic. Therefore, men have more flexibility to lead through different approaches than women (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonskly, 1992). Women are thereby set up to fail as leaders within higher education, as the hierarchies, practices, and expectations are all framed from a masculine dynamic,

where women are negatively received when they play within the constructed rules of the organization, but are not supported in shifting the culture to more inclusive dynamics.

Representation of Women in Higher Education Administration

Because there is a lack of comprehensive data on gender representation in the field of student affairs, examining the representation of women in academic affairs provides context for women's experiences in academia. For those in academic roles, gender representation is disproportionately skewed across all institutional levels, types, and faculty roles (Glazer-Raymo, 2008), perpetuating the "gendered prestige hierarchies" (Allan, 2011, p. 58), or significant underrepresentation of women at more prestigious institutions with higher representation at institutions of greater access. This disparity begins at the faculty level and intensifies at higher levels of institutional leadership. Glazer-Raymo (2008) found that women faculty are overrepresented in lower-ranking roles, with women holding 52.3% of lecturer and 52.8% of instructor positions, while holding a minority of ranked professor positions, including 46% of assistant professor, 38.8% of associate professor, and 25.1% of full professor titles. In 2015, women faculty held just 32% of all full professor positions across degree-granting higher educational institutions (Johnson, 2017). Additionally, women faculty are overrepresented at two-year public institutions at 55%, as compared to four-year institutions and master's-granting institutions at 41%, and have the least representation at research institutions with 33% of all faculty. Across institutional types, women faculty are most represented by 40% at denominational institutions, 38% at public institutions, and 36% in private and independent institutions (Glazer-Raymo, 2008). Johnson (2017) found that "women of all

races and ethnicities are more likely to hold lower ranking faculty positions" (p. 6) than their male colleagues as well.

The number of women in ranked faculty positions directly corresponds to opportunities for women to advance into senior-level academic positions. Women in academic leadership roles, including department chairs and deans, are even less represented than in full professor roles, showing a narrowing of the pipeline to academic leadership (Dominici, Fried, & Zeger, 2009). As women are more likely to hold chief academic officer (CAO) roles prior to the role of institutional president than men (Johnson, 2017), the opportunity for academic leadership plays a critical role for women's advancement to the presidency. While women held 15% of CAO positions in 2001 (Walton & McDade, 2001) and 33.3% in 2008, this number has increased to 43.6% of all CAO roles in 2013 (Johnson, 2017). At doctoral degree-granting institutions, however, the number of women in CAO roles has decreased from 33.3% in 2008 to 26.1% in 2013. At public, doctoral degree-granting institutions, the number has dropped even more substantially, from 40% in 2008 to 25.3% in 2013 (Johnson, 2017), signaling that the "gendered prestige hierarchies" (Allan, 2011, p. 58) do not just exist, but are magnified. For women who do advance to the CAO role, they are "less likely to be married, less likely to have children, and more likely to have altered their career to care for dependent, spouse/partner, or parent" than their male counterparts (Johnson, 2017, p. 11), also signaling a difference in expectations of the role based on gender.

Disparities in Career Progression

For women who choose to get married or have children, the gendered norms of higher education create barriers to their advancement. While being married and having

children make women less likely to advance in their academic careers, these factors increase the likelihood that their male colleagues will advance (Dominici, Fried, & Zeger, 2009). Additionally, academic culture is based on the male life cycle and timeline, which harms women in the academic pipeline as they have to explain gaps in their work product due to motherhood (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). While Fochtman (2011) found that motherhood has made women better leaders as their self-confidence, problem-solving, ability to address conflict, and flexibility are enhanced, women still navigate significant conflict in balancing academic work and family responsibilities. Though women can derive joy from having multiple roles and showing their children that work can be pleasurable, personal time was often missing from the lives of women faculty balancing family demands and professional advancement opportunities (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). Additionally, while faculty roles allow for flexibility and personal autonomy, many women still contemplate leaving the research institution after having a child (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). While this research is important in understanding some women's experiences, it also reinforces normative gendered expectations that all women want marriage and children. While this is what researchers have chosen to center in the literature, it is not reflective of all women's experiences or perspectives.

For women who work in academia and are interested in having children, many are forced to wait or hide any interest in pursuing a family life. Because having children threatens women's opportunities for tenure, many women try to time pregnancies so that they have babies in May, so as not to disrupt their academic schedules more than necessary (Armenti, 2004). Additionally, women will hide their desire to have children

until after they have achieved the male-focused tenure timeline, known as the "hidden pregnancy phenomenon" (Armenti, 2004, p. 212).

For women who persist in the academic ranks and advance to the CAO role, there are additional challenges that women must overcome to move into a presidency. While women held just 30% of presidency roles across all institutional types in 2016, they are often more directly qualified for the position. Women were more likely to have been a CAO or other senior leadership role within academic affairs, while men were more likely to have experience outside of higher education prior to their presidency (Johnson, 2017). In a study of presidents, Eddy (2002) described that 93% of men serving as college and university presidents were married, while only 48% of women in similar roles were married. The expectations of the partners of college and university presidents also differs by gender, as it is assumed that male spouses will have careers of their own, while female partners are expected to perform the unpaid functions required by the institution. Because of these differences in expectation, women presidents are expected to assume the responsibilities of their roles in addition to those of their partners, while the same is not expected of their men counterparts (Eddy, 2002). While women are more qualified to serve in the role of president, the gendered expectations and barriers that they face prevent them from advancing to these roles.

Advancing Women in Higher Education

In order for women to advance into senior-level leadership roles in higher education, institutions must make intentional, systemic change. Allan (2011) proposed strategies to elevate the status of women, including (1) organized activism and networking; (2) focusing on policy; (3) mentoring; (4) increasing structures that support

women; (5) developing leadership capacity; (6) changing norms and practices of institutions; and (7) transforming and expanding curriculum centered on women's experiences and feminist epistemology. Institutions should also diversify hiring committees in order to reduce male-favored bias, provide structured mentoring opportunities that prepare women for advancement into upper-level roles, and encourage women in senior-level roles to mentor other women in their career advancement (Ballenger, 2010). Additionally, feminist inquiry should be practiced on campuses by placing women's perspectives at the forefront of research and knowledge, resisting dominant and patriarchal paradigms that move beyond messages of oppression to resilience and advancement, and to challenge power through language and discourse (Niskodé-Dossett, Pasque, & Nicholson, 2011).

Outside of institutional structures, the need for and role of mentoring networks are essential for women's career advancement (Allan, 2011; Ballenger, 2010; Turner, Norwood, & Noe, 2013). Professional organizations should create women's mentorship programs to provide benefits of mentoring to women who do not have access to mentors within their own institutions (Blackhurst, 2000). These networks, both internal and external to an institution, allow for women to be identified as potential candidates for advancement opportunities (Fochtman, 2011) and increase the likelihood that women will be selected for senior-level roles.

Women as Senior Student Affairs Officers

Because there is little research on the experiences of women in senior student affairs officer (SSAO) roles, parallels with academic affairs experiences illustrate challenges and opportunities for women in student affairs. For women who choose to get

married or have children, they experience similar challenges as those in academic affairs about when to have children (Armenti, 2004), how to balance work and family responsibilities (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004), and barriers to their career advancement as a result of having families (Dominici, Fried, & Zeger, 2009). Women in SSAO roles also experience conflict in navigating work-life balance (Fochtman, 2011) and feel that they must not show stress caused by this conflict (Beeny, Guthrie, Rhodes, & Terrell, 2005). Additionally, gendered expectations of leadership influence the perceptions that women have in leadership roles (Dahlvig & Longman, 2010). Though these parallels exist, research is needed to understand whether "gendered prestige hierarchies" (Allan, 2011, p. 58) exist and serve as barriers to women's career advancement in student affairs.

Transitioning to SSAO Roles

Women in student affairs leadership roles described their leadership practices within transformational contexts through descriptors such as empowerment, care for others, guidance, collaboration, and participation (Dahlvig & Longman, 2010). Additionally, when women observed other women leaders who did not fit traditional gender norms it allowed them to move past their perceived expectations and embrace more genuine practices that reflected their own values (Dahlvig & Longman, 2010). Women in SSAO roles described their leadership approach using individualized influence rather than power, and that their own perceptions of power influenced how they were able to build, claim, or enact power in their roles (Enke, 2014).

Based on women's reflections on their leadership practices, their leadership approach may closely align with skills necessary to serve in a chief student affairs officer position, but the associate and assistant vice president (AVP), or second-in-command

role, may be structured to prevent women from advancing to the chief title. For those in AVP roles, Hecht (2016) described necessary competencies as "(a) politics; (b) position skills; (c) human resource management; (d) leadership and strategic vision; (e) resource allocation, acquisition, and management; (f) strategic assessment and evaluation; and (g) law and policy" (p. 6). For those in CSAO positions, Dungy (2011) identified competencies necessary for exceptional leadership, including "(a) responsibility and accountability; (b) learning from personal and professional experiences; (c) the power of knowledge; (d) listening and communicating; (e) functioning in a large, networked universe; (f) collaborations, partnerships, and relationships; and (g) innovation and creativity" (p. 270). As the CSAO role leverages more collaborative, participatory, and people-centered skills often associated with transformational leadership, it could be argued that women have the capacity to succeed in this role. However, when women are perceived as disruptive and challenging when being assertive and directive (Gordon, Iverson, & Allan, 2010), the necessary duties of acquiring and allocating funding, using assessment to inform decision-making, hiring and firing staff, and demonstrating expertise in law and policy might serve as gendered barriers to women's advancement to the chief officer role.

The Critical Need of Mentors

In considering how women advance to SSAO roles, mentors play a critical role in furthering women. Fochtman (2011) found that mentors recognized potential in women and could tap them for opportunities, which provided access to organizations, job searches, and decision-making for women. Mentors also played an important role in helping women navigate work-life balance and competing needs within their multiple life

roles (Fochtman, 2011). While mentoring is more critical for the career progression of Women of Color, African American women role model successful mentoring practices. Burke & Carter (2015) found that African American women have networks in student affairs that are more diverse the longer they have worked in the field, from both a gender and ethnic perspective and revolved around "(a) connecting, (b) meeting new people, (c) interacting with new people and others, (d) sharing information and resources, and (e) developing strong relationships but not necessarily friendships" (p. 150). For all women, having mentors in the workplace minimizes role stress and enhances women's commitment to the organization in which they work, but for Women of Color, a lack of mentorship exacerbated these issues (Blackhurst, 2000), emphasizing the importance of building and sustaining mentoring relationships.

The Myth of Work-Life Balance

For women in SSAO roles, the idea of balancing multiple roles and identities is often overwhelming. Fochtman (2011) found that the concept of work-life balance is an obstacle for women in SSAO roles to overcome, which can lead to role conflict and added pressure for these women. Additionally, women with partners and families feel competing expectations between work and family life, while also feeling the need to hide the stress that this conflict causes (Beeny, Guthrie, Rhodes, & Terrell, 2005).

Women SSAOs were more likely to report that they must commit their "entire being" to the role in order to be seen as successful in the position (Beeny, Guthrie, Rhodes, & Terrell, 2005, p. 144). This reflects the notion that women see the way that they navigate their work and home as multiple pieces of their larger life, rather than separate entities. Despite this, women feel that they are under greater scrutiny and

experience burnout more widely than their male colleagues (Spurlock, 2009). Men in SSAO roles felt more confident setting boundaries in order to successfully balance work and personal responsibilities, and were more likely to schedule their professional life around personal obligations (Beeny, Guthrie, Rhodes, & Terrell, 2005).

Women in SSAO roles also reported the belief that the field will be challenged to fill all levels of staff positions in the future if expectations for work demands remain the same (Beeny, Guthrie, Rhodes, & Terrell, 2005). The intensity of work demands influence why women choose not to advance to senior-level roles. Women have to plan for times that work and family balance are necessary, including maternity leave and returning to work after. Upon returning from leave, women reported feeling that they were being watched and that their work was under more intense scrutiny from others as a result (Nobbe & Manning, 1997). This feeling of work and life conflict can be off-putting for women considering whether they wish to advance in student affairs. For women who chose to stay in director-level roles, the importance and need for time with family, enjoyment of their current role, ability to be shielded from visibility, and approaching retirement were reasons not to advance to senior-level positions (Collins, 2009). Additionally, for women who decided not to pursue an opportunity to advance to a senior-level position, factors influencing their decisions included the time demands of future and current roles, sacrifice of personal time, fearing the disclosure of one's sexual identity and the acceptance of that within an institutional context, difficulty of relocation and the impact of that on their lives, and the questioning of one's competence for the role (Collins, 2009). Finally, women put their doctorate degrees on hold after having children, which prevented them from advancing into senior-level positions. Many also slowed

down their career advancement after having children, as they did not want to disrupt their families (Nobbe & Manning, 1997). Considering that women feel conflict in starting families and balancing associated responsibilities with their career needs, understanding the ways that student affairs creates barriers for women's career advancement is important in deconstructing gendered policies and practices in the field.

The Question of Representation

While there was a focus on women's representation in student affairs in the late 1980s and early 1990s, little research illustrates the modern context of how and where women work in student affairs. Early research showed that women do not advance to SSAO roles proportionally to men (Earwood-Smith, Jordan-Cox, Hudson, & Smith, 1990; Rickard, 1985b), while current data through NASPA provides a false narrative about gender equity in the field. Early research showed that women in chief student affairs officer roles were more likely to be at smaller institutions, and were significantly more likely to be at institutions with 1,000 or fewer students enrolled (Rickard, 1985a). Blackhurst (2000) estimated that women represented a majority of all student affairs professionals, but only between 23% and 33% of all senior-level student affairs positions, which was similar to the 1980s when women represented about 26% of these roles. Tull and Freeman (2008) estimated that women's representation in chief student affairs officer roles doubled over the course of 22 years, from 22% in 1984 to 45% in 2006. For women at public institutions, representation increased from 13% to 31% in the same period, and for those at private institutions the increase went from 26% to 44% (Tull & Freeman, 2008).

In seeking to understand whether race and sex were proportionally represented in director-level roles as feeder positions for CSAO roles, Rickard (1985b) found that men of all races had significantly more representation at the CSAO role than women and were overrepresented at public institutions, while women of all races were underrepresented in these same areas. Women had only gained proportional representation in 4-year religious and independent institutions (Rickard, 1985b), and there is no current research to help us understand whether this culture has shifted over the past three decades. Title and salary disparities also exist for women in CSAO roles. For those with vice president or vice chancellor titles, 58.5% were men, while 42.5% were women (Tull & Freeman, 2008). In a study of SSAO salaries, women made up 31.6% of the sample and were not promoted at proportional rates to their male colleagues (Reason, Walker, & Robinson, 2002), suppressing women's opportunity for salary advancement.

While there is no formally published data that comprehensively evaluates the number of individuals in senior-level student affairs roles by gender or other identities, there is cursory data that affirms the need for research in this area. The College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) reported that 71% of all student affairs professional positions were held by women, while 56% of those classified as chief student affairs/student life officer, deputy chief of student affairs, and dean of students positions were held by women (Pritchard & McChesney, 2018). Table 2 illustrates the number of women and men holding senior-level positions, as well as those in chief functional roles and heads of units.

While the CUPA-HR data looks promising for women's representation in senior student affairs roles, the report represents only 760 non-profit institutions (Pritchard &

McChesney, 2018) of the 3,824 public or private non-profit institutions in the United States (NCES, 2017), with every reporting institution paying for their membership in the CUPA-HR organization. This data, therefore, is concerning, as it represents less than 20% of not-for-profit institutions in the country and is a paid, optional reporting system. Furthermore, the CUPA-HR data is not disaggregated to understand the institutional types, intersecting identities, salary comparisons, or specific titles of women in this report, perpetuating a notion that the issue of gender equity has been solved in student affairs. This data is also concerning in that it is endorsed by the president of NASPA, furthering the narrative that progress has been made within the student affairs profession and associated organizations.

Table 2

CUPA-HR Data: Representation of Women in Student Affairs Roles

	Women			Men		
Position classification	*n*	Average Salary	%	*n*	Average Salary	%
Chief Student Affairs	413	$159,935	53.5	359	$161,776	46.5
Dean of Students	260	$112,634	52.8	232	$110,563	47.2
Deputy Student Affairs	274	$102,686	54.3	231	$107,361	45.7
Chief Student Activities	306	$69,362	61.3	193	$74,813	38.7
Chief Diversity Officer	35	$91,013	67.3	17	$157,405	32.7
Chief Greek Life Officer	63	$58,258	60.6	41	$69,859	39.4
Chief Student Housing	250	$77,920	49.5	255	$86,388	50.5
Head- Multicultural Student Affairs	242	$69,185	60.2	160	$71,251	38.8
Head- LGBTQ Student Affairs	50	$61,931	61.7	31	$65,489	38.3
Head- First Year Experience	173	$62,266	75.2	57	$64,384	24.8

Head- Student Success	124	$69,779	73.8	44	$75,882	26.2
Head- Campus Recreation	115	$71,070	31.8	247	$71,451	68.2

Data from the NASPA organization paints a much different picture about the representation of women in senior-level student affairs positions. Of those NASPA members who reported to work part or full-time in student affairs, 13,290 individuals reported serving in a senior-level position such as assistant or associate vice president, vice president, or other executive level position. Of these senior-level student affairs professionals, only 1,645, or 12.37%, reported being women, while 66% of the total membership identified as women (J.D. Jones, personal communication, August 23, 2018). This data, while not published or readily accessible by members, starkly contrasts the information presented by CUPA-HR and endorsed by the NASPA president, and illustrates the need for comprehensive research on this topic to see if "gendered prestige hierarchies" (Allan, 2011, p. 58) in student affairs parallel those in academic affairs.

The Need for Advancement

In order for women to advance in their careers, there have to be opportunities and support for women in SSAO roles. First, there are few women in senior level student affairs roles with children who can serve as role models to other women in the field (Nobbe & Manning, 1997). This means that women do not have access to many mentors or role models in which they can see themselves. Additionally, the need for a terminal degree plays a role in women's advancement (Earwood-Smith, Jordan-Cox, Hudson, & Smith, 1990) and can provide more opportunities for African American women than their counterparts (Burke & Carter, 2015).

In considering how women navigate SSAO roles, Earwood-Smith, Jordan-Cox, Hudson, and Smith (1990) recommended the following practices for women seeking to advance:

- Earn a doctoral degree as quickly as possible, as it is becoming more common practice that this is a requirement for the position.
- Start within a specialty concentration in student affairs and then broaden to a generalist position, as narrow experiences will not lead to advancement.
- Leave an institution in order to be promoted if there are not opportunities where you are.
- Use your network and professional organizations to provide opportunities for advancement.
- Publish, present, and research, as these actions stand out in resume reviews of candidates and women are more likely to have completed these tasks than their male colleagues.
- Seek out opportunities to develop additional management and leadership skills.
- Practice the management style of leaving the office and spending time with others in their spaces.
- Have interests and networks outside of higher education.
- Be healthy and promote a positive self-image, as others' perceptions influence your ability to advance.
- Have self-awareness and be confident in your professional identity.
- Have a sense of humor while avoiding emotional reactions to situations.

- Ask to be nominated for a role when you feel ready.

Though the recommendations from Earwood-Smith, Jordan-Cox, Hudson, and Smith (1990) served as a foundation for women seeking to advance in their careers, they focus on avoiding gender-based norms that penalize women, rather than confronting them. These recommendations ask women to change their own needs and behavior to meet the norms and practices of student affairs, which perpetuates culture that prevents women's career advancement. This begs the question: In what ways can women challenge genderized culture to advance their careers and the careers of other women?

Experiencing the SSAO Role

The senior student affairs officer role is a lonely one for women. Those in SSAO positions describe being one of few women at their level, and often as the only women at the cabinet level (Spurlock, 2009). Additionally, women experienced gender discrimination in both subtle and overt ways in the SSAO role, including being paid less than their male counterparts (Spurlock, 2009).

For those women who considered themselves successful in navigating their roles as a senior student affairs officer, they reported being relationship-oriented and using collaborative leadership practices to navigate their positions. These women also reported that the decision to have children was an integral part of their career navigation. Some women waited until they had achieved a career milestone, while others waited until their children were a certain age before advancing to a senior role. Some women reported returning to work early, declining professional development opportunities, and adjusting their doctoral degree timelines based on the demands of work and childbearing (Spurlock, 2009).

Chapter Summary

In spite of the progress that women have made in gaining access to higher education, women are still underrepresented in senior-level leadership roles. While the extent of underrepresentation is not clearly known within the field of student affairs, the research that does exist is flawed in its aggregated nature, as it is unclear the extent of representation of women by institutional type, role, and other intersecting identities. Without clear research on women's representation in student affairs, the need for mentors, challenge of work-life balance, genderized institutional norms, and perceptions of women's leadership capacities become critical themes in understanding factors that contribute to women's career advancement in the field.

This study builds on current literature to provide research on the factors and reasons that contribute to women's career advancement into senior-level student affairs officer roles. This study adds to the body of literature on the opportunities for and challenges associated with women's career advancement in the field of student affairs by sharing voices of women who have progressed to SSAO roles. Finally, this study challenges traditionally masculine, hierarchical structures in student affairs to force the consideration of who these structures and systems are supporting, discouraging, and promoting to lead organizations.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The systemic exclusion of women in ranks as faculty, academic administrators, and presidency roles is well documented (Allan, 2011; Dominici, Fried, & Zeger, 2009; Glazer-Raymo, 2008; Johnson, 2017; Walton & McDade, 2001); however, comparable research on women in student affairs is sparse. This study focused on the experiences that women had as they navigated career advancement into senior-level student affairs roles through the following research questions: (1) How do women in student affairs at large, public institutions in the United States understand their career advancement to senior-level positions? and (2) How have gendered institutional norms shaped women's experiences in their career progression? In considering these research questions, this chapter details the methodological approach utilized, including the qualitative design, positionality of the researcher, and sampling practices. This chapter also describes the data collection and interview protocols, which have been tested and revised through a pilot study. This chapter will conclude with information on the data analysis and coding methods utilized for this study.

Research Methods and Design

This qualitative study was founded in a critical epistemology and utilized phenomenological research to understand the lived experiences of participants. Qualitative research is based on the premise that people make meaning of their experiences through constantly constructed knowledge (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, all research is inherently interpretive when using a qualitative approach, as the researcher has a responsibility to understand the ways people experience a specific

phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Giorgi (1997) explained that qualitative research has five common steps in data collection and analysis, including:

1. Gathering verbal data,
2. Reading data,
3. Sorting data into parts,
4. Organizing and finding data related to themes, and
5. Synthesizing data to articulate findings.

As a form of qualitative research, phenomenology utilizes philosophy to study the lived experiences of people (Smith et al., 2009) and focuses on the "meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience" (Patton, 2015, p. 98) of the people experiencing the studied phenomenon. Phenomenology "provides us with a rich source of ideas about how to examine and comprehend lived experience" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 11). Edmund Husserl founded phenomenological research and argued that we make consciousness through the meaning of experiences and consciousness as an object does not exist (Vagle, 2018). Vagle (2018) explained that "living and experience take place in the intentional relationship between the subjective and the objective – and this 'between' space is ever expansive" (p. 8), which is what phenomenological research seeks to explore. Husserl further explained that phenomenological research can be transcendental, as seeking to understand people's experiences allows us to understand others' experiences around related phenomena as well (Smith et al., 2009).

Phenomenological research is centered in reflection in order to understand one's own experience (Smith et al., 2009). This is accomplished by treating a phenomenon as a noun; it is something to be experienced rather than a generalized phrase that represents

multiple experiences (Vagle, 2018). Husserl deemed the phrase *lifeworld* to represent the human experiences that are captured through phenomenological research (Vagle, 2018), while explaining that *intentionality* seeks to understand the consciousness of the thing being studied (Smith et al., 2009). For the purpose of this study, I sought to understand the consciousness of the experience that women had as they attained and served in senior-level student affairs roles.

Phenomenological research also uses description to express the consciousness of someone as presented in reflection (Giorgi, 1997). Description is different from construction or interpretation, as description focuses on the precision of what is reflected upon, while construction utilizes speculation and interpretation inserts theoretical or practical perspective into the experiences (Giorgi, 1997).

While there is a need for disaggregated data on women's representation and intersecting identities at various levels within student affairs, a qualitative, phenomenological study was selected in order to understand the experiences of women in senior-level roles. In essence, I felt that the story of women's experiences was more important to understand than the number of women having those experiences. In order to understand the lived experiences of women in senior-level student affairs positions, phenomenology provided me with the opportunity to examine the ways in which women made meaning of their experiences.

This study utilized a critical epistemology, with the understanding that a critical research approach includes multiple theories, is a living and evolving epistemology, and offers room for disagreement about what critical research is (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). For the purpose of this study, I operated as a critical researcher (Kincheloe &

McLaren, 2011), in that I aspired to utilize my research in order to critique both social and cultural systems that are informed by power, privilege, and oppression. As power is socially constructed and historically rooted, Kincheloe and MacLaren (2011) argued that power permeates all of society, including assigned value, subjective language, capitalistic behavior, and dynamics of oppression. Additionally, critical research posits that certain societal groups are assigned privilege associated with various identities, that oppression is perpetuated through groups' acceptance of their privileged or oppressed status (Kincheloe & MacLaren, 2011), and that oppressed groups are positioned against each other. Finally, Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) argued "that mainstream research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race, and gender oppression" (pp. 299-300). Through this epistemology, it is also assumed that critical inquiry confronts societal injustices that are embedded in the research topic (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). As such, it is a responsibility of critical research to identify and challenge oppressive systems.

Researcher's Role

Reflexivity

As my research interest is in understanding ways that women experience their advancement to senior student affairs roles, I have multiple personal experiences and identities that have shaped my research topic. As a white, cisgender, heterosexual, self-identified feminist woman who has worked professionally in the field of student affairs for over a decade, I bring significant privilege and personal investment into this research topic. My privileged identities have allowed me access to the education required to advance in this field and have afforded me opportunities to learn, grow, and challenge

people and systems along the way. I recognize that the many privileges I bring to my professional practice have provided me with access through my majority identities within the field of higher education. As a woman who has advanced in my own career and who aspires to grow as a leader within the field, my professional identity is closely tied with the identities that I studied. This means that I brought the capacity to relate and empathize with the experiences that I heard through my qualitative approach, but also that I had to tread carefully as to not project my own experiences, thoughts, assumptions, or needs onto others.

Additionally, I started writing my dissertation proposal immediately upon returning from maternity leave and have spent a significant amount of time reflecting on what it means to be a mother, partner, student, leader, and professional. These considerations and major shifts in my own priorities and personal identities influenced the way that I saw, heard, and received information from study participants, as I related to or differed from the stories and experiences that they shared. Practicing constant self-reflection was critical for me as I reconciled my own identities, privilege, priorities and experiences within the context of the research that I conducted.

Specifically, I played all roles in developing, conducting, and analyzing the study. I personally conducted all of the literature research to develop an understanding of the current climate for women in higher education and student affairs, which informed my understanding of the problem and research questions that I wanted to consider. From there, I developed the methodology and research protocol. I recruited participants, conducted interviews, read transcripts, analyzed data, and developed findings and implications. Because of this, it was critical that I understood my own identities and the

ways that they shaped my understanding of the women I spoke with and the data I analyzed.

Within the context of the study, I was both an insider and an outsider on my research topic. As a woman with aspirations to advance into a senior-level student affairs role, I related to participants' experiences on gender as it related to leadership, supervision, and personal identity. Similarly, I related to the conflicting demands of work and family responsibilities for those with children or who were taking care of family members. From an outsider perspective, I did not have the same identities as participants with a variety of social identities: race, sexual identity, ability, religion, etc. I have not held senior-level positions and therefore have not experienced the demand of the responsibilities associated with those professional roles, and sought to understand what those experiences might be like through the women's words and stories.

Because I was both an insider and an outsider, there were various barriers and opportunities I experienced in conducting my research. First, as an insider, I was attuned to the ways that women spoke about conflicting demands between personal and professional responsibilities and asked intentional follow-up questions that helped me to understand their experiences. Critically, I identified gendered language and perspectives that they expressed and intentionally addressed those through follow-up questions and critical analysis. As an outsider, barriers were present in my understanding of the complexity of women's work in senior-level roles, as I did not have direct experience or knowledge of the policies, structures, or systems with which they engaged. Additionally, it was imperative that I built trust with participants in the interviews, as my professional positionality may not have earned me a seat at their metaphorical table. In order to build

trust, I responded to all communication in a timely fashion to maintain participant interest, closely monitored my research protocol and storage of participant data so as not to inadvertently disclose participant information, and fully engaged in the interviews to ask thoughtful follow-up questions in order to elicit more reflective participant responses.

Language

Through this paper, I will be using language including “we”, “our”, and “she/her/hers” in describing the experiences of women. I do this for several reasons; first, as I have learned in my research, women must own and articulate the experiences that we share in order to challenge patriarchal systems and create meaningful change. Second, as I relate to and differ from these experiences, I hope that statements such as “we” and “our” demonstrate solidarity, support, and empowerment within a larger community of women. Additionally, all participants used “she/her/hers” pronouns, so I have utilized these throughout the text to share participants’ experiences. Finally, in using “she/her/hers” and other woman-identifying pronouns, particularly in reference to leadership practices, I hope to align with my critical epistemology and challenge gender norms that reinforce traditionally masculine structures and approaches.

Similarly, as I attributed leadership or personality characteristics to gender in the analysis of this study, it was only when that perspective was shared by participants or reflected in the literature. I consciously considered my own biases and assumptions about gender and sought to utilize participants’ language, descriptors, and associations as much as possible.

Finally, I refer to women as such in this paper, and the term includes those who self-identify as women, including cisgender and transgender women. As the term "female" is a reflection of one's biological sex rather than self-identified gender, I only used this term when it was reflective of the research or study participants from which it came, rather than by my own choosing.

Conflicting Epistemological and Methodological Approaches

An essential component of phenomenological research is maintaining objectivity by bracketing personal experiences of the researcher in order to give one's focus to the phenomenon as described by participants (Giorgi, Giorgi, & Morley, 2017). Additionally, it is the responsibility of the researcher to withhold their own positionality in order to see what the data is telling them, without the influence of the researcher's own experience (Giorgi, 1997). This approach of bracketing assumes that all participant data holds equal weight, and that the subjective experiences of the researcher will bias the data in its true form. This argument is inherently flawed, as it assumes that all data is objective, and that participants' perspectives are not shaped by societal influences and are instead truly only their own. It also ignores that data is reflective of the environments in which women of all races are experiencing them, including hierarchical higher educational organizations, built and sustained by and for white men. Engaging critical feminist perspective required that instead of utilizing bracketing, I considered the ways that power, privilege, and oppression shaped participants' experiences. In honoring that responsibility, I named the influence that oppression played in the data, from both participant and systemic perspectives. Additionally, I considered how the data reinforced or challenged societal constructs of power, privilege, and oppression, as well as how findings from this study

might do the same. While it was important that I recognize my own biases in the research process, I could not allow for the concept of bracketing to limit the ways in which I challenged systemic oppression in analyzing the data from the study.

In order to reduce the impact of bias from the research process itself I conducted a pilot study to test the research protocol, including communication with participants, interview questions, data storage, and the coding process; avoided asking participants leading questions so as not to influence their responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016); and consulted with my dissertation chair when unexpected situations arose. I also utilized member-checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in order to confirm that participant data was accurately captured, and utilized peer debriefers to provide me with additional perspective in my research process and data analysis.

Protection of Human Subjects

The pilot study was approved by the Institutional Review Board as study number 19-0239. Several considerations were accounted for in the research process in order to protect the confidentiality and well-being of the women who chose to participate. The first consideration was that of consent, as participants willingly shared about their experiences throughout the entirety of the study. Each participant was emailed an electronic consent and demographic form to determine eligibility for the study. At the beginning of the first interview, I explained key components of the signed consent form verbally with each participant to reiterate that they could withdraw consent at any time. Similarly, the second interview began with an overview and reminder about consent.

Additionally, participants had the opportunity to select a pseudonym to be used in all transcripts and analysis to protect the privacy of participants and to ensure that

individual identities could not be connected back to the data. For participants who did not select their own pseudonym, one was assigned to them. Storage of participant information was also a consideration in the research process. The participant demographic and consent form and master list of names and pseudonyms were saved to the researcher's institutional Google Drive, while transcripts and data analysis were saved to the researcher's institutional Dropbox account. Because transcript data was saved to Dropbox, the master list of participant names were not linked to the pseudonym-based data. Upon transcription of the audio and video files, the researcher reviewed transcripts for accuracy, conducted member-checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and then destroyed all original audio/video files.

In consideration of participant privacy, several steps were taken. Because participants came from the same institutional type (large, public institutions) and held similar positions (senior-level roles), there were limited opportunities to deduce specific participants based on information shared. Any personally identifying information that arose via interviews was left out of the findings. Additionally, position titles and responsibilities were generalized so as not to identify individual participants.

Participants were primarily interviewed via video conference, and exclusively so after the pandemic started. For interviews that took place in-person, the participants had the opportunity to choose the setting to make sure they felt their privacy was protected. For those who were interviewed via video conference, each call was conducted with the researcher in a private, locked-door space where no one was able to enter or see who was participating. Each participant had a private link to their scheduled video-conference so that another participant did not unintentionally enter the interview.

There were no perceived conflicts of interest associated with this study. Each participant held a title at an institution that was higher-ranking than the researcher, which minimized opportunity for coercion. Additionally, the consent form was provided to the participant at the time the interview was scheduled and reviewed at the start of each interview, which allowed participants to back out of the study, should they have chosen to do so.

While participants had an opportunity to reflect upon and draw meaning from their own experiences, the study did not provide individual benefit to participants beyond personal reflection. A potential benefit of the study was the opportunity to inform the ways that student affairs organizations understood women's career advancement. As this study was grounded in critical epistemology (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011), the researcher's critique on the social power dynamics may contribute to the ways that we understand women's experiences in student affairs and higher education.

In order to protect participants from any risks associated with the study, the researcher made sure that the master key linking names and pseudonyms was stored separately from transcripts and data. Participants were reminded that risks involved with the study were similar to those that they may experience on a daily basis in reflecting on their professional experiences, and that they may withdraw their consent at any time. Finally, all demographic and consent forms, transcripts, and coding data were stored on password-protected servers.

Sampling

The selection of research participants was purposeful (Patton, 2015) based on experience, role, identities, and institutional type. Because of this, there was no specific

research site associated with the study. Inclusion criteria included individuals who self-identified as a cisgender or transgender woman, held any racial and ethnic identity, worked at large, public four-year institutions with enrollment greater than 10,000 students, and who held the title of vice president/vice chancellor, associate or assistant vice president/vice chancellor, dean of students, or other title that included responsibility over more than one unit within a designated student affairs division. In order to critically examine the systemic and structural ways that higher education influenced women's experiences in senior-level student affairs roles, preference was given to women with a variety of intersecting social identities including race and ethnicity, sexual identity, gender, and their specific positionality and career path into their current role. All email correspondence was deleted if a participant did not meet criteria. A total of nine participants were interviewed for this study, with eight completing both interviews and one completing only the first interview. Participation in the study was confidential and pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of participants.

Upon determination of eligibility for the study, participants were selected based on information shared on their demographic form. In alignment with the critical feminist epistemology, a diverse sample of women were selected, considering women's racial, gender, sexual, and other identities, as well as their career paths and former professional experiences in order to understand the layered ways power, privilege, and oppression impacted women's experiences. For demographic information on participants, see Table 3.

Table 3

Participant Demographic Overview

Name	Salient Identities	Region	Years in SA	Title	Doctorate
Erin	Hispanic	South	10+	Assistant vice president	Completed
Gloria	Latinx Immigrant, Mother	South	25+	Associate vice president & dean of students	Completed
Jennifer	White, Mother	South	20+	Associate vice president & dean of students	In progress
Julia	White, Hearing disability, Mother	South	20+	Vice president	Completed
Lauren	White	South	15+	Assistant vice president	Completed
Nancy	Black, Mother	West Coast	25+	Vice president	N/A
Shea	Black, Mother	South	25+	Associate vice president	Completed
Sheri	Black	South	20+	Vice president	Applied
Yvonne	White, Lesbian	West Coast	25+	Associate vice president	Completed

Note. All participants identified as cisgender.

Nine participants were recruited through a combination of purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015) and snowball sampling (Goodman, 1961). First, participants who appeared to meet eligibility criteria were identified and contacted by the researcher using purposeful sampling techniques (Patton, 2015). To do this, I solicited names from senior-level leaders with whom I was connected to identify those within their professional

networks who may meet eligibility requirements for the study, who were then invited to participate. For those who submitted the demographic form and were eligible, I sent the participant the selection email and invited her to schedule her interviews. While primary preference was given to participants who were scheduled to attend the NASPA Annual Conference, most interviews were conducted via video conference as a result of the pandemic and the cancellation of the NASPA Annual Conference.

Data Collection Techniques

Data was collected in three ways. First, all potential participants completed an electronic demographic form (Appendix A), which included questions on their social identities, previous professional roles, and gender. This information allowed me to determine whether the individual met the research criteria and informed follow-up questions in the interviews.

The second and primary data collection method was two semi-structured interviews (Appendix B). Semi-structured interviews allowed me to follow a flexible outline of open-ended questions with the opportunity to follow-up on topics discussed, without being tied to consistency in order or wording of the questions (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). While initial interviews were conducted in-person, an electronic web conferencing system was used for most interviews as a result of the pandemic limiting in-person interactions. Interviews were recorded based on the participant's preference for audio or video recording, and were uploaded and initially transcribed through Temi, after which I read and edited all transcripts. Member-checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was utilized to verify that the transcripts reflected the content from the interviews, at which time audio files were destroyed.

The third set of data was from observational notes written during interviews. These notes focused on words or phrases of interest (Vagle, 2018) that allowed me to ask intentional follow-up questions or exhibited the essence of the studied phenomenon. Additionally, notes recorded body language and other behaviors that reflected the participant's response to questions, including laughter, silence, important hand gestures, and others.

All member-checked transcripts were uploaded into Dedoose to support coding and analysis practices. I used demographic forms and observational notes when coding the data and in writing memos and annotations within the transcripts. Detailed descriptions of the data analysis process are described in a later section.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation used in this study was consistent with phenomenological study as a mechanism to understand the lived experiences of women's career navigation into senior-level student affairs roles. First, a demographic form was used to gain demographic and historical data on the career paths of participants. From there, two semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. Semi-structured interviews were appropriate, as they allowed for a balance of the interests of the researcher with the experiences and thought process of the participant. Semi-structured interviews also allowed for open-ended questions so that the participant could respond, follow-up questions could be asked, and experiences unique to the participant could be explored (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014).

Consistent with the power-sharing approach of feminist inquiry, participants were emailed the guiding questions before each interview, as a means to create participatory,

co-constructed knowledge (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012). Questions included those such as “What was your family life like growing up,” “How do you define gender,” and “Who are people that have shaped your professional career?” Each question allowed for participants to share their experiences, while also providing space for the researcher to ask follow-up questions to probe deeper into the content that they shared.

A pilot study was conducted to test the interview protocol, demographic form, and data analysis process in order to make sure they informed the research questions. The pilot study utilized the full research protocol with two participants, including collection of the demographic form, two semi-structured interviews, observational notes, and data analysis.

Data Analysis Procedures

In order to understand the lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009) of women in senior-level student affairs roles, I utilized phenomenological research and many data analysis practices aligned with the methodology. However, in layering in my conceptual framework of power, it was important that I also considered how power was enacted upon and by women as a layer of analysis in addition to the descriptions women provided. The first round of analysis included holistic readings, where I reacquainted myself with the participants’ experiences (Vagle, 2018). As the second round of analysis, I used holistic coding to identify large sections of data that reflected overall categories evidenced by participants (Saldaña, 2016), which produced seven holistic codes including gender, career navigation, personal, leadership, family, mentorship, and genderization. Through this process, I reviewed my observations of each participant’s interview and took notes on additional thoughts and questions that arose as I spent more time with the

data. I then read each transcript line-by-line and coded to identify excerpts that reflected "essences of the phenomenon" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 52). Through this process, I was better able to capture the essences and experiences of each participant, which allowed me to produce 78 codes, including descriptive codes focused on the noun and topic being described, and in vivo codes, which used participant's words to reflect action (Saldaña, 2016).

After the third round of coding, I horizontalized the data to give equal weight and consideration to each excerpt (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To achieve this, I first read each excerpt by code to examine the experiences of each participant through the lens of the code and made notes about commonalities, outliers, and other considerations. I then horizontalized the data with consideration for other perspectives, including the participants' job titles, identity characteristics, and parenthood status. This allowed me to further explore commonalities and differences between participants as it related to aspects of their personhood or position. I then began theming the data to identify commonalities at the manifest level, or those observable within the data that represented connections across codes (Saldaña, 2016), resulting in 24 initial themes (Appendix C).

Next, I conducted several methods of mapping in order to analyze the data within my conceptual framework of power, including power enacted upon women and power enacted by women, in order to understand the dynamics that shaped participants' experiences. First, I developed a power chart where I situated each manifest theme within the outlined acts of disruption from Chapter 3. From there, I developed a power map (Appendix D) to understand whether power represented in each theme was oppressive, hierarchical, and/or expansive, and whether that power aligned with critical or post-

structural feminism. I then clustered the excerpts within the manifest themes to develop 12 latent power-centered themes, or themes "underlying the phenomenon" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 297). I then developed a Venn diagram to examine how the latent themes were represented within oppressive, hierarchical, and expansive power constructs. Finally, I analyzed the participant excerpts within each of the 12 themes along with my notes, to create four latent themes that reflected participants' experiences and the power dynamics that influenced those experiences.

Analysis continued through the writing process. While I had initially identified four latent themes that illustrated the phenomenon from both a participant and power perspective, I also identified one encompassing theme that was present within each of the others. In identifying the encompassing theme, I conducted additional analysis of transcript excerpts within each of the latent themes and was able to identify excerpts that represented both the latent and intrinsic theme. Identifying the encompassing theme and continuing to analyze while writing allowed me to continue considering the connections between participants and across latent themes.

Trustworthiness

Several measures were taken to demonstrate trustworthiness in the study. First, upon completion of both interviews, each participant was sent their transcripts to review for accuracy and to expand upon topics that were discussed in the interviews. This member-checking process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) allowed for participants to make sure that their experiences were appropriately represented, while also reviewing for accuracy of the data.

Additionally, this study was piloted with two participants in order to test the interview protocol and to have any subsequent changes vetted through the IRB process prior to launch of the full study. After the pilot study was completed, the participants were asked for feedback on the consent form, interview protocol, and overall process in order to develop a protocol that elicited reflection and depth of response from later participants.

A peer debriefer was utilized to discuss observations, codes, and themes, as well as to provide external perspective to the researcher while maintaining anonymity of participants. Finally, as this study was part of a doctoral research study, I consulted my dissertation chair, methodologist, and three additional committee members for guidance on methodological, epistemological, protocol, and other considerations. Upon completion of the study, I consulted my dissertation chair and methodologist to discuss the process and refine my findings and discussion.

Limitations

Limitations of the study include proximity to participants. There were nine participants in this study, each located at large, public institutions across the country. While in-person interviews were conducted initially, one limitation was that most interviews were conducted via video conference, which may have affected the willingness of participants to provide the depth of reflection that in-person interviews may have solicited. Participants were also asked to reflect on how they had experienced gender in their life and through their professional practices. As each woman's understandings of and identification with gender varied, this variation may have influenced the ways and extent to which she shared about the influence of gender in her

career. Additionally, as each woman's social identities and career backgrounds varied, the variation in the ways that they each understood their experiences may not have been fully captured.

While the nine participants described their experiences with gender as it related to their careers, transferability of the findings are dependent on the number and context of the participants. As phenomenological studies seek to understand the lived experience (Smith et al., 2009) of participants, the number of participants needed to reach data saturation is small. Though findings from this study are not generalizable beyond its scope (Maxwell, 2013), they can be used to contextualize the lived experiences of women in senior-level student affairs roles at other institutions.

Phenomenology and qualitative research have limitations as well. Shi (2011) argued that phenomenological researchers experience three common dilemmas, including (a) the dilemma of utilizing descriptive or interpretive inquiry, (b) the dilemma of objectivity when it is socially constructed by the subjectivity of the researcher, and (c) the dilemma of whether the research truly reflects participants or researcher voices. Van Manen (1990) argued that researchers cannot truly remove their own experiences or interests, and that when they try to do so, their presuppositions and backgrounds still influence their interpretations around the studied phenomenon. There is criticism of qualitative research, as the findings are not generalizable to experiences beyond the scope of the study (Maxwell, 2013). While disaggregated research is needed to identify the representation of women and their social identities at various institutional and positional types within student affairs, qualitative study was chosen to describe the depth of participants' experiences in navigating their career into senior-level roles.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the epistemological framework and methodology of the study. This study utilized a phenomenological approach to answer the research questions: (1) How do women in student affairs at large, public institutions in the United States understand their career advancement to senior-level positions? and (2) How have gendered institutional norms shaped women's experiences in their career progression? Nine women in senior-level student affairs roles completed a demographic form and two semi-structured interviews, and transcripts were analyzed to find codes and themes that reflected the "essences of the phenomenon" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 52). Instrumentation, data analysis procedures, trustworthiness, and limitations were all explained in this chapter.

The following chapters will illustrate research findings. Chapter four will present a participant summary, data analysis overview, and themes that emerged from the study. Chapter five will provide a summary and discussion of the findings, limitations of data collection and analysis, and practical implications for practice, policy, and research in student affairs.

Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand how women in senior-level student affairs positions have navigated their experiences and career paths in order to advance to their current role. The study was centered on two research questions:

1. How do women in student affairs at large, public institutions in the United States understand their career advancement to senior-level positions?
2. How have gendered institutional norms shaped women's experiences in their career progression?

This chapter synthesizes the study procedures and details the findings of the study, including a summary of each participant's position, background, and student affairs career path. Through the analysis process, it became clear that the data and findings were interconnected across and between research questions. Because of this, findings are presented through one encompassing theme that spanned the data, as well as four themes that showcased specific features of the encompassing theme. The chapter concludes with a summary and transition to chapter five.

Procedure Summary

Consistent with phenomenological research, I utilized several data analysis practices in order to understand the lived experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) of women in senior-level student affairs roles. The first round of data analysis included rounds of holistic readings to reacquaint myself with participants' experiences (Vagle, 2018), the second round utilized holistic coding to identify large sections of categories described by participants (Saldaña, 2016), and then line-by-line readings and coding were

used to identify excerpts that illustrated “essences of the phenomenon” (Saldaña, 2016, p.52). Through this process, I also reviewed observations of participants’ interviews and horizontalized the data to give equal consideration to each excerpt (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). From there, manifest themes arose, or those that were connected across codes (Saldaña, 2016).

I then layered on my conceptual framework of power, including power enacted upon women and power enacted by women, to understand how power shaped participants’ experiences. I developed various power charts, including one situating each manifest theme, a map of power types within themes, and one aligning power dynamics within critical or post-structural feminist perspectives. From there, I developed latent power-centered themes, or themes “underlying the phenomenon” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 297). I then developed a Venn diagram to examine the representation of latent themes within power constructs, and finally developed four latent themes that reflected participants’ experiences within the power structure of genderization.

Participant Summary

Nine women participated in this study, with eight completing both interviews and one completing only the first interview. The women held a variety of identities, characteristics, positions, and backgrounds that contributed to their understanding of navigating career advancement in student affairs. Each woman met the study criteria of self-identifying as a cisgender or transgender woman, holding any racial and ethnic identity, working at large, public four-year institutions with enrollment greater than 10,000 students, and holding the title of vice president/vice chancellor, associate or assistant vice president/vice chancellor, dean of students, or other title that included

responsibility over more than one unit within a designated student affairs division. In order to protect participants, job titles, division names, and other identifying information have been standardized. Each participant is introduced in alphabetical order below.

Erin

> Women can be very intelligent and therefore you're powerful. Women can create more humans and that's powerful. Women can empathize with other people and get the story and that's really powerful. You kind of have to know what the game is and how to be powerful and the right times you are powerful.

Erin identified as a cisgender, heterosexual, Hispanic woman who described womanhood as being powerful. With a Ph.D., she served as an assistant vice president of student affairs at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) in the South, the only institution she had worked at full-time. In her mid-30s, Erin worked in student affairs for the entirety of her career, starting in housing and progressing through various roles within student affairs to her current position. At the time of the interview, Erin was pregnant with her first child. While Erin provided rich data for the study, she only completed the first interview, so has fewer excerpts included.

Erin described growing up in a household with two loving parents, where she was taught to have confidence in herself. She shared that she learned "it's a man's world" from her mother and observed traditional gender dynamics between her father's work and her mother's support of the family. Erin shared that she was previously in an emotionally abusive relationship, which informed her understanding of gender, power, and confidence within her personal and professional self.

Within Erin's career, she shared the power of having a mentor and supervisor who saw potential in her and provided her with opportunities for advancement. Though Erin did not advocate for her promotion, she was presented the opportunity to advance to her current role early in her career. Erin described challenging the vice president at the time of being offered the role, stating "aren't you afraid that people are going to think you're crazy for… handing out weird job titles to 12 year olds that haven't earned their place?... I was literally afraid that her colleagues were going to lessen her credibility." Though Erin described successes she had in navigating her role, she initially doubted her readiness for the role based on the age she assumed one should be given the job title.

Gloria

> I am the exception. And it's the same thing with being a woman. There may be some people saying or [who] see myself as a female, some people may say, "oh, women tend to be so passionate, so, so sensitive." And I'm like, wow, don't they see I'm a woman?... It's the little things that people are saying, but it means a lot to a person in that box that they are putting in that box because I'm saying, "Wow. So they think I'm like that?"

Gloria identified as a cisgender, heterosexual, Latinx woman in her 60s who described herself as "a star of this world." Gloria immigrated to the United States from Central America on a prestigious graduate scholarship and remained in her state ever since. Gloria served as the associate vice president and dean of students at a HSI in the South. Gloria had three children who were grown and had college degrees, for which Gloria was very proud. Gloria had worked her entire career in student affairs and was approaching a point where retirement was on the horizon.

Gloria described growing up in Central America and her parents' commitment to educating their children in order to escape the cycle of poverty. Gloria described her education as "world class" through high school, which allowed her to earn a prestigious international scholarship, allowing her to pursue graduate study at an institution of her choice. In moving to the United States, Gloria was surprised to learn the assumptions and stereotypes that were placed upon Latinx individuals, including by her peers and later, by her colleagues.

In pursuing higher education, Gloria held graduate employment through her master's and Ph.D. programs, but upon completing her doctorate was unable to get an interview for two years. Gloria entered the profession by volunteering in a department, which eventually secured her a part time role, and finally allowed her to enter into a full time position. As Gloria navigated career advancement, she found that people "put me in a box," which often limited opportunities for her to advance. Gloria also described her desire for a mentor to help her identify areas for personal growth, but was disappointed when a former supervisor agreed to serve as a mentor and then never followed-through on the request. As Gloria reflected on her career in student affairs, she said, "my career path has been very hard."

Jennifer

> I think in my role as dean of students I am perceived as maternal. I mean, students will call me mom, like, "you're my school mom." Right? I don't know if they say to my boss, "you're my school dad." I've never, I've actually never heard that ever in my entire profession. And it's not the first time that I've been referred to as school mom or you know… "I consider myself your adopted son because of how

you've mentored me or cared for me or reached out to me when I'm in stress" or whatever. So I think that that is a very interesting perception.

Jennifer identified as a cisgender, heterosexual, white woman who reflected on her reality of navigating multiple roles at once. Jennifer, in her 40s, served as an associate vice president and dean of students at a Historically White Serving Institution (HWSI) in the South, where she had spent most of her career. In addition to her professional position, Jennifer was enrolled in a doctoral program.

Jennifer spoke extensively about the value of family in her life, including the influence her mother played in her life, as well as her relationship with her husband and two adolescent children. Through these reflections, Jennifer realized, "as I'm saying the words out loud is this first epiphany that I've had really fully, that I live in multiple realities every day." Jennifer shared the complexity of balancing a high-demand job, doctoral coursework, and family responsibilities while also reflecting that she felt alone in the challenges she experienced, both at work and at home.

Jennifer had worked at her institution for a majority of her career, beginning in housing and moving into various roles within the dean of students office. Jennifer shared that her reputation and relationship-oriented approach allowed her to succeed and advance into higher-level roles. Though Jennifer specified many examples of successfully navigating difficult situations, she also described self-doubt and struggles with perfectionism. Jennifer described her doubt as directly connected to lower position titles and salaries than she felt that she had earned.

Julia

> For me, grit is the "yes I can," when circumstances or people don't expect that you could, you can be successful in something or that you can accomplish something. I would say I had to work a lot harder than other people. But [in] that, I found success. Right? To me, grit is being able to push through a challenging circumstance and work hard to accomplish a goal that you've set out.

Julia identified as a cisgender, heterosexual, white woman with a hearing disability diagnosed at a young age. Julia earned a Ph.D. and served as the vice president for student affairs at a HWSI in the South, where she had spent the entirety of her career. Julia had one adult child who had not lived at home for several years. Julia's second interview took place the day after her father moved into hospice care, about which Julia openly shared her emotions.

Julia described her parents' divorce and the ways that her mother role modeled the importance of education by going to school through Julia's childhood. Julia also described her experience with education as a young child, as her teachers thought that she was not smart because she was not understanding what they were covering in the classroom. Julia reflected on hearing her teachers talk with her mother and thought, "I'm not stupid." Soon thereafter, Julia was diagnosed with a hearing impairment and the stigma that came from receiving special support through her school. Through that experience, Julia developed grit, a concept she strongly identified with. Through that "yes I can" attitude, Julia excelled as a student and athlete, and transitioned into her career in student affairs.

Julia worked in student activities early in her career and navigated several roles managing university events before moving back into student affairs. A significant experience that shaped Julia's career was being sexually assaulted at a work event. Though the assault happened many years ago, Julia shared frustration that there was no formal process back then, so she informed legal counsel and no action was taken. As a result, Julia shared the ways that she changed her own practices at events and with groups of people to protect herself. Though Julia was in her early 50s, she shared that she sought to move into a faculty role in the next few years, as she felt she had made important contributions in her career and had valuable knowledge to share with aspiring professionals.

Lauren

> I think the way I feel [womanhood] most is when I'm interacting with the senior cabinet, cause like I'd mentioned, they're mostly men, but sometimes I think about the way that I speak in a little bit of a different way. I am very mindful of the way that I literally sit in meetings, how I sit in a meeting where I'm at the table. I'm strategic about that. Especially dealing with that upper level of folks, who I've had a lot of contact with during the pandemic.

Lauren identified as a cisgender, heterosexual, white woman in her early 40s. Serving as an assistant vice president for student affairs at a HWSI in the South, Lauren had been in her role for about a year, and shared that she was learning every day. Lauren was married and did not have any children, which she faced assumptions and rumors about at various points in her career, and had her Ph.D.

Lauren described growing up in the Northeast in a "normal household," where her parents both worked and she learned the importance of education from them. Lauren shared that her parents role modeled traditional gender roles, where her mother was affectionate and her father was stern and did not show his emotions. Lauren reflected on this, as she described that in her marriage her husband was "definitely a feminist," and that they did not operate under prescribed gender roles.

Lauren had worked at several institutions in her career, starting in the field in student involvement programs in the Midwest. Lauren's career had introduced her to two important mentors in her life, both of whom played a critical role in challenging her to consider the role she held at the time of the study. During the pandemic, Lauren described serving on her emergency operations committee on campus, and the ways that language, approach, and dynamics all centered traditionally masculine approaches. Though Lauren was able to challenge those dynamics, she also reflected on the ways she noticed them, as one of few women in the room. Lauren also reflected that at this time in her career, she did not wish to serve as a vice president for student affairs.

Nancy

> I just really care about other people. I care about their success. I want us all to rise together. There's not this, you know, "just get out of my way cause I'm trying to get ahead." It's more about, "come, let's all be successful together."

Nancy identified as a cisgender, heterosexual, Black woman in her 60s. Nancy served as the interim vice president for student affairs at an emerging HSI on the West Coast, and had spent the entirety of her student affairs career there. Nancy shared that she was in an

interracial marriage where she learned that “there’s always a reason for a fiesta,” had one child and one grandchild, who she enjoyed spending time with.

Nancy spoke about the importance of watching her parents have a strong marriage, based on trust and respect, before losing her mother as a teenager. Nancy attended college for two years before realizing that she did not want to spend money when she was unsure what she wanted to do. She left college, got married, had a child, and was divorced quickly thereafter. Nancy credited her father with playing an important role in her recognition that she did not have to accept behaviors in her marriage that were unhealthy. Nancy later remarried and her husband raised her son.

Nancy had a nontraditional path in student affairs. She initially started working at her university in an administrative support role within a student affairs unit. After working there for a while, the vice president had a conversation with her and pushed her to go back to school. After completing her bachelor’s and master’s degrees, Nancy progressed within her department to become the director. Upon the exit of a vice president, the president of the institution tapped Nancy to serve in the role for one year. Nancy negotiated to hold the interim position for two years and retire at the end of her term. Nancy was scheduled to retire three weeks after our second interview.

Shea

> I think we have to be in tune with we are women, we are the nurturers; we are the ones who provide, time and time again, support and assistance. And we are leaders too. We are leaders, we are problem solvers… we can stand up against anyone else in the board room. We are opinionated. I do think that sometimes we

> as women don't know exactly how much power we have and those are some of the areas that I continue to work on.

Shea identified as a cisgender Black woman who had worked at her institution for more than 25 years, and did not disclose her sexual orientation or age. Shea worked at a HSI in the South, and had her Ph.D. Shea served as the associate vice president for student affairs and advanced through several functional areas within student affairs through her career. At the time of our interviews, Shea was preparing to move into a new role at her institution where she would establish a new, institution-wide initiative.

Growing up, Shea reflected on the values of family and education that her parents instilled in her. She described that both of her parents had master's degrees, and that she was expected to attend college. Shea explained that because of this expectation, her father felt strongly that his children would not take out loans to pay for college and instead funded their education. Shea also learned from her parents that gender was binary, and she felt that she was sheltered from considering gender and sexuality beyond the binary until she was an adult. Shea was divorced and had two children and two grandchildren, of whom she spoke proudly. She described that while she gave her institution her full self during the week, the weekends were time for herself, as "I take care of me in order to take care of others."

Shea started her career in another industry, where she faced a situation where a man was given a promotion over her, though she had demonstrated success in the position. Shea ended up filing an equal opportunity complaint and the decision was found in her favor, resulting in her promotion and back pay. Shea moved into higher education after relocating for her husband's work, and had a few women play significant roles in

identifying her potential and helping her to advance in her career. Shea spoke passionately about her responsibility as a Black woman to lift other women and help them learn the power we hold and the things we should ask for in our careers.

Sheri

> Within my division, I ask lots of questions about how things work, but I also ask them in a way that gives people an opportunity to save face, because mistakes are difficult things to embrace and accept and fix and it's even harder to fix when you've been shamed. So when I think back about mistakes that I've made in my past and I think about the people who have been involved in how I operate around that, men have been more likely to shame me about it than women.

Sheri identified as a cisgender, heterosexual Black woman in her 40s working at a HSI in the South. Sheri served as the vice president for student affairs and dean of students for approximately a year, as the position was reorganized to oversee both responsibilities. While Sheri did not have a doctoral degree, she was completing her application to a program at the time of the interviews.

Sheri described her parents as people who showed her the value of hard work and education, as she watched them work hard every day of their lives to provide for her. Sheri described sharing books with her mother, as they both loved to read. Sheri saw her father display some misogyny and traditional perspectives growing up, but reflected that she was able to challenge him and gain trust differently from him as an adult. Because her parents taught her to love education, Sheri aspired to go to college but would have been unable to attend had it not been for the scholarship that she received. Both of Sheri’s

parents passed away while she was in her late 20s, so Sheri created a chosen family of friends within her community.

In navigating her career path, Sheri worked in housing and campus activities before moving into dean of students-related work. Sheri worked at several institutions in different regions of the country before moving back to her home state. Sheri spoke about the ways that she learned the leader she wanted to be, as well as the leader she did not want to be, through observation of her former supervisors. She reflected that she picked up strategies from each former supervisor that allowed her to see herself as a successful leader within her current role. Even though Sheri was confident about her leadership within her position, she shared the struggle that "eyes are on me all the time." For women in leadership roles, Sheri explained, "most think it's innate in us that we're strong… it's more complicated than that and I think that's what's the most important thing is that people need to be able to unpack how we can support women in leadership." Sheri considered the many ways that her gender and race shaped the perceptions that others had for her, and the ways that she intentionally engaged on campus to role model what it meant to be a Black woman.

Yvonne

> Even though you look at numbers and you say, wow, there's been so much positive change that there [are] more women, more People of Color in these executive roles. And yet they're saying overwhelmingly that they are not on a level playing field, that you do have to prove more, accomplish more, that kind of thing to get to even.

Yvonne identified as a white, cisgender, lesbian woman in her 60s. Yvonne had her Ph.D. and worked at a MSI on the West Coast, where she served as the associate vice president for student affairs. Yvonne had worked at several institutions around the country over the course of her career, moving to her current institution a few years ago.

Yvonne described growing up in the rural South and having traumatic experiences of sexual abuse by family members as a child that shaped her perceptions of herself and her body through adulthood. Yvonne described learning gender from her mother and grandmother, as her mother did not believe in gender roles, but realized that her grandmother was never allowed to "outshine her husband." Yvonne shared her educational background and explained that she came out while enrolled in her graduate program, which was not common at the time and in the South. Yvonne met her wife through a friend and relocated jobs in order to be closer to her. At the time of the interviews, Yvonne worked in a different state from her wife, and they were considering where they would like to settle as they approached retirement.

Yvonne's career path had centered in housing, through many roles at several institutions. Though Yvonne worked in a common field within student affairs, she shared that working in the business-side of housing presented several barriers to her, as that was not a specialty for women. Additionally, Yvonne described working at an institution with great support, where she was able to play an important role in leading the president's commission on women. Her next role was described as a "toxic cesspool," because of the disparaging comments made by her supervisor about the LGBTQ+ community and racist student sanctioning practices. In Yvonne's current role, she shared that she had a positive

relationship with her supervisor and had asked for additional responsibilities as colleagues left, so that she gained additional expertise.

Findings

Through participant interviews, four themes emerged that illustrated the experiences that women had within the field of student affairs. Through women's stories of successes, challenges, internal narratives, doubt, and expectations to submit, an encompassing theme of genderization emerged. For the purposes of this study, genderization is defined as the dichotomization of systems, structures, functions, and power based within a man-woman gender binary. As higher education was founded by and for white wealthy men (Cohen & Kisker, 2010), the systems, structures, functions, power dynamics, and expectations embedded within higher education are framed from traditionally masculine perspectives. Because of this, participants' stories were understood differently when considering the role that genderization played in shaping their experiences.

Illustrating the encompassing theme of *genderization*, four themes emerged: *the person on the path, achieving through and with others, conflicting messages of competence and value*, and *overtasked and alone.* Each theme showcased unique ways that women experienced *genderization* within their career paths in student affairs and culminated through specific stories from each participant. Table 4 provides an overview of the encompassing and embedded themes.

Finally, in presenting findings of the study, I elected to use the words "participants" and "women" interchangeably, in order to center gender within the context of the lived experiences that women described. Please note that in using the word

"women" to refer to participants, I am not generalizing all women's experiences and instead am centering participants' womanhood in the narratives that they shared.

Table 4

Summary of Encompassing and Embedded Themes

Encompassing Theme		Description
Genderization	• When the System Pushes You Down • Internalizing the Narrative	*Genderization* is defined as the dichotomization of systems, structures, functions, and power based within a man-woman gender binary and is illuminated through the systemic and personal examples women described.
Embedded Themes	**Subthemes**	**Description**
Person on the Path	• What it Means to be a Woman • The Caretakers	*Person on the Path* described women's explanations of their personal womanhood, as well as ways that womanhood related to caretaking.
Achieving Through and With Others	• People Over Power • Submit or Quit	*Achieving Through and With Others* illuminated women's practices of power-sharing in order to empower others, role modeling gender within their roles, mentoring women, and responding to power enacted upon them.
Conflicting Messages of Competence and Value	• Why Am I Being Treated This Way? • The Right to Take Up Space • Shoving Up Against Normative Hierarchy	*Conflicting Messages of Competence and Value* showcased the ways that women experienced both pride and doubt in their work. This theme also detailed the gender-binary cultures of their organizations and the ways women were forced to respond.
Overtasked and Alone	• What Makes Me Worthy?	*Overtasked and Alone* represented the ways that

- Alone Together — women were tasked with overwhelming responsibilities while simultaneously being isolated from others.

The Person on the Path

This theme captured women's uncertainty about how they viewed and defined their own womanhood, as well as the ways that they struggled to align those within their field of work. Participants experienced discomfort in considering their own womanhood and exhibited a noticeable knowledge gap in articulating the differences between sex and gender. Women also grappled with the realization that they saw womanhood as a deficit, even though they felt that their contributions and competence were meaningful. Despite the dissonance between knowledge and experience, women displayed a connection to the field of student affairs through their womanhood.

What it Means to be a Woman. Though the participants each shared stories of meaningful or challenging experiences they navigated that were centered in gender, most participants struggled to separate gender from sex and spoke about women's experiences from a female lens. While many participants tried to demonstrate gender inclusivity by speaking about gender as a spectrum and unique to individual experiences, they used 'female' and 'male' language to describe people and experiences they had, in conflict with the gender inclusivity they had mentioned earlier in the study.

The tension between seeing gender as a spectrum and understanding differences between sex, gender, and sexuality was illustrated through Gloria's lens. In describing womanhood, Gloria shared:

> I definitely don't see gender as a male or female… Nothing is black or white. I think gender is more like gender expression. And I agree with that. I mean I am heterosexual, but I don't think that everybody is like me. And that's the way I define gender. I think it's a personal thing. I think it's a socially constructed, and, and I think is rigid. And just because some people, how they define that male, female, it doesn't necessarily mean that's what it is. That's how the world is.

Gloria's understanding of gender as non-binary was muddled by the use of sex descriptors. Further, Gloria's description of sexuality as a manifestation of gender perpetuated a narrative that sexuality was grounded in one's gender, rather than understanding that each of these were independent aspects of one's personhood. Yvonne, who self-identified as a lesbian, also struggled to describe her womanhood as it related to sexuality. Yvonne explained:

> I think [womanhood is] intertwined with sexual orientation for me and being a lesbian. I think 'cause that's so salient to my identity. That's probably why I say I strongly identify as a woman... You can't be a lesbian and be, well I guess, you know, everything is fluid these days. There are no… you can only do X or Y.

Yvonne was trying to articulate what she knew to be true, in that gender and sexuality were fluid and independent constructs, though this may have been different from what her experiences taught her as her own truth.

While Gloria and Yvonne both struggled to disentangle gender from sex and sexuality, other participants felt a strong grounding to the religious teachings of gender that they learned growing up. Nancy described a connection to her religious upbringing that shaped her adult perspective. Nancy explained,

> I believe what the Bible teaches and from my perspective there's male and there's female. And now that I'm like 60 days away from retiring, I really don't hesitate talking about that… I certainly appreciate a perspective that allows for some other ideals, but for me, I just… I think you're one or the other.

Nancy's perspective of gender as directly reflective of sex also informed her perspective of what it meant to be a woman, as she described it as strongly connected to a woman's ability to have children. "Most women… are wonderfully blessed in being able to have children," Nancy explained. "I think there's something that just happens to you when you create, you grow this being and then you launch them into this world and you have to mind their every need and want." Nancy explained that this biological reproductive characteristic of cisgender womanhood allowed women in student affairs to have an intuitive "sensitivity about impacts" in the ways that we develop students and staff with whom we work. She described this instinct as having a "mother kind of feeling" that women used to take care of others.

Though Erin's perceptions of womanhood were not tied to her religious perspectives, she also connected womanhood to biological sex:

> Women can be very intelligent and therefore you're powerful. Women can create more humans and that's powerful. Women can empathize with other people and get the story and that's really powerful. You kind of have to know what the game is and how to be powerful and the right times you are powerful.

Erin's sentiments paralleled Nancy's, as they reflected a sense of power and intuition in the ability for cisgender women to reproduce and empathize as a practice of caretaking.

Shea echoed the sentiment about women serving as caretakers. Shea described, "We are the nurturers, we are the one who provide time and time again support and assistance. And we are leaders too… we are problem solvers." Shea's understanding of caretaking through womanhood was based on the strengths by which women used those skills. Similarly, Lauren described womanhood as "being strong, being vocal, being a good friend, being an advocate." Lauren's description, while strength-based, also reflects a nurturing perspective of womanhood, as there is an implied 'other' that she is speaking of, as women are vocal about, being good friends to, and advocates for other people.

Several participants described the challenges of what it meant to be a woman, even within the concept of caretaking. Jennifer described womanhood as having "multiple roles" that she was responsible for in both personal and professional realms. Jennifer explained:

> Multiple roles means being a competent professional, working professional, but also being a compassionate caretaker, both of children but also a compassionate caretaker of your relationship with your partner. And sometimes there's not enough time or energy to focus on all of those equally… You have to be aware of the multiple realities around you and the multiple ways in which people expect you to take care of them.

For Jennifer, caretaking reflected a toll on her personal and professional experiences, as she felt pulled in multiple directions to provide for everyone, often at her own expense. Jennifer continued to explain that she thought about her womanhood most "when I get bitter," as she was frustrated to feel alone in managing so many competing demands. She expanded on this by saying, "I think it's the personal expectation that I put on myself in

order to be the one that is the caretaker. And secondly, I think it's the societal expectation that that's what I am supposed to be doing." The pressure that Jennifer felt externally and internally to take care of others perpetuated the exhaustion and bitterness connected to her sense of womanhood.

Several participants described the ways that their womanhood was being defined for them, while rejecting those definitions and instead working to create personal meanings of gender for themselves. Sheri summarized this sentiment concisely, in describing womanhood as "difficulty." She explained,

> Simply because you are the way you are, people are going to have thoughts that don't align with who you are and… people will hate or dislike you simply because of how you present. And that's not fair and it's not right.

Though Sheri associated her womanhood with the difficulty of being judged or disliked by others, she also shared that she sought to have her actions speak for her work rather than worry about others' perceptions of her. This was consistent across participants, while many described the challenges and struggles they had experienced as a result of their womanhood, they also described a resilience and tenacity to focus on their quality of work and impact on others rather than worrying about the stigmas or stereotypes they could not control.

The only participant who described womanhood from a gender-inclusive perspective was Julia. In recent years, Julia supervised a staff member who transitioned genders and recognized the education and advocacy that she had to take on in order to make sure that staff member's needs were met. Through that experience, Julia gained a

nuanced understanding of gender and womanhood. Julia explained her recent understanding of gender:

> It's a spectrum within dimensions of someone's body and their experience with their personal body and how they view their body. The other would be their identity. So how you identify personally, an outward view that's evident, and pronouns, and those types of things. And then also someone's social perspective on gender and how they interact socially with others.

Julia's understanding of gender from the lens of one's body, identity, and social constructs allowed her to think about this differently in shaping her perspectives on serving her campus community. In Julia's words, this has allowed "people to… bring to me what they believe their gender is in those different areas because those areas can be different," allowing her to also serve in the role of caretaker for a historically marginalized community by seeking to align her actions with her developing understanding of womanhood.

The Caretakers. Based on the ways participants described their womanhood, their performance in student affairs became an extension of their womanhood. This was evident in looking at the ways that women described their roles as caretakers of others; the roles that were prescribed to women carried over into their roles in student affairs.

Shea summarized her purpose within student affairs through her desire to impact others. Shea explained, "I really wanted to be a change agent… I really wanted to help students grow and develop and that I'm passionate about the work that I do. I always have been." Shea's desire to help others grow permeated the desire to serve as a caretaker across participants. Erin described her desire to take care of others by allowing them to

succeed. Erin shared, “I want to fill a need… I want to make my bosses look good doing it. I don’t care if I look good, I just want them to not be questioned when they bring my materials to the table.” Erin’s desire to serve her supervisors by enhancing opportunities for their success was an act of submission, opening the door to risk that she may not receive credit for her role in institutional or divisional initiatives. Even when framed as selfless or in service to students, Erin’s insecurities about having a title that could be perceived as her supervisor “handing out weird job titles to 12 year olds that haven’t earned their place” perpetuated a perspective that submission may prove competence, easing Erin’s fears about her qualifications for her role.

In reflecting on career advancement, Gloria expressed a desire to advance in order to better serve students. Gloria shared, “I was never after the power… I was always after serving students… But the higher I went, the more change I could bring.” Gloria’s stated desire for power was only in order to have a larger impact for student-centered change rather than for her own needs or career goals.

In reflecting on her professional purpose, Julia recognized that her work and self were interconnected. Julia explained, “I love what I do… What we do is so wrapped up, our identity becomes wrapped up in it… All of the things that make me unique I think make me good at my job.” In considering the concepts of her gender and work, Julia realized, “I can’t see separating one from the other.” Her womanhood contributed to the ways that she succeeded at work, and her professional success contributed to her womanhood.

Through the narratives of caretaking in both their personal and professional lives, participants demonstrated that caretaking equated to removing their own needs or

emotions in order to serve students, staff, or supervisors. Through this caretaker mentality, women minimized themselves for the good of the communities in which they worked and led. Through participants' descriptions, it became clear that the ways that women defined who they were in their womanhood was not different because of student affairs, rather, it was illuminated within the field of student affairs.

Achieving Through and With Others

Understandings of power dynamics were illustrated by participants' reflections on their leadership approaches as compared to the ways that leadership was enacted upon them. Participants described their leadership practices as open, transparent, vulnerable, authentic, people-centered, and power-sharing, allowing them to gain respect and trust from staff. Their approaches also allowed them to understand the role that gender played on their campuses and take action to create and empower opportunities for other women, thereby expanding access to power. While women were successful in centering people over power, the institutions in which they worked were structured to maintain hierarchical dominance, often putting the women's leadership practices at odds with the expectations set for them. Participants shared stories of challenges and failures that arose between the roles they were in and the decisions others made, resulting in the women having to choose between submitting to power-dominant structures or leaving their roles.

People Over Power. Participants described the values-centered leadership practices that made them effective leaders and supervisors to others. Rather than centering themselves, the women centered people over power by practicing interpersonal, transparent leadership that brought others together. Women spoke to the importance of seeing their employees as whole people and supporting their professional and personal

needs, including paying attention to the work that people did, recognizing that work, and discouraging people from allowing work to consume their whole selves. Through this people-centered approach, though, women did not intentionally think about how they role modeled gender or expectations about what it meant to be a woman in a leadership role to others within their division, and instead assumed that their leadership practice reflected this perspective. Women also talked about mentoring other women in student affairs, with structured examples of what mentoring relationships looked like to them.

Women talked about their leadership practice as just that, something that was a constant, conscious process by which they self-examined, made mistakes, learned, and grew. This cyclical practice was evident in the ways that women described their leadership approaches and illustrated the ways that they centered others' needs. Jennifer spoke to her calling in the field and the relationship she saw between her work and the foundations of student affairs, through the dean of women role. Jennifer described the role as, "overseeing the moral and the psychological and ethical development of women in college… I am drawn to that lineage and that philosophy around what that dean originally was… a caretaker for that population of students." The concept of caretaker translated to a people-centered leadership approach for all participants. Nancy expanded on this idea by describing how her womanhood influenced her leadership practice:

> I think that we just have this sort of sensitivity about impacts and the words that you say and the things that you do and relationships that you try to create… I'm not saying that men aren't, can't be that way, but I just see a whole lot more of it in women.

For Nancy, caring for others allowed her to consider the ways that her words and actions impacted those around her. Though she did not perceive this to be an attribute exclusively held by women, she reflected that she most often saw it practiced by women.

The influence of gender on leadership was not directly reflected upon by all participants but the stories they shared illustrated consideration of others through words and actions. Shea reflected that one of her direct reports recently described her leadership as "you're the kind of leader who will challenge us. You'll lead us to the cliff, but you won't let us fall over." Shea laughed at this and reflected, "That's true. I think that we have to challenge our team because we see things in them that they don't see. And when people are challenged often, oftentimes they will step up and learn a lot about themselves." Sheri expanded on the concept of being people-centered rather than power-centered. Sheri explained, "I have never been, power has never been particularly important to me and so the idea of shared power and empowering others through the role that I have, I think helps people a lot." While Shea and Sheri described experiences of sharing their power with others, all participants provided examples of utilizing expansive power dynamics, including seeking input from staff, naming and celebrating others' accomplishments, acknowledging when it was time to change course, meeting individually with staff, and providing transparent information to their teams.

The practice of sharing power also manifested through participants' interpersonal leadership approaches. Each participant spoke about the ways that she was able to understand the needs of her team and develop proactive, intentional opportunities to make decisions in support of those needs. As Nancy transitioned into the interim vice president role at her institution, it was important to her that she was seen as accessible

and open to those within her division, even though she had worked at the institution for decades. Nancy described an event series she developed to create opportunities for social interactions with staff within her division where, "people started to think about, well how could I partner with X unit to accomplish some of the things we're trying to do for our students?" Through this practice, Nancy demonstrated her commitment to relationship-building and collaboration for all staff within her division.

Several participants also shared stories of understanding staff needs and making proactive decisions to support staff. Lauren shared a lighthearted story of recognizing that one of her units was doing important work in response to the pandemic, but that work was not visible across the division. Lauren asked the assessment team to highlight the work of that unit in the divisional newsletter and shared, "selfishly it was fun to be able to brag about those folks and give them an opportunity so that they didn't have to fight for the spotlight when I can just shine it on them." Lauren's identification of the divisional culture and ways that it might impact her team allowed for her to quietly highlight their successes.

In leading a divisional reorganization that would relocate many of her staff into a new divisional structure, Shea proactively arranged for several layers of change management. Shea explained bringing HR in to host a series of change management workshops for her staff, as well as her desire to support her team through the transition. Shea described centering staff needs:

> I met with one of my teams yesterday because many of them are going to be moving into different roles and I want… to see how they're doing, to make sure that they, we address any questions, any concerns that they may have.

In managing a multi-divisional realignment, Shea recognized that her staff were whole people with complex emotions and sought to acknowledge and work through any challenges that they might face together. By providing them with reflection space and resources, Shea was demonstrating her commitment to their continued success, even for those who transitioned out of her direct reporting structure.

This thought process was extended further by Julia and Jennifer, who recognized that the work done within their departments only accounted for a portion of the lives that staff lived. Julia explained the ways that she supported the full lives of staff, "I really want to respect that they should have lives outside of our work. And so that means getting time to be a spouse, a partner, a parent, whatever those things mean." While Julia explained that she set boundaries by trying not to contact her staff outside of business hours, Jennifer described being a leader as, "supporting their personal growth and their personal life… Being compassionate and considerate and flexible and kind and understanding that there's more to their contribution in life than what they contribute here from eight to five or whatever." Rather than assuming that work was the most important component of her staff members' lives, Jennifer assumed that life was encompassing of work and other meaningful things. Allowing flexibility in her staff's roles allowed Jennifer to expand power dynamics to allow individuals to articulate their needs and how they could succeed in their roles.

Centering the needs of others allowed women to lead with vulnerability and sincerity in challenging times. Each participant shared stories of difficult situations that they had managed by centering others' needs, but Julia's example had happened the day prior to her second interview. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Julia was given the

news that she had to terminate an employee that had been identified by the president's office. She was given a script from legal counsel and was not allowed any say in the employee's termination. Julia shared the role that her emotions played in navigating the situation:

> I wept. I mean, I just wept, both when I had to tell the supervisor and when I was telling him… and so I'm saying all of that to say it's okay. I think as a woman, I think it's absolutely okay for me to show my emotion at appropriate times… and I just don't think, know that any of my male counterparts would show that kind of emotion… but I think it's okay for people to know that you hurt and that you feel deeply about things.

While Julia modeled vulnerability with her staff in terminating the employee, Julia responded to the president after the fact, stating that she hoped to be "more involved in the evaluation of what's most critical in our areas" as they make future cuts, again centering her staff's needs.

While most participants shared that they did not intentionally think about role modeling gender within their roles, all gave examples of how they embodied and embraced their womanhood within their work in a way that empowered other women to do the same. As a result, most women also explained the value they placed on formal networking relationships and the responsibility they took to mentor the next generation of aspiring leaders.

In considering how they role modeled gender to others, participants spoke more about perceptions than direct actions. Sheri explained that her approach was not strategic,

instead, “I just do it.” Sheri explained that she thought about the impact that her actions might have on shaping others’ decision-making:

> I know that people are watching… I also know that people are looking to me to [see] how I approach something so that they can also follow suit or they can make a different decision.

By understanding others’ perceptions of her actions, Sheri balanced the critique she anticipated with the opportunity to role model leadership to others.

Jennifer explained the weight of role modeling her full womanhood within her position, as staff and students saw her manage multiple priorities at once. Jennifer explained the comments she heard from others about successfully navigating her roles as professional, mother, partner, and student, and that others aspired to be like her.

> I feel this responsibility of role modeling that thing you can have. You can have a successful job. You can have a family. You can pursue further studies. And you're not sitting in the corner crying. Like you're strong, you're resilient, you're tired, but you're strong.

While Jennifer felt a responsibility to role model her full life for others, she also described the weight that she felt in doing so. She shared a sense of pressure to demonstrate the ability to manage everything at once, and the expectation she felt that she could not delegate anything or let anyone down without being seen as incompetent. While role modeling gender to others was something participants shared examples of, it was also an experience internalized by many.

Participants also viewed role modeling gender as practical actions they took to empower other women. Julia expanded on the idea that centering gender in her thought process allowed her to demonstrate equitable ideas through her actions. Julia shared,

> When I'm in front of a group of students just even saying my pronouns, you can see kind of a sigh of relief from a few students who are like, "okay, this'll be a good place for me…" I think that awareness and the role that it can have for so many, it can't be dismissed.

Having experienced challenges directly related to her gender allowed for Julia to understand the importance of acknowledging the role that gender played on her campus and signaled that to others. Lauren shared another example of understanding the role of gender on her campus and challenging norms to support other women. Lauren explained, "it's also about showing up and being in the room and speaking up or… if someone says something that you agree with, especially if it's a woman… amplifying that in a space, especially for females… that's really important." Using amplification to acknowledge other women in the space and promote their ideas allowed Lauren to challenge institutionalized gender norms that silenced women or promoted dominant voices.

As a way of expanding opportunities provided to women, Sheri described the practice of strategically identifying women to take on divisional responsibilities. Sheri explained, an important practice was "to tap shoulders and to encourage strategically how I can get other women involved in things and not in an unfair way to where I'm not thinking about men." She explained that she considered those individuals who were not the obvious choice and instead looked across her division to identify the right person for a given opportunity. Sheri explained looking for someone she had "not picked to be in

charge of something… I try to put people in places to push them and encourage them. But I also check in on them to make sure [they are] doing okay and feeling okay." Sheri's intentionality of selecting and challenging women to help them grow was a tangible method by which she practiced empowering women.

Finally, Julia described her approach of providing professional development opportunities for women in her division. Julia described her practice of providing funding specifically for women to attend NASPA or ACPA opportunities that expanded their knowledge base within the field. Julia explained "I think that's really important, and for them to know that I'm supportive of their career movement and progression… to move forward with that Ph.D. or whatever it might be." Julia described this practice as sponsorship, as it was not as formal as a mentoring relationship and instead focused on the skill and professional development for women who may continue to advance in their careers.

While participants gave many examples of the ways that they supported and promoted opportunities for women, few had intentionally considered how they role modeled gender to others. By demonstrating authenticity, using pronouns, amplifying other women's' voices, and providing women with opportunities, participants unintentionally role modeled the ways that women supported other women.

Mentoring was also an important practice that shaped many women's professional experiences. Several participants shared the void of mentorship within their early careers, and sought to change that narrative for other women. Shea described, "Early on in my career, I didn't know what I didn't know and I did not have a mentor per se.... So I think it's, that's why I think it's really important that we share our knowledge." The void that

Shea felt in her early career was also experienced by Julia, who encountered women that discouraged her from taking advanced opportunities. Julia explained, “I didn't have women investing in me… the only interactions I had with females… in higher level jobs than me were negative, not real supportive. So that is something that I want to do differently.” Though several participants felt the absence of mentors in their early careers, those experiences shaped the ways they understood mentors to add value to one’s career and their desire to mentor others.

Lauren, however, had the opposite experience. Without the mentors in her life, Lauren likely would have missed the opportunity to move into her current role. In a serendipitous circumstance, Lauren had dinner with a former vice president who she greatly respected. He encouraged Lauren to consider the next position in her career. The next day, Lauren’s mentor texted her that she had talked with a vice president looking for a leader and encouraged Lauren to apply. Lauren reflected on the role of these two mentors on her career trajectory:

> Those two things, you know in that 48 hour period, like it was life changing… but I think if those two things had happened a month out, I might be having a different conversation with you. But they were like back to back and they were like serious, monumental conversations.

As Lauren respected and trusted the two mentors, she took their advice seriously and applied for the job she had been encouraged to consider, which she now holds. Because of the role that mentorship played for Lauren, she committed to the practice of mentoring other women at her institution. At the time of the study, Lauren was mentoring someone who was early in her professional career, and described her mentee by sharing, “if she

had like 10% more confidence, she could be two positions up the ladder right now. But she has a lot of self-doubt and I don't think anyone's ever pushed her or pulled her up." In considering her mentee's experience, Lauren recognized the responsibility she had to consider opportunities that would benefit the mentee in her career and provide her with ample opportunity to grow in those capacities. Lauren described her approach, "if I sent her 10 things and only 2 stick, that's fine. If she doesn't know about the 10 then 2 are never going to stick." In utilizing this approach, Lauren preferred to provide her mentee with more opportunities than she might need for her growth and empowered her to choose what to pursue.

Other participants shared what formal mentoring relationships looked like to them. While Shea expressed her commitment to mentoring women and Women of Color in particular, she also explained what a formal mentoring relationship looked like to her:

> It's me connecting them with other influential people here at the university… it's me connecting them to resources on campus, sharing information with them, sharing the books that they should read, resources that they should pursue, encouraging them to seek a higher degree or a terminal degree, moving them outside of education if it's really not the right fit for them… It's very engaging.

Shea's approach to mentorship was that of alleviating barriers and providing access to women who were seeking to grow through relationships, information, resources, and support.

In addition to providing mentees with career development and support, participants also shared the value that mentorship provided to them in their roles. Yvonne described a relationship that sustained for over 30 years with someone that she mentored

early in her career. Yvonne's mentee was "someone that I don't necessarily see all the time, but we have always stayed connected and are friends and are still in the same career path." Yvonne shared that the power of their relationship was likely tied to their sexuality, as her mentee had family conflict when she came out, and Yvonne was able to relate to those experiences as an out lesbian.

Additionally, Shea described the fulfillment that she experienced in seeing her mentees develop through their careers. A former mentee of Shea's was moving into a vice president role at a "high profile institution," and Shea shared "just to see where they started and to know that I was instrumental in plowing into their success. It's what I came to do." For Shea and other participants, mentorship was about service to other women in student affairs.

Submit or Quit. Though women reflected on ways that they centered people over power by role modeling gender and mentoring others, the hierarchical organizations in which women led were not often reciprocal in that approach. Participants reflected on times that they faced professional challenges and failures, which often connected to hierarchical power dynamics conflicting with their internal morals and values. Through these experiences, participants also shared a desire to use failure to propel themselves to learn, grow, and improve in navigating difficult situations. Through that process, women also internalized the messages of value that were inherent in their failures: you must submit to those above you or risk punishment.

In Sheri's first full-time role, she removed a student from an officer role in a student association after he failed to meet the grade requirement for the role. The student, though, had a history of disruptive behavior and problematic decision-making in the role

prior to his termination, and Sheri expressed relief that she could bring in a new student leadership board and move the group forward after managing this student for a long time. She shared, “I thought I did all the things that I needed to do and do them right.” The student, though, threatened to sue the university, and instead of supporting her, Sheri’s supervisor reversed the decision. Sheri explained,

> And so, my supervisor gave him the position over again… “all that stuff that Sheri did [was] not important, didn't do it…” He didn't discuss it with me. We didn't process that at all. I was devastated and our students were livid. How do I explain after doing everything that we did right and showing students what it looks like to hold people accountable, that's what we do after all of that, simply because he's threatening?

Even though Sheri’s power was stripped away by her supervisor, Sheri internalized the failure as her own. Sheri took responsibility for the outcome, because “it still felt like failure because so many people were impacted and I couldn't do a whole lot about it.” Though the situation happened many years ago, Sheri described the importance of that lesson in her career, as it taught her “I can do it better than I did do it before,” even though the power of that decision was not hers.

Julia shared a recent story of a student movement on campus to create a more equitable tradition experience for students, opening the opportunity for anyone to apply, rather than designating gendered awards and excluding any trans, gender nonconforming, or non-binary students. Julia worked with students to change the process and had communicated this with the institution’s president when a board of trustee member raised

concerns. The president told Julia to “do something” about it, so she made modifications while maintaining a more equitable practice. As a result, Julia shared,

> It… became a very big deal… And I got reamed by some board of trustee members as well, in executive session that I got my ass handed to me… I just, I just listened. I didn't respond. I didn't say a word… I just listened and I thought there was nothing that I could've said that that particular person, that would've been helpful. So I just listened and I said, “well, I appreciate you sharing your thoughts.”

When asked what the long-term outcome of the situation would be, and whether there will be changes next year, Julia’s reaction was immediate and visceral. She shared “I [will] have [two gendered awards], dammit.” The implication of this statement was that she was forced to appease her president and the board, and was expected to provide the award structure they wanted rather than the one she had worked with the students to develop.

Julia and Sheri’s stories both reflected a defeated mentality shared across participant stories of challenge and failure. While the women felt strongly that they had made a decision that was right for their students, roles, and institutions, institutional leadership reversed those decisions while also undermining the authority of the women who had made them. Sheri and Julia’s stories reflected the power-dominant systems of leadership in higher education that treat women and their authority as expendable and compliant, rather than knowledgeable and valid.

For many participants, experiences of failure were directly connected to situations that challenged their ethical intuition. Through these experiences, women had to define

boundaries for professional practice within their roles and were often forced to decide whether to prioritize their jobs or ethics. Jennifer shared the unspoken expectations she felt within a conduct role at a private religiously affiliated institution she once worked at, sharing there was "this very subtle expectation that I treat students who were from donor families differently than students who did not have the financial means to make high donations. And that didn't sit well with me." While Jennifer grappled with the classist expectations of her institution, Yvonne experienced racist institutional norms that made her question the institution as a whole:

> We had conduct cases and the African American student who was selling drugs [was] booted out. The white student who was selling drugs [was] given an exception… all these things that happened totally violated my sense of what's right and wrong, what's moral and not. What supports the values of the institution.

Yvonne's experience started to make her question whether the institution was a place where she could continue to work within her own values. As the patterns of behavior continued, Yvonne started to speak up about concerning issues. "I would say to my boss, okay, this violates the law. We really can't do this," and yet, her vocalized concerns were not heard. "By the end it was just like, I had already started to job search. I had had a couple interviews. I knew, I gotta go. I cannot survive this anymore." Ultimately, Yvonne made a decision to leave the institution in order to preserve her sense of moral self.

Several women navigated similar situations to Yvonne, where they chose to leave an institution due to ethical concerns in their roles. Gloria, having worked at an institution for over 25 years, made the difficult decision to leave after speaking out against the difference in treatment between two student organizations. While each student

organization had a hazing death, the organization that was made up of Students of Color was suspended with several students expelled, while the predominantly white organization was allowed to write their own educational sanctions, and no one was held responsible for the death of their peer. Gloria was livid and named the discrepancy to institutional leadership, but ultimately shared that the president "took the power away from us." In considering how to move forward, Gloria decided that she had to share her disagreement with university leadership.

> I told my dean, I told the legal counsel, I said, "as a staff person of the university, I will do what the president tells us because this is my job. But I will tell you, I totally disagree with what we're doing. And I don't know, I don't think this is the right thing to do…" After that, I decided to leave the university… I said I can no longer stay here.

While Yvonne and Gloria's situations were painted as moral decisions that they made for themselves, their decisions were an extension of Sheri and Julia's stories. Sheri and Julia were indirectly told by supervisors that their competence and decision-making were inadequate. As a result, Sheri and Julia were forced to accept the hierarchical structures and power dynamics that made their jobs more difficult. Yvonne and Gloria were in similar situations, but made the decision to leave jobs and people that they cared about rather than accept the power dominance forced upon them. In each of these examples, the women's power and autonomy was stripped away, leaving them to question their own worth and value in their roles and within the institution. In essence, participants were presented the impossible decision: should I submit or quit?

Conflicting Messages of Competence and Value

Women in senior level student affairs roles described the struggle they experienced in understanding their professional competence and the value that they lent to their organizations, while also being told and internalizing the narrative that they had to work harder to be seen as equal to men in similar roles. This tension manifested in several ways. First, women described the ways that their intersecting identities contributed to intersectional oppression, specifically related to race, ethnicity, age, size, ability, and religion. Women spoke about the overt and subtle ways that they were treated by colleagues and supervisors that made them question the specific identities that were shaping those experiences – whether it was their gender, race, ability, etc., or all of those components of their selves together. This directly connected to the experiences women shared in fighting for the right to take up space**,** as women felt that they performed exceptionally while they also accepted lower-salaries than peers, avoided negotiating or seeking to have their needs met, and declined to pursue elevated roles, even when encouraged to apply. As women combatted the narratives of 'other' and 'less than' that were perpetuated through student affairs organizations, they also faced difficulty in challenging those dynamics. Women shoved up against normative hierarchy in seeing and observing gendered experiences and asked themselves how they contributed to that environment, essentially blaming themselves. As a result of these experiences, women shared their own questions and self-doubts in wondering whether they were competent in their roles after experiencing the challenges they faced, but kept moving forward in leading and challenging dynamics in the ways that were authentic to them.

Why Am I Being Treated This Way? Most participants shared the ways that having multiple minoritized identities contributed to the oppression they experienced as women. As the women described experiences, they also shared that they were often unable to disentangle their identities to pinpoint one as the reason that they were being treated in a particular manner rather than another. While overlapping oppression was most widely experienced around race and ethnicity, participants described experiences connected to their age, ability, and sexuality as well.

The most widespread form of intersectional oppression were described around race and ethnicity. As a first generation immigrant, Gloria described how common it was for her to have colleagues who made disparaging comments about members of the Latinx community to her. Gloria reacted, sharing her sentiments, "Doesn't he know that or doesn't she know that… I am one of those [people]?" Gloria continued by sharing that she experienced similar issues with colleagues talking about the sensitivity or passion of women and had realized "they don't see me as one. I am the exception." Gloria shared her understanding that people categorized others by boxes and did not put her "in that box", while still having to prove herself against the deficits that each of those boxes assumed. In navigating daily situations where she experienced intersectional oppression as a result of her gender and ethnicity, Gloria spoke about having to decide when to speak up against interpersonal aggressions. Gloria described the constant decision-making around whether or not to acknowledge the discrimination she faced, explaining:

> So what I have learned is to choose when do I speak up and not speak up… So I have my red lines… when somebody crosses that red line I will say something, and if they don't I make a decision. Do I address this with this person

> individually, one on one? And sometimes I do… but I will let some of them go. Because also that hurts you emotionally. If I'm jumping at every single thing and I'm thinking that everybody has ill intention when they say it, I mean I cannot take that because then I will live very frustrated and very bitter.

Though Gloria made decisions as to whether or not she wanted to spend the emotional energy confronting discriminatory statements, Erin expressed her willingness to engage in those conversations. Erin, who identified as Hispanic, shared that she was told by others that not every statement has a meaning, but disagreed. Erin explained, "everything means everything. Everything is a cause and effect … I just call it out when I see it… but I don't really call it any label because people can't learn if they have an aversion to that label." Erin shared that she does not identify as a feminist or any other politically-associated label, as she found that labeling her beliefs or responses to others limited the ways that people heard and understood her. While coming from different perspectives, both Gloria and Erin shared the ways that being put "in a box" by others based on their identities limited the ways they could effectively engage in conversations and build relationships with others.

Similarly, most Black women felt that they were ascribed a box based on assumed limitations associated with their race and gender. Shea described working in multicultural affairs early in her career and shared, "people on this campus came to see me as an African American female who could work with African… who could work with Students of Color. And I really wanted to diversify that." Shea described feeling as though she had been assigned a niche expertise, although she knew she was capable of supporting all students on campus. Shea explained:

> Every committee that you could imagine where they needed diversity… I was the person called upon to do that… I just thought I was helping people. I was like, oh sure, I can do that. And then somebody pulled me aside and they were like, "Shea, do you realize why you are being called on to do this?"

The tokenization that Shea experienced opened her eyes to the role of gender and race on campus and challenged her to consider the ways that she accepted or rejected those norms.

In understanding the boxes that others might put her into, Sheri described the responsibility she felt to reject some social norms and to role model her race and womanhood to faculty, staff, and students on her campus. Sheri described her rejection of "respectability politics" so that students did not feel that they had to present themselves in a particular way to be received by her. Sheri described her sense of responsibility to challenge norms:

> They need to be able to see people like me wear a head wrap from time to time. They need to hear me use vernacular that I used when I was growing up in spaces that have different types of people in them because that's authentically part of me and I am, I can be okay with saying "ain't" just as well as I can say other words too…. It took a long time for me to get to that because I was raised with that level of respectability politics to say I have to dress a certain way, I have to be a certain way, I have to act a certain way, I have to say these things in this particular way and switch code all the time back and forth. But now that I am in a particular role in this position of power, I feel in some ways it is my duty to be able to show all

> of it, my full range of myself. And so I don't think I'm compartmentalized in any way… my womanness versus my Blackness. They are interconnected.

Though race was a salient part of Sheri's identity, she used her Black womanhood to challenge the ways that leaders were assumed or expected to be on her campus in order to make room for others.

Contrary to the ways that Shea and Sheri described their experiences as Black women, Nancy shared that experiencing racism "just hasn't been my experience." Nancy attributed this perspective with the diverse, integrated communities in which she was raised and lived, as well as through her interracial marriage. Nancy also explained that much of her perspective was taught by her father, who served in the military during segregation and taught his children that racism was not bad as what it once was, which allowed Nancy not to focus on it. Nancy shared, "I refuse to carry the chip around… so when things happen, the first thing I do not think is 'oh my gosh, I've had this happen cause I'm Black.' My brain doesn't even go there." While Nancy has not felt that she experienced racism or discrimination based on her race and gender, she shared that she was presented with multiple opportunities to move into higher roles or presidencies outside of her current institution, which she attributed to the success she had as a Black woman.

As two participants earlier in their career than others, Lauren and Erin reflected on the ways that age played a role in their advancement, as well as the ways they internalized the messages that they were young. Lauren talked about feeling as though she was a "kid sister" in her first role. Lauren explained, "I wanted to be taken seriously. I wanted people to trust me and give me responsibilities… I was very young and it was a

good old boys culture. And there were fewer women in leadership roles." As Lauren advanced in her career, she realized that being younger than colleagues was part of her professional identity. She described, "for a while as a director, I was often the youngest director in the room." Lauren explained that age was something that she thought about often, but as she advanced into her current role she felt age less acutely. Lauren was very aware of her age within her early career, as she felt that it directly impacted the ways she was treated by others. Erin was also aware of her age in her career, but internalized the ways that might impact her success. In receiving a promotion, Erin reflected on the conversation she had with her supervisor. She asked,

> "Are you sure?"... I just felt like I'm too young to have this job title… I mean, "aren't you afraid that people are going to think you're crazy for… handing out weird job titles to 12 year olds that haven't earned their place?"

In doubting herself and communicating that to her supervisor, Erin undermined her own credibility for the promotion. Erin was fortunate to have a supervisor who served as a champion and role model for her and provided her with advancement opportunities, even before Erin realized that she was ready for them. Conversely, Nancy used age as a metric for one's readiness to serve in a senior-level role. Nancy explained, "having a few gray hairs doesn't hurt… I do think that there's sort of this expectation that you've got some level of seniority in terms of, you know, being able to get people to take you seriously." Though Nancy's perspective of age validated her own experience as she approached retirement within her vice president role, it could also serve as a barrier to women who sought to advance into mid or senior-level roles within her reporting structure, if they did not have the level of seniority Nancy considered valid.

In considering the ways gender and ability intersect, Julia reflected on managing her own needs with the ways others perceived her. Though Julia was diagnosed with a hearing impairment as a child, she did not feel that she needed hearing aids until a few years ago. While Julia thought she could manage her own needs without hearing aids, she realized the cost that was having on her. Julia acknowledged "the perception of 'oh, she's just ignoring us' or whatever, or not paying close enough attention… eventually I was like, okay, I gotta say something about this." While Julia thought that she could manage her own needs without assistance, she realized that others may misunderstand what was happening in a way that lessened her credibility. Julia shared that "I don't know that I can separate" gender and ability in her experiences, and having one aspect of her personhood lessen credibility in other aspects was no longer a risk she wanted to manage.

Yvonne reflected on the interconnectedness she experienced between her sexuality and gender. While Yvonne had explained that "I strongly identify as a woman," because of the interconnectedness of her gender and sexuality, she described her frustration in challenges she has experienced. Yvonne shared, "I've done a lot of LGBTQ advocacy work over the years with both professional organizations in my field, on campus, volunteer work… I find organizations that are LGBTQ focused to be very challenging. You can never be lesbian enough." Yvonne's frustration working within the LGBTQ community was also mirrored by experiences with people outside of the community. In a previous role, Yvonne described the environment as "a toxic cesspool. It was a bad, bad work environment," as her supervisor would make comments about people within the LGBTQIA community and shared her perspective that bisexuals were individuals who cannot decide their sexuality. Because Yvonne saw her gender and

sexuality as strongly connected, feeling as though she was not lesbian enough and hearing homophobic statements made by leaders led to her feeling insecure in her womanhood and unsafe in the work she was doing on her campus and beyond.

Throughout each woman's experience, it was clear that their womanhood was integrally connected to their race, ethnicity, sexuality, ability and age. Though participants tried to disentangle one identity from another, the interconnectedness was part of the power that they held or by which they were limited in those experiences. Also, participants felt as though others had put them "in a box" (Gloria) based on their identities and then made assumptions and judgements based on those boxes, often compounding the oppression they experienced.

The Right to Take Up Space. As a result of the messages that women received about who they were and were not, participants experienced deep-seeded questioning of their competence within their roles, despite knowing they were doing excellent work. Women described the manifestation of questioning through hyper-analysis of language and appearance, a desire to portray an image of perfection, a fear of delegation, and a pervasive doubt when presented with new or challenging situations. For each story that participants shared of their own success, they navigated doubt and negative self-talk throughout the experience, prior to meeting the demands of the situation.

One reason that women experienced doubt was because they were often one of few women at the table, so the norms of those experiences were dictated by men. As a team lead on an emergency operations committee, Lauren described how language shaped her confidence to serve in her role. Lauren explained,

> Most of the chiefs in the room are also men… So when I first got there and they said, "oh, you're going to be the chief of operations." I didn't say this out loud, but I thought, "can I just be the captain or the team leader?" It sounded so funny to me, but I don't think the men in the room cared about the language, you know?

Lauren's attention to language was centered on the masculine norms, as they made her feel like an outsider in a space that she was charged with leading. The masculine norms that shaped spaces extended beyond the titles people were given to the behaviors that manifested in various spaces.

Jennifer described a similar experience with a colleague in a meeting with her vice president's leadership team, where she served as one of three women alongside five men. Jennifer described a man in a peer position saying, "'I'll just go to Jennifer because she takes notes and I can just get them from her.' I said 'no… take your own notes.' I was sort of joking and sort of not." Because masculine norms defined the group that Jennifer was a part of, the statement of a colleague entitling himself to Jennifer's work was likely a reflection of those norms. Jennifer was then forced to choose whether to push back in front of all of her colleagues in that space. Jennifer's half-joke response illustrated the power dynamics of that room, as Jennifer needed to preserve her relationships with colleagues while she also set boundaries about expectations. Jennifer explained that the dynamic of this group had improved for women as she was no longer the only woman in that space. Jennifer explained, "it's nice now to have two other women and have their perspectives and bring their voice to that table." In having more women involved in the leadership team, Jennifer described the relief of no longer being the only perspective outside of the masculine norms of the group. Several participants discussed the ways that

women were able to build coalitions and support each other in cabinet and other leadership meetings, amplify women's voices, and shift the masculine culture and norms.

The interpersonal aggressions that women experienced, through multiple minoritized identities, underrepresentation, behavioral norms, and passive statements from colleagues caused women to have to fight a constant battle of questioning their validity as leaders. Jennifer struggled with the need to portray an image of perfection as a way to demonstrate competence in her role. Jennifer described herself as having the mindset, "that if you want it done well, you do it yourself… if it's done then I need to be okay with that and move on to the next thing on the table. So delegation… is that managing?" In considering the concept of delegation, Jennifer realized that delegation allowed her staff to grow their skills and experiences, which embodied the leadership approach she sought to practice. At the same time, Jennifer realized why delegation had been uncomfortable to her. Jennifer reflected, "I think I knew that in the back of my head, but I also let my guilt of… is it going to look like I can't handle my job?" Because of the narrative that Jennifer had learned about gender, she was forced to navigate conflicts between an external narrative and her personal inclinations of leadership.

The battle between competence and value was demonstrated by other participants as well. Yvonne shared her tendency to think about decisions she may have made after a situation resolved itself. Yvonne shared:

> I have a lot of confidence in my ability and I think that's a good thing. But there also are times when I am just like, "oh, did I make the right choice, go down the right path?"… I think my mantra is you make the best decision you can at a point in time with all the info you have.

While Yvonne had confidence in her ability to do her job well, she still doubted the decisions she made and considered what she may have done differently to produce a different outcome.

In transitioning into her role, Lauren shared that she was hired to be an excellent administrator and supervisor, but transitioned into a role overseeing functional areas in which she had no experience. Lauren explained that while she was still very confident about her strengths in supervision and administration, she also struggled with confidence in understanding the areas she oversaw. Lauren described,

> I've never quite been in this type of position before where I came in feeling like I really didn't know much. But then also recognizing the man that hired me needed me to be a strong supervisor and a strong administrator. So I am confident in those abilities. It's like right now finding the balance between the two and being humble and learning every single day.

While Lauren understood the strengths she was hired to utilize, she still doubted her competence because of her inexperience in the units she managed. Through these experiences, Jennifer, Yvonne, and Lauren all illustrated the ways that competence was directly linked to value. If the women were not constantly proving their competence and knowledge on all fronts, their internalized assumption was that they did not deserve their seat at the table. Even though space was made at the table for them, the participants doubted their worthiness of those seats, largely due to the masculine norms that they confronted every day.

The ways that women were forced to question their value in their roles was perpetuated in the ways they considered whether to pursue advanced job opportunities.

Despite feeling confident in the successes they accomplished, women spoke about the many ways that gendered hiring practices and internal narratives limited their career opportunities.

Earlier in their careers, defining moments pushed several participants to recognize the role that gender played in limiting advancement opportunities. As a young professional, Julia described an experience where she was serving in an interim role for a year and was then told that she was not qualified to apply for the permanent position, as she had not yet finished her master's degree. Julia found another job on campus and was then recruited back to the role after the hired individual did not work out. As she was given the position she had originally held in an interim capacity, she was told that she would not get the full benefits package typically associated with the role. Julia described,

> "You're going to be in this other classification because we have [name], and he needs to provide for his family. So he needs the insurance and you have [a husband] to provide that for you"… Then, I'm like, "I better just take whatever they offer, right? I don't want to cause waves and not be able to do what I'm wanting to do, right?"

Though this experience happened decades ago, Julia was frustrated that her classification was dependent on the needs of a man with whom she worked, rather than the objectivity of the positions as a whole. Julia also described that this experience was typical for the vice president at the time, and that she had several similar interactions with him.

In a similar situation, Jennifer made a decision to pursue a job outside of the institution she had been at for the entirety of her professional career and was a finalist for

a role at a prestigious institution. Jennifer shared that she was nervous to negotiate for the role, but was also confused when she got the offer. Jennifer explained:

> When they called to offer me, the salary was lower than the salary that was posted… The previous [person] was a man… and so I asked a question about why is this lower than what had been posted and lower than what I knew the previous [person] had made. And the HR person said "oh, it was an accidental oversight. The previous person had been an associate, but we decided to reduce this to an assistant. And so this is the salary we're offering you and we're not negotiating on that salary." And so I'm thinking… "just take it and be grateful." Right? But then in the other side of my head, I'm like, "how am I going to support my family on this?"

While Jennifer shared that she was not certain that the title and salary demotion were due to her gender, she saw gendered advancement opportunities at that institution which made her realize there was a positional limit available to women. In taking the role, Jennifer struggled with a feeling that she should be grateful for the opportunity to work at a selective institution, even though her intuition about the gendered nature of her offer became clearer as she worked there.

Shea also navigated self-doubt in pursuing an opportunity for advancement. Earlier in her career, Shea was encouraged to apply for a position in another unit at the university at which she worked. While Shea was excited for the role, she was offered the position and salary and said, "great and wonderful, but that's less than I'm making and I can't take the role for that." Rather than thinking about the power that Shea had in that situation, she assumed that she had to accept the lower pay or turn down the role. Shea

described the important lesson she learned from the hiring manager at the time, who helped Shea to understand how to have her needs met. Shea explained, "I'll never forget this woman saying to me… 'I felt you were a better negotiator than that.' Which then said to me, 'oh my God, I can negotiate. I can negotiate.'" For Shea, having a woman indirectly encourage her to advocate for herself empowered her to do so. Without that woman's encouragement, Shea likely would have turned down the role, which would have changed the trajectory of her career. She also spoke to the importance of that experience, as it instilled a passion to encourage women to consider their needs in a role rather than assuming their needs are not valid. Shea explained, "I think we undercut ourselves so often by not asking for what we want or need in order to do a role… we have to be, our voices have to be heard." In learning this lesson, Shea was able to advocate for herself and get the salary she needed in that position.

While Shea's experience was one of empowerment, Gloria experienced limitations that she attributed to her intersecting ethnicity and gender. At a previous institution, Gloria served as one of several assistant deans. The dean of students, who was a white woman, often gave additional responsibilities to the assistant deans when another staff member left, and Gloria observed that she was never tasked with interim responsibilities that would expand her knowledge and skill set. Gloria asked her supervisor for the opportunity to take on interim responsibilities and then watched as others were tapped for those roles. When Gloria was finally given interim responsibilities, she was told, "you can be the interim office manager. Everybody reports to that person working for the administrative assistants." Frustrated, Gloria shared, "what kind of experience is that?" Though Gloria had been given additional responsibilities, she

felt like it was not representative of what she was truly seeking: additional experience. Instead, her supervisor had sent Gloria a message about her value within the unit. Gloria reflected, “And at that point there was only an African American male and me in the leadership team. Everybody else was white… we say we value diversity. And yet when you can do something about it, people don't do it.” This experience made Gloria feel undervalued, though she had a track record of excellent performance on the campus, while also making her question how she could move into an advanced role when she could not get additional opportunity to grow her knowledge and skill set.

Experiences like these became embedded into the ways participants saw themselves within the organizations they led. Because of the constant ways women were forced to question their value within their organizations, despite proof of their competence, women doubted their abilities to move into higher level roles. Sheri described being asked to serve in the CSAO role after her predecessor moved into another position, as well as the certainty that she felt that she was not ready for the role. Sheri described:

> I didn't think one person could do it and I definitely didn't think I could do it cause I was new… and then after I talked to my mentor who supported me and said, “shut up, get over this and just go ahead and do it, they wouldn't offer this if they didn't think you could do it.” Then I kind of warmed up to the idea.

Without the support of mentors and her predecessor, Sheri would have missed the opportunity to grow into the position that she held. In reflecting on her first year in the CSAO role, Sheri explained that her perspective about the position shifted, and she realized that often, people “feel like you were put into this role because you are supposed

to already know what you're doing. No, that's not it at all, as student affairs is really complicated and really difficult and messy and it's rarely easy." Though Sheri initially struggled with the question about her readiness for the role and the expectation that she had to know what she was doing, she has since embraced that she was allowed to ask for help and that she had the capacity to lead through difficult times.

On the other hand, Nancy had turned down an opportunity to apply for the CSAO role at her institution, though she had been encouraged by multiple colleagues. Nancy described telling herself that in order to be a CSAO it should have been a career goal or something that she sought to do at a younger age. While Nancy had decided not to apply for the role at that time, she regretted it after having a vice president enter the position and make decisions that jeopardized the division's financial solvency. After that person left, the president asked Nancy to serve as an interim in the role. Nancy, having acknowledged her interest in the role after the former search and recognizing her power in the situation, negotiated to serve in the role for two years, upon which she would retire. Through this experience, Nancy felt like she was able to demonstrate her competence and change the culture of the division in a positive way at the end of her career. Nancy explained, "now I think we're in a place where I can hold my head up high and we can pass this division on to the next person and they can, they can be successful." To Nancy, it was meaningful to overcome the doubt that had prevented her from leading her division earlier in her career, and instead have that experience as the way she remembered her career as she moved into retirement.

While the examples of women navigating various spaces and roles ultimately contributed to their advancement into senior-level student affairs positions, the pervasive

culture of competence questioning played a significant barrier for participants. Additionally, these women represented success stories in the field. They persisted into leadership roles, despite the many challenges and setbacks that they faced. This begs the question, how many women have decided not to pursue advanced career opportunities due to similar genderized dynamics?

Shoving Up Against Normative Hierarchy. While all participants served in assistant, associate, or vice president roles, there was not a resounding attitude that women should aspire to serve in comparable positions. Participants shared the perspective that the role was often idealized and the challenges of the position were not well understood, while also acknowledging the many genderized ways that student affairs made it challenging for women to attain these positions.

While many graduate students and new professionals aspire to be vice presidents, participants questioned the necessity of that goal. Julia shared her reflection of hearing people say that they seek to be a CSAO, explaining:

> For some people, being a great director is where they're going to have the most impact… I think that people have misconceptions of… the fairy tale of what it is to be a VPSA. I don't know that everyone should just aspire to do that job.

As Julia reflected on her actual experiences within her role, the fairy tale perception that others held seemed to invalidate the very real successes and failures that she managed. By idealizing the role, the value of the women's work was minimized. Lauren, currently an assistant vice president, balked at the question when asked if she aspired to be a vice president. Lauren shared:

> I want to be an amazing AVP and it's going to take me awhile to feel really confident in my position… I have also seen people that I love and admire in that role and they're not necessarily people who love their lives. I love my life and I don't know that I want to compromise that. So right now I would say no, and I'm very comfortable saying that.

While Lauren had worked with and been mentored by successful vice presidents, she also saw the demands of that role and equated the aspiration to be a vice president with the loss of happiness. Gloria mirrored this sentiment when asked if she aspired to be a vice president. Gloria explained, "I could have applied right now… I made the decision. I didn't want to do that. I'm ambitious, but ambition doesn't mean only money… I want to also be happy. I also want to give to my family." Gloria also associated the role of vice president with the sacrifice of happiness and fulfillment outside of work, which was not something she was willing to sacrifice.

While participants reflected a fear of losing or sacrificing happiness as a result of moving into a vice president role, Shea provided a different perspective. Shea shared that her career had not been driven by a long term goal, and so she did not aspire to be a vice president, as her primary objective was more about learning and growing. Shea explained:

> That's just not been my trajectory. I didn't set out to be an associate vice president or vice provost… I'm happy with the work that I'm about to do, that I'm about to engage in, and look forward to making an impact and setting some really positive goals that we will achieve. But the next step in the career, no. Just not important to me.

Rather than aspiring for a title or position, Shea's aspirations centered in the work and impact of her role, as well as the fulfillment she finds in her current environment. For Shea, the title of her position was not the driving force of her career path.

Jennifer felt mixed emotions about pursuing a vice president role. Jennifer shared that she aspired to be a vice president but questioned the context in which she would do so. Jennifer explained:

> I like interacting with students and staff members, you know? And so I feel like if I'm in a vice president's role, depending on where that is and what size of institution it is, I can still, that can still be a priority…. You make time for things that are important to you. I don't want it to be in such a large institution that I have no interaction with students especially.

As Jennifer was working at a large institution, her assumption that serving in a vice president role at a similar institution would remove her from student and staff interaction likely signaled the culture and environment in which she worked. Even when women aspired to move into CSAO roles, they questioned whether to do so at the same institutional types that they had worked in to prepare themselves for the role.

The participants also observed the genderized climate of student affairs and the ways that the climate limited opportunities for women's advancement. Gloria summarized the culture of student affairs as being made for men. Gloria explained, "for all women… it's challenging because universities still are run by males, and if not by males, by a male culture... So even when they're run by women… there is still a culture that has been created by males." The masculine-centered culture made it challenging for women to navigate the unspoken assumptions and expectations to which they were held.

Many participants spoke about their frustration that men were often provided with advancement opportunities based on their potential, while women were accomplishing more without opportunities for advancement. Yvonne shared her awareness of the gender and racial imbalance of senior-level student affairs professionals:

> Even though you look at numbers and you say, wow, there's been so much positive change that there [are] more women, more People of Color in these executive roles. And yet they're saying overwhelmingly that they are not on a level playing field, that you do have to prove more, accomplish more, that kind of thing to get to even.

By masking the number of women and People of Color in the field as progress, Yvonne reflected that student affairs is not actually equitable in promoting women and/or People of Color into higher-level leadership roles. For women specifically, Julia shared that "women are almost required to have all the boxes checked to move to the top level where men are given a pass maybe on certain credentials because of their experience and the way they might present that experience." Julia described the unspoken requirement for women to have met all requirements for a role as one of the "collective systemic challenges" that we face. The danger of this "collective systemic challenge" is that it is an unspoken and unacknowledged barrier to women, which puts the burden on women to find ways to prove their expertise and qualifications as they seek advancement.

For women who were in senior-level roles, Sheri described the importance of authentically sharing their experiences with others in order to combat the cultural norms of student affairs. Sheri explained:

> People need to hear women's voices and the struggles that we have in these roles of leadership. Most think that it's innate in us that we're strong but it's more complicated than that and I think that's what's the most important thing is that people need to be able to unpack how we can support women in leadership… because of the many different ways we need to, "need to" keep it together, keep striving forward and have the expectation that we can spin all the plates and be expected not to cry when they break, but… we need more than that.

While women expressed that they were expected to meet all requirements of the position, they were also challenged to project unrealistic images of what it meant to be in those roles, which may serve as a barrier to other women considering senior-level jobs.

Another systematic barrier for women's advancement was illustrated by the penalties women faced for motherhood. Whether or not women were or wanted to be mothers, it was assumed that they would be absent for some portion of their role due to maternity leave or care for children. Jennifer, who had children still living at home, described the assumptions placed on women in their roles:

> I think that whether it's intentional or not, there is an underlying assumption that because you're a female, you're not going to be around for a while because you're going to go have a kid, you're going to come back, your mind's going to be elsewhere… But I honestly think until culture shifts, and that's not an invisible expectation that we women have to work harder. We have to work harder to prove our competence and to be heard in spaces that are often male dominated.

While Jennifer's experience was that motherhood was viewed as a deficit to the organization, the impact of that was for her to work harder to prove her competence and

perpetuate images of perfection, similar to Sheri's observations about gendered expectations.

Lauren, who did not have children, shared a story of a time that a rumor spread that she was gay because she was not a mother. Lauren felt it was a strange way to try and paint her in a negative light, while she recognized the impact that may have had on herself and other women. Lauren also managed questions from others, framed from the perspective that she was not normal for not having children. Lauren described, "sometimes people have asked me literally, 'what's wrong with you? You don't want children?' Because for some, it's not a choice. Some bodies cannot have children… I'm very mindful of how I respond to those questions." Lauren was both expected to have children by others, and was directly othered for not having any. Regardless of whether women had children or not, they were held to the expectations of motherhood and were penalized for the possible or actual reality of managing parenting with work. The punishment of assumed motherhood was directly representative of genderization in student affairs, as it reinforced the notion that women were a burden to the organization because they might elect to have families.

Though women were penalized for motherhood through the culture of their organizations, other women contributed to this mentality. Gloria contributed to the narrative that for women, family must come first, and that success in one's job was often at the expense of family. Gloria explained the ways that the culture of student affairs impacted her generation of women in higher education, by describing the sacrifices that many of her peers made in prioritizing their careers over their families. Gloria described the struggle of the "trailblazers" who moved into senior-level roles, sharing, "they had to

behave like the ones on top of them to be successful, so I think they lost a lot…The culture changed them." Gloria's reflections on the sacrifices women made, both personally and professionally, represented the many challenges women described in navigating their career progression.

In order to successfully transition into senior-level leadership roles, women had to choose between assimilating to the masculine norms of their divisions and risking their careers. While participants spoke of this experience being one of the past, they also shared very specific current examples of women's advancement being limited because of the assumptions made about their gender.

Overtasked and Alone

Women shared the many struggles that they faced in their roles, including the volume of work they were tasked with managing and the sense of isolation they had in their positions. Because of these factors, women doubted or disagreed that they wanted to move into a vice president role. To combat feelings of isolation, women established their own support systems outside of their divisions, at other institutions, and within professional organizations.

What Makes Me Worthy? A challenge of the work women performed in senior-level roles was the sheer scope and demand of their positions. For those at the assistant or associate vice president level, women shared that they were responsible for two levels of function, often having two job titles to represent the two separate hats that they wore within one position. An example of this would be a person serving as an associate vice president and dean of students. Across participants, women described directly supervising as many as twelve functional areas, across functions such as housing and residence life,

student conduct, student emergency response, fraternity and sorority programs, disability services, student government, ombuds person, student centers, identity centers, health and wellness, orientation and transition programs, veteran services, and many others. A few participants also served in Title IX coordinator or deputy coordinator capacities as well. For the women in these roles, the functional areas that they oversaw represented only a small portion of their responsibilities. Participants described the strategic planning, divisional assessment, crisis response, institutional committees, supervision, national projects, grant work, and student needs that they managed on a daily basis.

Jennifer described the toll that having two roles had on her. Jennifer remarked, "I have two jobs and I don't know that I can continue to do both without some kind of split in my responsibilities because it is emotionally and physically taxing and exhausting… it's not reasonable." Sheri described that she almost turned down her current role, as they had reorganized the position to encompass both the CSAO and dean of students positions. As Sheri had come to understand her two positions in one, she explained:

> They do overlap in really uncomfortable ways sometimes… when I am in those higher level positions. I'm sitting in the president's cabinet or when I'm sitting with the academic council, the folks who are in that room generally have no idea what students experience… so having to elevate the dean of students part of the role into that landscape is not something I always usually have to do.

Sheri described the need to compartmentalize her two roles as much as possible in order to understand the focus of her work in a given moment, but that there were times that she wore both hats at once, making her job incredibly challenging.

In order to successfully navigate the demands of dual roles, Jennifer described having to consider "what's on fire the most" and communicated with her supervisor about what would or would not get done based on the circumstances that arose every day to disrupt her calendar. Shea described that "I thought I needed to touch it," early in her role, meaning she thought that she had to do everything herself. Later in her career, Shea described that she had "learned how to delegate. I've learned to listen better." Shea described her approach of bringing together her direct reports to collaboratively solve problems so that she did not have to take things on herself. Participants described the perspective that there was no clean or easy way to navigate such a large scope of responsibilities, but that doing so was a constant practice for their success.

While the demands of those in dual-titled roles were significant, all participants spoke about the ways that they attempted to make space for their personal and professional lives. While this concept is often referred to as finding 'balance,' none of the participants used that term to describe how they managed competing demands within their personal and professional lives. Julia rejected the notion of balance, sharing:

> This is what I've signed up for, right? I know that it's a 24/7… I never go to sleep without my cell phone on next to my bed… I don't think there's any truth to work life balance… nothing's ever balanced, right? You just do what you can do.

Julia's description illustrated a resignation that balance was unachievable, and instead she approached competing demands by doing the best she could at a given time.

Jennifer rejected the notion of work life balance through an example of all aspects of her life colliding at once. Jennifer illustrated:

> So there is not… a day where all three of my worlds don't intersect, weekends included… I don't believe in work life balance for me. I believe in work life integration. And so I try to manage the intersection of those things… bringing my family to events on campus where I need to be seen… but also don't want to leave them behind and not spend time with them.

By focusing on integration, Jennifer attempted to satisfy all of the demands in her life, while also expressing frustration that she never had a break or was able to truly focus on the thing with which she needed to spend time.

While participants like Jennifer triaged the demands of their work and personal lives, others used compartmentalization as a tool. Shea described, "it's important to me that I give [university] all of me during the week, but on the weekend I really take care of myself… It's important that I take care of me in order to take care of others." By separating her work and life needs, Shea found a way to ensure that both the needs of her role and her life were met. Sheri similarly described her need to compartmentalize her personal and professional time, explaining, "it's just easier to be able to check lists and make sure that those items are getting taken care of separately." Since working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, Sheri explained that it was important to her to separate her personal space and work space. Sheri described her approach of having a separate computer, work space, and time that she worked at home, so that when she was able to shift into her personal space she was not bringing the work with it.

A final theme in navigating competing demands was evidenced by Gloria and Yvonne, who approached their whole lives with considerations of long-term goals and outcomes. Yvonne described making a decision to accept a new position after two

decades at her previous institution. While the role was not ideal for her, it positioned her in the same geographical location as her wife. Yvonne explained, “we could live together. We had just gotten married. So like, you know, you make choices based on all of your life, not just your career.” Yvonne described that by centering her long-term goals, she was able to navigate the short-term decisions or sacrifices that may have led to her desired long-term outcomes. Similarly, Gloria prioritized long-term goals in navigating career demands:

> When my kids were young, I didn't want to be in a career track… it was hard because I’d have to be pulling myself down… But then as my kids were growing, then I was getting more and more and more. And now I work as much as I want to. And I tell them now is my time. And I did excel in my career.

In prioritizing her family through the earlier portion and advancement through the latter portion of her career, Gloria felt that she was able to navigate work and life responsibilities in a way that satisfied her own goals and values.

Finally, Julia described the responsibility she felt to role model healthy approaches to work and life management to staff within her division, which she referred to as “a healthy professional life.” Julia shared that she did not call staff over nights or weekends if not essential and tried to focus her requests during business hours to support the lives staff had beyond work. Julia explained, “they should have lives outside of our work. So that means getting time to be a spouse, a partner, a parent… Those are all very important things in our, in our lives and it's not just about our work.” In experiencing stresses and conflicts of navigating work and life demands herself, Julia aligned her

practices with her experience so that she was not forcing staff to have to unnecessarily navigate competing demands as she had to through her career.

The concept of work-life balance was not described or experienced by participants. Instead, participants described integration, compartmentalization, and trade-offs in order to ensure all demands were fulfilled. Though there was not one specific approach participants used to manage these demands, the pervasive presence of conflicting demands on their time was an experience that all described.

Alone Together. While women described the challenges of their roles, often associated with the weight of managing complex emotional situations while combatting genderized organizational norms, a shared sense of loneliness exacerbated these issues. Gloria reflected, “I was not the one in the job that [has] many friends. So I’ve been pretty lonely, to be honest with you.” Gloria also shared that this loneliness was magnified through the absence of a mentor, as she did not have anyone at her level or above her with whom she could talk about challenging situations. In reflecting on her role as vice president, Julia described, “it can be very isolating. I think people aren’t prepared for how isolating it can be.” While Julia described that she would share information at times with her direct reports, she was not always able to be transparent, resulting in feelings of isolation. In considering her loneliness, Jennifer explained, “it is lonely being the dean of students… Many of [the other AVPs] are focused on one particular area. And because of the role of the work that I do, I get pulled everywhere. And that's very exhausting.” Because the nature of her role was inherently different from her peers and colleagues, Jennifer’s experiences were in isolation.

Though there was a resonating sense of isolation for participants within their roles, many spoke to the critical role that support from other women played in contributing to their successes. At their institutions, women were able to connect with women in other divisions in meaningful ways. Yvonne reflected on the developmental experience she had in a former role, where she served on the president's committee on the status of women. Yvonne described the experience:

> There were a lot of late career, very established women… and I think for me in part, I found my voice there… I was early career, but I wasn't afraid to say what, what about lesbians? What about bisexual women?... Then I became chair, co-chair with a faculty… so I was able to find a place where I could be a leader as a woman and really feel that support from people who were much more senior than I was.

Through her involvement on that committee, Yvonne was able to find her voice, advocate for the LGBT community, and find a supportive network of women. Lauren also described the importance of similar groups, as she served on the commission for women at her institution. Lauren explained, "we are able to put forth proposals that the president and the senior cabinet consider and it makes a difference." While the opportunity allowed Lauren to develop connections with other women on campus, it also allowed her to drive broad change for women.

Jennifer and Julia both described the relationships that they developed on campus that provided them opportunities to authentically share their experiences. Jennifer described a colleague that she knew during graduate school and had worked with at the institution for years as someone who served as a confidante. She also shared that she

tapped several staff members across the institution based on their expertise to help her process the demands of her role.

Julia talked about her relationship with the chief equity officer on her campus, who became a friend and confidante outside of work. Julia shared that they used their friendship to address issues of inequity on their campus, “because especially the white men in that space are very traditional older white men who kind of shrug off everything diversity and inclusion.” Julia felt that her friendship with the chief equity officer allowed her to better practice equity within her job as well.

Sheri also described the ways that a woman with more senior-level experience created space for her at cabinet meetings. Sheri showcased the approach:

> So she says, “I'm going to give you a moment to get back to that, but I really need to make this point.” And then she'll make the point, or if any of the rest of us are interrupted, she will say, “I thought I heard such and such speaking, let's hear what she has to say.” So she has this, a power already in being a dean of a hard science that makes it easier for the rest of the deans to respect and listen to her.
>
> And I appreciate the fact that she does make so much space for the rest of us.

Having another woman at the table use her voice to amplify Sheri’s was a powerful tool as Sheri came to understand her new position and learn the dynamics of spaces on campus.

For Shea, she was able to find connection and validation through external organizations. Shea explained:

> I've also been involved with a number of women organizations because it's not about always giving back. It's also about learning… That encouragement from

> women, that ability for a woman to hear and to express their concern for you as an individual, concern for you as a professional, to pull you aside and say, "I just want you to be aware of this." For them to be able to sit with you and give you wisdom because they've traveled the road before. That has been very positive.

For Shea, sharing space with women allowed her to be empowered, learn, and find community. She described the power that came from sharing space as a way for her to find her own power. Shea also described similarly meaningful experiences through the American Council on Education (ACE) and Higher Education Resource Services (HERS), developmental experiences specifically designed for women in higher education.

Sheri described her "care team," who included a therapist, executive coach, professor, and personal support. Sheri explained that a therapist helped her to "listen to you whine and complain and moan and then also get over yourself and then fix the issues internally." Her executive coach assisted her in "building a plan" for next steps, while her professor was a metaphorical title for someone who helped her to find resources and knowledge to solve issues. Finally, Sheri's personal supports were people who were not connected to her work, who allowed her to disconnect from the demands of her role. Sheri explained, "I have built this care team to help me be better at being me," as an act of taking care of herself so that she could succeed in her role.

Finally, participants spoke about the value that mentors played in supporting their needs and experiences. Early in Nancy's career, when she was serving in an administrative assistant role, the vice president called her to understand her educational background. Nancy continued, "I told her that I had gone to college for two years… she

said… I'm gonna encourage you to think about going back to school because… you don't want doors arbitrarily closed because you don't have the credentials." Nancy shared that she did not know what prompted the vice president to call and push her to go back to school, but reflected, "she must have seen something." To Nancy, the attention and action of that woman was significant in impacting her future in the field. Nancy shared that the moment was also significant as it connected the two women, who were still friends in retirement.

Erin, who was pregnant with her first child during the study, described the importance of her supervisor's support for her whole life. Erin shared one meaningful experience:

> My dad had open heart surgery and she was like, "is there something else you can just do? Take care of what you need to do this Saturday? Can you just leave? Can you just leave my office now and get on the road? Like what's stopping you?"

To Erin, watching her supervisor successfully navigate a vice presidency while also prioritizing others' needs played an important role as Erin considered how she would manage her work and personal demands as she approached maternity leave and motherhood.

While some participants shared important connections with mentors, the absence of a mentor in Gloria's career contributed to her feelings of isolation. Gloria explained that she had asked a former supervisor to mentor her, while she was at a critical point in her career trajectory. The woman agreed, but then never followed through on the promise. Gloria reflected, "it was obvious [she] mentored other people, two other women to be honest…. They were two white women." Gloria shared that she then felt as though

she had to find her own strategies and opportunities for development. Later, a new woman became Gloria's supervisor and tried to help Gloria with her professional growth. Gloria described, "to be honest with you… when I needed a mentor the most, that time was gone… I'm very thankful to her because she extended more [of] my portfolio," but the experience did not make up for the absence of a mentor Gloria had felt at a time she needed one.

While the roles in which women served were isolating, the networks that they created to support themselves, contribute to the profession, find empowerment, and be well allowed them to sustain in their roles. In reflecting on the need of support, Lauren shared "I'll just say that we can't do it by ourselves or we shouldn't do it by ourselves. And there are people in our lives that care about our success deeply." Without networks of support and encouragement, there would be no counter narrative to the women's reflections of isolation.

Genderization

While the phrase genderization is new in the higher education landscape, the experience of genderization was not new to participants. Genderization, as defined within this study, is the dichotomization of systems, structures, functions, and power based within a man-woman gender binary. In essence, genderization exists to perpetuate the acquisition and maintenance of dominant power over women and is enacted individually as well as within systems. In student affairs, genderization has promoted traditionally masculine organizational norms, forced women to submit to authority figures, encouraged women to be grateful for what they were given, and penalized women for defying normative behavior. While participants shared overt examples of genderization,

the pervasive internalization of genderization shaped women's perceptions of themselves, their work, and other women.

When the System Pushes You Down. For women in senior-level roles, there was an acknowledgement that university communities had sparse representation of women in high-ranking roles. Whether reflecting on each participants' division or institution, all could specify the small fraction of women that made up their peer group. Sheri made this observation, describing, "higher education as a field… is pretty woman heavy, right? And at the same time, the rooms that I'm in are not the same anymore. So they are very male driven, male heavy." Though women were well represented in student affairs, women in senior-level roles were still the exception rather than the norm.

While many of the gendered norms that made it challenging for women to advance were subtle interpersonal aggressions, several participants experienced blatant genderization and overt discrimination within their careers. Yvonne shared the nature of student affairs early in her career through the messages she was told about women's roles in housing programs. Yvonne shared that as she began to advance in the field, she learned, "only men can run housing programs. You didn't see women who were directors, either a director or on the business side of housing." As Yvonne considered the goals she had for herself in her career, she reflected that she was not sure that she would be able to serve in the role she aspired to because of that acknowledged ceiling.

Similarly, Nancy came up through housing, though not in the residence life functional area, and ran into the ceiling that Yvonne described. Upon the retirement of a director, Nancy applied for the director role and was not given an interview for the position. She reflected that after a few months in the position, the new director said to

her, “Nancy, I do not know why they hired me for this job. It's obvious that you are the one [who] has been running this department for all.” Nancy shared that she could have been bitter as a result of that comment, as she had applied and had not gotten an interview for the position, but instead worked with her new supervisor to identify opportunities for her to grow within her current role. When he left the institution several years later, Nancy was hired for the role. Though her supervisor’s comment was intended to be supportive, it illustrated the genderization that Nancy experienced, as she was doing the work of running the department without the title, compensation, or career trajectory associated with the director title.

Erin provided a specific experience with a colleague who had reached out to ask a favor from her, starting the communication with, “now Dr. Erin don't get huffy puffy, but I need...” Erin reflected that she immediately recognized this as a power move by her colleague, as he had a dominant personality and expected to get his way. By introducing his request with this line, Erin felt like he was being strategically dominant. Erin shared her response to him:

> I said… I do not appreciate… the preemptive words of “now don't get huffy puffy…” I don't think that you would have asked Dr. [man], “now don't get huffy puffy, would you?... Because I have never been huffy puffy with you. I have only been objective and straightforward.”

Erin’s frustration with this experience was centered in the assumption of Erin’s submission to his request, as well as her colleague’s assumption that she would not push back on the dominant nature of the message.

For Julia, a sexual assault played a significant role in her career path. Julia explained working at a high-level university event many years ago, and explained the experience, “a board of trustee member actually physically grabbed me…. Literally grabbed my rear end with both hands, and that person was drunk. Didn’t happen in front of other people, but I did report it. Of course, nothing happened.” As a result of the assault, Julia described that her behavior at university events changed. Julia shared that “in social situations I am extremely professional… distance myself a little bit. I don’t drink in social situations where there’s a mixture of people with the board or anything… I also am very cognizant.” The assault that Julia experienced and reported literally shifted her approach in environments that she navigated often within her role. The genderization of this experience reinforced the necessity for Julia to submit to a man and placed a direct burden onto Julia to avoid a similar situation, rather than addressing or correcting the behavior that occurred with the offending individual.

Sheri and Jennifer both spoke to the toxic nature of men that they reported to as a manifestation of genderization. Sheri described her former supervisor, sharing:

> In many ways he was a great mentor and at the same time he was a great example of what not to do, but because he was misogynistic and sexist and inappropriate… he had some ability to make people really loyal to him and it proved to me that you can do things in the wrong way but for the right reasons and that I don't have to be that way.

To Sheri, her supervisor’s behavior was accepted because of his ability to make others loyal to him and mentor those around him. Sheri also described his practices as “making people icky” around him, and saw a significant values conflict between the means and

ends of his work. Sheri recognized that she would be held to different expectations, by others as well as herself, and that she would face different consequences if she embodied his behaviors.

Similarly, Jennifer reflected on a former supervisor who she described as "very patriarchal" in his approach. She explained that his attitude was "a do as I say, don't question me, don't speak until spoken to," dominating approach that seemed intended to reinforce power hierarchies. Jennifer continued, "I never really thought it was because I was a woman. It was just because I thought he was an asshole, you know? But as I reflect… I wonder, did he treat other women that way?" As Jennifer reflected on this supervisor, she realized that she did not think that he supervised men from a "don't speak until spoken to" perspective. Again, the dominant approach of the man in this role reflected the systemic ways that women were expected to submit and act within their normative place, rather than challenging norms or daring to work outside of their specified scope.

Across all of these examples, genderization relied on the dismissal of behaviors and attitudes as personal attributes or characteristics, rather than naming them as individual actions that perpetuated the systemic differences in expectation for and oppression of women. However, for participants, each of those individual actions resonated through the women's careers, shaping the ways that they understood themselves within their roles. In looking at the aggregated impact of these stories, it became clear that genderization exists to continue to support and promote men in positions of power, while forcing women to accept and submit to their prescribed roles.

Internalizing the Narrative. The concept of genderization became increasingly clear as participants shared stories of inequity in expectation and experience. Though the women identified experiences where they were treated unfairly, most did not identify the ways in which they had internalized the narratives of genderization in ways that directly influenced their own opinions, decisions, and actions. The pervasiveness of genderization became a central narrative of the study, even when women did not realize that they had experienced the phenomenon. In order to illuminate the impact of genderization on and for women in senior-level student affairs roles, this section highlights the ways that women have internalized genderized narratives through the words of each participant.

Sheri. For Sheri, the experiences of genderization and the intersection of gender and race prompted her to internalize perpetual self-doubt. Though Sheri developed skills to manage her doubt, she described the role that the imposter syndrome played in her professional experience and how she managed it:

> I doubt myself all the time. I suffer from imposter-syndrome. I have all my life, but obviously that hasn't stopped me… I'm better at it than I used to be because I used to say all the time that, "Oh, you know, I'm just lucky. Right time, right place." You know, that kind of stuff. It wasn't about my abilities or wasn't about my drive or the hard work that I put into things… My current therapist had me list… the top 10 things I'm most proud of… I listed all those different things out and then in our next session, she said, "so… were any of those luck?" And I said, "no, I work really hard for every single one of those things…"

For Sheri, the experiences she navigated through her career advancement played a significant role in shaping her understandings of herself within student affairs. As a new

professional, having her decision to fire a student reversed was one that filled Sheri with shame and a sense of failure. While there was nothing that she could have done to change the circumstances, and though her supervisor did not provide her with space to talk about the situation, Sheri still internalized that the outcome of the situation was her responsibility. Having this experience at a formative time of her career, Sheri received the message that her competence and value were not respected by her supervisor or organization. This narrative then resonated through Sheri's understandings of herself as she continued to advance her career. Sheri's formative experience with genderization prompted her to have self-doubt as she was presented with opportunities for advancement.

Sheri was the only participant who spoke candidly about the role that therapy played in helping her to navigate internalized messages. Though Sheri still experienced doubt and imposter feelings when making difficult decisions, therapy provided Sheri the tools to combat that narrative and take credit for her work. Sheri's connection to therapy allowed her to actively work against the messages that she had learned about her value within the profession.

Erin. As Erin shared past experiences that had shaped her work within student affairs, she reflected that her parents provided her with a foundation to succeed in her career. Erin attributed her confidence to the messages that she received from her father growing up, and the ways that she saw her parents navigate their own relationship. Erin also described her approach as straight forward, and acknowledged that she directly addressed people who made assumptions or treated her in a stereotypically gendered way. Though Erin prided herself on her confidence and approach, Erin experienced

genderization in the ways that she understood women who exhibited more traditional gender norms. Erin explained:

> I don't have time for you. If you don't think that you have the ability to be in this room or the ability to speak up, it's hard for me to send super downwards to be that confidence coach to other women. Which is hard to say because I try, but there's some people who are like very hung up on their emotions and their demons… I can't bring you from, "I… think I'm worthless" all the way to… make you a director of a unit or be able to stand up for yourself.

Because Erin understood womanhood in her role to mean that she needed to stand her ground with colleagues who tried to force her to submit, she internalized the narrative that other women must do the same in order to succeed. Through that narrative, Erin expressed frustration with women who were not as confident or assertive as she was, and shared that she did not have the energy to help someone advance in those skills. As she described these women as "very hung up on their emotions and their demons," Erin rejected the narrative of staff as whole people and closed herself off from mentoring those for whom the experience may benefit most. Erin's narrative of what women must embody in order to advance in their careers was directly reflective of the genderization that promotes masculine leadership characteristics, dismisses vulnerability and emotion, and encourages the isolation of women in power.

Yvonne. While Yvonne reflected about her experiences within student affairs, she was both frustrated and motivated by the ceiling that she observed for women to advance as housing directors. In challenging that narrative, Yvonne also recognized that she observed both women and People of Color having to work harder and do more than

expected in their roles in order to advance. Though Yvonne recognized that this dynamic was a frustrating double standard embedded within the field, she did not recognize that she had internalized this message of genderization as well. In providing advice to women seeking to serve in senior-level roles, Yvonne shared her perspective:

> What I look for in people is you go outside of your job description, you volunteer for things, you're part of a project. You know, I work with a lot of people who worry about, "I'm doing more than him…" in my head it's like, "I don't care." You need to benchmark against you, right?... That's going to help you get to that level that you want to go to. If your baseline is… "I couldn't possibly do this thing in the job description," that says something. You know what, I give a different reference for those people than I do for the, "oh me… I want to do [that]".

In describing the comparative ways that women evaluate their work with those of colleagues, Yvonne dismissed the reality of genderization that women have to meet higher standards for their work loads in order to advance to higher-level roles. By discouraging women from naming that standards are different and asking to be fairly compensated for them, Yvonne had internalized the narrative that women have and must be expected to do more to advance.

Gloria. Because Gloria experienced significant, intersecting challenges as a first generation immigrant woman as she established her career, Gloria reflected on the significant progress she saw both within the field of student affairs and for her professional path. Gloria shared her perspective on progress within the field:

> I always tell people we have gotten a lot better, although sometimes we seem like we haven't. I think progress has been made… and I [am] thankful for that. I can

> see progress. Some of my younger people get frustrated because they say "no, there's a lot of discrimination." Yes there is, but it's half of what it used to be, you know… It's not going to disappear overnight.

As Gloria reflected that there was less discrimination in the field, she also perpetuated the idea that women should be grateful that the field is not as bad as it once was. While progress is important, Gloria internalized the narrative that women should be grateful for what they have and are given rather than naming and challenging oppressive power structures. Though Gloria did not specifically name examples, this form of genderization can lead to women accepting lower salaries or titles as Jennifer and Julia did or doubting one's ability to advance to a higher role as Sheri and Nancy did. By framing women's status in students affairs as compared to how it once was, genderization tasks women with accepting an improved state rather than acknowledging further progress exists and advocating for change.

Jennifer. As Jennifer reflected on the climate for women in student affairs, she described the ways that the field was welcoming to women based on the numbers represented in senior-level roles. As Jennifer described her understanding of why women were better represented in student affairs leadership roles, she began to explore the nuance of genderization in the field. Jennifer articulated:

> I will say now there are, there are eight staff members on our vice president's senior team. Three of us are women. For a while I was the only woman at that table… it's nice now to have two other women and have their perspectives and bring their voice to that table… I don't sense that there is an air of discrimination. I think there's an air of… "they can get more work done…" I think that whether

> it's intentional or not, there is an underlying assumption that because you're a female, you're not going to be around for a while because you're going to go have a kid, you're going to come back, your mind's going to be elsewhere. You're not going to be dedicated or focused. And so, I think I overcompensate for a lot of those things to the detriment of my personal and, you know, family life at times. But I honestly think until culture shifts, and that's not, an invisible expectation that we women have to work harder. We have to work harder to prove our competence and to be heard in spaces that are often male dominated.

While Jennifer's initial descriptions about the climate for women in student affairs were positive, she continued to reflect on the messages that inform the climate and shifted her description. Jennifer reflected that women not only demonstrated their ability to manage demanding workloads, but that they were also given more work because of that competence. Additionally, Jennifer shared that a justification of tasking women with more was due to an assumption that women would be out to care for children or family for a point in their career. Jennifer connected those two sentiments realizing that the need for women to work harder was directly connected to the need to prove competence due to an assumption of parenthood, whether or not a woman chose to be a parent. Jennifer internalized the narrative of genderization as she struggled to reconcile the times that she felt that she prioritized work over her family as a manifestation of doubt about her competence.

Nancy. As Nancy reflected on her experience as a senior-level student affairs professional, she considered the ways that women presented themselves as critical to how they are received by colleagues. Nancy specified this around attire at professional

conferences, and expanded as she considered the ways that women responded to situations at work. For Nancy, her unemotional demeanor contributed to her reputation and success. Nancy shared her perspective:

> I try to stay away from the things that maybe women get a bad rap about. So things like gossip, things like being overly emotional. You know, I don't scream, I don't cry… it's a work environment and we may not like it, but… I work at a public university… So we made this choice to work within this environment. And as long as you're being, you're not being abused in any way or anything like that, I think it's okay for you to kind of step up to the norm of the place. And I don't think you lose yourself in doing that.

As Nancy shared her avoidance of things that women "get a bad rap about," she associated emotions with the theater, implying that expressing emotions was a dramatic act. Nancy's willingness to act within the norms of the organization demonstrated her internalized narrative of genderization by believing that emotions were inherently dramatic, and that the appropriate approach for any professional was one rooted in traditionally masculine dynamics such as objectivity and directness. Though Nancy shared experiences of being stigmatized for coming up in the field through an administrative support role, she did not recognize the ways that the masculine norms of her organization created the culture that placed value of some roles over others.

Lauren. As Lauren spoke about her career in student affairs, she discussed confidence in her ability to be a strong administrator and compassionate supervisor. Lauren articulated the relationships that she had cultivated with mentors who saw her potential and challenged her to explore a higher level leadership role. Though Lauren had

significant experience and support, she battled a feeling that she may not be received as intelligent by others. Lauren shared her intention when engaging with others:

> Especially with audiences that I don't know as much… I am more mindful about the words that come out of my mouth… there's more intention… Maybe the relationship isn't as strong and so I want to make sure that people know that I'm intelligent… I want that layer of people to know that I deserve to be in the position that I'm in and that I can be really helpful.

As Lauren shared that she wanted others to know that she deserved to be in her role, she was asked if she thought that others assumed she may not be intelligent or deserving of her role. Lauren responded:

> Maybe that I'm not *as*, like "she's smart but maybe not *as* smart" or I don't know. I just want to help ensure that they recognize that I'm there for a reason and that I can be a really good resource and an advocate. I feel like I sometimes need to prove myself a little bit more.

Though Lauren described her successes and strengths without question, she combatted a feeling that the expectation others had for her would be that she was not intelligent or capable of her job. Early in her career, Lauren shared the experience of being treated like the "kid sister" by her supervisor and colleagues, making her conscious of her age as compared to others. Because of this experience, Lauren internalized the narrative of genderization that she was not intelligent enough or experienced enough for the level of role that she held. By being treated as though she was not old enough for a role early in her career, Lauren internalized that her competence would be questioned for serving in a role at any level, especially if she appeared to be younger than colleagues.

Shea. While Shea reflected on her career, she shared that the hardest decisions she had to make were related to terminating staff. Though Shea described how much time was consumed by managing personnel issues, she shared that they were important to managing her team, as they allowed her to understand her staff as people. Additionally, Shea explained her thought process as she navigated terminations:

> When you know that you've got to move someone to a termination that's pretty difficult. Personnel issues are issues that consume so much of your time at this level… Personnel issues are real… I know my team well and just the idea of terminating someone, understanding that they don't have employment, that they will not be able to pay bills… and then I think another part of it is… taking on ownership when I shouldn't… What could I have done to prevent this from happening?... Did I invest enough in this employee? Did I listen to the warning signals? Were there warning signals?

Shea described the importance of knowing her staff and understanding their lives, which made it harder when she had to terminate employees. In addition to knowing the impact termination would have on staff in finding employment or providing for their families, Shea described her own sense of responsibility for the person, questioning whether she had done enough to prevent the termination from happening. While Shea described the caretaker dynamic demonstrated by many participants, this dynamic encouraged Shea to feel responsible for another adult's decisions. Shea internalized the genderization narrative by demonstrating empathy for others and having that empathy lead to blaming herself. While Shea did not explain that she felt failure when having to fire staff, the questions she asked herself alluded to the narrative that somehow she had fallen short as

a supervisor because she was not able to see and prevent the termination from happening. Shea's experience illustrated the genderization that occurs as women are expected to serve as caretakers for campus communities and then internalize the failures of others as their own.

Julia. After Julia's sexual assault at a work event, her interactions at work events changed. Though Julia shared that the assault happened before Title IX offices existed on campuses and while she was serving in another position, she was frustrated that no action was taken and there was no outcome for the perpetrator. Because of that incident, Julia felt that she should be aware of gender issues and women's issues. Julia described her reaction to a bias test:

> It's interesting, I took the Harvard implicit bias test and I was totally disturbed when my gender bias came back really high. And so I had a lot of conversations with a couple of my colleagues that are good friends, one being the chief diversity officer. She and I have had a lot of conversations about, "Oh my God, like this horrifies me, that I have these issues myself, being a woman…" You would think that… I should not have any implicit bias in regards to gender, but I totally do.

Though Julia described her assault as a critical moment in her career, she thought that she had learned more about bias against women as a result. In recognizing that her own behavior had changed but her bias had not, Julia was surprised to realize that she was continuing to learn and grow to combat gender bias. Julia had internalized the genderization narrative that no matter what actions she took, she was not safe at work. In sharing details of the assault, Julia recognized that she had done nothing wrong and had no control over the man's actions, and yet, without any action taken by the university

after the event, she learned that she had to protect herself through her own actions. She changed her behavior, was "very cognizant" of her surroundings, and acted professionally to meet the norms of the institution. And with these actions, Julia also internalized messages about women's responsibility to prevent their own assaults. While Julia was surprised to learn she had implicit bias against women, she had experienced a situation at work that reinforced many biases against women, reminding her that she had to submit in order to have job security and safety.

Through women's stories of genderization, it became clear that student affairs thoughtlessly perpetuated a culture that values dominant power, often at the expense of women. Though many messages of genderization were subtle, the culmination of those messages repeated through the participants' inner-dialogues: Am I good enough? Do I deserve my role? Do I belong here? Did I make the right decision? How do I prove my worth? Do they see how hard I am working? What if I fail?

Because of that inner-dialogue and the doubts that women internalized, they were forced to perpetuate the culture in which they worked. They reflected that student affairs was a supportive environment for women, while advising women to work harder and take on more responsibilities without pay in order to demonstrate their competence and be considered for advancement. They described their work product as exceptional, and questioned whether they had the knowledge and experience to serve in their roles. They reflected on the frustrations of holding all-consuming roles that isolated them from others, while sharing their belief in the value of the work they performed. Genderization caused women to struggle through their successes, rather than embracing their excellence. Genderization caused women to perpetuate the problems of student affairs

while also acting as change agents that defied organizational norms. In understanding the ways that women experienced genderization, it became clear that women were both part of the problem and a key to the solution.

Summary and Transition

This chapter presented a summary of each study participant, including information on their background, career path, and a notable quote. The study procedures summarized the data analysis process before presenting findings. There was one encompassing theme of *genderization* that spanned the experiences of women by illustrating the many ways that women were told to submit their voices, needs, and career aspirations at their own expense. Four additional themes emerged that illustrated specific examples of genderization. *Person on the path* detailed women's explanations of their own womanhood, as well as the ways they related womanhood to caretaking. *Achieving through and with others* showcased women's approaches of sharing power to empower others, role modeling gender within their work, mentoring other women, and responding to power enacted upon them. *Conflicting messages of competence and value* explained the ways that women were frustrated to recognize that while they did great work, they had to work harder to prove their competence. Women also detailed the gendered ways they were treated by others within their organizations while also trying to challenge the gender-binary culture of their organizations. O*vertasked and alone* reflected the ways women took on significant responsibilities within their roles, and the ways that their roles isolated them on their campuses.

Chapter five will present a summary of the findings before presenting a discussion of the findings. Limitations of the study will be presented before implications for practice

and research. A conclusion about the study will be shared, and a summary of the chapter will conclude the paper.

Chapter Five: Conclusions, Discussion, and Future Considerations

Summary of Study

This phenomenological study sought to understand how women in senior-level student affairs positions have navigated their experiences and career paths in order to advance to their current roles. While women represent a majority of staff in the student affairs field, they are clustered at assistant, associate, and director-level roles (Jones & Komives, 2001) and are least represented in SSAO roles at prestigious institutional types, while serving in CSAO roles at private institutions more than public (Tull & Freeman, 2008). Because of this discrepancy in women's representation in the field, this study sought to understand the experiences that propelled women beyond mid-level roles into senior-level leadership positions in student affairs. Chapter one introduced the purpose of the study, and articulated the research questions that framed the study:

1. How do women in student affairs at large, public institutions in the United States understand their career advancement to senior-level positions?
2. How have gendered institutional norms shaped women's experiences in their career progression?

Chapter two introduced the conceptual framework of power, which shapes the conditions of the experiences (Patton, 2015) that women have, thereby illustrating the importance of analyzing power when conducting feminist research. The chapter introduced literature around women in student affairs through two primary focuses of (a) women's influence on higher education and (b) women as senior student affairs officers.

Chapter three detailed the methodology of the study, as bounded in critical epistemology and utilizing phenomenological research to understand women's lived

experiences in their roles. I presented my reflexology, acknowledging my relationship to the topic studied and the ways that I was both an insider and outsider on the research topic. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit nine participants (Table 3), eight of whom completed two interviews and one who completed one interview. Data was collected through an electronic demographic form, two semi-structured interviews, and observational notes. Interviews were conducted and recorded via video conference and transcripts were uploaded to Dedoose for data analysis. Holistic reading, holistic coding, and line-by-line coding were used to analyze the transcripts. I then horizontalized the data with regard to my conceptual framework in order to understand the relationships and the ways power contributed to women's understandings of their experiences. I then developed several mapping tools in order to examine the ways power was enacted upon and by women before developing manifest and latent themes. Practices to ensure trustworthiness and limitations of the study were described at the conclusion of the chapter.

Chapter four presented findings of the study by theme, as the research questions were interconnected and could not be analyzed in isolation of each other. In chapter five, four themes and one encompassing theme are detailed below, in the summary of findings. The context of data collection provides information about three timely influences that shaped the study. Discussion of findings, limitations, and recommendations for practice, policy, and research are shared below. This study concludes with the researcher's reflections and a summary of the chapter.

Summary of Findings

Four themes emerged, with one encompassing theme reflecting all four themes. *The person on the path, achieving through and with others, conflicting messages of competence and value,* and *overtasked and alone* emerged as common narratives across participants, while each theme reflected systemic issues of *genderization.* Participants reflected on what their womanhood meant to them, as well as the interconnectedness between womanhood and work. They reflected on the gendered norms and expectations within the field of student affairs that encouraged them to take on enormous workloads to prove their competence, and then forced them to submit to hierarchical power structures when making challenging decisions. For women with multiple marginalized identities, they described being treated from deficit lenses and struggled to prove their competence to colleagues. Women described their leadership practices as sharing power with others, though they did not consider their actions to role model expectations about gender to others. Women shared feelings of isolation in their roles and questioned whether advancement into higher-level roles was worth the perceived sacrifice. Because of the experiences that women had, they internalized the narratives of genderization by questioning their own competence, perpetuating gendered norms and expectations for other women, and limiting their own opportunities for advancement. The findings presented data that demonstrated the interconnectedness of the research questions through thematic descriptions. In order to fully reflect the participants' experiences by research question, I will describe each theme by research finding below.

Research Question 1. Findings in this section answered the research question: How do women in student affairs at large, public institutions in the United States understand their career advancement to senior-level positions?

The Person on the Path. Participants described their womanhood as aligned with their sex, demonstrating a knowledge gap in articulating the differences between sex and gender. Women described their connections between their womanhood and their work, reflecting a responsibility and pride of being a caretaker to staff and students on their campuses. This caretaker mentality was perceived as a strength by many participants, allowing them to see their womanhood as adding value to the ways they performed their work.

Achieving Through and With Others. Power dynamics greatly shaped women's ability to successfully lead in their roles. As participants described their leadership approaches of sharing power, women considered the needs of their employees and centered collaborative practices. Women also described the responsibility they felt to mentor other women in student affairs as a practice of influencing the future of the field. Each of these practices allowed the women to build and maintain relationships within their roles, while also providing them with confidence about their leadership abilities.

Conflicting Messages of Competence and Value. Women described the ways that they excelled in their roles and the competence they demonstrated that allowed them to advance, while also managing messages that they had to work harder in order to be seen as competent. Through these narratives, women shared times when they were limited in their advancement and felt that they had to accept lower salaries than peers, avoided

negotiating job offers, accepted lower position titles than their predecessors, and chose not to apply for advanced positions when they had been encouraged to apply.

Overtasked and Alone. Consistent with the ways women disclosed feeling that they had to work harder to prove their competence, participants described the volume of work assigned to them within their roles, which was often associated with those who held two job titles. Through the demand of their jobs, women did not feel that work-life balance was possible, and instead integrated components of their lives, compartmentalized their responsibilities, and made short and long-term trade-offs in order to manage their full lives. Due to the demands of their roles, women also described feeling isolated in their roles on campus, with little support within their divisions. In order to find communities of support, women created their own networks outside of their divisions, institutions, and fields of work.

Genderization. As women navigated their career advancement, they understood that being a woman was perceived as inherently less than, through both words and actions that limited their career opportunities. From being called "huffy puffy" by a man in a peer-level role to being sexually assaulted at a work event, women described the ways that they were shown and expected to submit to the men around them. While the experiences described by participants illustrated hierarchical power dynamics of student affairs that promoted masculine norms, these examples influenced the way women saw and understood themselves within the field.

Research Question 2. Findings in this section answered the research question: How have gendered institutional norms shaped women's experiences in their career progression?

The Person on the Path. As women described their gender, they acknowledged that they were treated from a deficit perspective by their institutions, while also internalizing feelings of womanhood as a deficit. As women defined themselves as caretakers for their communities, they also described the sacrifice of minimizing their voices and needs for the good of their greater community, thereby ascribing to gendered dynamics that treated women as less than their peers.

Achieving Through and With Others. As a critical structure in women's career paths, power enacted upon women defined the ways that they were limited within their careers. In contrast with women's practices of sharing power, women described times that their decisions were reversed and experiences where they were forced to choose whether to stay in a role or leave due to conflicting power dynamics. To stay in their roles, they had to submit to the hierarchical, traditionally-masculine power dynamics of their organizations. To escape those power dynamics, women were forced to leave their roles and institutions to which they felt strongly connected.

Conflicting Messages of Competence and Value. While seeking to demonstrate competence within their roles, women internalized the narrative that they had to work harder than their peers in order to prove their competency to others. Through this narrative, women with multiple marginalized identities described the ways that they had to work harder to prove their competence and challenge deficit expectations from others. Through overt and subtle examples, women described their experiences in questioning whether they were being treated a certain way because of their gender, race, ability, ethnicity, age, or the intersection of those identities. Because women felt that they were seen as 'other' and 'less than' within their organizations, they struggled to challenge

those dynamics and at times blamed themselves when they observed gendered behaviors happening. This narrative manifested in a profound and constant cycle of self-questioning and self-doubt for participants.

Overtasked and Alone. As women had significant responsibilities within their roles, they felt the pressure to complete tasks themselves to avoid being perceived as incompetent. The sense of having to put work ahead of their lives was present as women shared their expectation to be available at all hours of the day, often at the expense of their families. Consistent with women's narratives of serving as caretakers within their communities, women described the emotional toll of managing complex situations within gendered institutional norms. Women also described the ways that they intentionally developed relationships with other women outside of their divisions, as they felt that they did not have the support or colleagues with comparable responsibilities who could relate to their experiences within their divisions. This illustrated the ways that women internalized genderization within their roles, as they did not have structures or opportunities for support from other women within their own organizations.

Genderization. Gendered institutional norms not only shaped women's career opportunities within student affairs, they also shaped the ways that women viewed themselves and other women within the field. Each participant articulated powerful illustrations of the ways that they internalized genderization. Sheri internalized the narrative to doubt herself and attribute her successes to luck, rather than to the hard work she had done to accomplish a goal. Erin internalized genderization through frustration with other women who were not as confident as she was, sharing that she could not invest in them as they navigated their careers. Further, Yvonne perpetuated genderization by

encouraging women aspiring to move into a senior role to take on more responsibility in order to prove their competence to others. Additionally, Gloria internalized genderization by minimizing the discrimination that currently existed while crediting the progress seen through her career as evidence of a positive climate. Contrarily, Jennifer internalized the narrative by describing student affairs as a field that is welcoming to women, and then sharing that women were expected to do more in order to compensate for the possibility of having a family. Additionally, Nancy internalized the narrative of genderization by perpetuating the stereotype that displaying emotions made women dramatic and less effective at their jobs. Similarly, Lauren internalized genderization through her mindfulness around language, as she worried that she would not be seen as intelligent by colleagues or worthy of her role. Further, Shea internalized the narrative of genderization by blaming herself and taking responsibility for an employee's actions when she had to terminate them for their behavior. Finally, Julia internalized genderization when she changed her behavior at university events after being sexually assaulted by a board of governors member and having the university take no action. Each participant's story illuminated the ways that the genderization of student affairs contributed to long-term, ongoing harm to women's careers and self-image.

Interconnectedness of Findings

While the data illustrated themes within each of the research questions, the findings also showcased the ways that gendered institutional norms shaped women's experiences in navigating their career advancement. Through these findings, it became clear that the concept of genderization permeated their experiences, both in how participants were forced to fit into the norms of their organizations, as well as how the

women understood themselves as a result of those organizational norms. The interconnectedness of the research questions also reflected the complexity of women's experiences, as no instance or internalization of genderization existed in isolation.

Context of Data Collection

This study was conducted at a pivotal time in United States history, as a majority of interviews were conducted after the COVID-19 pandemic had spread within the country and shaped the landscape of higher education. The New York Times projected that during the pandemic, one third of all women's jobs were designated as essential, with those roles being disproportionally represented in health care (Robertson & Gebeloff, 2020). Beyond jobs, many parents have also been faced with the daunting task of caring for and educating children at home, adding complexity to the ways work and life are navigated by women who are parents. Because this dissertation was written in the midst of the pandemic, there have not been formal studies published that present the burden of the pandemic that women carry.

Additionally, though the genocide of Black people in the U.S. has existed through our country's history, the murder of George Floyd took place on May 25, 2020, after data collection had concluded. In the time since, Black Lives Matter protests have had more single-day protests than any other movement in U.S. history (Putnam, Chenoweth, & Pressman, 2020), shaping the national discourse on structural and systemic racism, white supremacy culture, anti-Blackness, and whiteness among other topics.

Concurrently, as I was drafting the findings of this study, Kamala Harris was nominated as the Democratic Vice-Presidential candidate for the 2020 election, representing the first Black and Indian woman to be nominated to executive office.

Kamala's acceptance speech reflected many of the leadership characteristics described by participants: family, support networks, a desire to confront inequity, and a drive to challenge the status quo. At the same time, Kamala also represented a woman submitting to serve as the vice president to a 77-year-old white man, after experiencing misogyny and racism throughout her presidential campaign. Though not an illustration of student affairs, Kamala Harris provided a parallel example of the ways women were both powerful and overpowered.

Finally, in the weeks between drafting and defending this dissertation, Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg passed away. A champion for women's rights and gender equity, Justice Ginsberg's legacy was seen throughout her lifetime and in the wake of her death. Promptly upon the announcement of her passing, Senate Republicans announced that they aspired to fill her Supreme Court seat, in the midst of a presidential election. Though the outcome of this appointment will not be known at the time this dissertation is published, the national conversation on women's equity, reproductive rights, health care, employment, discrimination, and justice are as present today as they have ever been.

Because of these four intersecting moments in society, it can be assumed that many women were experiencing the complexity of emotions represented through the findings in the study: pride, excitement, joy, exhaustion, anxiety, doubt, and frustration. These examples also reflect the compounding weight that women may have been feeling at the time of the study, as the expectation that they serve as caretakers of their communities placed burdens of racism, a pandemic, politics, and for some, family responsibilities onto them, while also navigating the demands of their jobs.

Discussion of Findings

The five findings of the study reflected the conceptual framework of power and research presented in the literature. This section discusses these findings through the lens of the framework and literature, while showcasing the original contributions of the study.

The Person on the Path

While participants reflected on their womanhood and the ways they felt that gender contributed to their success as leaders, they perpetuated cis heteronormative perspectives and focused on gender binaries between men and women. This either/or thinking (Okun & Jones, 2001) reflected the perspective that cisgender women were insiders within the field, while casting trans women, gender nonconforming, and non-binary people as outsiders to women's experiences. Through interviews, no trans women, gender noncomforming, or non-binary people were named by participants as holding senior-level leadership roles within their divisions or institutions, thereby illustrating a noticeable absence in both position and perspective. In researching women's experiences in senior-level roles, it became clear that we must also ask why there are so few trans, gender nonconforming, and non-binary people in senior-level leadership roles in student affairs.

Beyond women's perspectives on cis heteronormative womanhood, their reflections on gender also represented the tension between gender essentialism and constructionism embedded in the field. Shea reflected this tension in explaining, "we are the nurturers, we are the ones who provide time and time again support and assistance. And we are leaders, too… we are problem solvers. We can stand up against anyone else in the board room." Shea's reflection of nurturing as a strength of womanhood

represented stereotypical responsibilities ascribed with sex, consistent with essentialist feminism (Rosser, 2012). Conversely, Shea rejected the stereotypical weakness of womanhood by sharing that women could solve problems and assert competence in leadership roles, consistent with gender constructivism (Greer, 1999). Several participants reflected a similar conflict in perspective, as they described womanhood as a combination of caretaking and power. Through this tension, it became obvious that the field of student affairs depends on both perspectives; that women are needed to be caretakers of their communities while also expected to demonstrate strength and resilience to sustain the many challenges associated with institutional genderization.

As Jennifer described her connection with the lineage of student affairs, traced back to the deans of women, the history of women's role as caretakers could be drawn back to those roots. Through Amos' establishment of programs that supported students' social, emotional, physical, and spiritual health (Herdlein, 2004), deans of women became the caretakers for students in those four respects. As participants described their experiences in their roles, each reflected direct responsibility for at least one, if not more, of those four student support considerations. Additionally, just as early deans of women faced sexism on campuses, including inequitable pay (Miller & Pruitt-Logan, 2012; Schwartz, 2010), on-campus residency expectations (Miller & Pruitt-Logan, 2012), and inequitable instruction by gender (Hevel, 2016), women in senior-student affairs roles were forced to confront gendered norms that reinforced the expectation to be caretakers of students. While participants embraced their role as caretakers of their communities, they also described the exhaustion that occurred as a result of putting others' needs first. Though women felt empowered to care for others in their roles, it resulted in their

relinquishment of power over their own needs to others. Though post-structural feminist perspective argues that power is expansive and able to be claimed by all (Gannon & Davies, 2012), women experienced finite concepts of power and struggled with sharing it at their own expense.

As women also described their loneliness in their roles in the finding o*vertasked and alone,* the questions must be raised: Is their loneliness a result of caretaking for others as much as it is a function of their position? How are institutional pathways encouraging women to pursue positions that serve in caretaking capacities and perpetuating genderization within the field of student affairs? To what extent is student affairs work itself gendered or viewed as gendered within institutions?

Achieving Through and With Others

This finding uniquely introduced the complexity of power for women in senior-student affairs roles, as participants practiced power-sharing leadership practices, largely embodying Gannon and Davies' (2012) notion of post-structural feminism, that power can be claimed by all without power-sharing being at the expense of another. However, the organizations that women worked in reinforced the expectation that power be hierarchically enacted, which were demonstrated through examples that were directly at the women's expense. This tension of power-sharing within hierarchical organizations led women to question their leadership practices, feel shame for situations over which they were undermined by supervisors, and leave positions.

Consistent with the literature, women practiced relationship-oriented, collaborative leadership within their roles (Spurlock, 2009), allowing them to challenge the norms of their organizations. As a practice of collaborative leadership, women spoke

about the value of mentoring others as an act of empowering the next generation of student affairs. This practice was consistent with the literature that showed that mentors were critical to women's advancement, as they tapped women for opportunities and helped women navigate competing work-life demands (Fochtman, 2011).

Though women shared their struggles with the hierarchical power structures of student affairs, they were also complicit in reinforcing those norms. Nancy described the need for women to adapt to fit within the organizational norms, and claimed that they were not losing anything by doing so. Nancy's perspective, while reinforced by organizational norms, was contrary to the literature that showed women were more likely to effectively perform transformational leadership, a practice that also allows them to overcome deficit-modeled assumptions about their leadership abilities (Eagly et al., 2003). Erin expressed her frustration with women who did not have confidence, sharing that she could not promote them and do the work of self-growth for them, perpetuating the message that women must embody traditionally masculine norms in order to be worthy of advancement. Though Erin perpetuated this thought process, it was contrary to the research of Eagly et al. (1992), which described that women were evaluated more negatively when using traditionally masculine leadership practices. Jennifer suggested that women were penalized for the possibility of motherhood while later encouraging women to work harder to prove their competence and combat that narrative, reflecting the ways women experienced motherhood as a barrier to career progression (Dominici, et al., 2009). All three of these perspectives reflect the ways "discourses related to femininity, heterosexuality, fertility, and maternity have structured the conditions of women's lives" (Gannon & Davies, 2012, p. 74), and more specifically the ways that women have

internalized these discourses. These normative expectations reinforced that women held and deserved less power than others and perpetuated the idea that women had to prove their competence within the hierarchical norms of the organization, rather than challenging those norms themselves.

Consistent with the findings of *submit or quit*, women were forced to choose between their own values and their jobs. Because of this hierarchical power dynamic, women were expected to comply with power dynamics and norms at their institutions in order to maintain their jobs. While Yvonne, Gloria, and Sheri all faced situations that led to their eventual departure from their roles, the situations all reinforced that women's options were to submit or quit. Though women should use their voices and positions of power to challenge toxic dynamics and unethical situations, they were reminded that they did not have the power to do so without it causing risk to their careers. This was the most dangerous power dynamic reflected within the study, as women were oppressed into silence and complicit inaction as an act of self-protection. How are women expected to challenge oppressive hierarchical norms if they feel that there is no way to maintain their jobs in doing so?

The central theme through this finding was that of navigating normative power dynamics within hierarchical student affairs organizations. Though women directly experienced oppressive power while practicing expansive power dynamics, participants were also complicit in perpetuating those power dynamics within their roles. While women had a lot to gain by challenging genderized power dynamics in their organizations, they also had a lot to lose, including their positions, credibility, opportunities for future advancement, and comfort of what was expected of them. As

power dynamics shaped the conditions of the experiences (Patton, 2015) that women had, identifying and dismantling power structures became a critical objective of women's leadership within senior-student affairs roles.

Conflicting Messages of Competence and Value

Participants internalized the many messages about their worth in ways that contributed to their self-doubt and self-blame. This was especially apparent for Nancy and Gloria, two Women of Color, who started their careers in student affairs in non-traditional paths. While Nancy began her career in an administrative support role, Gloria's first position was as a volunteer within a student affairs department, as she had been unable to secure a full-time position for two years after securing her Ph.D. Both Nancy and Gloria faced significant struggles in finding positions and then combatted assumptions about their capabilities based on the roles they held at the foundation of their career, reflecting oppressive work environments that valued titles over human value. Intersecting with their racial and ethnic identities, both women shared the ways that their career progression was significantly more challenging than their colleagues. Though each woman's entry into student affairs was non-traditional, they each faced continuing barriers to advancement, including lack of promotion, lack of mentorship, and lack of respect from supervisors, that significantly impacted their career progression. By focusing on the context of Nancy and Gloria's experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), the visibility of their barriers centered around their gender, race and ethnicity, and position title.

The concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) was also present in the ways that participants discussed their practices. Jennifer, Julia, and Lauren, all white women,

discussed the importance of showing vulnerability and emotions in order to relate to others. Both Jennifer and Julia named their use of crying as a demonstration of authenticity, and shared that it was important to them to role model vulnerability to other staff. Conversely, Black participants, including Nancy, Shea, and Sheri, each described the ways that they compartmentalized emotions in order to be effective leaders and manage their work. Similarly, both Gloria and Erin, who identified as Latina and Hispanic, expressed the importance of considering peoples' needs while maintaining objective perspective at work. This difference in expectation between white participants and Women of Color illustrated the power that white women have to demonstrate a full range of emotions within their professional capacity, while Black women and Women of Color were expected to limit their emotions. Because of this difference, it is important for white women to use their power to engage in discourse as a tool of disruption (Gannon & Davies, 2012) about the inconsistencies in expectations they experience as compared to Women of Color in comparable roles.

Participants also experienced conflict in recognizing that their work was exceptional, while simultaneously expressing significant doubt about their competence and value within their organizations. This tension between performance and value reflected the conflict between women's leadership practice of power-sharing within hierarchical organizations. As women approached leadership from the lens of Helgesen's (1995) web of inclusion by centering others' needs and sharing power, they did so within organizations that perpetuated dichotomized gender leadership norms (Glazer-Raymo, 1999) and hierarchical, traditionally masculine approaches (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006). Additionally, men still serve in a disproportional number of academic and student

affairs leadership roles at large, public institutions (Blackhurst, 2000; Eagly, 2005; Earwood-Smith et al., 1990; Glazer-Raymo, 2008; Johnson, 2017; Rickard, 1985b; Walton & McDade, 2001), placing the burden on women, who have less power and less representation, to challenge power dynamics for change. This experience directly reflected the genderization of student affairs, as the norms of the field perpetuate traditionally masculine leadership approaches, sending the message that women's practices, though successful, do not hold the same value within the organization.

In considering the ways that student affairs perpetuated a climate of genderization, women reflected the realities that the climate was strong for women while also acknowledging that change needed to happen. When directly asked how they perceived the climate of student affairs for women, most participants shared that the climate was strong, and attributed both the number of women in the field as well as their representation in their role as evidence of this. Later in the interviews, as women described experiences they had within their own career paths, they reflected on the ways that the climate set different expectations for women's success, which was both frustrating and challenging for them. Women's descriptions reflected either/or thinking (Okun & Jones, 2001) that the field could either be positive or negative for women. In considering how this might be acknowledged differently if women adopted both/and perspectives (Gannon & Davies, 2012) regarding climate, power could be considered differently. If women were to acknowledge that the climate of student affairs was positive in bringing women into the field and negative in promoting women into senior-level roles at equitable rates, opportunities for dialogue could focus on bridging the gap between those realities. Additionally, in questioning what it would look like for women in senior-

level roles to acknowledge the ways that the climate was harmful to women asks them to consider the ways that they were perpetuating the harm that was done to them and onto other women. This would have challenged participants to consider the ways that they enacted power to perpetuate a climate of harm onto other women. Finally, Yvonne, Gloria, Nancy, Julia, and Shea all described ways that the climate of student affairs was better for women than it was for them earlier in their careers. While the progress they saw in their careers validated their own experiences, dismissing the genderization embedded in student affairs organizations meant that they did not have responsibility to change the climate. By not acknowledging genderized power dynamics for women in student affairs, those in senior-level roles were able to maintain power over others within their divisions.

Finally, most participants also shared experiences of being tapped for roles that allowed them to gain experience or move into senior-level positions. Participants were tapped by women and men, most of whom had actively served as mentors for the women prior to tapping them for the experience. These acts of power expansiveness allowed women to claim power (Gannon & Davies, 2012), even within hierarchically structured organizations. This practice of power-sharing illustrated the importance of mentorship for women, consistent with the research that mentors recognize and tap women for opportunities and job searches (Fochtman, 2011).

Overtasked and Alone

As participants described their feelings of isolation within their roles, this reflected the literature that women experienced burnout and felt that they were under greater scrutiny than their male colleagues, while also often identifying as the only women at the cabinet level (Spurlock, 2009). In considering power, student affairs

organizations seeking to maintain the status quo benefited from having few women in senior-level roles and in shaping roles to be isolated from others. When women could not come together to share experiences, consider different approaches, and challenge organizational dynamics, the status quo prevailed. This status quo then reinforced hierarchical organizational structures, assertive and directive leadership practices, and traditionally masculine norms, thereby limiting women who were able to successfully advance into senior-level roles.

As women felt alone in their roles, they also struggled to manage the enormous demands of work and personal responsibilities. Consistent with the research that women felt they were not able to show stress from managing work and family demands (Beeny, Guthrie, Rhodes, & Terrell, 2005), women described feeling that they had to personally manage multiple demands in order to prove their competence. Participants described using integration, compartmentalization, and trade-offs in order to navigate competing demands, and none used the term 'balance' to describe their approach. In considering the concept of work-life balance as compared to participants' realities, the concept of 'balance' seemed to pit work and life as competing interests, contributing to women's feelings of failure in trying to navigate their complex lives. Consistent with Beeny, Guthrie, Rhodes, and Terrell (2005), women felt that they had to commit their "entire being" to their role in order to be seen as competent, which then contributed to their feelings of burnout and isolation (Spurlock, 2009). Though women did not describe feelings that their approaches to managing their work and life alleviated the pressures they felt to prove their competence, their rejection of the term 'balance' and adoption of

personal language eased the expectation that they approached work and life as competing interests.

Genderization

At the heart of genderization was power. This systemic practice, illustrated through participants' stories, perpetuated power centered in masculine norms and penalized women for any deviation outside of those norms. In turn, women internalized the narrative that they were less competent, less deserving of their roles, less intelligent, less successful, and less valuable to the organizations they led.

In examining the ways that power was practiced between individuals and systems (Gannon & Davies, 2012), it became clear that the institutional dynamics of genderization occurred consistently, at the expense of women, eventually forcing them to submit to the norms or leave the position. Additionally, as women described feelings of isolation in their roles across institutions, a culture of isolation presented itself as a common experience for women. In considering why isolation might be a common experience for women in these positions, it reinforced the concept of genderization, as women felt like outliers or deviants from the norms of their institutions. By isolating women from each other, systemic genderization perpetuated the organizational norms of student affairs that benefit men.

Genderization became clear as women described the ways that their internalized doubt prevented them from advocating for themselves or having their needs met within roles. Jennifer and Julia both shared stories of accepting lower titles and salaries than they had expected but felt they should be grateful for the position, illuminating the ways genderization created that experience. As Sheri and Yvonne shared their stories of failure

and shame that arose from self-doubt, genderization had cultivated that environment. And as Erin expressed frustration about women who did not have the confidence to progress in their careers, genderization had groomed that perspective. Through the participants' experiences and stories, it became clear the climate and norms of student affairs were not controlled by or for women.

Discussion of Conceptual Framework

It became apparent that the conceptual framework of power was present throughout the study, both through participants' experiences as well as through the ways they utilized hierarchical and expansive power within their roles. For this reason, the need to name and deconstruct power as exhibited by participants became increasingly important in order to fully understand women's experiences in senior-level student affairs roles.

Hierarchical Power

Participants described having limited access to power and experienced instances where power was stripped from them as a result of taking a stand against something with which they disagreed. Because of this, findings such as *submit or quit* related to all participants' experiences. In analyzing data, though, it also became clear that hierarchies existed between women with more privileged identities as compared to those with historically minoritized identities. Namely, white women held more power in their roles than women of color, and cis-heterosexual white women held more power than their peers within the LGBTQ+ community. Examples of the power white women held over others were clear as they described utilizing full ranges of emotions and having that seen as authentic by those they led, having their voices acknowledged and heard in spaces

where other women's perspectives may have been further minimized, and challenging power dynamics without substantial risk of their jobs. While all participants struggled to combat power dynamics present within their institutions and roles, white women did not identify the power and privilege that they embodied nor did they use that power to deconstruct racialized power dynamics at their institutions, thereby perpetuating hierarchical power dynamics.

Expansive Power

Post-structural feminism requires that rather than conforming to the masculine norms that have been created in society, power be claimed by women in order to deconstruct and redefine the ways that we understand society to be. From a student affairs perspective, few participants described practicing wildly outside of the professional norms of the field, but most also described individual, unique approaches to their work that did not fit into the traditional, hierarchical, and masculine norms of student affairs. Because of these practices, women felt successful on their own terms within senior-level student affairs roles.

Several participants described tapping individuals to take on responsibilities when opportunities presented themselves. Sheri and Lauren both described intentionally tapping women who did not have direct experience to take on additional responsibility as an act of empowering those women to learn and grow, while also defying the expectation that women meet all requirements in order to be considered for a role. Similarly, many participants described the importance of developing trust within their teams of staff in order to successfully achieve their work. Shea and Gloria described the creative ways that they supported staff in order to build a sense of community within their units, which

defied the organizational norms of top-down, hierarchical leadership. Though each of these practices seemed small to participants, these were acts of expansive power-sharing, which aligned with the disruptive perspective of post-structural feminism and allowed women to redefine the ways that their organizations functioned.

Limitations

This qualitative study does not offer the generalizability of larger populations that is often associated with quantitative studies. Additionally, the study does not apply to all women in senior student affairs roles at all institutional types. Instead, this study offers contextual experiences of nine women in senior student affairs roles at large, public institutions. The findings from the study may inform policy, practice, and research in the field of student affairs, and aligns with previous research about women's experiences in academic affairs. Considering the gender binary around which past research has been presented, a limitation of this study was that all participants identified as cisgender, so the findings only represent cisgender women's experiences rather than a more expansive perspective of women's experiences.

Additionally, all participants volunteered to participate in this study, and were selected for meeting inclusion criteria. As the study sought women in senior-level roles, all participants had achieved the benchmark that I sought to understand, meaning that they could not account for the reasons or barriers that prevented women from attaining similar positions. Further, participants' narratives were constructed in their own views and through their own memories, meaning that other factors and contextual considerations may have gone unnoticed or unmentioned. Because participants were all situated within a similar time and place given the COVID-19 pandemic, participants also

reflected common crisis management responsibilities that were not necessarily typical within their roles. Given the context of the pandemic, a future study with a similar research questions and procedures would likely produce unique insights into women's experiences.

Recommendations for Practice and Policy

The experiences articulated by participants illustrates the need for change within student affairs organizations and operations. Participants largely described student affairs as being more equitable than when they had started their careers, as many had seen more women advance to senior-level roles over the course of their careers. With that, participants also reflected how few women held senior-level positions in student affairs, as well as the small number of women in cabinet-level positions at their institutions. If large, public institutions of higher education are committed to advancing gender equity, women's voices and experiences must be intentionally centered in order to create meaningful change. Because of this, recommendations are articulated for university presidents, current CSAOs, women aspiring to be SSAOs, professional organizations, and graduate programs.

University Presidents

University presidents should be invested in creating equitable workspaces to create opportunities for all people with minoritized identities. As the literature reviewed consistently demonstrated "gendered prestige hierarchies" (Allan, 2011, p. 58) for women in academic affairs across all position types and institutional types (Armenti, 2004; Dominici, Fried, & Zeger, 2009; Eddy, 2002; Fochtman, 2011; Johnson, 2017; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004), this study mirrored that genderization in student affairs.

Because limitations to women's career advancement exist across institutional divisions, university presidents should conduct internal equity studies to illuminate the specific barriers at their institution, establish a commission on the status of women to review policies and make recommendations, and prioritize the hiring of women to cabinet-level positions, in order to create women-centered change in both leadership and practice.

Additionally, in order to disrupt practices that penalize women, pathways for women's advancement must be present at all levels. In posting vacant positions, presenting a clear salary range for a given role allows all applicants to understand the realities of the role. As several participants shared stories of accepting lower salaries for positions, it became clear that withholding salary information penalized women who were taught to be grateful for the offer. By requiring that all positions clearly list a salary range, women will have the necessary information to ensure they are paid equitably for their work.

Chief Student Affairs Officers

Equitable pathways for promotion should be considered as well. For women who sought advancement in their careers, barriers arose when adequate information was not shared about interim responsibilities, promotions, or search practices. Student affairs organizations should consider the number of women at associate director and director level roles as compared to those in assistant and associate dean or vice president positions, to critique the practices that prevent women from rising above these mid-level roles. In considering interim responsibilities or promotion opportunities, senior-level leaders should ask themselves which women might have the transferable skill sets to take on new opportunities and compensate them appropriately for doing so.

Additionally, as women described taking on responsibilities outside of their job descriptions in order to combat feelings of incompetence, CSAOs should conduct divisional studies to understand who is being tasked with responsibilities outside of their roles, who is and is not being paid for interim responsibilities or extra work, and who is taking on caretaking responsibilities for their campus. Particularly as it relates to workload in response to COVID-19, student affairs organizations should consider who has taken on adaptive responsibilities to meet the demands of changing campus environments, and whether there is equity in scope and pay associated with that work.

Student affairs organizations must also begin to name the caretaking burdens that women share, by articulating and including those responsibilities in job descriptions. As participants described the weight they felt from invisible caretaking responsibilities, few of those responsibilities were formally described as part of their job. As long as women are tasked with taking care of the students and staff on their campus without acknowledgement of that work, they will continue to question whether their contributions have value. Additionally, in naming caretaking responsibilities in job descriptions, applicants can better discern their interest in a role, and divisions will be forced to articulate how those responsibilities fit within the greater scope of a position, taking the burden off women to navigate this themselves.

Additionally, student affairs divisions should recognize that women are clustered at the assistant, associate, and director-level (Jones & Komives, 2001) and create structured opportunities for women's professional development. Providing financial support for women to attend leadership-development programs, offering book discussions that illustrate women's leadership practices, and creating skill-development workshops

all reflect an investment for women's career success. As mentorship provides women with important access to higher-level positions (Fochtman, 2011), offering structured, divisional mentorship programs also allows for power-sharing between participants, promoting women's leadership practices.

The most nuanced implication for practice is the challenge of shifting institutional norms. While women can attain senior-level roles that allow them to shift the climate and culture of their divisions, they are still expected to adhere to the traditionally masculine norms of higher education institutions. While large, public universities share similar hierarchical organizational structures, masculine norms and power dynamics will continue to perpetuate genderization. To combat masculine norms and power dynamics, student affairs divisions and institutions should consider building organizational webs, modeled after Helgesen's (1995) web of inclusion, that promote power-sharing, collaborative work, and information-sharing. Hierarchical organizational structures that promote masculine norms are so embedded within higher education that there are no visible examples of alternative organizational approaches, particularly at large, public institutions. For this reason, an organization that sought to create a more equitable organizational structure would revolutionize the field, while creating likely challenges for divisional leadership in doing so. Based on Helgesen's (1995) web of inclusion, power-sharing organizational structures might create job responsibilities that are developed around projects rather than within specific units, offer transparent two-way communication to generate ideas prior to implementing major changes, provide regular 360 degree evaluations to normalize consistent multi-level feedback, and promote flexible and responsive job duties that allow staff to grow through new experiences.

Though a new organizational model would be a radical approach for disrupting genderization, it is essential that women's voices and effective leadership practices be centered to create meaningful, sustaining change.

Women Aspiring to Senior-Level Roles

For women seeking to advance, it is imperative to build a network of mentors who can help with developing skills and applying to elevated positions. Several participants shared the critical role that mentors played in tapping them for a position, encouraging them to negotiate after being offered a job, and supporting them as they confronted spaces where they were one of few women at the table. Additionally, it is important to promote women's advancement to those within student affairs. It is vital to create structured opportunities and mentorship to women, and enhance the pipeline of women available to serve in SSAO roles. Several student affairs professional organizations, including NASPA and ACPA, have mentorship programs available for women at any level.

Unfortunately, for women aspiring to advance into senior-level roles, the burden remains on their shoulders to understand and navigate the genderization of student affairs to proactively confront organizational norms. In navigating career advancement opportunities, it is important to consider how a particular role might fit into the whole picture of one's life in order to identify potential barriers to personal fulfillment or success. The following questions might be helpful to women considering senior-level roles in making decisions around job advancement, taking on interim responsibilities, or understanding the scope of the commitment:

- What does a typical day look like in this role? What consistent responsibilities and what variable responsibilities must be managed on a daily basis?
- What percentage of this role will be managing crises that arise? With which aspects of the job description are these associated?
- How is staff wellness encouraged within the division?
- What does flexibility look like within this role?
- If interim title or pay are not available, is professional development funding available to compensate for the additional responsibilities required? Is it possible to create a working title that represents the additional responsibilities required?

As women are provided opportunities for advanced roles or interim responsibilities, it is important to advocate for their needs and consider the ways that responsibilities might be promoting genderization. Considering each career advancement opportunity as an opportunity to negotiate positions within the organization allows women to name the value of their work and contributions to key decision-makers at the institution.

Professional Organizations

Professional organizations share responsibility for accurately capturing and sharing information about the field. Student affairs organizations already collect data about their members, including job title and demographic information. To accurately identify the genderization and other identity-based oppression present in the field, student affairs organizations must publish data openly. Particularly, NASPA and ACPA, as the largest organizations within the field, should lead our profession in identifying

opportunities for change that center the equitable hiring and promotion of all minoritized groups.

Beyond data, professional organizations should also consider whose voices they are publishing, promoting, and engaging in contributing to the knowledge of the field. Organizations should advance the gender equity conversation by not only researching it, but also in highlighting voices who disrupt the hierarchical, masculine norms of student affairs. Similar to recommendations for university presidents, professional organizations should establish commissions on the status of women to gain insight about members' experiences, collect recommendations for practice and policy, and inform the diverse functions of student affairs differently. Through conference presentations, webinars, speakers, leadership roles, and publications, our student affairs organizations have a responsibility to think beyond what student affairs has been and instead consider the ways that we can better center equity within the profession.

Graduate Preparation Programs

Graduate preparation programs play an active role in informing aspiring student affairs professionals' understandings of the foundations and current practices of higher education. In considering the need to disrupt organizational structures and norms in order to create more equitable environments across gender, all graduate programs should consider the role gender plays in their curriculum. As has become increasingly discussed within the current political and social climate, United States history was constructed by and for white men. In order to acknowledge the foundation of higher education and dynamics that exist as a result, deconstructing the curriculum to defy masculine norms would shape the understanding of incoming professionals. Rather than teaching separate

courses on the history of higher education, organizational theory, leadership theory, and student identity, integrating curriculum to understand how each of those components impacts the other would situate student affairs within a broader construct. By connecting the history of higher education with the ways we understand student identity development and the experiences of those with multiple minoritized identities, the profession can start to acknowledge the ways that we perpetuate power, privilege and oppression. Similarly, by connecting the ways that organizations are constructed and the people who are viewed as leaders within those constructs, we can begin to understand the masculine norms that shape our field.

Finally, providing graduate students with tangible tools for career and salary navigation allows them to understand their own power in the field. Particularly for those looking for jobs at large, public institutions, showing students how and where to find public salary databases allows them to advocate for equitable pay at any point in their career. Similarly, educating students on additional, non-traditional compensation options such as career coaches, professional development funding, moving expenses, job title, and flexibility might allow for them to understand the full picture of compensation when exploring opportunities.

Recommendations for Research

In considering the ways that women navigate their career advancement into senior-level student affairs roles, further research is necessary both within the field of student affairs as well as within the context of time this study was conducted. Recommendations for research are presented within student affairs, COVID-19, racial equity, and institutional context perspectives.

Student Affairs

This study centered on the experiences of women in senior student affairs roles at large, public institutions. While the contributions from this study provided important insights into the ways women experienced their career paths through the lens of gender, further research about women's experiences at other institutional types would contribute greater knowledge on this topic. Additionally, this study focused on the experiences women had as they advanced through their careers, not what motivated women to move into senior-level roles. Understanding what contributes to women's desire to take on additional responsibilities, given the challenges they face, would be an important contribution to women's experiences in student affairs.

From a quantitative perspective, basic research is needed from NASPA and ACPA, as the largest professional organizations in the field, that presents an aggregate picture of student affairs professional demographics, as well as data that illuminates the differences in demographics by institution type, size, location, position title, functional area, and other information. Without this information, higher education and student affairs are forced to operate only through parallels drawn from academic affairs data, or through assumptions made by leaders. Additionally, opening this data up to researchers within the field would allow for broader contributions to this knowledge than through the professional organizations themselves. The profound absence of comprehensive student affairs staff data allows for the perpetuation of genderization and other forms of oppression to occur.

COVID-19

Within the context of this study, it will be imperative to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic and movement for racial equity shapes the field of student affairs. In considering COVID-19, research should be conducted to understand how work was distributed and to whom, as institutions pivoted to online instruction and deployed months-long crisis management teams. Additionally, research that seeks to understand the role that women played in managing COVID-19 responses on their campuses and the leadership approaches that allowed them to succeed would inform other women seeking to learn about crisis leadership. Further, research understanding the ways that women were tasked to balance more demands in a high-stress time might illuminate the ways that women navigate work and life demands, particularly as women who were mothers were challenged to navigate work, parenting, schooling, and other responsibilities. Finally, it will be critical to understand the impacts of COVID-19 on women's future opportunities for advancement. While many institutions are executing furloughs and layoffs as a result of the pandemic-related economic collapse, understanding the people impacted by those job changes, both short and long-term, will be essential in understanding gender equity in staffing. Further, for those women navigating competing demands, it will be important to research how COVID-19 propelled them into the next position or created barriers for advancement.

Racial Equity

In consideration of the movement for racial equity in the United States, further research on the intersectional ways that women experience oppression between their gender and other minoritized identities while serving in senior level positions would also

help to identify compounding systems of oppression embedded in student affairs and higher education organizations. Specifically, understanding how organizational norms limit career progression opportunities for Women of Color would illuminate additional layers of critical change for the field.

Institutional Context

While this study focused on women in senior-level roles at large, public institutions, most women had only worked at that institutional type and did not speak specifically to the nature of their institution in relation to career navigation. Though women's reflections were not direct, the examples of genderization shared reflected the organizational size and structure associated with their institution type. Because men hold a disproportional number of academic and student affairs leadership roles at large, public institutions (Blackhurst, 2000; Eagly, 2005; Earwood-Smith et al., 1990; Glazer-Raymo, 2008; Johnson, 2017; Rickard, 1985b; Walton & McDade, 2001) and women are least likely to hold CSAO roles at large institutions (Rickard, 1985a) and public institutions (Tull & Freeman, 2008), understanding women's experiences at large, public institutions had the most power in challenging organizational norms of higher education. With that, examples of genderization at smaller or private institutions may look different than the examples given by women working in large, hierarchical organizations.

In considering the context for this study, researching the ways that genderization is evident at other institutional types would contribute to understandings of women's experiences in senior-level student affairs roles. Institutional presidents and CSAOs should conduct equity studies at their institutions to understand the ways that gender is used as a tool to perpetuate systems of power, privilege, and oppression. Additionally,

examining the gendered leadership norms, caretaking expectations of campus, interim roles and responsibilities, and pathways for advancement may illuminate genderization embedded within the organization or institution.

Researcher Reflection

As a white, cisgender, straight, self-identified feminist woman who aspires to move into a senior-level student affairs role, I was strongly connected to this study. While I consciously sought to understand participants' experiences and not project my own, it became important for me to journal and take notes to separate my own thoughts and experiences from those of the women studied. Additionally, as I heard women describe their challenges, successes, failures, and joys within their roles, I was able to learn from each of them and understand myself differently. I also experienced profound relation to participants as they described navigating work and life demands, as I was working full time, parenting full time, and conducting dissertation research and writing during the pandemic, experiencing the most challenging work-life conflict of my career. I was amazed by the connections I was able to build with participants, as they shared intimate stories, thereby sharing their power with me, to allow me to learn and grow as a scholar and professional. Because of the time I spent with each participant and their transcripts, I feel forever connected to each woman as I move forward in my own professional journey. Through their honesty, I feel that I have a better understanding of the difficulty required to advance, while also feeling a stronger responsibility and capability to lead in a senior-level role.

Through the connectedness that I felt with each participant, I also worried that I would not capture their stories or experiences as robustly as they shared them. I feared

that in finding meaning across participants, I would dilute their individual, unique contributions to the study. I also feared that I would make the same assumptions that many participants made, generalizing cisgender or white experiences as all women's experiences. In order to hold myself accountable to the critical feminist nature of my study, I worked with a peer debriefer to process the many layers of power, privilege, and oppression embedded in women's experiences. In doing so, I specifically discussed the findings within *why am I being treated this way?* to consider the ways that my own identities were limiting my understanding of participants' realities. We discussed the multiple minoritized identities that women held, and the systemic oppression that reinforced the messages that they internalized. I was also able to process much of the language that I used in this paper with my peer debriefer. As an example, I shifted away from the word microaggressions in my writing, as the impact of the experiences women had were not micro; they experienced real, tangible harm through each oppressive interaction. As a result of this conversation, I instead decided to use the phrase interpersonal aggressions to express this concept.

Because of the racial equity uprising that occurred through data collection and analysis, I feel an additional responsibility to center racial equity in my daily life. As an aspiring leader, I have realized the critical need for me to understand my white identity and the ways that I contribute to both patriarchal and white supremacy constructs of student affairs so that I can instead disrupt them. It has also become apparent to me through this movement that women are more critically needed in leadership roles now, in order to fully and effectively engage in and create change that is people-centered and power-sharing in approach.

Through this study, it became clear to me that I have my own work to do. In addition to considering the ways that I hold power within my dominant identities, I also recognized the ways that I am complicit in upholding traditionally masculine organizational norms. Though I critiqued power structures within this study, I must engage myself every day to advocate for my own needs, uplift others around me, speak for those whose voices are being silenced, and recognize that we can all succeed together. This study is the proudest work I have done in my career, and I realize now that I am just getting started.

Summary

This study sought to understand how women in senior-level student affairs positions have navigated their experiences and career paths in order to advance to their current roles. Two research questions framed this study:

1. How do women in student affairs at large, public institutions in the United States understand their career advancement to senior-level positions?
2. How have gendered institutional norms shaped women's experiences in their career progression?

There were four findings embedded in one encompassing finding. *The person on the path, achieving through and with others, conflicting messages of competence and value,* and *overtasked and alone* illuminated the ways that women experienced genderization in their career paths. The encompassing theme of *genderization* highlighted the profound systemic ways that women were taught that they were less worthy and how they internalized that narrative. This study contributed to the understanding of gender

dynamics within student affairs, particularly as it relates to gender equity in senior-level leadership roles.

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Appendix A

Participant Demographic Form

Name:_____

Phone:_____

Email:_____

Age:

What is your age in years? _____

Gender Identity (check all that apply):

Woman___ Man ___ Transgender ___ *Cisgender___ Genderqueer___

Nonbinary___ Not Listed (Please Specify) _____

*Cisgender means that the assigned sex at birth is in congruence with your current gender identity

Pronouns:

What pronouns (examples: she, he, ze, they) do you use to refer to yourself?_____

Sexual Identity (check all that apply):

Asexual ___ Bisexual ___ Gay ___ Heterosexual ___ Lesbian ___ Pansexual ___

Queer ___ Questioning ___ Not Listed (Please Specify)_____

Prefer Not To Disclose ___

Race/Ethnicity (check all that apply):

Black___ Latino/ Latina ___ Asian American/ Pacific Islander ___ White ___

Native American ___ Bi/ Multi-Racial ___ Not Listed (please specify):_____

Other Things About You:

What is your current job title?

_____

In which division do you work?

_____

At which institution do you work?

_____

To whom do you report in your current role?

_____

What prior full-time positions have you held in student affairs, and for how long (e.g. Director of New Student & Family Services, 6 years)?

_____

_____

_____

How many full-time staff members currently report to you? _____

Do you have a preferred pseudonym (to be used in the dissertation)? _____

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

INTERVIEW ONE: HISTORY & BACKGROUND

1. **Tell me a little bit about yourself.**
   a. What was your family life like growing up?
      i. Who raised you?
      ii. Did you have any siblings or others living in your house?
      iii. What was your relationship like with those who raised you?
      iv. What was their relationship like with each other (if multiple)?
      v. What did you learn about gender from your family growing up?
   b. What is your family life like now?
      i. If partnered, describe your relationship.
      ii. If a parent, what is your experience like raising children?
      iii. How does gender play out in your family?
   c. How do you define gender?
      i. What does it mean, to you, to be a woman?
      ii. How do you experience your gender in daily life?
      iii. How often do you think about your gender identity?
   d. What are other identities that are salient to you (e.g. race, sexuality, disability, religion)?

2. **How did you decide you wanted to go in to student affairs (SA)?**
   a. What is your educational background?
      i. Undergraduate degree?
      ii. Master's degree?
      iii. Do you have a terminal degree? If so, in what?
         1. Why did you decide to pursue this degree?
         2. What value or benefit did you perceive to be associated with this degree?
   b. Which meaningful experiences influenced your interest in student affairs?
      i. Were there people in student affairs who influenced your interest in the field?
      ii. When did you decide to pursue student affairs as a career?

3. **Tell me about your career path in student affairs.**
   a. Tell me about your first professional SA job.
      i. What did you learn or gain from this position?
      ii. Who was an influential person to you in this role?
   b. [Repeat series for each significant professional role of person.]
   c. Have you had mentors who have shaped your professional path?
      i. What about this person did you aspire to learn from?
      ii. What has your relationship looked like over time?
      iii. How did this person contribute to your understanding of gender?
   d. Have you had any defining moments in your professional career that you can share?

e. If you could start your career over again, is there anything you would do differently?

4. **Of all the things we discussed today, what's the most important part?**

INTERVIEW TWO: PHENOMENON & REFLECTION

5. **Tell me about your current role.**
    a. What are you responsible for in your current position?
        i. What functional areas do you oversee?
        ii. What skills and experiences are critical for your success in this role?
    b. How do you navigate the demands of your professional responsibilities?

6. **Tell me more about how you experience gender.**
    a. Last time you defined gender as [insert]. Do you have anything else you would like to share related to that definition?
    b. You also described what it means to be a woman, and shared [insert]. In hearing your description, is there anything else I should know?
    c. In your experience, what is the climate of gender in the field of student affairs?
        i. What has this looked like in the past?
        ii. What does is look like currently?
    d. Tell me about a time that you've been aware of gender in your position.
    e. How often do you think about gender related to your job?
    f. What role does gender play within your institution?
    g. What gendered experiences have you had in student affairs?
        i. In your unit/division?
        ii. At your institution?

7. **Could you give me an example that illustrates your leadership approach?**
    a. What is your supervisory approach?
    b. What's the hardest professional decision that you've made, and how did you come to that decision?
    c. Who comprises your professional sounding board?

8. **What has career navigation looked like to you? How has gender played a role?**
    a. Have there been times in your career that you've felt limited because of your gender?
    b. Have there been times in your career that you've had opportunities associated with your gender?
    c. What other social identities or factors do you believe have influenced your career navigation?
    d. How have others' perceptions of your gender impacted your professional success?
    e. Tell me about a time when you've advocated for yourself related to your career?
    f. How do you role model gender to other women in your division?

g. What skills, abilities, or knowledge are critical for women who seek to serve in senior student affairs roles?
h. What advice do you have for future women in SSAO roles?

9. **Is there anything else you would like to add in context to being a woman in student affairs that I haven't already asked about?**

10. **Is there anything else you would like to add in context to navigating career advancement in student affairs that I haven't already asked about?**

11. **Of all the things we've discussed in our time together, what is most important for me to know?**

Appendix C

Development of Initial Themes

Code	Initial Theme
Scope & responsibilities of role	"Proving our competence" (Jennifer)
Skills, experiences critical to role	
Skills, knowledge, and abilities	
Intersection of gender and ability	"Realize the interconnectedness": Intersectional experiences
Intersection of gender and age	
Intersection of gender and race/ethnicity	
Intersection of gender and religion	
Intersection of gender and sexuality	
Intersection of gender and size	
Expectations of having children	Career Genderization (Being treated like the kid sister)
Impact of gender on career path	
Long term career goal	Career aspirations: Pursuing the fairytale
Challenging climate and culture	Challenging power structures: Holding credibility
Challenging power dynamics	
Advice to other women	Climate of SA: "There's really no luck"
Climate for women in SA	
Network of women	Critical need for support: Leading in isolation
Sounding board	
Support systems	
Mentoring other women	Embodying women's leadership: Sharing our knowledge
Role modeling gender	
Tapping other women	
Ethics	Ethical leadership: Making tough decisions
Hardest decision made	
Failure: "I can do it better than I did do it before"	Failure: "I can do it better than I did do it before"
Being assaulted / abused	Genderization: Power over women
Gendered experience	
Diversity of administration	Institutional power dynamics: Environmental power constructs
Institutional / divisional leadership dynamics	
Doubting herself	Internalization of gendered experiences
Internalization of gender norms	
Cultivating relationships	Interpersonal leadership: Leading through shared power
Gender in leadership	
Interpersonal, transparent leadership	
Navigating competing demands	Living in Multiple Realities
Work / life	

Career path in SA	Navigating career advancement: "Shut up, just do it. Say yes." (Sheri)
Tapped for role	
Gender roles in marriage	Performing gender
Learning gender from family	
Leadership practice / approach	Practicing leadership: "Succeed and fail together." (Lauren)
Leading change	
Womanhood adding value to work	
Purpose of work	Professional purpose
Reflecting on career	
Reputation	
Influential women	Role of mentors: Bringing others into power
Person who lifted her up	
Role of mentors	
Advocating for herself	Self-Advocacy: Grappling with her worth
Salary negotiations	
Supervising former peers	Supervision
Supervisory approach	
Terminating employees	
Discrimination in job promotion	Systemic Genderization
Role of gender and race in opportunities for progression	
Working harder to have the same opportunities	
Definition of gender	Understanding Womanhood
What it means to be a woman	

Appendix D

Data Analysis Power Map

	Total	Oppressive	Hierarchical	Expansive	**Code**	**Oppressive or Hierarchical**	**Practiced between individuals or systems**	**Either/Or thinking**	**Influence of femininity, heterosexuality, fertility, maternity**	**Context of each participant's experience (institution, SA, org)**
Oppressive, Hierarchical & Expansive	**3**	1	1	1	"Realize the interconnectedness": Intersectional experiences	CP	CP	CP	CP	CP
	3	1	1	1	Climate of SA: "There's really no luck"		C	C	CP	CP
	3	1	1	1	Ethical leadership: Making tough decisions		CP		CP	C
	3	1	1	1	Failure: "I can do it better than I did do it before"		P	C	C	C
	3	1	1	1	Navigating career advancement: "Shut up, just do it. Say yes." (Sheri)	C	C		CP	CP
	3	1	1	1	Supervision	C	CP		CP	C
Oppressive & Expansive	**2**	1		1	"Proving our competence" (Jennifer)	P	P		CP	C
	2	1		1	Institutional power dynamics: Environmental power constructs		CP		P	C
	2	1		1	Living in Multiple Realities	C	C		C	P
	2	1		1	Understanding Womanhood		CP		CP	
Oppressive & Hierarchical	**2**	1	1		Career Genderization (Being treated like the kid sister)	CP	CP		C	C
	2	1	1		Genderization: Power over women	C	C		C	C

Hierarchical & Expansive	**2**		1	1	Career aspirations: Pursuing the fairytale	CP			P	
	2		1	1	Critical need for support: Leading in isolation		C		P	C
	2		1	1	Embodying women's leadership: Sharing our knowledge		P	P	CP	P
	2		1	1	Practicing leadership: "Succeed and fail together." (Lauren)	P	CP	P	CP	C
	2		1	1	Role of mentors: Bringing others into power	P	CP		CP	CP
Expansive	**1**			1	Challenging power structures: Holding credibility		P		P	P
	1			1	Interpersonal leadership: Leading through shared power		P	P	P	
	1			1	Professional purpose				P	P
	1			1	Self-Advocacy: Grappling with her worth	P	P	P	P	P
Oppressive	**1**	1			Internalization of gendered experiences				C	
	1	1			Systemic Genderization	C	C		C	C