

WOMEN VICE PRESIDENTS OF STUDENT AFFAIRS:
NAVIGATING STUDENT AFFAIRS' GENDERED ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR IN
PURSUIT OF CAREER ADVANCEMENT AND SENIOR LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

By

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ABSTRACT

WOMEN VICE PRESIDENTS OF STUDENT AFFAIRS: NAVIGATING STUDENT AFFAIRS' GENDERED ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR IN PURSUIT OF CAREER ADVANCEMENT AND SENIOR LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

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This qualitative study considers how gender affected women vice presidents of student affairs' (VPSAs) or senior student affairs officers' (SSAOs) professional experiences and career trajectories to gain insight into the influence of gender on all women professional's working experiences and ability to advance in the field. Although there is a substantial body of literature focused on women in higher education, few studies focus exclusively on women professionals in student affairs and center gender in examining women's underrepresentation in student affairs' most senior leadership positions. By applying aspects of comparative case study methodology (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017) to the individual cases of six women VPSAs or SSAOs, I learned gender is a consistent external and internal force on women professionals, which colored their daily work experiences and shaped their professional choices, behaviors, and career paths. This study contributes a needed organizational theory perspective to inquiries of women's experiences in student affairs through its theoretical framework built on Acker's (1990) five processes of gendered organizations, which illuminates the hidden ways gender is perpetuated and operationalized often to the disadvantage of women professionals at every career stage.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Lena Stefanese, whose love and strength sustained me every step of my educational journey and every day of my life.

To my son, Theo, “everything I do, I do it for you.”

Most of all, this dissertation is dedicated to women student affairs professionals who work tirelessly to support our students. You do not go unnoticed.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Student affairs is a field and profession focused on postsecondary education students' learning and holistic development (American Council on Education, 1937, 1949; Evans & Reason, 2001; Evans et al., 2010; NASPA, n.d.-a; Reason & Broido, 2017). Student affairs professionals or educators are university administrators tasked with meeting and serving students' mental, physical, and emotional needs and fulfilling vital business or administrative tasks of colleges and universities (Brookman, 1989; Dungy & Gordon, 2011; Thelin, 2011) through a variety of functional areas, departments, or offices, such as residence life, career services, student engagement, admissions, student activities, athletics, study abroad, orientation, Greek life, and multicultural affairs (Long, 2012; Wilk, 2016). Although women¹ currently hold over two-thirds of student affairs professional positions (Pal & Jones, 2020), their experiences in the field are more complicated than their numerical majority implies (Townsend & Twombly, 2007). For instance, women professionals are disproportionately underrepresented in upper-level student affairs positions (Ford, 2014; Pal & Jones, 2020), overly employed at less competitive institutional types (Pal & Jones, 2020; Turner et al., 2013), and face "gender bias and structural barriers" (Sulpizio, 2014, p. 97) that limit their career advancement and professional success (Ardoin et al., 2019; Vongalis-Macrow, 2016), circumstances I wish to interrogate through my dissertation study.

¹ In this study, I utilize traditional gender categories or terminologies, such as "woman," "women," "man," and "men," which seem to adhere to the gender binary. I recognize that these terms, particularly "woman" and "women" are sometimes utilized in homogenous ways that present and prioritize the experiences of cis-gender, White women over the experiences of women of Color and transgender, non-binary, or gender-fluid individuals (Lugones, 2007; Mann & Patterson, 2016). Despite the terminology utilized in this piece, I do not see gender as a byproduct of biological sex, and I support the understanding of gender as a continuum rather than a binary. As a result, I intentionally do not use male and female as synonyms for men and women. I continue to utilize these terms, namely "women" and "men," despite their social construction and problematic nature, to tap into the present shared understanding of these words and to align with the language used in the literature.

In my dissertation study, I explore how women vice presidents of student affairs' (VPSAs) or senior student affairs officers' (SSAOs) experiences working in the student affairs field and career trajectories were affected by gender. For the purposes of this study, gender encompasses both participants' gender identity as women and the gendered organizational behavior of higher education institutions and the student affairs field which are rooted in masculine gender and work norms. In other words, I consider how gender, both women professionals' gender identity and ideas about gender embedded in the policies and practices of student affairs and higher education, affected women VPSAs' or SSAOs' professional experiences throughout their careers and their career path. In my examination of the influence of gender on women VPSAs' or SSAOs' professional experiences and career trajectories, I consider both the field's gendered behavior, expectations, and norms as well as participants' individual choices, which led them to their current, senior student affairs position. I also consider the implicit and explicit influence of gender, namely the relationship between student affairs' gendered behavior and women's gender identity, on how they chose to perform or behave in the workplace and how they fulfill their current role.

Through a qualitative study incorporating aspects of comparative case study methodology, I present and compare the professional experiences and career trajectories of six women VPSAs or SSAOs to examine the influence of gender or the relationship between women's gender identity and the gendered nature of student affairs on women student affairs professionals. Each case was constructed through two rounds of semi-structured interviews, and document analysis of participants' resumes, press releases and news articles on participants' career milestones or achievements, reflection activity documents, institutional staff biographies or profiles, and dissertation abstracts. I found gender was both an external and internal force or

influence on women VPSAs or SSAOs' professional experiences and career trajectories. For example, gender externally affected these women VPSAs or SSAOs by subjecting and exposing them to supervisors' and colleagues' infantilizing and patriarchal behavior, which at times limited their ability to do their jobs and to advance their careers. Gender internally affected participants by promoting their feelings of imposter syndrome or feeling like they do not belong and are unworthy of professional success in student affairs. I ground my analysis in Acker's (1990, 1992, 2006) work on gendered organizational theory and ideal worker norms, which uniquely conflict with and affect working women. Acker's work (1990, 1992, 2006) helps to illuminate systemic gender inequalities within student affairs and higher education institutions, which make working in the field challenging for women.

In this chapter, I introduce my dissertation study focused on the influence of gender on women VPSAs' or SSAOs' experiences and career trajectories in student affairs. To begin this introduction, I provide relevant background information that informs and foregrounds my interest and study of women student affairs professionals, namely women VPSAs or SSAOs. Specifically, I offer a brief history of student affairs focused on women's historic involvement and positionality within the field through the dean of women position, which was the initial and sole high-level student affairs role open to women professionals on college and university campuses. Then, I provide a problem statement, which introduces the current state of women student affairs professionals' participation and positionality in the field. Women student affairs professionals' current positionality and professional experiences are more thoroughly discussed in Chapter 2, literature review and theoretical framework. Following the problem statement, I detail the significance or importance of this study. Lastly, I provide an overview of the study's organization to assist readers in navigating the components of this dissertation. Throughout this

study, I illuminate how gender, namely the conflict between women's gender and the gendered behavior of student affairs, influenced or affected six women VPSAs' or SSAOs' experiences working in the field and their career trajectories. To inform my exploration, I utilize a theoretical framework built on Acker's (1990, 2006) work on gendered organizational theory, explained in Chapter 2, which helps to elucidate the influence of gender on women working in student affairs.

Background Information

Student affairs' history and development is enveloped within the overarching history and progress of the United States higher education system (Schwartz & Stewart, 2017). The U.S. higher education system, which I define as incorporating all postsecondary education institutions, namely community colleges or two-year institutions, four-year colleges and universities, and graduate institutions, regardless of their public or private distinction, can be traced back to the establishment of colonial colleges in the late 1600s. These colonial colleges developed into some of the most prestigious and publicly recognized institutions in the United States, such as Harvard University (Thelin, 2011). However, this earliest iteration of higher education operated in an almost unrecognizable way compared to colleges and universities in the twenty-first century; specifically, within these initial higher education institutions, faculty and college presidents, who were often religious clergy or religiously affiliated, strictly oversaw all educational, moral, and administrative business of the institution and its small, elite student body (Schwartz & Stewart, 2017; Thelin, 2011; Thelin & Gasman, 2017). These students were overwhelmingly White, Christian, wealthy young men who sought educational preparation for leadership in colonial society through either the clergy or civil service (Renn & Reason, 2013; Thelin, 2011; Thelin & Gasman, 2017). Colleges, at this time, fully "embraced the role of *in loco parentis*, with the faculty members and president offering supervision of student conduct and

moral development” (Thelin & Gasman, 2017, p. 6). These institutional actors fulfilled many of the responsibilities, which are now associated with student affairs divisions and their professionals, such as enrollment, conduct, and housing (Thelin, 2011). However, these institutional actors’ philosophy or approach toward students was focused on control and order compared to today’s student affairs professionals’ focus on student development and learning (Schwartz & Stewart, 2017; Thelin & Gasman, 2017). This strict regulation of students regularly led to student unrest and conflict (Thelin, 2011).

Despite unrest and conflict between faculty, college presidents, and students, the administrative structure of U.S. higher education remained small and largely unchanged until prompted by societal shifts and, subsequent, institutional changes, such as the creation of women’s colleges, coordinate colleges or women-specific sections of formerly all-men institutions, and coeducational institutions in the mid to late 1800s (Thelin, 2011). These new institutional types expanded the eligible college-going population, increased student enrollment, and diversified the student body (Thelin, 2011); specifically, women gained access to higher education and began to enroll in greater numbers (Solomon, 1985; Thelin, 2011). As the higher education system and student population grew in both number and diversity with the novel enrollment of women students, there were increased calls from faculty, students’ parents, and society for greater student oversight, discipline, and services (Schwartz & Stewart, 2017; Thelin, 2011). These stakeholder demands and larger student populations led to the creation of the dean of women and dean of men positions (Nuss, 2003; Patton, 2016; Rentz, 2004): “As college campuses grew, the organizational complexity of increased campus size, enrollments, and student diversity demanded specialized professionals to attend to students’ needs. These professionals became the Pioneer Deans” (Patton, 2016, p. 48). These deans were the earliest

developers of student affairs work, positions, and divisions who “built our profession [student affairs] from the ground up” (Rhatigan, 2009, p. 3). These deans first encompassed, “the fundamental tenets of what would later become student affairs” (Schwartz & Stewart, 2017, p. 21) and managed “[student] problems dealing with the adaptation of student life” (Rhatigan, 2009, p. 5). Deans of women at midwestern and eastern colleges were credited with establishing what would later become the student affairs field (Duffy, 2010; Patton, 2016; Schwartz & Stewart, 2017). Hevel (2016) described these deans of women as “direct antecedents to the modern student affairs administrator” (p. 847).

Women’s Historic Involvement and Positionality in Student Affairs

The dean of women position was created to champion, protect, and address the unique concerns of women undergraduate students, particularly their safety (Patton, 2016; Rentz, 2004; Rhatigan, 2009). Hoffman (2011) defined the dean of women position as a role created by men-dominated administration to “guide the lives of women students at their institution. Women in these administrative roles responded to concerns over educating women students and [the] changing purpose of educating women students...” (p. 35). Women students were overwhelmingly the minority on U.S. college campuses, considered vulnerable to men students (Schwartz & Stewart, 2017), and seen as in need of gender-specific attention for all their educational and personal needs. As a result, deans of women were seen as necessary and critical to alleviate the general public’s concern for monitoring women students’ activities (Hevel, 2016), which was rooted in both paternalism (Schwartz & Stewart, 2017), the restriction of students’ independence, and sexism (Solomon, 1985). The general public’s concern grew from a desire to preserve women students’ virginity or purity and, therefore, their value in marriage (Solomon, 1985). White, wealthy families, in particular, feared sending their daughters to college

because they would not be able to control who their daughters interacted with and they worried their daughters would become pregnant out of wedlock or marry someone below their station (Solomon, 1985; Renn, 2014). The prominent worry over pregnancy and inappropriate matches is rooted in the sexual purity of White womanhood established during the colonial period (Lugones, 2007). Deans of women were seen as the solution and protectors of women students' virtue and reputation.

Despite this controlling, gendered, and patriarchal rationale behind the creation of the dean of women position (Hoffman, 2011; Patton, 2016; Rentz, 2004), the women who fulfilled these positions often subverted gender norms by pursuing and earning graduate degrees, remaining single or unmarried, organizing educational opportunities for other deans of women, and prompting women students to pursue socially acceptable careers, such as education and nursing, rather than encouraging them to focus solely on marriage and childrearing (Rhatigan, 2009). These women were well educated and, arguably, overqualified for the dean of women position when compared to their dean of men colleagues (Hoffman, 2011; Patton, 2016). These women were often pressured into accepting the dean of women position because they could not secure a faculty position due to their gender (Nidiffer, 2001). Rhatigan (2009) described deans of women as “nonconformists; not always respected, but through nuance, poise, and skill, they worked to expand opportunities for women students” (p. 6). Some of the earliest and most notable deans of women include Alice Freeman Palmer, the first dean of women at the University of Chicago, and Marion Talbot, initially the assistant dean of women at the University of Chicago and, later, the dean of women following Palmer's retirement (Hevel, 2016; Patton, 2016; Schwartz & Stewart, 2017).

In addition to serving as one of the first deans of women, Talbot organized the Association of Collegiate Alumnae (ACA), which was an annual meeting of deans of women focused on professional networking and development (Schwartz & Stewart, 2017). The ACA later became the first student affairs professional association or organization, the National Association of Deans of Women (NADW), in 1916 (Schwartz & Stewart, 2017). The NADW developed its own professional journal, which served as an outlet for deans of women to both share their own and learn from others' work, studies, and reports. NADW also prompted the development of a deans of women academic department at Columbia University's Teachers College (Schwartz, 1997; Schwartz & Stewart, 2017), which is the forebearer of student affairs graduate preparation or academic programs.

Deans of women also expanded the responsibilities, professionalism, and training of their own position and other institutional actors who would today be considered student affairs professionals or administrators (Hevel, 2016; Klink, 2014). For example, deans of women expanded their role from strict disciplinarian to student advocate and mentor (Hevel, 2016), and became known for creating and expanding educational and extracurricular opportunities for women students (Klink, 2014; Sartorius, 2014). Additionally, deans of women pushed back against higher education's depiction of women students as either morally deficit or naïve and childlike; for example, Alice Mary Baldwin the first dean of women at Duke University's Women's College (Duke University, 2021) resisted pressure from the university and the public to build an iron fence around the women's dormitory to lock women students in overnight (Hevel, 2016). Baldwin argued the fence would give a poor impression of Duke's women students (Hevel, 2016). Baldwin also advocated for the employment of women faculty members, created a student government for women students who were excluded from the general student

government, pushed for women students to be able to take upper-level coursework that was, initially, limited to men students, and assisted women students in producing their own literary magazine after they were excluded from writing for the university's established literary magazine (Duke University, 2021).

Similarly, another notable, but often overlooked, dean of women, Lucy Diggs Slowe, the first African American dean of women in the United States, expanded her role at Howard University to include advising the women's student government, overseeing campus housing, providing academic advising and career counseling, organizing students' health records, managing scholarship funds, and creating campus employment opportunities for students (Herdlein, 2004, 2005; Hevel, 2016; Miller & Pruitt-Logan, 2012). Slowe also lectured on gender equity on campus and traveled across the country to advocate for racial equality (Hevel, 2016). Furthermore, Dorothy Stratton, the first dean of women at Purdue University, sought to better prepare institutional actors or staff to live and work alongside students by establishing a "Housemother Training School" (Klink, 2014), which was a summer training institute open to adults working in campus housing or with fraternities and sororities across the United States (Hevel, 2016).

These examples provide evidence of women's foundational involvement or participation in student affairs' establishment, their vital efforts to professionalize the field (Hevel, 2016) within "the still predominantly male college campus" (Duffy, 2010, p. 239), and overall, the gendered nature and history of student affairs. As Duffy (2020) explained, these deans of women "saw their role, profession, and gender inextricably tied" (p. 239). Women developed the work itself, namely what it involves, by working directly with women undergraduate students. They established student affairs' first professional organizations or associations and designed

academic curricula and professional development experiences that would later become the foundation of student affairs professionals' graduate education and training.

Women's Decline in Positionality within Student Affairs

Although deans of women were critical in the creation and implementation of student affairs work and its long-term development, women remained limited in their positionality and their ability to affect change and exert their agency within their individual institutions, the student affairs field, and the higher education system in general (Patton, 2016). They also regularly experienced sexism and gender discrimination in the workplace. For example, Slowe was subjected to poor treatment and alienation due to her gender (Hevel, 2016); specifically, Howard University's first African American president, Mordecai Johnson, hindered Slowe's ability to fulfill her position by cutting her funding and denying her entry to critical meetings, weakened her position by removing its residential responsibilities, and attempted to physically restrict her movements and alienate her from her personal community by pressuring her to move on campus (Hevel, 2016). Johnson also refused to approve any raises for Slowe during her tenure as dean of women (Hevel, 2016). Slowe's professional experiences were described "as one of the most blatant examples of sexism" (Miller & Pruitt-Logan, 2012, p. 348) in the history of higher education.

Additionally, deans of women were expected to uphold socially constructed gendered norms, namely gendered spheres, which assume men and women possess distinct predisposed behaviors, inclinations, and talents, and were most successful when kept separate (Nidiffer, 2000; Sartorius, 2014). Most deans of women internalized these gender ideals and elected to create separate spaces for women on campus rather than fight the system for inclusion: "many deans of women stopped short of asserting that college women were entitled to full equality with

college men...believing that women thrived in same-gender environments... deans of women created single-sex spaces on campus, including dormitories, student unions, and gymnasiums” (Hevel, 2016, p. 856). As society developed deans of women continually faced pressure from two opposing sides. On one side, deans of women were expected by conservative institutional leadership, students’ parents, and society to uphold gender constructs and ensure women students’ “decorum” or appropriate behavior (Hevel, 2016; Schwartz, 1997). On the other side, deans of women were called on by women students to reduce patriarchal rules and argue for women students’ equitable treatment (Bailey, 1999; Hevel, 2016; Sartorius, 2014). Although deans of women were able to improve women students’ collegiate experiences by operating within the system and its gendered rules, they had little latitude to make sweeping changes on college and university campuses nor were they successful in subverting gender disparity and division in higher education (Bailey, 1999; Hevel, 2016; Sartorius, 2014). Deans of women, themselves, were extremely vulnerable to gender dynamics and discrimination in the higher education system; for instance, deans of women were unable to preserve their positions, which were eliminated in favor of deans of students and filled by men professionals (Hevel, 2016).

The dean of men position “was created in response to deans of women” (Schwartz & Stewart, 2017, p. 23) rather than a true need for the role; however, deans of men spent their time fulfilling administrative responsibilities rather than working directly with students as their dean of women counterparts did. Deans of men assumed many of the tasks previously completed by college and university presidents (Schwartz & Stewart, 2017), which provided deans of men more power, influence, and respect on campus. As a result, deans of men were viewed as more qualified and effective leaders than women on their campuses and within the student affairs field (Schwartz & Stewart, 2017).

Societal changes also positioned deans of men over deans of women and expedited women's demotion within student affairs; for example, the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, known as the GI Bill, rapidly increased student enrollment causing institutions to more heavily rely on deans of men to complete necessary administrative tasks and to oversee newly created student services positions to meet the growing demand for more men student affairs professionals to better relate to and reflect the student population (Schwartz, 1997; Stewart & Schwartz, 2017). It was assumed deans of women could not adequately supervise these men professionals. Also, because of the GI Bill, men student enrollment grew, and women student enrollment declined, which made the dean of women position seem obsolete or unnecessary (Schwartz, 1997; Stewart & Schwartz, 2017).

Furthermore, following the passage of Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972, which was considered a turning point for women students' access and treatment in the U.S. higher education system, institutions began to eliminate gender-specific or single-sex positions, namely the deans of men and women positions and offices, in favor of more inclusive dean of students and vice president for student personnel services positions (Hoffman, 2011), later known as the VPSA or SSAO position. Due to their positionality and experiences on campus not to mention their close relationship with college and university presidents, deans of men were seen as better positioned to take over these newly created senior leadership roles (Schwartz, 1997; Schwartz & Stewart, 2017): "Even though many of the women serving as deans of women were often equally, if not better, prepared, they did not get promoted if a man was available" (Schwartz & Stewart, 2017, p. 28). This preference for men over women in upper-level positions remains present in contemporary student affairs (Turner et al., 2013), which I discuss in the below problem statement section.

Student affairs professional associations also adjusted to and reflected these changes in the field, namely the elimination of gender specific student affairs roles in favor of more gender-neutral titles (Schwartz & Stewart, 2017). For example, the deans of men professional association, the National Association of Deans of Men, which developed in response to the deans of women professional association, changed their name to the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators in 1951 (NASPA, n.d.-b). The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators is the forefather of one of today's largest and well-known student affairs professional associations, NASPA Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA, n.d.-b). Women student affairs professionals attempted to maintain their gender specific associations to conserve their presence in student affairs; however, they lost membership to the overarching associations, such as NASPA, which were rooted in deans of men organizations and, often, men-dominated (NASPA, n.d.-b; Schwartz & Stewart, 2017). Eventually, the first student affairs professional association which was established by deans of women, initially entitled ACA, then called the National Association of Women Deans, Administrators, and Counselors (NAWDAC), and lastly renamed the National Association of Women in Education (NAWE), could no longer compete and "ceased to exist altogether in 2000" (Schwartz & Stewart, 2017, p. 28). Men student affairs professionals led by these early deans of men and deans of students effectively took over student affairs leadership, which had lasting effects on the culture of the field, the work, and women's experiences within it.

This brief history of student affairs emphasizes women student affairs professionals' demotion within the field despite deans of women being the founders of student affairs work in the U.S. higher education system. Student affairs history, embodied by these early professionals, upheld and perpetuated sexist ideals or gendered behavior on both students and, more relevant to

this study, fellow student affairs administrators (Stewart, 2019). The historic gender hierarchy and dynamics between women and men student affairs professionals had long-lasting effects on the field and carried into the contemporary behavior and treatment of women professionals. Currently, women student affairs professionals continue to struggle with gendered behavior and a gender hierarchy within the field, which mitigates their representation within and access to senior leadership or upper-level positions in student affairs. Women's negative professional experiences and positionality is deeply embedded and rooted in the field's history and development.

Problem Statement

Although women professionals, namely deans of women, were considered the first to embody and develop student affairs as a unique type of work or profession in the U.S. higher education system (Hevel, 2016; Patton, 2016), they were limited by, controlled by, and positioned below men within their institutions and the field (Schwartz, 1997; Schwartz & Stewart, 2017). College and university presidents, who were almost exclusively men, designed the dean of women position to control women students not foreseeing the influential role deans of women would have on women students and on what would later become the student affairs field (Hoffman, 2011). However, women's leading role within student affairs was short-lived. Men-dominated higher education leadership significantly limited the power and influence of women student affairs professionals by eliminating the deans of women position and with-it women's professional sphere or space within the field. Men were the preferred leaders within the field and consistently promoted over women into upper-level positions (Schwartz & Stewart, 2017). This replacement and displacement of women in student affairs established a

longstanding gender hierarchy within the field that positioned men as leaders and women as supporters or followers.

Women's Current Involvement and Positionality in Student Affairs

Notwithstanding the storied history and positionality of women in student affairs, student affairs is currently considered a welcoming field for individuals of all social identities (Stewart, 2019), especially for women who are assumed to be embraced and successful within the field (Calhoun & Taub, 2014; Rue, 2019; Stimpson & Filer, 2011; Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2011). Women are assumed to enjoy professional success and, even, gender equity in student affairs because it is widely considered a feminized field (Ford, 2014; McEwen et al., 1990; Sallee et al., 2020). A feminized field is a field that society deems socially acceptable for women to work within, such as education, nursing, and social work (C. L. Williams, 2014), because it involves traditionally feminine characteristics or qualities, such as providing care, guidance, or nourishment (Leathwood & Read, 2009; Wingfield, 2009), and aligns with the conception of women as caregivers.

Although women are members of the numerical majority within these fields (C. L. Williams, 2014), they remain disadvantaged when compared to men in these fields, which underscores women's persistence displacement and negative treatment in the workplace (Wingfield, 2009). Men pursuing careers in feminized fields benefit from structural advantages in hiring, evaluation, and compensation processes (C. L. Williams, 2014). Men are more likely to be hired in these fields because of their numerical minority status and receive more positive performance evaluations (Powell, 2014; Seo et al., 2017), higher salaries, and a faster rate of promotion or advancement than their women counterparts (C. L. Williams, 2014). Williams (2014) described these benefits or advantages for men in feminized fields as "a glass escalator,"

which moves men swiftly out of low and mid-level positions to high-level or senior positions. For example, men nurses are more likely than women nurses to be promoted to supervisory positions and have greater access to and ability to socialize with doctors and other high-powered hospital personnel (Wingfield, 2009). The “glass elevator” stands in contrast with the “glass ceiling,” which is a term used to describe the invisible, structural barriers preventing women from achieving upper-level positions in their chosen fields (Baumgartner & Schneider, 2010). While women describe the disadvantages associated with being the numerical minority or “token” woman (Kanter, 1975), such as “standing out” or struggling to assimilate or adapt to the organizational culture, men in feminized fields, including student affairs, describe benefiting from additional leadership opportunities (C. L. Williams, 1995; Wingfield, 2009).

In keeping with women’s positionality in other feminized fields, it follows that although student affairs is considered “women-friendly” (McEwen et al., 1990) due to the high presence of women employed in the field (Ford, 2014) and the nature of student affairs work that aligns with traditionally feminine qualities (M. S. Hughes, 1989; Sallee et al., 2020), women generally remain relegated to entry-level, administrative or support staff and mid-level positions rather than represented in upper-level positions (Amey & Eddy, 2002; Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2011; Zorn, 2007). Specifically, women student affairs professionals fulfill two-thirds of entry and mid-level student affairs positions, but are disproportionately underrepresented in upper-level, executive, or senior leadership positions (Pal & Jones, 2020; Townsend & Twombly, 2007; Turner et al., 2013).

Women’s representation in upper-level student affairs positions is additionally diminished based on institutional type and women’s social identities, namely racial identity. For example, women comprise 47% of VPSAs or SSAOs across institutional type (NASPA, 2014),

yet they only comprise 37% of VPSAs or SSAOs at doctoral degree granting institutions (NASPA, 2014), which are seen as more selective, prestigious, and competitive institutions within higher education. This institutional reputation affords student affairs professionals employed within doctoral degree granting and other selective institutions greater exposure and influence within the field; however, women student affairs professionals are unable to fully access leadership positions within these institutions. Women student affairs professionals are more likely to fulfill upper-level positions at associate degree granting and other less selective institutions (Dugger, 2001; Pal & Jones, 2020; Turner et al., 2013), which are not as highly regarded in the field.

Women's representation within upper-level student affairs positions also drastically decreases for women of Color across institutional type (NASPA, 2014; West, 2020). For example, although Black women fulfill the greatest number of higher education and student affairs positions after White women and men (West, 2020), they comprise only 7% of VPSA or SSAO positions (NASPA, 2014). Black women's limited representation or underrepresentation in senior and high-level student affairs positions remains consistent despite their experience and educational credentials or degrees (Miles, 2012; West, 2020). Similarly, Hispanic women or Latinas comprise only 6.5% of these leadership roles (NASPA, 2014).

Despite the field's reputation, women continue to describe higher education as a hostile or chilly environment (Ardoyn et al., 2019; Gonzales, 2018; Jones et al., 2015; Pal & Jones, 2020; Sandler & Hall, 1986). As Duffy (2010) explained, "it is a false impression to believe gender equity in higher education and student affairs administration has been achieved – academia is still a man's profession" (p. 235). For example, women student affairs professionals were found to leave student affairs at higher rates (Beeny et al., 2005; Blackhurst, 2000), to earn

lower salaries than men in similar positions (Blackhurst, 2000; Dean et al., 2009), and to fulfill a heavier load of labor associated with student affairs work (Blackhurst, 2000; Stewart, 2019). The field's reliance on women professionals to do this critical work further contributes to women's high levels of burnout, job dissatisfaction, attrition or leaving the field, and the overall limited number of women leaders (Jo, 2008; Marshall et al., 2016).

Although some recent research (e.g., Ardoin et al., 2019; Sulpizio, 2014; Vongalis-Macrow, 2016) documented women student affairs professionals facing gender bias, discrimination, and barriers, which limit their ability to secure upper-level positions in the field, there is overall little recent empirical research centering gender as a key factor within or underlying cause of women student affairs professionals' negative experiences and positionality in the field. Overall, the literature largely does not consider the implications or effects of gender on women's professional experiences and career trajectories in student affairs (Nicolazzo, 2019; Nicolazzo & Henderson, 2019; Patton, 2016; Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2011). The purpose of this study is to fulfill this gap; specifically, I explored how gender, namely women student affairs professionals' gender identity and the gendered nature of student affairs, influenced women's professional experiences, choices, and career trajectories in pursuit and fulfillment of the VPSA or SSAO position. My guiding research questions included: (1) How do women VPSAs or SSAOs perceive the influence of gender on their professional experiences and career trajectories? (2) How do women VPSAs or SSAOs describe the influence of gender on their current role, namely their experiences and choices in this role?

Study Significance

Women professionals' unique gendered experience is understudied in recent higher education (Nicolazzo, 2019; Nicolazzo & Henderson, 2019) and student affairs research

(Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2011); specifically, major studies focused on the influence or intersection of women student affairs professionals' gender identity and professional experiences are dated (e.g., Blackhurst, 2000; Burns, 1982). This dated literature highlights the need for updated research that centers gender and examines if the negative gendered trends and experiences mentioned above (e.g., women leaving student affairs at higher rates and receiving less career advancement opportunities than their men colleagues) continue in today's context. Without recent research focused on this topic, such as this study, there is little chance that women professionals' unique experiences will be recognized and addressed despite evident gender disparities or differences in the treatment and professional experiences of men and women student affairs professionals.

Additionally, this study is significant because women face gender inequities and professional setbacks due, in large part, to the gendered responsibilities placed on them (McKinnon-Crowley et al., 2022) in higher education, student affairs, and other fields; however, research on the working experiences of women in higher education mainly focuses on the challenges facing women faculty (e.g., Craft & Maseberg-Tomlinson, 2015; Gonzales, 2018; Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Mena, 2016; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2016) and higher education administrators² (e.g., Ballenger, 2010; Compton & Palmer, 2009; Diehl, 2014; Kersh, 2018; Marshall, 2009; Mitchell & Garcia, 2020; Turner et al., 2013; Vongalis-Macrow, 2016), which leaves women working in student affairs administration minimal attention in recent scholarship (Pal & Jones, 2020; Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2011). The existing research also largely does not

² The literature focused on higher education administrators refers to leadership positions within academic affairs typically accessed through promotion from a faculty position, such as academic deans, department chairs, provosts, and college and university presidents.

question nor critique gendered responsibilities, which are rooted in sex role theory and gender norms or gender stereotypes (Connell, 1987; Kanter, 1975).

These roles, norms, and stereotypes align women with being nurturing, caring, and maintaining an ethic of care (Connell, 1987). Without questioning or critiquing traditional gender roles and stereotypes, which are a component of higher education and student affairs' gendered behavior, men and women will continue to be treated differently in the workplace and separated into distinct areas of focus and positions within student affairs and higher education. This study contributes a necessary structural or organizational perspective focused on the influence of gender on women student affairs professionals to the conversation on women's professional experiences in the workplace broadly. Through this study, I highlight and question gendered organizational behavior (Acker, 1996, 2000), which negatively affects women's experiences and career advancement in the workplace (Ibarra, 2004; Kanter, 1975) rather than accepting it as commonplace and inevitable.

Furthermore, through this study's examination of the influence of gender on women student affairs professionals, particularly how the field perpetuates gendered organizational behavior that centers men and their work and life patterns, I draw into question the professional expectations student affairs imposes on its professionals and administrators, such as working irregular hours (Sallee, 2016), being continually available for students (Renn & Hughes, 2004), and providing students emotional support (Burke & Robinson, 2019; Stewart, 2019). These expectations remain largely unexplored and unchanged despite evidence of their negative effects on student affairs professionals' retention and mental health (Beeny et al., 2005; Blackhurst, 2000; Kersh, 2018; Pal & Jones, 2020), particularly on women professionals (Blackhurst, 2000; McKinnon-Crowley et al., 2022; Stewart, 2019). These demanding professional expectations

conflict with the societal gender roles and expectations placed on women, namely motherhood and other caretaker responsibilities (McKinnon-Crowley et al., 2022; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2016). This conflict and other gender inequities were exacerbated and made more apparent during the continued COVID-19 pandemic, particularly within higher education, and already points to lasting, negative effects on women's presence and advancement in the workplace (Gabster et al., 2020), which makes this study even more relevant and timely.

This study also has the potential to improve the professional experiences of women student affairs professionals who seek upper-level or senior leadership positions in the future; specifically, this study includes the experiences of women who were able to persist or remain in the field and secure upper-level positions despite gender barriers and obstacles. Other women student affairs professionals may benefit from participants' experiences, namely how they were able to manage student affairs' gendered organizational behavior. Furthermore, by illuminating the problematic, gendered behavior of student affairs, institutional leadership can recognize and address the gender disparities and inequities within their policies and practices. Lastly, creating more equitable professional environments within student affairs will improve the professional experiences of not only women professionals but all student affairs professionals, which ultimately leads to improved services and support for students.

Study Organization

This study includes six chapters: an introduction, literature review and theoretical framework, methodology, data, findings, and discussion with recommendations for practice and future research. Following this introduction, which included background information on the history of student affairs and women's participation in it, the problem statement or rationale for this work, the significance or importance of this study, and the study organization or roadmap, I

include Chapter 2, which provides an overview of literature pertinent to this study. Within this literature review, I highlight and evaluate the current research focused on women student affairs professionals; specifically, I thematically categorize the literature in terms of the gender related challenges or barriers women face in the field, which contribute to the limited number of women in VPSA or SSAO positions. Chapter 2 also includes an overview of my theoretical framework focused on Acker's (1990, 1992) gendered organizational theory work. Within Chapter 3, I explain my selected research paradigm, critical humanism, and implemented methodology and methods, which are grounded in comparative case study methodology. In Chapter 4 or the participant profiles chapter, I present case studies focused on each participant, which I then analyze and present thematically in Chapter 5, the findings chapter. In chapter 5, I explain how gender, externally and internally, acted upon participants throughout their careers, particularly in pursuit and fulfillment of their VPSA or SSAO position. Lastly, in Chapter 6 or the discussion chapter, I integrate Acker's (1990) five processes of gendered organizational theory and situate my work within the literature and conversation on women in higher education and student affairs. I conclude my study by offering recommendations for practice focused on supporting women student affairs professionals' career advancement. I also offer recommendations for future research within this topical area.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Women are often assumed to have achieved gender equity and parity in the United States higher education system (Duffy, 2010) because they enroll in and graduate from both undergraduate and graduate degree programs at higher rates than their men counterparts (Adebayo, 2008); specifically, in the fields of higher education and student affairs, women comprise the majority of graduate preparation program enrollment (Adams, 2014; McEwen et al., 1990), hold the majority of higher education and student affairs graduate degrees (Miles, 2020), and fulfill the majority of professional positions (Pal & Jones, 2020). However, women's ability to professionally progress or advance within student affairs and the organizational or hierarchical structure of higher education institutions is limited due to gender, particularly the conflict between women's gender identity and gendered organizational behavior, which implicitly favors men in the workplace. I divide this chapter between my review of the literature on women in student affairs and higher education, and an explanation of my theoretical framework based on Acker's (1990, 1992, 2006) theory of gendered organizations. Within my literature review, I highlight the structural, cultural, societal, and individual barriers that negatively affect women's professional experiences and limit women's career advancement.

Literature Review

Women continually face structural and systemic gender bias in the workplace (Sulpizio, 2014) through organizational practices, such as hiring and evaluation processes, that are assumed to be gender neutral yet inherently advantage men over women (Correll, 2020; Costello, 2012; Gonzales, 2018; Seo et al., 2017). For example, performance evaluations or job performance criteria overwhelmingly measure professionals' ability to reflect masculine characteristics in the workplace, such as assertiveness, rather than feminine characteristics or qualities, such as

helpfulness (Correll et al., 2020; Turnbow, 2019). Correll et al. (2020) found gender affects how supervisors both complete and interpret evaluations. Supervisors are more likely to evaluate women employees harshly for behaving in the same ways as men employees (Correll et al., 2020; Fiske et al., 2002). Women professionals are also less likely to be described as “likeable,” perceived as “future leaders,” and seen as “exceptional” in their work than men (Correll et al., 2020; Rivera & Tilcsik, 2019). Because evaluations are critical in salary increase and promotion considerations their embedded gender bias disadvantages women (Correll et al., 2020). Women working within higher education and student affairs are subjected to similar organizational policies and practices that privilege White, cis-gender, men at the expense of women (Mullen, 2010) and limits their ability to secure and succeed within upper-level leadership positions (Aleman & Renn, 2002; Ardoin et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2015; Sulpizio, 2014; Vongalis-Macrow, 2016).

The State of Literature on Women in Student Affairs

The disparate treatment between men and women workers, and the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions is discussed in higher education literature; however, the literature overwhelmingly focuses on women faculty (e.g., Craft & Maseberg-Tomlinson, 2015; Gonzales, 2018; Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Mena, 2016; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2016) and higher education administrators³ (e.g., Ballenger, 2010; Compton & Palmer, 2009; Diehl, 2014; Kersh, 2018; Marshall, 2009; Mitchell & Garcia, 2020; Turner et al., 2013; Vongalis-Macrow, 2016) rather than solely on women student affairs professionals (Pal & Jones, 2020; Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2011). Furthermore, most of the literature tends to portray a deficit mindset when

³ In this context, the terminology, higher education administrators, refers to leadership positions within academic affairs and academic departments, such as deans, department chairs, and provosts, rather than leadership positions in student affairs divisions and functional areas.

examining women leaders and focuses on the “impossibility” of women leadership in higher education (Turner et al., 2013) rather than identifying, critically examining, and proposing changes to the gendered behavior of organizations and the implicit masculine bias of ideal worker norms (Acker, 2006; Risman & Davis, 2013; Wilk, 2016), which I address in this literature review and overall study.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Literature Review

My examination focuses on literature, written in English, involving cis-gender women who are working within the fields of student affairs and higher education administration in the U.S. higher education or postsecondary education system. I limit my focus to cis-gender women, who are defined as women who identify with the gender traditionally correlated with their biological sex assigned at birth. Although transgender student affairs professionals’ unique experiences in the field is an important area for future research on gender in student affairs, transgender professionals’ experiences are outside the scope of this dissertation. I also focus on literature involving women working within these two related fields, higher education and student affairs, because women and gender are, overall, under researched in recent scholarship (Nicolazzo, 2019; Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2011); specifically, there was a drastic decline in gender considerations or studies in both higher education and student affairs research since the 1990s (Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2011).

In this literature review, I prioritize analyzing the limited literature on women professionals in student affairs, particularly focusing on the challenges or specific barriers women face in the field. However, I extend my analysis to incorporate literature on women working in higher education administration, generally, because many of these studies do not distinguish between the fields and incorporate both student affairs professionals and higher

education administrators as participants (e.g., Ardoin et al., 2019; Boss et al., 2019; Selzer & Robles, 2019). The literature on women working in student affairs and higher education used ambiguous participant selection criteria by conflating higher education and student affairs and including any women who worked in higher education or academia, broadly defined. The authors largely do not distinguish between these fields, their associated positions or roles, and their unique, though interconnected, disciplinary cultures (e.g., Boss et al., 2019; Marshall, 2009; Selzer & Robles, 2019), which is crucial to consider because student affairs professionals do not experience the same leadership trajectory or career progression as higher education administrators (e.g., department chairs, deans, and provosts) who are often promoted from faculty positions. One notable exception within the literature, Wilk (2016) clearly defined student affairs as “student-oriented...positions that are unique to higher education...[including] student housing, academic advising, career and personal counseling, and student activities” (p. 39–40). More recent work (e.g., Pal & Jones, 2020; McKinnon-Crowley et al., 2022) also provided clear participation criteria and focused solely on student affairs professionals.

Although I find it problematic to broadly describe the experiences of women in higher education without distinguishing the unique educational and professional trajectories of women student affairs professionals, I included these pieces in my literature review because of the overall minimal number or lack of empirical studies on upper-level women in student affairs (Beeny et al., 2005), namely VPSAs or SSAOs who are the focus of this study. Subsequently, this literature provides greater context on the professional experiences of women working in higher education outside of traditional faculty roles.

Rationale for Literature Review on Women in Student Affairs

The lack of critical, empirical examinations of women's professional experiences and career advancement in student affairs (Beeny et al., 2005) is concerning given that women fulfill most student affairs positions (Costello, 2012; Engstrom et al., 2006; Ford, 2014; McKinnon-Crowley et al., 2022; NCES, 2016; Pal & Jones, 2020). Despite their numerical majority, women are disproportionately relegated to entry and mid-level positions when compared to men in the field (Costello, 2012; Duffy, 2010; Engstrom et al., 2006; Ford, 2014; Marshall, 2009; Pal & Jones, 2020), are found to leave the field at higher rates than their men counterparts (Beeny et al., 2005; Blackhurst, 2000; Burns, 1982; McKinnon-Crowley et al., 2022), and earn lower salaries than men in similar positions (Blackhurst, 2000; Dean et al., 2009). Yet, women professionals are also disproportionately relied on to complete the labor associated with student affairs work (Blackhurst, 2000; Jones & Komives, 2001; Stewart, 2019), which involves extensive student interactions (Anthony, 2016; Marshall et al., 2016) and support for students' holistic well-being and cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal development (M. S. Hughes, 1989). Both the field at large and institutions' student affairs divisions rely on women to complete the day-to-day work and student-centered mission and purpose of student affairs, yet their contributions are neither proportionately valued nor rewarded.

Women's limited representation in upper-level student affairs positions, namely the VPSA or SSAO position (Selzer & Robles, 2019), is often attributed to a lack of women candidates or women in the "leadership pipeline" (Kellerman & Rhode, 2014). For example, in their study of 257 mid-level, women student affairs professionals, Pal and Jones (2020) found only a third of participants aspired to the VPSA or SSAO position. Participants who were uninterested in upper-level or senior leadership positions primarily cited work-life balance

concerns as their rationale for remaining in their current position (Pal & Jones, 2020). Pal and Jones' (2020) findings were echoed by McKinnon-Crowley et al. (2022) whose study of 21 mothers working in student affairs underscored women student affairs professionals often feel pressured to either remain in entry or mid-level positions or leave the field entirely due to work-life balance concerns, namely the field's incongruency with women's familial and caregiving responsibilities (Anthony, 2016). Women student affairs professionals are uniquely concerned and affected by work-life balance issues because their personal responsibilities, namely being primarily responsible for childrearing and eldercare, directly conflict with the field's temporal, emotional, and physical demands (Anthony, 2016; Hoschschild & Machung, 1997; McKinnon-Crowley et al., 2022; Sayer, 2005). These field-specific demands are exacerbated for women who are not only expected to be more nurturing toward students but also more caring toward colleagues and staff than men professionals, which makes the VPSA or SSAO position even more demanding and difficult to align with women's personal responsibilities (Jones & Komives, 2001).

Women student affairs professionals also identify a lack of career advancement opportunities as another motivator or rationale for either remaining in a mid-level position or leaving the field (Bailey, 2011; Cosimini, 2011; Marshall et al., 2016; Pal & Jones, 2020). For example, Pal and Jones (2020) found approximately 70% of their participants believed they would have to look outside their institution for career advancement. Women student affairs professionals' high attrition from the field is also related to student affairs' high professional expectations that strain professionals' mental and emotional health (Anthony, 2016; Beeny et al., 2005; Blackhurst, 2000; Kersh, 2018; Pal & Jones, 2020).

Although some women student affairs professionals elect not to pursue a VPSA or SSAO position, this “choice rhetoric” or the idea that women “self-select jobs that require less education and lower level of skills” (J. Williams, 2001, p. 14) does not account for the role gender plays in women’s negative experiences in the field and low representation in upper-level student affairs positions. Subsequently, examining and understanding the gender-related challenges, barriers, or “roadblocks” (Duffy, 2010, p. 236) women in student affairs must navigate in their pursuit of professional success and senior leadership positions (Pal & Jones, 2020) is crucial. A gendered examination of women’s experiences and inequitable representation and treatment within the field can also help move the field closer to its long-espoused values of gender equity and inclusivity (Stewart, 2019).

Literature Analysis

The literature revealed women continue to hit a glass ceiling (Turner et al., 2013) or “invisible barrier built into the social structure of organizations” (Diehl, 2014, p. 54) between mid-level student affairs positions and senior or upper-level positions (Duffy, 2010; Johns, 2013; Selzer & Robles, 2019). The glass ceiling is constructed, in part, because of student affairs divisions and higher education institutions operating in gendered ways (Ballenger, 2010) meaning they align with and perpetuate masculine ideals of work and advantage men over women within policies and practices or professional behavior (Acker, 2006). For example, student affairs divisions adhere to socially constructed gender norms, such as associating men with leadership roles and equating leadership behavior with masculine qualities (e.g., decisiveness, confidence, and strength) and associating women with nurturing roles and behaviors (e.g., being emotional, good listeners, and team players) (Jones & Taylor, 2012; Selzer & Robles, 2019). As a result, student affairs divisions tend to rely on women professionals to

directly interact with students and rely on men professionals to do more strategic planning and budgeting work, which are typically necessary skills for advancement and more likely to be rewarded by supervisors (Selzer & Robles, 2019). In addition, organizations expect their professionals to align with socially constructed gender roles and cultural images, namely men are assumed and expected to be ideal workers, breadwinners, or financial providers and women are assumed to be the primary caregivers whose employment outside the home is purely supplemental (Heilman, 1997; Seo et al., 2017). In keeping with these gender roles and cultural images, women student affairs professionals are paid less than men in the same roles, culminating with women VPSAs or SSAOs making 94 cents for every dollar paid to men VPSAs or SSAOs (CUPA-HR, 2022). Women professionals also reported being taken less seriously and passed over for promotions because supervisors assumed they would prioritize their families and their husbands' careers, over work and would be more likely to leave their positions and possibly the field (Joyce-Brady, 2004). As a result of the field's gendered behavior, women must navigate challenges and face barriers or obstacles, namely structural or organizational, cultural, societal, and individual barriers (Diehl, 2014), related to their gender identity (Costello, 2012; Pal & Jones, 2020; Selzer & Robles, 2019). In this section, I delve into the different categories or types of barriers women face in the field, which harms their career progression and negative impacts their experiences in the field (Johns, 2013; Pal & Jones, 2020; Selzer & Robles, 2019; Turner et al., 2013).

Structural Barriers

Women face structural barriers to their full participation, career advancement, and satisfaction working in student affairs. Structural barriers include organizational or institutional policies, practices, or mechanisms that favor men over women (Seo et al., 2017), which Acker

(1990) discusses in the fifth process of gendered organizations and refers to as organizational logics, gendered organizational behavior, or a gendered social structure. Structural barriers include implicit gender bias in hiring and evaluation processes (Adams, 2014; Dean et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2015), inequitable or disparate salary structures (Blackhurst, 2000; Compton & Palmer, 2009; Dean et al., 2009; Kulich et al., 2011), and supervisory practices that create gendered divisions between men and women or overall “segregation in occupations” (Tiao, 2006, p. 45).

These structural barriers are experienced by women at all levels and roles within higher education (Jones et al., 2015; Pal & Jones, 2020; Sandler & Hall, 1986); for instance, extensive empirical research captured the negative, gendered experiences of women pursuing tenure and fulfilling faculty roles (e.g., Craft & Maseberg-Tomlinson, 2015; Gonzales, 2018; Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Mena, 2016; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2016). Costello (2012) and Jones and Taylor (2012) highlighted women support staff’s gendered experiences within higher education, and Townsend and Twombly (2007) discussed the gendered experiences of women faculty and higher education administrators interchangeably. While Gillespie et al. (2001) conflated the experiences of women support staff and student affairs professionals, which Wilk (2016) described as “conflat[ing] the experiences of employees who occupy fundamentally different jobs” (p. 38). Regardless of women’s positions within higher education institutions and student affairs divisions, like other businesses or organizations and professions, hold professionals to insurmountable gendered standards, expectations, and norms, which Acker (1990, 2006) described as the male norm, ideal worker norm, or the disembodied worker.

The ideal worker construct assumes workers, read men, can fully commit themselves to their professional roles without any outside responsibilities, roles, or distractions (Acker, 1990,

2006; Costello, 2012; Sallee, 2012; Wilk, 2016). The ideal worker construct or image is built on the assumption that workers have a wife who will care for all other needs and responsibilities (Acker, 1990, 2006; Costello, 2012), such as the household and children (Wilk, 2016; J. Williams, 2001). Although this ideal is unrealistic for all professionals (Sallee et al., 2020; Wilk, 2016), men and women alike, women student affairs professionals are particularly disadvantaged because the field and higher education institutions continue to operate in male-oriented ways (Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2011) while holding a reputation for being woman-friendly, which obscures or hides the negative, gender-related experiences of women professionals. The obstruction of women's gender-related experiences in "woman-friendly" spaces was the central argument in Jones and Taylor's (2012) study of over 900 women support staff members' perception of their experiences working in community colleges. They found women continue to face the same structural barrier to their job satisfaction and career advancement in community colleges despite being more likely to hire women than other institutional types.

Structural barriers to women student affairs' professionals career advancement also include a lack of organizational policies to support women in managing their disproportionate external responsibilities, which inherently disadvantages them to men professionals who typically do not carry to brunt of childrearing and other domestic responsibilities (Estes, 2011). In Nobbe and Manning's (1997) study of 30 women student affairs and higher education administrators, professionals described limited institutional support for their personal lives, which, ultimately, had negative effects on their professional careers. These findings were echoed in Wilk's (2016) study, which included 14 men and women student affairs professionals. Wilk (2016) described, "half of the [student affairs] administrators were not satisfied with their overall work-life balance, and 79% admitted they had difficulty finding a balance between their personal

and professional lives” (p. 41). Both dissatisfaction and difficulty associated with work-life balance was heightened for women professionals. Yet, institutions largely failed to implement policies to support work-life balance or to mitigate work-life conflict, such as substantial maternity leave, parental accommodations, flexible scheduling, and telecommuting (Nobbe & Manning, 1997; Marshall, 2002; Wilk, 2016). Failing to implement family-friendly work policies and accommodations uniquely affect women, particularly limiting their ability to progress and remain in the field (Nobbe & Manning, 1997; Marshall, 2002; Wilk, 2016).

Even institutions that offered work-life policies, such as maternity or parental leave policies, effectively punished women for utilizing them, which led to women professionals’ job dissatisfaction, attrition, and limited advancement opportunities (Swiss, 1998; Blackhurst, 2000). Women professionals returning from maternity leave reported receiving poor performance evaluations, being passed over for promotions, and losing professional responsibilities, opportunities, and titles (Joyce-Brady, 2004; Zacker, 2004). Women professionals also described supervisors’ ambiguity surrounding and lack of enthusiasm for the institution’s work-life policies and accommodations, such as flexible hours and remote work, which made them hesitant to take advantage of these offerings (Wilk, 2016). As a result, some women student affairs professionals, elected to pause or “[to] opt out of working for a period of time or entirely when their institution did not provide family-friendly or flexible working environments” (Pal & Jones, 2020, p. 18) to focus on childrearing and other care responsibilities, such as caring for aging parents (Anthony, 2016; Levtov, 2001). Women who left the field or paused their professional career to fulfill other responsibilities described re-entering the field as difficult (Anthony, 2016). Johns (2013) also found upon re-entering the workforce women professionals failed “to gain

momentum and parity in promotion and earning power with their male counterparts” (p. 5), documenting lasting negative implications on their careers.

Women professionals also described a lack of women mentors (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007) and institutional mentoring programs, which were well documented as initiatives that increase women’s ability to secure high-ranking and executive positions across industries (Johns, 2013; Madsen et al., 2012; McNair et al., 2011; McNair et al., 2013; Selzer & Robles, 2019). The literature described a lack of women mentors in student affairs due to women professionals leaving the field at a higher rate than men (Blackhurst, 2000), subsequently there are less women in senior leadership positions to offer mentorship to the vast number of women entry and mid-level professionals. Additionally, women leaders in student affairs are already overtaxed or overburdened with balancing their professional and personal lives, which makes finding an invested and available mentor challenging (Selzer & Robles, 2019). Yet, Marshall (2009) and Selzer and Robles (2019) argued finding a women mentor or an example of success in the field is crucial for women’s career advancement in student affairs. Mentorship is especially crucial for women’s professional development in student affairs, particularly gaining skills in finance and budgeting, strategic planning, and business management, which women professionals are often excluded from learning in their mid-level positions (Selzer & Robles, 2019). Instead, men colleagues “are often assigned to work on projects that develop these skillsets and eventually lead towards upward mobility in an organization” (Selzer & Robles, 2019, p. 108).

Women experience similar structural barriers at every level of higher education and student affairs from support staff, to entry-level, (Costello, 2010) and mid-level student affairs positions (Selzer & Robles, 2019; Wilk, 2016) despite the different levels of education and professional experience associated with these roles. Women professionals’ shared experiences

with these structural barriers despite their different titles or placement in the organizational structure, experience, and education within the field suggests that student affairs divisions and higher education institutions create and perpetuate gendered barriers that limit women's professional success. Women's professional obstacles or challenges are not a result of their individualized or personal circumstances rather they are a result of systematic or structural gendered behavior (Acker, 1992), which I explore further in this study.

Cultural Barriers

These structural barriers are heightened for women in student affairs due to the field's professional or disciplinary culture. Corsmini (2011), in her narrative inquiry-based study of four women fulfilling senior leadership positions in student affairs, found the field and higher education's patriarchal culture was the greatest barrier for women's career advancement. Corsmini (2011) argued the culture of student affairs is evident through men's representation in senior leadership positions and different expectations of men and women professionals. The field's specific professional expectations and norms presents unique challenges for women working in the field. For example, student affairs regularly expect professionals to work irregular hours (Forney et al., 1982; Lorden, 1998; Marshall, 2009; Nobbe & Manning, 1997; Sallee, 2016; Wilk, 2016), to be continually available for students (Renn & Hughes, 2004), and to handle students' emotions (Burke & Robinson, 2019; Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009; Saunder et al., 2001; Stewart, 2019), which conflicts with the temporal, emotional, and mental demands of women's external roles and decreases their ability to advance beyond mid-level positions (Corsmini, 2011; Eddy & Ward, 2015; Pal & Jones, 2020).

Chliwniak (1997) explained student affairs is a uniquely challenging field for women because it exacerbates the pressure, insurmountable expectations, and gender-based assumptions

already levied against them. For instance, Renn and Hughes (2004) introduced their collection of autobiographical narratives on mid-career women in student affairs by describing the field's normalization and acceptance of overworking and underpaying professionals, which was echoed in Hirschy et al.'s (2015) and Stewart's (2019) more recent works. Negative ramifications of student affairs' culture is heightened for women of Color student affairs professionals who not only conflict with the field's androcentric culture but also its Whiteness. Women of Color professionals are also unduly relied on to represent, advocate for, and support students of Color regardless of their job title, description, or responsibilities (Burke & Robinson, 2019; Stewart, 2019). Women of Color, as members of multiple marginalized identities (Miles, 2019), are often expected to "borne the burden of carrying out this [student affairs] work" (Stewart, 2019, p. 19).

Despite some literature focused on the unique experiences of women of Color in student affairs (e.g., Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; West, 2020), much of the literature on women in student affairs and higher education poorly defined, conflated, or failed to include different racial identity groups within their participant pools. Failing to distinguish between the experiences of White women and women of Color is problematic because it leads to women being viewed as one, collective, homogeneous group with White women's experiences overshadowing the experiences of women with multiple, marginalized identities (Lugones, 2010). The lived experiences of White women continue to be privileged and centered over the experiences of women of Color (Harding, 1993), which is particularly problematic within student affairs and higher education because professionals of Color experience additional pressure, unique challenges, and demands for unpaid labor in the field related to their gender and racial identities (West, 2020).

The field regularly equates professionals' willingness to accept these strenuous circumstances and to remain in the field despite the more competitive salaries and more manageable schedules available in the private sector as a "badge of honor" (Nobbe & Manning, 1997; Renn & Hughes, 2004; Sallee et al., 2020). The field also glamorizes professionals who adapt a "culture of busy-ness" and alienates professionals who question these work demands, especially women professionals who the field expects will be more intrinsically motivated, most dedicated to the altruistic goals of higher education, and less concerned with financial benefits and rewards (Hirschy et al., 2015; Renn & Hughes, 2004). The assumption that women are less concerned with or motivated by salary is rooted in both the ideal worker construct or image of someone solely dedicated to his work, and heteronormativity. By adopting this assumption, higher education institutions justify paying women professionals less than their men colleagues because they assume women professionals have a man partner who will financially provide for them and their families. Yet, the literature failed to comment on and critically examine the field's perpetuation of heteronormativity, which is intricately related to and supports its gendered behavior and ideal worker norms. This field-specific or disciplinary culture makes it difficult for women to persist and progress within the field because it shapes professional expectations and, subsequently, evaluation measures around men (Corsmini, 2011).

Both White women and women of Color were found to face "cultural and structural barriers" within student affairs (Perez, 2014). In her study of 290 women working in student affairs, Blackhurst (2000) found 27% of respondents were asked to work longer hours than their men counterparts, 33% were "being given less support than men and being assigned less rewarding or less visible tasks" (p. 409), and 26% described having less autonomy than men coworkers. As noted by Pal and Jones (2020), Blackhurst's (2000) study was conducted two

decades ago; yet, there is little recent research on women in student affairs from which we can draw conclusions about women's gendered work experiences (Pal & Jones, 2020). However, Pal and Jones (2020), Duffy (2010), Yakaboski and Donahoo (2011), and others argue not much has positively changed for women in the field since Blackhurst's (2000) study. Pal and Jones' (2020) findings supported that women in student affairs are "kept in supportive roles versus given the opportunity to advance" (p. 28), which leads to a lack of professional development and career advancement opportunities. These two factors, limited professional development and career advancement opportunities, are linked to women's high attrition from the field and low representation in VPSA or SSAO positions (Blackhurst, 2000; Lorden, 1998; Marshall et al., 2016; Pal & Jones, 2020; Tull & Freeman, 2008).

In addition to the field-specific culture, student affairs exists within the organizational culture of higher education or academia, which Nicolazzo (2019) described as a conservative space that reflects and perpetuates social inequities, such as racism, classism, and sexism, rather than the liberal space it is often conveyed to be in popular media. Nicolazzo (2019) highlighted higher education perpetuates inequities to support capitalism, which extends to the business practices and behaviors of student affairs. The capitalistic or "corporate university dominated by patterns of managerialism also perpetuates gender hierarchies and reward systems rooted in credentialism and expertise" (Glazer-Raymo, 1999, p. xi). In other words, higher education's, and by extension student affairs' capitalistic practices within the neoliberal academy are rooted in a gendered hierarchy (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Seo et al., 2017) that keeps men in positions of power and women in supportive, administrative roles (Costello, 2012). This culture and hierarchy often lead to the exploitation of staff, particularly women. Higher education institutions are considered especially "greedy institutions" (Coser, 1974) that require their faculty

and staff to be ideal workers or “[to] give their work roles highest priority” (Craft & Maeberg-Tomlinson, 2015, p. 67). Simultaneously, the hierarchical division of men and women in higher education and student affairs creates a power dynamic or distinction between the genders, which reinforces a masculine organizational culture (Ely, 1995; Powell, 2014; Ross-Smith & Chesterman, 2009; Seo et al., 2017).

Furthermore, student affairs operates in a layered, complex institutional environment that is heavily resource dependent, meaning higher education institutions rely on public perception and external funding to support their educational mission (Bess & Dee, 2012); as a result, student affairs must exist and, largely, align with its specific, institutional environment (Bess & Dee, 2012; Marshall et al., 2016; Tull et al., 2009). Institutional culture and climate are intricately tied to institutional type; for example, Pal and Jones (2020) found that research universities, particularly highly ranked and prestigious institutions, implicitly and explicitly favor men in leadership and disadvantage women (Bird, 2011; Bornstein, 2008, 2009; Diehl, 2014; Jones et al., 2016). In comparison, community colleges and other institutions focused predominantly on teaching tend to be more accepting of women leaders in higher education and student affairs administration (Jones et al., 2015; Townsend & Twombly, 2007). Despite community colleges being more welcoming to women leaders, Townsend and Twombly (2007) argued community colleges remain gendered organizations because they are part of the higher education system, which perpetuates norms that continue to favor men (Jones et al., 2015; Wilk, 2016; J. Williams, 2001).

Societal Barriers

Student affairs often treats its professionals in ways that are contradictory to its inclusive and caring reputation (Anthony, 2016; Perez, 2014) to meet external demands, pressures, and

expectations (Rue, 2019). These policies, practices, and professional expectations, detailed above, are often incompatible with the societal demands and expectations placed on women (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2016). Socially constructed gender roles and expectations for women include motherhood and other caretaker roles (Glenn, 2016). Women remain primarily responsible for childcare and disproportionately tasked with household chores or responsibilities (Acker, 1992; Duauaine-Watson, 2017; Mottarella et al., 2009; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2016). Additionally, women who work outside of the home, such as women student affairs professionals, are viewed as less nurturing and worse mothers than those who elect to stay home full-time (Bridges & Etaugh, 1995; Bridges & Orza, 1993; Fuegen et al., 2004). Concurrently, these women professionals are viewed as less competent and capable of upper-level positions than both working fathers and non-parenting coworkers (Selzer & Robles, 2019); for example, Joyce-Brady (2004), a counseling center professional, described being passed over for a promotion while both her men colleagues received them. In confronting this issue with her supervisor, the supervisor responded, “You shouldn’t be stressing yourself out about this while you are pregnant...Why don’t you let it go?” Joyce-Brady (2005) explained, “I was offended by the message that my having a child meant that I should no longer care about what happened with my job” (p. 118). In another interaction with her supervisor, after the birth of her daughter, Joyce-Brady (2004) was told, “What a shame. You had such promise as a professional in student affairs” (p. 119), which implied motherhood and student affairs work are incompatible. This supervisor inferred Joyce-Brady (2004) was no longer a “promising” student affairs professional because she was now a mother. This experience was echoed in Anthony’s (2016) experience attempting to re-enter the field after taking a year off to manage her parents’ cancer treatment and to recover from childbirth.

In addition, women who oppose societal expectations by behaving as providers were pressured to feel guilty whenever they were perceived as prioritizing work over their children (Estes, 2011; Mottarella et al., 2009); for instance, Zacker (2004) described experiencing undue pressure and guilt surrounding her conflicting identities as both a student affairs professional and a mother:

When I was at work, I felt I should be at home. When I was at home, I felt like I should be at work...We feel less able to contribute professionally because of our roles as mothers and we feel less capable as mothers because of the time we spend working. (p. 127)

Furthermore, societal constructions and understandings of gender, namely gender stereotypes, traditional gender or sex roles, and gender socialization, negatively impact women's ability to secure leadership positions in student affairs and higher education (Jones et al., 2015). Higher education and, subsequently, student affairs are particularly susceptible to socially constructed ideals of gender due to their distinction as a cultural institution, a key part of the social system, and a workplace (Curry, 2000; Jones et al., 2015; Ropers-Huilman, 2003). Higher education and student affairs mirror the society and social structure within which they exist; for example, the "great man theory of leadership" (Jones et al., 2015, p. 4), which associated men with the leadership ideal throughout history and society, translated to higher education within which men, historically and currently, dominate leadership positions. In comparison, women find themselves stagnated in positions that most closely align with traditionally feminine characteristics or roles (Costello, 2010; Jones et al., 2015), such as completing clerical or administrative work and providing advisement or guidance to students. Additionally, women in higher education and student affairs are less likely to fulfill positions where they make decisions

(Jones et al., 2015) instead they typically fulfill mid-level positions, such as “assistants to, assistants, or associates” who provide information and proposals to executive leaders or those with decision-making power, such as “directors, deans, vice presidents, provosts, or presidents” (Tinsley, 1986, p. 7).

Women who were able to secure upper-level positions in student affairs positions are pressured to behave in traditionally masculine ways that align with traditional constructs of leadership (Broido et al., 2015; Jones et al., 2015). Yet, women leaders are simultaneously expected to fulfill feminine characteristics and harshly viewed for subverting feminine standards or ideals (Ardoin et al., 2019; Lester, 2011). As a result, women student affairs professionals find themselves in a “double-bind” within which they are viewed more harshly than their men counterparts and less likely to be perceived as successful and effective leaders (Johns, 2013; Mitchell & Garcia, 2020; Turner et al., 2013).

The replication of this hierarchical division between the genders in higher education and student affairs allows hiring committees to disregard women more easily from consideration for leadership positions (Turner et al., 2013). Consistently seeing men in leadership positions at every level of society, including higher education, allowed men to be solely associated with leadership, to be seen as more capable, and to define the necessary qualities of leadership, which women were seen as lacking (Acker, 1992; Jones et al., 2015). As a result, women leaders became and continue to be improbable (Turner et al., 2013).

Individual Barriers

The structural, cultural, and societal barriers faced by women professionals contribute to and enhance the individual barriers or obstacles women face in their career progression. For instance, Nobbe and Manning (1997) found prior to having children, women student affairs

professionals already struggled to reconcile their desire to have children with their career goals. Women professionals feel additional pressure as their professional expectations and desires clash with the traditional ages and timeframe for women to establish and develop relationships, and to make decisions about having children (Marshall, 2004). Both Hughes (2004) and Marshall (2004) found women professionals felt incredible pressure and stress due to life-stage overlaps, namely that the foundational years for career advancement and graduate studies in student affairs overlaps with women's optimal childbearing years. This pressure affects women's professional choices and behaviors (Blackhurst, 2000; Broido et al., 2015; C. Hughes, 2004; Nobbe & Manning, 1997).

Although this convergence of women's educational, professional, and familial goals can be observed in other fields, student affairs, distinguishes itself by its mixed messaging, unobtainable expectations, and enhanced negative implications for women who transgress the field's socialized guidelines or disciplinary culture (C. Hughes, 2004; Levtov, 2001; Nobbe & Manning, 1997). For example, the field seems to equally value and expect professionals to possess both advanced and terminal degrees in student affairs or higher education and extensive professional experience (Nobbe & Manning, 1997; Renn & Hughes, 2004); yet, simultaneously acquiring professional experience and completing a terminal degree is extremely difficult with the high expectations and demands of student affairs work (Wilk, 2016). Cosimini (2011) also found women professionals are held to higher standards of education and expertise than men in hiring processes. Women who aspire to advance in student affairs are often expected or required to have a terminal degree to make them competitive candidates for the role despite most positions not requiring the skillset developed in a doctorate degree program (Cosimini, 2011). Problematically, Pal and Jones (2020) found women student affairs professionals' degree

acquisition is neither advancing them in the field nor financially benefiting them. These circumstances regularly result in women's limited career advancement and lateral rather than upward career movement (Blackhurst, 2000; C. Hughes, 2004; Nobbe & Manning, 1997).

Women professionals also described being unable to pursue upper-level student affairs positions because they were unable to relocate, a common expectation in the field, due to familial responsibilities and financial constraints (Pal & Jones, 2020). Instead, some women professionals pursued lower-paying and less-prestigious positions, which were either local or more family-friendly, flexible, and accommodating of the societal expectations placed on them, particularly those expectations placed on working-mothers (Jo, 2008; Marshall, 2009). Women professionals felt forced to make professional compromises, such as making lateral career moves, taking lower salaries, and discontinuing doctoral studies, because of work-life conflicts and the unique barriers they experience in the field (Renn & Hughes, 2004). Overall, women student affairs professionals regularly feel pressured to reevaluate, lower, or abandon their career aspirations to accommodate their individual, familial obligations (Joyce-Brady, 2004; Marshall, 2002, 2004; Nobbe & Manning, 1997).

The literature underscored that women continue to struggle with gender-related barriers to their persistence and success within student affairs; particularly, structural, cultural, societal, and individual obstacles limit women's ability to rise above the glass ceiling and fulfill a proportionate number of leadership positions in the field. Instead, women find themselves feeling pressured to leave the field or becoming stagnant or stuck in mid-level positions with limited power and agency to positively influence their institutions, the field, and the higher education system.

Theoretical Framework

It is contradictory and ironic that student affairs was “founded on the values of equal access, equal rights and the development of the whole person” (Levtov, 2001, p. 30); yet the women who work within it and do the majority of critical student affairs work on college and university campuses are unable to access upper-level positions, are treated unequally, and are professionally punished for their roles outside of work (Marshall, 2004). Although it may remain surprising that women continue to traverse structural, cultural, societal, and individual barriers related to gender in their pursuit of professional success within student affairs (Levtov, 2001; Marshall, 2004), the literature showed gender inequity is persistent within the field. To better understand the implicit gender bias within or gendered nature of the field and how gender negatively affects women VPSAs’ or SSAOs’ professional experiences and career trajectories, I employ Acker’s (1990, 1992, 2006, 2012) work on gendered organizations, namely Acker’s (1990) five processes of gendered organizations and the ideal worker concept. In this section, I provide an explanation of these concepts supported by examples of gendered organizational behavior within student affairs.

In her seminal work, Joan Acker (1990) explained how gender is embedded and reproduced within organizations. Acker (1990) asserted “organizations are one arena in which widely disseminated cultural images of gender are invented and reproduced” (p. 140). The thrust of this argument is organizations are not gender-neutral as many organizational theorists initially argued (Acker, 1990) rather organizations operationalize gender. In this context, gender is defined as a socially constructed means to control the social relationships and interactions between people, namely men and women, through sex-based distinctions (Acker, 1990; Scott, 1986). In other words, gender is used to highlight a difference in status between men and women

(Scott, 1986) with men being the default or universal and women being the “other” (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Wynter, 2003). Subsequently, organizations were presented as gender-neutral and asexual spaces because men were assumed to be the default and ideal worker (Acker, 1990; Kanter, 1975). With organizational theorists assuming White men’s experiences in the workplace was the common experience, they effectively ignored the effects of gender and the unique experiences of women in the workplace despite ample evidence of women’s negative, professional experiences being tied to gender rather than their individual characteristics, qualities, or competency (Acker, 1990).

Rejecting the common organizational theory narrative, Acker (1990) argued gender is inherent within each aspect of organizational life and the workplace; specifically, organization’s workers or institutional actors, hierarchies or structures, policies, and job functions reinforce a distinction between “male and female, masculine and feminine” (Acker, 1990, p. 146). This distinction promotes the prioritization and advancement of men over women. In summation, “to say that an organization...is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity” (Acker, 1990, p. 146) are all rooted in the socially constructed binary between men and women.

Organizations’ or workplaces’ implicit bias in favor of men is grounded in the ideal worker construct (J. Williams, 2001). Although Acker (1990) did not initially use the terminology, ideal worker, rather it was coined by Joan Williams (2001), the construct underscores and supports Acker’s argument, namely the inherently gendered nature of organizations. The ideal worker construct highlights how organizations design their expectations and environments around men who, by nature of their physicality and socialization, more closely reflect this unobtainable ideal. The ideal worker is embodied by and envisioned as a White cis-

gender man who is solely dedicated to his organization, institution, or employer without any external responsibilities or domestic concerns (Sallee, 2012; J. Williams, 2001). The ideal worker and its associated norms align with traditional male-life patterns, which “centers on his full-time, life-long job” (Acker, 1990, p. 149), rather than women's life patterns, which typically includes “legitimate obligations other than those required by the job” (Acker, 1990, p. 149) like domestic responsibilities and childrearing.

Acker (1990) and others (e.g., Connell, 1987; West & Zimmerman, 1987) emphasize organizational behavior, particularly the treatment of women in professional contexts, cannot be understood without a careful examination of gender. For example, Kanter (1977) and Hart (2016) both utilized gender in their analysis of women in the workplace; however, they both ultimately say women’s negative experiences are more closely aligned with their positionality within organizational hierarchy rather than their gender. However, Acker (1990) argued the gendered nature of organizations contribute to women either finding themselves in lower level or lower-status positions within the organizational structure or hierarchy. In the context of student affairs, both the field’s and higher education institutions’ gendered organizational behavior or implicitly gendered policies and practices contribute to women professionals’ overrepresentation in entry and mid-level student affairs positions and women’s difficulty in achieving high-level or executive positions in the field, namely the VPSA or SSAO role. Organizations are gendered or operationalize gender through five interrelated processes⁴: divisions along gender lines, gender-based symbols and images, interactions between and across gender groups, internalized or individualized gender performance, and, subsequently, a gendered social structure.

⁴ Processes is used to reflect Acker’s (1990) work and word choice.

Divisions Along Gender Lines

Organizations or workplaces establish divisions along gender lines or separate men and women in two ways: (1) through the organizational structure or hierarchy with men concentrated in upper level or leadership positions and women in lower level or support positions (Acker, 1990); and, (2) through a “segregation of work” (Acker, 1990, p. 140) or gendered division of labor with women being assigned and expected to complete more unpaid labor and “unskilled work” or tasks (Kanter, 1975). In student affairs, women overwhelmingly fulfill entry or mid-level positions across the field and roles and men are overrepresented in upper-level student affairs positions, namely the VPSA or SSAO position (CUPA-HR, 2022; Glazer-Raymo, 1999; M. S. Hughes, 1989; Jones & Komives, 2001; Stimpson, 2009). Women also tend to be concentrated in student-oriented functional areas and “student-facing” positions while men are often found in more business focused functional areas (McEwen et al., 1990; Sallee et al., 2020; Stimpson, 2009), such as housing operations, athletics, and campus recreation.

These divisions are more apparent and rigid in feminized fields, such as student affairs, because the few men in these fields are quickly promoted into visible leadership positions or are concentrated in more masculine or business orientated roles within these fields to affirm their masculine identity and counteract negative perceptions associated with being a man in a feminine field (C. L. Williams, 1992; Lewis & Simpson, 2011). Women and men find themselves in different focal areas and roles within feminized fields that align with traditionally feminine and masculine qualities or characteristics. For example, women student affairs professionals tend to fulfill student-facing positions and address students’ emotional needs because it is assumed they are nurturing. In comparison, men professionals fulfill management functions because they are seen as “having the capacity to make decisions” (Broido et al., 2015,

p. 597), which is associated with leadership and upper-level positions. Women student affairs professionals also experience “intraoccupational segregation” (Reskin & Roos, 1987, p. 12) meaning their employment is concentrated in “different work settings” (Reskin & Roos, 1987, p. 12) than men professionals, namely they are overrepresented in less selective institutional types. Acker (1990) explained divisions along gender lines are preserved through “organizational means” (p. 146) or practices, such as salary or compensation differences, which maintain men’s reputational and institutional status over women. For instance, the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) found women in student affairs leadership positions are paid less than men in the same position (2018), which communicates men are more valued in the field and in their respective institutions than women. Other organizational means include hiring, promotion, and evaluation.

Gendered Symbols and Images

Organizations are also gendered through the perpetuation of symbols and cultural images that “explain, express, reinforce, or sometimes oppose” (Acker, 1990, p. 146) the distinction between genders. In her later work, Acker (1992) noted these symbols and images typically reinforce gendered divisions and rarely oppose them. Gendered symbols and images are conveyed through organizational logics, practices, or behavior and can include language, dress, and ideology (Acker, 1992). A prominent symbol in academia is the hegemonic masculinity of leadership (Acker, 1992; Connell, 1987). Hegemonic masculinity involves the assumption that successful leaders are men who are “often portrayed as aggressive, goal oriented, competitive, [and] efficient” (Acker, 1992, p. 568), patently masculine qualities, and rarely described with traditionally feminine qualities, such as “being supportive, kind, and caring” (Acker, 1992, p. 568). In student affairs, new professionals continually see men fulfilling the field’s and

institutions' leadership and management positions, which creates and perpetuates the image of the ideal or stereotypical leader in student affairs as a man (M. S. Hughes, 1989; Stimpson, 2009). As men became continually associated with leadership positions in the field, the ideology that successful leadership is inherently masculine: "the image of the top manager or the business leader is an image of successful, forceful masculinity" (Acker, 1990, p. 146) is reinforced. In contrast, women student affairs professionals become solely associated with traditionally feminine qualities and roles, namely "providers of emotional support" (Acker, 1990, p. 147). Sallee et al. (2020) also described how the field perpetuates "cultural images of men as workers and breadwinners" and women "as caregivers" (p. 262) through its differential treatment and expectations of men and women professionals.

The lack of symbols or images of successful women in academia and student affairs also negatively affect women's aspirational goals. If women do not see other women in the VPSA or SSAO position and other institutional leadership positions, it communicates women cannot be successful in these positions or spaces and thus should not aspire to them. The lack of gender representation in these roles contributes to women's "self-selection" or decision to exit the leadership pipeline. In other words, gendered symbols and images contribute to the cyclical underrepresentation of women in the VPSA or SSAO position.

Interactions Between and Across Genders

Acker (1990, 2006) described the third process or way organizations become gendered as gendered social interactions between and across gender groups in the workplace (Lester & Sallee, 2017). Overt gendered interactions may include sexual harassment and the sexualization of women bodies, which is used to exert power over women in both low-level and executive positions and maintain the gender hierarchy operating in organizations, particularly in

historically male-dominated organizations like higher education (Acker, 1990). Overt or explicit gendered interactions make it even more difficult for women to attempt to fulfill the ideal worker image and be seen as promising workers by centering their bodies and sexuality (Acker, 1990; Kanter, 1975). Common covert gendered interactions across gender groups include men speaking over and interrupting women in meetings while women take turns and “[share] airtime” in meetings (Acker, 1990). These gendered social interactions are significant because they lead to continued gender inequality in daily “organizational life” (Acker, 1990, p. 147; West & Zimmerman, 1983), particularly, in maintaining the inherently gendered hierarchy of organizations (Acker, 1990). Gendered interactions may also include the use of coded language to disparage or undercut women’s work and qualifications, publicly scolding or yelling at women professionals, and asking women colleagues to assume or complete secretarial tasks, such as taking notes or minutes during meetings.

Within social interactions, institutional actors also sometimes disparage or ostracize women professionals for either failing to behave in ways that typically align with their gender or failing to assume masculine work approaches, which Jamieson (1995) and others (e.g., Johns, 2013; Mitchell & Garcia, 2020; Turner et al., 2013) described as a “double-bind” for women leaders in higher education. In this way, gendered social interactions also serve as a way of “policing” women professionals’ behavior and gender expression.

Individuals’ Gender Internalization and Performance

These preceding processes —division across gender lines or gendered segregation of work, gendered symbols and images, and gendered interactions between and across genders— contribute to and inform individuals’ internalization of gender or their gender performance. In the workplace, professionals may convey or express gender through, “choice of appropriate

work, language use, clothing, and presentation of self as gendered members of an organization” (Acker, 1990, p. 147). In other words, professionals perform their gender through the type of work or career they pursue, their word choice and communication style, their dress, and the way they carry themselves, which Butler (1990) described as gender performativity. Gender performance is a collection of individuals’ gendered acts that convey their gender identity (Butler, 1990). Acker (1990) emphasized masculinity is overwhelming internalized by workers because it is deeply entrenched within organizational policies, practices, and processes while femininity is typically discouraged and rejected by individuals. All workers, men and women, are expected to aspire to and behave in ways that align with the gender-neutral ideal; however, “gender- neutrality” is rooted in masculine ideals (Acker, 1990, 1992).

In higher education, women faculty, staff, and administrative professionals often change how they behave at work to better align with gender expectations. For example, in her ethnographic case study of 6 women faculty members, Lester (2008) learned women faculty members were expected to “perform the woman’s role” (p. 291), most chose to act subserviently and fulfill this role with colleagues. Women in student affairs experience similar pressure to internalize gendered expectations and make professional choices in accordance with these gendered expectations (e.g., Blackhurst, 2000; C. Hughes, 2004; Nobbe & Manning, 1997). For instance, women student affairs professionals regularly elect to forego leadership positions in the field (Blackhurst, 2000; C. Hughes, 2004; Nobbe & Manning, 1997) because they no longer perceive these positions as “suitable” after they have children (Broido et al., 2015, p. 567).

Gendered Social Structure

Lastly, the fifth process of gendered organizations—gender as a foundational part of complex organizations’ and professional fields’ social structure—is both the culmination and result of the preceding processes (Acker, 1990; Saltee et al., 2020). Although removed in Acker’s (1992, 2012) later explanations of gendered organizational theory, this final process emphasized gender’s foundational role in the “ongoing processes of creating and conceptualizing social structures” (p. 147). As a foundational or “constructive element” (Acker, 1990, p. 147), gender underlines all organizational functions, practices, guiding assumptions, and messages conveyed to workers (Acker, 1990; Britton, 1997; Saltee et al., 2020), which Acker (1990, 2012) referred to as organizational logic. In other words, organizational logics include formal and informal “work rules, policies, and practices” (Hart, 2016, p. 609) and ideas about what it means to be a worker within the organization or field (Hart, 2016). The fifth process of gendered organization is used to provide evidence of Acker’s (1990) central argument that organizations are not gender neutral rather they operate in gendered ways that favor men and masculinity over women and femininity.

Organizations are built on gendered assumptions and ideologies, which are continually reproduced through policies, practices, and daily work activities (Acker, 1990). For example, Seo et al. (2017) explained a longstanding gendered assumption involves men being perceived as more competent in the workplace than women, which leads hiring committees to implicitly preference men for high-level positions and women for lower-level roles (Konrad & Pfeffer, 1991). Additionally, organizational leadership across fields is dominated by men (Kanter, 1975; Powell, 2014) who tend to favor and provide more professional development opportunities to employees with a shared identity, in this case a shared gender identity. This professional

favoritism or attraction theory typically leads to men employees receiving more promotions and salary increases leaving women professionals behind (Carli & Eagly, 1999; Seo et al., 2017). In academe, higher education institutions also reproduce gender norms through organizational behavior, and is supported by gendered hiring processes, job evaluations, job descriptions, dress codes, and other organizational logics (Acker, 1990; Lester & Sallee, 2017).

The fifth process of Acker's (1990) gendered organizational theory highlights the mechanisms or ways organizations are gendered; however, organizations' gendered behavior is cyclical and inherent. Examination of the gendered organizations cannot be limited to these five processes rather the five processes highlight how organizations' treatment and perception of workers are entrenched in gender both implicitly and explicitly (Acker, 1990).

Ideal Worker Construct

In addition to these five processes, gendered organizations are built on the ideal worker construct or image, which assumes workers are completely committed to the organization or, in the case of student affairs, the institution with no external responsibilities, such as a family (Sallee, 2016; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2016; Wilk, 2016). The ideal worker construct assumes men work outside the home and have a partner at home, typically a woman partner, to fulfill all domestic responsibilities (Sallee, 2016; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2016; Wilk, 2016). Acker (2006) explicitly defined the ideal worker as "a White man who is totally dedicated to work and who has no responsibilities for children or family demands other than earning a living" (p. 448). Organizations' adoption and perpetuation of the ideal worker construct results in the crafting of work norms and expectations around a masculine ideal (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2016). In student affairs, ideal worker norms are embedded within the field's professional expectations and standards. For example, student affairs professionals are typically expected to work 50 to 60

hours a week, which is incompatible with the stereotypical care and domestic responsibilities placed on women (Anthony, 2016). Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2016) found women professionals are expected to fulfill ideal worker-based professional expectations without regard for or consideration of the inherent influence of gender at every level of the organization.

Conclusion

Considering women's experiences in student affairs and higher education through an organizational theory lens suggested gender is intricately tied to women's high attrition, personal and professional dissatisfaction, limited professional mobility or advancement, and, ultimately, lack of representation in disciplinary and institutional leadership. However, little is being done to ameliorate women's negative experiences and positionality in the field, which may be a result of student affairs' reluctance to critically examine its own participation in and promulgation of systemic forms of oppression (Stewart, 2019). In this study, I critically examine how gender effects women student affairs professionals' experiences and career trajectories in pursuit and fulfillment of senior-leadership positions.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how gender influenced women VPSAs or SSAOs' professional experiences and career trajectories, including their career-related choices and professional behavior, in pursuit of career advancement and fulfillment of a senior leadership role. In this interest, I conducted a qualitative study using aspects of comparative case study (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017) grounded in a critical humanism or critical theory research paradigm (Rossman & Rallis, 2017; Sipe & Constable, 1996) to explore the influence of gender on the professional experiences and career trajectories of six women VPSAs or SSAOs. In this chapter, I present my methodology and accompanying methods. First, I explain my research paradigm beginning with a description of my underlying research assumptions or epistemology and ontology. Then, I describe case study and comparative case study methodologies followed by my research design, which includes my sampling and selection criteria, and data collection and analysis methods. I also provide both positionality and trustworthiness statements. To conclude, I detail the delimitations associated with this study. Throughout the chapter, I provide rationale for my methodological choices.

Research Paradigm

Research paradigms represent the researcher's assumptions surrounding social science and society or the "social world" (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 26); specifically, research paradigms encompass the researcher's epistemology or their ways of knowing (Dietze, 2014; Rossman & Rallis, 2017) and their ontology, which incorporates the researcher's understanding of the social world or ways of being (Dietze, 2014). In other words, my research paradigm highlights both my understanding and assumptions of social reality, which align with interpretivism epistemology or the belief that reality is socially constructed through individuals'

lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations (Rossman & Rallis, 2017), and my motivation for exploring social phenomena, which aligns with radical change (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Interpretivism and radical change leads me to my research paradigm, critical humanism, which is also considered critical theory. I explore these terminologies and concepts below.

There are two guiding continuums in research: the epistemological continuum comprised of interpretivism and objectivism and the ontological continuum comprised of improvement or radical change (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). When intersected or crossed, these two continuums create the four research paradigms: critical humanism, descriptive interpretivism, critical realism, and positivism (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Generally, qualitative researchers like myself, align with the interpretivist end of the epistemological continuum and argue there is no single truth or universal knowledge rather they seek to explore “multiple perspectives” (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 28) by building relationships with research participants, “focusing on understanding [their] subjective experience” (p. 28), interpreting data, and communicating data through thematic categories. Within the ontological continuum, which focuses on the researcher’s objective in exploring social phenomena ranging from improvement to radical change, my work falls within the radical change end of the spectrum. Radical change focused researchers “assume that social processes are oppressive and deprive individuals and organizations” (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 32) and seek to identify systems of oppression to prompt transformational change.

For this study, I utilized interpretivism to gain insight into the multiple perspectives and experiences of women student affairs professionals through the cases of six women VPSAs or SSAOs. I interpreted senior women student affairs administrators’ perspectives and reflections to identify inconsistent treatment and potentially gender oppression or discrimination throughout

their careers and within their professional organizations or workplace contexts, namely the student affairs field and higher education institutions. Lastly, in keeping with the radical change perspective, later in this dissertation I present recommendations for practice focused on transforming women's professional experiences and potential for career advancement in student affairs. My alignment with interpretivism and radical change perspectives predispose me to a particular research paradigm, namely critical humanism (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

Critical Humanism

Critical humanism is grounded in critical theory, which involves considering the power dynamics within organizations and society (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Critical humanists assume society is "composed of oppressive social structures and domination" and believe radical change begins at the individual and local levels (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 84). Critical humanist researchers utilize face-to-face interactions, namely interviews, for their data collection and often co-construct knowledge with their participants (Rossman & Rallis, 2017); for instance, critical humanist researchers often share their research intentions or objective, design, data, emerging analysis, and writing with participants (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). In this study, I consider the use of socially constructed ideals of gender within student affairs and higher education institutions, view reality as socially constructed, and consider how student affairs divisions, institutional actors, and women professionals "unwittingly participate in or resist the reproduction of...gender-based hierarchies" (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 84), a component of gendered organizational behavior (Acker, 1990; 2012). I centered my participants' professional experiences and their interpretation or understanding of these experiences within the context of social structures, namely gendered organizations within higher education (e.g., Acker, 1990).

Methodology Explanation and Rationale

In keeping with my interpretivist epistemology, radical change ontology, and, subsequently, a critical humanist or critical theory research paradigm, I utilized case study methodology. Case study is a popular qualitative methodology particularly for interpretivist work (Rossman & Rallis, 2017); specifically, I implemented components of critical, comparative case study methodology (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). In this section, I explain this selected methodology and my rationale for utilizing it.

Case Study

Case studies are defined as “in-depth and detailed explorations of single examples (an event, process, organization, group or individual)” (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 91), that come from or present similar phenomena. Case study methodology positions researchers “[to] seek to understand a larger phenomenon through intensive examination of a specific instance” (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 81). This methodological approach is useful because it offers rich description, provides a holistic perspective of context, and “illustrates the complexities of a situation” (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 91). For this study, case study methodology provided me the tools and approach to offer a more thorough understanding of the professional experiences and career trajectories of women student affairs professionals. Case study methodology allowed me to explore the multilayered nature of women’s professional experiences, career trajectories, choices, and behaviors in pursuit of career advancement in student affairs. Within the case study tradition or approach, I constructed multiple cases to compare across cases, which Miles and Huberman (1994) described as cross-case analyses and Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) referred to as comparative case study.

Comparative Case Study

Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) presented a comparative approach to case study methodology, which allows researchers to systematically compare cases to gain insight on the effect of context on cases and “[to] generate rich theoretical insights that transfer to other times and places” (p. 34). Cases can be defined as a particular site or location, an individual, a single data point, or other measures (Kaarbo & Beasley, 1999; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). In this study, I defined each case as an individual research participant. In other words, I considered each woman VPSA or SSAO, their career trajectories, and their current experiences within the context of their institutional or organizational environment as a case. I then compared each case to consider similarities or shared experiences across participants’ different times and locations, to comment on the overarching relationship between gender and women’s professional experiences and career trajectories in the student affairs field. In utilizing a comparative case study approach, I aimed to see patterns across individualized professional experiences (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017), namely patterns related to gendered organizational behavior in student affairs and higher education institutions that affect women’s professional experiences, choices, and behaviors. Comparative case study allows for more generalizability than traditional case study methodology, which interprets cases as separate, bounded experiences (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017).

Bartlett and Vavrus’ (2017) approach to comparative case study research involves three axes of comparison: horizontal, vertical, and transversal. The horizontal axis is informed by traditional case study and multi-sited ethnography, which involves tracing or following a culture or conflict through individuals’ trajectories, movements, or life histories across spaces or locations (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017; Marcus, 1995). However, these spaces or locations are connected “with one another in such ways that the relationships between them are as important

for this formulation as the relationships within them” (Hannerz, 2003, p. 206). For example, in this study, I compare participants’ experiences working in various higher education institutions and student affairs divisions, which are connected within the student affairs field. The relationship between these locations as members of a field allowed me to “trace” gender throughout participants’ careers. In other words, the horizontal axis allowed me to observe the presence and influence of gender across participants’ the various institutions and geographic locations they experienced over their extensive careers.

The vertical axis or vertical comparison focuses on how a phenomenon unfolds at different scales and how actors respond “similarly or differently” to the phenomenon (Bartlett & Varsus, 2017, p. 75). While Bartlett and Varsus (2017) emphasized local, national, and federal policy in their work, I adopted their procedural vertical comparative approach to consider organizational logics, which includes field-specific and institutional policies and practices. And, how institutional actors, namely these women VPSAs or SSAOs, reacted similarly or differently to these policies and practices.

Lastly, the transversal axis or a transversal comparison prompts researchers to consider how a phenomenon either changed or remained consistent over time. The transversal axis is applicable to my study because participants’ reflections over their careers allowed me to consider how their interactions with and the effects of gender may have changed over time. Also, by comparing the VPSAs or SSAOs of different ages, I gained insight into gender’s influence across several decades. However, I predominantly relied on the horizontal and vertical comparative approaches.

Bartlett and Vavrus (n.d.) summarize their approach to comparative case study as “tracing phenomena across and through sites...to follow the inquiry as it unfolds over space and

time” (p. 2), which makes it well-suited to trace gender’s influence over the course of women VPSAs’ or SSAOs’ careers spanning multiple institutions in different geographic locations. Comparative case study also encourages researchers to be attentive to social relations and social networks (Bartlett & Vavrus, n.d.), which are components of the social construction of gender and how gender is reflected or observed in organizations.

My study may also be interpreted as a critical case study because it is “grounded in a critique of existing social structures and patterns” (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 92), namely gender within organizations or the workplace. I compared cases of women VPSAs or SSAOs to identify and question gender-based social structures, behaviors, and patterns through the lens of organizational theory (e.g., Acker, 1990, 2006). Rossman and Rallis (2017) described this type of case study as “assum[ing] theoretically that oppression and domination characterize the setting and seek to uncover how patterns of action perpetuate the status quo” (p. 92). The foundation of this study was the assumption or hypothesis that gender-based oppression and domination implicitly characterizes the student affairs field and higher education institutions. Part of this study involved gaining an understanding of how organizations, namely student affairs and higher education institutions, perpetuate gendered behavior and its effects on women student affairs professionals’ experiences and career trajectories.

Research Design

I conducted a qualitative study with aspects of critical, comparative case study through multiple data collection techniques; specifically, I conducted two rounds of semi-structured, qualitative interviews with participants and document analysis of participants’ resumes, press releases and news articles on participants’ career milestones, biographies or profiles on their current institution’s website, a reflection activity, and excerpts of participants’ dissertations. The

reflection activity, which I describe in greater detail later in this chapter, prompted participants to create a visual timeline of their career trajectories with an emphasis on any life events that may have influenced their career path and choices. My participants were women student affairs professionals fulfilling a senior leadership position in student affairs divisions, namely the VPSA or SSAO position. In this section, I detail my research design, beginning with an explanation of my sampling and selection criteria, which includes my recruitment plan and participant inclusion and exclusion criteria. Then, I discuss my data collection methods followed by a description of my data analysis methods or approach. I implemented this research design to answer the following guiding research questions: (1) How do women VPSAs or SSAOs perceive the influence of gender on their career trajectories? (2) How do women VPSAs or SSAOs describe the influence of gender on their current role, namely their experiences and choices?

Sampling and Selection Criteria

In identifying and constructing cases for this study, I comprised a sample of 6 women VPSAs or SSAOs working at different higher education institutions. At the start of data collection, participants served as the most senior student affairs professional at public research or comprehensive universities across the northeastern and midwestern regions of the U.S. Two participants have since their VPSA positions, one retired and one left the field to start a position in the private sector. This sample size allowed me to spend an extensive amount of time connecting with and learning about each participant to construct a thorough, informative case capturing their interactions with or experience of gender over the course of their student affairs careers. Respective participants and their extensive employment histories or career trajectories formed the basis for each case rather than their physical location or site, which reflects the bounds of Bartlett and Vavrus' (2017) cases.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling (Robinson, 2014), which involves selecting individuals based on characteristics that I assumed would position them to offer valuable insight on the influence of gender on women student affairs professionals' experiences and career trajectories. The specific selection criteria for participants included (1) gender identity, namely individuals who self-identify as women, (2) employment, specifically women who fulfill the VPSA or SSAO position within their institution. I neither limited my participant pool based on their educational attainment, institutional type, nor their geographic location.

Based on these selection criteria, my participant population offered some racial, regional, and institutional heterogeneity, which allowed me to achieve a more robust analysis (Robinson, 2014). Specifically, two participants identified as women of Color, namely Black women, and four participants identified as White women, which is reflective of the racial composition of student affairs. At the time of data collection, participants worked in research and comprehensive universities across the northwestern and midwestern regions of the U.S.; however, over the course of their careers, participants worked at a variety of institutional types (e.g., religiously affiliated institutions, Hispanic serving institutions, and community colleges) across multiple geographic regions including the southeastern and south-central regions of the U.S. Participants also advanced through the student affairs field in different ways or had different pathways to the VPSA or SSAO role. For example, participants started their careers in different functional areas and advanced at different rates. Two participants even left the field for a significant amount of time before returning and advancing to the VPSA or SSAO role. These individual circumstances or variations, which I discuss in-depth in Chapter 4, allowed participants to speak to the persistent influence of gender across contexts.

Participant Recruitment

Participants were recruited in two ways. First, I relied on my personal and professional networks, namely my former supervisors, colleagues, and classmates, to form connections and develop introductions between myself and women VPSAs or SSAOs. Second, I drew on organizational insiders or institutional contacts (Rossman & Rallis, 2017), namely higher education and student affairs graduate program faculty members, to connect me with potential participants. Fortunately, these channels led to my participant pool. I was also prepared with materials to recruit participants through social media outlets and professional association communities and their list-servs, such as NASPA's WISA Knowledge Community, ACPA's Coalition for Women's Identities, and the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Research on Women and Education Special Interest Group.

Although I relied on participants as the basis or foundation of each case, I needed to gather data through a variety of methods, described in the next section, to provide rich, descriptive cases (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). These cases were designed to allow readers to "gain an extended comprehension of some complex set of events or circumstances" (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 92). For this study, I constructed these cases through interviews with participants and document and artifact analysis, which provided contextual information on participants' career trajectories and when their personal and professional lives may have intersected.

Data Collection Methods

Qualitative work, particularly work that follows an interpretivist epistemology, relies on data collection based in person-to-person interactions (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). In keeping with this research tradition and following the practices of case study methodology, I utilized in-depth individual interviews (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). I also utilized

document analysis of participants' resumes, published newspaper articles and press releases focused on the participant, excerpts of participants' dissertations, and participants' response to a reflection activity to contextualize the information shared by participants within the interview process. I describe these data collection processes below.

Interviews

Interviewing is considered a “primary [data collection] method in comparative case study” (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 55). For this study, I utilized semi-structured individual interviews, which allowed conversation to develop more naturally between the researcher and participant (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). Semi-structured interviews are not only “more consistent” with comparative case study methodology but also “facilitate the sharing of experiences” (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 55), which is an underlying goal of my research: to understand the influence of gender on women in student affairs' professional experiences. I conducted two rounds of semi-structured interviews with six women VPSAs or SSAOs. During these interviews, I followed semi-structured interview protocols (see Appendix A) comprised of open-ended questions, which I designed to prompt discussion pertinent to my guiding research questions. See Appendix B for a chart connecting my interview protocol questions to the guiding research questions.

All interviews were conducted virtually over a video-calling platform, which enhanced my conversations with participants through non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions and body language. First-round interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes depending on the level of detail participants were willing to share. My first round of interview questions focused on building rapport with participants and gaining insight into their professional background and career trajectories. For example, I asked participants to share how they came to pursue student

affairs and to reflect on their career aspirations when they first entered the field. In prompting women to describe how they came to student affairs or what motivated them to receive a doctorate degree in the field, participants shared details about their personal lives, such as how they grew up, theirs and their parents' perspective on education and gender, and how their racial, gender, and socioeconomic status affected their college and career choices. This information was pivotal in allowing me to gather a holistic picture of participants, which allowed me to tailor follow-up questions and construct a nuanced case for each participant. I also prompted participants to describe their current position, what the VPSA or SSAO role on their campus involves, and what they find most rewarding and challenging in the position. These questions and subsequent conversations provided insight on how gender influenced these women's professional behavior or how they presented themselves and acted in their current positions.

The second-round interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and were more robust given the previous rapport built between me and participants during the first interview and over email communications between the two interview cycles. The second-round interviews focused more explicitly on gender in the workplace. I began by asking participants to describe instances when their personal and professional roles and responsibilities influenced, interacted, or conflicted with one another. Participants' responses shed light on the gendered expectations women faced in and out of work. Within this round of interviews, we also talked extensively about the role gender played in women's experiences in their current positions and throughout their student affairs careers. Participants appeared to be more comfortable during these interviews and were more candid and direct regarding negative, gendered interactions with colleagues and supervisors, and they were more critical of the student affairs field than they were initially.

Following participants' informed consent (see Appendix C), I video and audio-recorded each interview and then transcribed the interviews. I used otter.ai, a machine transcription software, for the initial transcription. Then, I went through each transcript and simultaneously listened to the audio files to correct any transcription errors and mask all identifying information. Participants received a copy of their interview transcripts and were asked to check them for accuracy. I also took observational notes during each interview. I noted participants' verbal and non-verbal responses, such as their facial reactions and body language.

Document Analysis

To triangulate data provided by participants and create a more robust case (Bowen, 2009; Eisner, 1991), I asked all participants to provide a copy of their resume and to complete a reflection activity. Participants' resumes allowed me to both generate individualized interview questions and served as data I utilized to add context to their cases. For the reflection activity (Appendix D), I prompted participants to draw or create a visual representation of their career trajectories that also noted significant personal moments or events that may have impacted their careers. I purposefully left this activity open-ended and ambiguous to prompt participants' creativity in showcasing their careers. Five participants chose to free-draw or hand-draw their career timelines and one utilized word-processing software. I utilized these reflection activities or artifacts to inform my second-round interview questions and to provide additional context when constructing participants' cases. In one instance, a participant's reflection activity highlighted how her sexuality and her identity development paralleled her career path, which was not discussed in the first-round interview. I was able to utilize this document to help generate new interview questions, which is a primary use of document analysis in qualitative research

(Bowen, 2009; Goldstein & Reiboldt, 2004). I also read selections of participants' dissertations to be more informed when entering conversation with them and constructing their cases.

If available, I also utilized local and student newspaper articles and institutional press releases focused on participants being hired within their various roles to learn more about their respective institutions, and gain insight into how stakeholders perceived them and were reacting to a woman in institutional leadership. These documents also revealed relevant information about the institution's history, such as if and how many women have previously served in the VPSA or SSAO role. Often these documents revealed small details participants did not have the opportunity to share or did not think were relevant but were useful in constructing a fuller understanding of their careers. In these instances, the documents provided additional data (Bowen, 2009) for me to include within my cases. Table 1 below summarizes the documents I collected and analyzed per participant.

Table 1

Documents Collected Per Participant

Participant Pseudonym	Resume	Reflection Activity	Dissertation	Current Institution Website Biography	Number of Newspaper Articles	Number of Student Newspaper Articles	Number of Press Releases
Sandra Thompson	X	X	X	X	3	1	1
Marion Kennings	X	X	X	X	0	3	3
Terry Hunter	X	X	X	X	0	0	0
Rebecca Hayes	X	X	X	X	1	0	1
Gina Smith	X	X	X	X	3	0	3
Shauna Sanders	X	X	X	X	1	0	2

Data Analysis Methods

After collecting data, I uploaded the data into Atlas.ti, a qualitative analysis software, to organize and store the data. I analyzed data utilized an iterative data analysis strategy (Rossman & Rallis, 2017), which involved “(1) fully knowing the data (immersion), (2) organizing these data into chunks (analysis), and (3) bringing meaning to those chunks (interpretation)” (pp. 227–228). In pursuit of immersion, I took notes during interviews, periodically reviewed data sources, and, lastly, analyzed data. In pursuit of analysis and interpretation, I utilized a cyclical coding process to explore data (Saldaña, 2013).

A cyclical coding process involves developing first cycle codes, organizing these initial codes into second cycle codes, categories, or patterns, and finally identifying themes (Saldaña, 2013). I started with 264 first cycle codes, some of which included: “negative interaction with supervisor,” “negative interaction with colleague,” “attacked by institutional actor.” Then, I organized these codes into broader categories, such as “gendered interactions in the workplace.” Lastly, I identified themes (Saldaña, 2013) informed by Acker’s (1990) five processes of gendered organizations.

As I mentioned above, I composed distinct cases based on my data and then sought to identify “key factors shared across [these] cases” (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 122). For example, I looked for shared social, organizational, and professional policies and practices (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017) rooted in gender that contributed to women student affairs administrators’ unique professional experiences and career trajectories. I also utilized, in part, deduction (Rossman & Rallis, 2017), which Saldaña (2013) defined as having a preconceived notion of what to look for within the data. Specifically, I drew on gendered organizational theory (Acker, 1990, 2006) as an analytical lens to better understand participants’ organizational contexts and the organizational

behavior that contributed to their career path to the VPSA or SSAO position and their professional experiences throughout their career.

Positionality Statement

My positionality or relationship to my selected research topic, namely the professional experiences and career trajectories of women working in student affairs, is an intimate one. As a cis-gender woman who attended a student affairs graduate preparation program, worked in the field prior to pursuing a doctoral degree, and recognized gender-based messages and behaviors within student affairs from both firsthand experiences and through the literature, I recognize my perspectives of both the field and women's professional experiences within it are shaped by my identity and these lived experiences. Within my academic and professional experiences, I worked in both departments and functional areas staffed entirely by women professionals and led by a hierarchy of women leaders, such as a woman vice president of enrollment management, provost, and college president, and I worked in departments, functional areas, and institutions devoid of women in both student affairs leadership and overall institutional leadership. I witnessed women fulfilling and excelling in upper-level student affairs positions despite personal and professional challenges, I saw women's careers stagnate within entry and mid-level student affairs positions, and I saw women pushed out of student affairs altogether. I proposed this study to examine what may be perpetuating women student affairs professionals' unique experiences and their underrepresentation in upper-level student affairs positions, namely the VPSA or SSAO position, across institutional types (Pal & Jones, 2020).

I also recognize my positionality as both an insider and outsider within this research context. For example, I can be considered an “insider” within this research context because I share a level of “sameness” with participants (Obasi, 2014, pp. 61–62); specifically, I present the same gender identity and some similar professional experiences as my participants. By sharing these commonalities with participants, I was able to easily develop bonds with them and be considered “in the know” (Johnson-Bailey, 1999; Obasi, 2014). Although this “insider” perspective and status afforded me the advantage of being familiar with field-specific terminology, environments, and experiences, and allowed participants to feel more comfortable sharing difficult experiences, the “insider” perspective also presented challenges to the research process. For example, Obasi (2014) described that within the “insider researcher/researched relationship” (p. 75) participants may not feel the need to elaborate on experiences or events during interviews as they would with an “outsider.” As a result, I needed to navigate this “assumed knowledge” (Obasi, 2014, p. 67) and ask additional probing questions to elicit more information from participants.

Despite some commonalities with participants, I am still an “outsider” due to the contrived nature of research itself; specifically, I am positioned as an “outsider” because I conducted research on others, which created a researcher/researched relationship and power differential between myself and participants (Obasi, 2014). My participants and I also differed in terms of experience, namely my participants are considered “elites” (Rossman & Rallis, 2017) because of their professional positions and terminal degrees in comparison I am a student. My participants are also significantly older than I am. Both positional differences and age created a power differential between me and participants.

Furthermore, two of my participants presented different racial and cultural identities than I do, which further positioned me as an “outsider” and created different power dynamics. For instance, as a White woman, I am a member of an agent identity group and a racial majority in student affairs; specifically, 51% of student affairs positions are held by White women (Bichsel et al., 2018; Pritchard & McChesney, 2018). Not all my participants shared this agent identity and subsequent experiences in the field. My participants’ differing intersectional identities, specific contexts, and lived experiences influenced their thoughts and perspectives on gender. For instance, gender was not always the most salient or “prominent aspect of [their] identity” (Obasi, 2014, p. 69). As a result, when conducting this research, I had to remain cognizant of additional aspects of participants’ identities and how these identity aspects may interact with, enhance, or mitigate the effects of gender. I also needed to accurately represent participants and their complex identities in composing these cases. I fully acknowledge my previous experiences and my identity contributed to my interest in this research area and helped shape my research questions; however, by practicing reflexivity and acknowledging my positionality, I was more cognizant of not only my role as a researcher in this relationship but also my holistic identity and how it affected my participants. This reflectivity positively affected each step of my research study; for example, it helped shape my data collection approaches, assisted me in building rapport with participants, and influenced my data analysis. Reflexivity also allowed me to be vigilant against my biases, assumptions, and predispositions influencing my findings.

Trustworthiness Statement

To ensure the trustworthiness or reliability of my study, I implemented techniques described by Creswell and Miller (2000), Lincoln and Guba (1985), and Rossman and Rallis (2017). I practiced triangulation, researcher reflexivity, and participant validation. I also included

thick, rich descriptions to establish credibility in my data and findings (Tracy, 2010). I briefly describe each technique below.

Triangulation

Triangulation involves utilizing multiple research methods and data sources to construct a holistic account of the phenomenon (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). In this study, I practiced triangulation using multiple research or data collection methods, namely interviews and document analysis. For example, document analysis allowed me to triangulate or confirm the experiences and perspectives shared in participants' individual interviews.

Research Reflexivity

In keeping with my critical theory paradigm, I practiced research reflexivity (Creswell & Miller, 2000) or self-reflexivity (Tracy, 2010). Research reflexivity requires researchers to reflect on their "assumptions, beliefs, and biases" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127) and to openly describe how these inherent predispositions may influence their research, which I displayed in the proceeding section. Throughout this research process, I continually practiced the careful, habitual reflection presented in my positionality statement through my field notes and reflections following each interview.

Participant Validation

Following the guidance of critical humanism, I also ensured the reliability of my research by involving participants in the research process (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). This approach is known as participant validation or member checks (Rossman & Rallis, 2017); specifically, I provided individual interview transcripts to each respective participant, so they may make corrections, additions, clarifications, or deletions. I also shared emerging data analysis and

findings with participants during second round interviews, which offered participants an opportunity to provide feedback on my research (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

Thick, Rich Descriptions

Lastly, I utilized thick, rich descriptions in my data, findings, and overall project. Thick, rich descriptions, such as detailed accounts shared by participants, lend themselves to establishing trustworthiness or credibility (Tracy, 2010) by allowing readers to “[feel] that they have experienced or could experience, the events being described in the study” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 129). This type of description is especially reflective of and necessary for case study research (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017).

In addition to implementing these four validity procedures, I also ensured my study’s trustworthiness by aligning my study with relevant theories (Rossman & Rallis, 2017) and utilizing ethical research practices (Tracy, 2010); specifically, I followed the institutional review board (IRB) guidelines (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

Delimitations

Although I am confident this study will positively contribute to the small body of literature on women student affairs professionals by centering gender as the means of analysis or critical lens, I would be remiss if I did not mention the study’s delimitations. Research delimitations “derive from the design and methods and help contextualize the study” (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 119). In acknowledging potential delimitations, I help the reader more accurately evaluate this study by prompting them to keep these limitations in mind during their reading and assessment (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

Through this dissertation study, I explored the influence of gender on women student affairs professionals’ career trajectories and professional experiences. However, I limited this

exploration to the perspectives and experiences of women VPSAs or SSAOs rather than including a diversity of voices and experiences from women student affairs professionals at different career stages or from women who chose to leave the field. By focusing on women who are considered successful in the field due to their senior leadership position, my study may be considered to have a “success bias” or “positivity bias” because it does not include cases of those who exited the field or chose not to pursue the VPSA or SSAO position. This study also heavily relies on participants’ reflections and reconstruction of past events and interactions to highlight the influence of gender and provide evidence of gendered organizational behavior. Reflections may be considered less reliable than data collected through observations. While observations are a preferred data collection method of case study methodology (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017), I was unable to conduct observations due to the on-going COVID-19 pandemic. However, participants’ high level of engagement and willingness to share in conjunction with participants’ documents (e.g., resumes, reflection activity drawings, dissertation excerpts, website biographies or profiles, and published articles and press releases) allowed me to construct cases full of thick, rich descriptions, which I present in the following chapter.

Conclusion

In this dissertation study, I consider how gender influences women working in student affairs’ professional experiences and career trajectories with the intent of uncovering the often-hidden ways gender is operationalized and its effects on women’s experiences in working in student affairs and their ability to pursue upper-level positions. In this pursuit, I engaged with six women VPSAs or SSAOs through two-rounds of semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Then, I utilized the data to construct thorough cases that contextualized participants and mapped their professional experiences and career progression from their entry into the field

through their current position, which I present in the following chapter. Comparative case study methodology allowed me to trace the phenomenon and influence of gender on women student affairs professionals across institutional and temporal boundaries.

Chapter 4: Participant Profiles

In pursuit of answering my guiding research questions: (1) “How do women VPSAs perceive the influence of gender on their professional experiences and career trajectories?” and, (2) “How do women VPSAs describe the influence of gender on their current role, namely their professional experiences and choices?”, I compiled case studies focused on six respective women VPSAs or the equivalent SSAO position at their institution. These women all serve at mid-sized to large-sized public, research or comprehensive universities located across the northeastern and midwestern regions of the United States. Based on the Carnegie Classification System (2021), one participant is VPSA at a research-one (R-1) university or a doctoral university with very high research activity, two participants are VPSA at research-two (R-2) or doctoral universities with high research activity, one participant is a VPSA at a doctoral/professional university, and two are SSAOs at regional, comprehensive, master’s universities with medium to large programs. As mentioned in Chapter 2, literature review and theoretical framework, women are overall less likely to fulfill VPSA or SSAO positions than men, particularly at doctoral degree-granting and research universities (Dugger, 2001; NASPA, 2014; Pal & Jones, 2020; Turner et al., 2013), which makes this grouping of participants particularly unique and provides additional insight into how these women student affairs professionals were able to achieve executive leadership roles in universities, which are gendered organizations. Participants ranged in age from 44 to 68 years old with an average age of 55. Four participants identify as White women and two identify as Black women, and four are married with at least one child (see Table 2). All participants possessed doctoral degrees in higher education, educational leadership, or a related field, which they earned prior to fulfilling their VPSA or SSAO position. Lastly, five out of six participants are in their first VPSA or SSAO

role. In this chapter, I present a case for each participant to capture their individual, nuanced, and complex career trajectories, professional choices, and experiences within student affairs. Each case was constructed based on two, semi-structured qualitative interviews and document analysis of respective participants' resumes, reflection activities, institutional biographies or profiles, dissertation excerpts, and media articles about their appointment to VPSA or SSAO.

Table 2

Participant Demographic and Identity Information

Participant #	1	2	3
Pseudonym	Sandra Thompson	Marion Kennings	Terry Hunter
Gender Identity	Woman	Woman	Woman
Racial Identity	White	Black	White
Age	52	68	66
Relationship Status	Married	Single	Married
Number of Children	One	None	Four
Current Institutional Type	R-2 University	R-2 University	Regional, Comprehensive
Current Regional Location	Northeast	Northeast	Midwest
Highest Degree	Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration	Ph.D. in Educational Administration	Ph.D. in Educational Leadership

Participant #	4	5	6
Pseudonym	Rebecca Hayes	Gina Smith	Shauna Sanders
Gender Identity	Woman	Woman	Woman
Racial Identity	White	White	Black
Age	44	56	47
Relationship Status	Married	Married	Single
Number of Children	One	One	None
Current Institutional Type	Regional, Comprehensive	Doctoral/Professional University	R-1 University
Current Regional Location	Midwest	Midwest	Midwest
Highest Degree	Ph.D. in Higher Education and Adult Learning	Ph.D. in Educational Leadership	Ph.D. in Educational Policy

Case 1: Sandra Thompson

Sandra Thompson is a 52-year-old, White woman with 27 years of experience working in student affairs and is in the sixth year of her first VPSA position at a public, mid-to-large size, R-2, land-grant university in the northeastern region of the United States. Sandra oversees an extensive student affairs division, which encompasses 24 student affairs units or departments, such as the Dean of Students' office, Greek Life, student union and activities, college access programs, campus auxiliary services, health services and counseling, and others, and supervises over 500 professional staff members, 45 graduate assistants, and 1200 student employees. In addition to being a VPSA, Sandra serves on several public boards, is a wife and stepmother, teaches in her institution's student affairs graduate preparation program, is active in student affairs professional associations, and describes herself as a "practitioner scholar" with a substantial publication record.

Prior to fulfilling her current position, Sandra frequently moved institutions, never staying in one place or in one role for an extended period with her longest tenure at one institution being six years. She described being professionally known as a "fixer" or someone who came into institutions to restructure struggling departments, make significant transformative change, and leave, which allowed her to quickly advance through career stages, gain experience in a variety of institutional types, develop relationships with student affairs professionals across the United States, and develop the skill set she described as necessary to be a competitive VPSA candidate and, ultimately, successful in the role. Specifically, Sandra sought out opportunities to build competency in budget and finance, fundraising, law, assessment, and supervision, which she believes are crucial knowledge areas for VPSAs. With each institutional move, Sandra received more advanced titles and greater responsibilities. She credits these many professional

and physical moves with allowing her to become a VPSA at a relatively young age; however, these frequent moves also involved ending previous romantic relationships, uprooting her family, curtailing local friendships, necessitating the repeated establishment of new support systems, and considering if new geographic locations would be safe and welcoming for her and her wife as married, gay women. Sandra shared after meeting and marrying her wife, she needed to consider her career moves differently:

There are certain states I'll never consider jobs in because it's not safe, like physically safe for us to go there...You know, we joke about all the states that begin with the letter A, they're out. There's [a] geographic line, we're not going to go below it.

Sandra also described her desire to “put down roots” as a strong motivation for accepting her current position as well as needing to select an institution close to a reputable cancer treatment center for her wife, which was a consideration she never expected to be a factor in her career moves:

One of the interesting things when your personal life and your work comes into play ...when I was doing my search for vice presidencies, I had to do something I never thought I would have to do; I job searched around breast cancer centers. No one tells you that's something you may do in your career. How would you think about that?

Sandra also shared she selected her current role and institution, in part, because she was tired of being seen as an institutional “outsider” who would not be at any institution for long and, as a result, was often disliked and ostracized by longstanding institutional actors; for example, at her previous institution, Sandra described a negative interaction with a staff member who said, “we know you're not going to be here long, so we just need to outlast you.” Unfortunately, Sandra

described often being met with similar reactions from colleagues and staff members when entering a new institution as a high-ranking, woman, student affairs professional.

Sandra described in detail negative experiences throughout her tenure at her previous institution, which ultimately motivated her to start a formal job search for VPSA positions. Prior to this search, Sandra's career moves were all initiated through her professional network and personal connections rather than her actively searching and applying for new positions or roles. For example, while pursuing her doctoral degree, the institution's dean of students came into her graduate assistant office space and asked if she would like to be the assistant dean of students. Sandra's next "big" career move, which she described as "her ticket," materialized in a similar way, a member of her doctoral cohort called her and asked if she wanted to be the assistant director of residence life at their institution.

Sandra's need to initiate her first formal, professional job search to leave her past institution immediately rather than wait for another opportunity to emerge emphasizes how badly she was treated there, which she believes was deeply connected to her gender. Although this institution was led by a woman president and had women in other senior leadership roles across campus, Sandra described the institutional environment as unwelcoming and unsupportive of women, both women students and professionals. In one gender-related occurrence, Sandra was "offered a developmental opportunity" to oversee the institution's student union and activities in addition to her current role; however, she was neither offered a new title to reflect these new responsibilities nor additional compensation for her time. When Sandra asked if her title or salary would be adjusted, her supervisor refused to discuss compensation and instead responded that they could always find someone else to do it. Sandra also described feeling pressured to hire a particular candidate, who happened to be a White man, to fill an open position on her staff

despite him neither being her first choice nor the most qualified candidate for the job. This person was given a better starting salary than Sandra, despite working under her, and upon Sandra leaving the institution, she noted this same person was brought in to take over the student union on an interim basis. Despite being interim, he was given both a title change, and significant salary increase, which Sandra never received. Sandra also explained regularly being disregarded or overlooked in conversations and decision-making involving university facilities in favor of her men staff members despite her position, which gave her the authority in such matters. Sandra was also frequently yelled at and disciplined publicly. In one instant, Sandra's supervisor called a meeting with Sandra's whole staff to yell at her, then he called a meeting with all his direct reports to yell at her in front of her colleagues, followed by a pre-arranged meeting with the university's president, so he and the president could yell at her together. Sandra described their vitriol and anger for a minor, warranted action and explained they never had nor would ever treat a man in this way. Lastly, Sandra shared being expected to manage staff and colleagues' emotions while remaining stoic and never expressing her own feelings: "So these are the behind-the-scenes things...when staff get angry and stuff like that, how much of that can you absorb? So, I think a lot of this is gendered." Sandra explicitly stated these negative experiences were related to gender. Sandra's poor treatment from her supervisor and other institutional actors reflected both individual gendered interactions, and institutionalized gendered policies and practices, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

Upon reflecting on other gendered experiences throughout her career, Sandra recalled being initially introduced to the faculty at her current institution by the provost as "kiddo" despite holding a terminal degree and bringing over 20 years of professional experience. Sandra

also described being dumbfounded by a man colleague at the institution physically pushing her out of the way while participating in a panel discussion for her student staff:

I was describing something to a group of students that was about to happen to give them a heads up on something, a colleague literally stood up in front of me and put their hand, in front of me, and pushed me physically aside, in front of the students and two of my staff members...in that moment, [I felt] one is shocked and two is I don't want to embarrass the students, I don't want to embarrass my staff, I didn't want to embarrass my colleague, though I should have.

Sandra went on to describe her follow-up conversation with her colleague who said, “I had to do that [physically stop you] because you were explaining it wrong.” Despite these two negative experiences, Sandra spoke about how rewarding the VPSA role can be and how she has generally enjoyed her time at her current institution.

However, at the time of data collection, Sandra was contemplating leaving not only her position but also the student affairs field. Sandra’s rationale for leaving her current institution is due to institutional leadership changes and the subsequent devaluation of both her influence and the student affairs division’s position within the institution. Sandra believes the new institutional leadership neither respects student affairs as a field nor respects her as a leader, which she suspects is related to her being a woman. Sandra explained her disillusionment with the institution when reflecting on her experience with the recent presidential transition. The former university president afforded Sandra a lot of latitude and held her in high regard. He even allowed her to assume some presidential responsibilities, such as running presidential cabinet meetings; however, other institutional leaders conveyed they did not value the experience and work of student affairs and higher education professionals when they made possessing tenure a

new requirement of the president position. While Sandra noted presidents advancing from tenure-track, academic lines are commonplace in research institutions, she took issue with herself and administrative professionals from academic affairs, human resources, finance, and other areas being excluded from consideration in this way. Sandra contemplated or questioned aloud if tenure was added as a requirement to specifically exclude her from the role because she is a gay woman, and the institution is not ready for a same-gender couple in such a visible role.

Sandra's desire to leave the field intensified between our two interviews. When we first spoke, Sandra was confident she would soon be leaving the institution but was debating between three paths: (1) pursuing a VPSA position at a larger institution, (2) pursuing a college or university presidency, or (3) leaving the field. At the time, she seemed to be leaning toward pursuing a presidency role. However, during our second interview, Sandra explained she is no longer interested in pursuing the presidency nor a new VPSA position. Instead, she is seriously considering leaving student affairs and higher education entirely because of the continual high expectations, low compensation, and pressure to compete for limited institutional resources and funding, which were all exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sandra shared the COVID-19 pandemic and concurrent incidents of racial injustice were not only mentally, physically, and emotionally draining, particularly because of the responsibilities associated with the VPSA role and her management of the institution's COVID-19 response and initiatives, but also enlightening. Inspired by the strain the COVID-19 pandemic put on her and her staff, Sandra found herself reassessing her career, relationship with her institution, and her perspective on student affairs in general:

Now at this point in my career, and having navigated the pandemic, and learning a lot about myself, our field and everything...I've also learned an incredible lesson. It

took me 27 years, but no place of employment is going to love me back. No place I work is going to love me back. So as much love as I put into our students as much love as I put into our center directors as much love as I put into this, that love will never be returned. We want it to be, often, but it's not. So, I have to (a) either be okay with that or (b) decide, do I still want to stay in this work and do this recognizing that I have now learned that.

Additionally, pursuing another VPSA role would require a geographic move, which Sandra is unwilling to do at this point in her life because she finally feels “at home” after seven, career-motivated relocations or moves. Sandra also described being tired of fighting and worn down from the “hidden” or “darker” sides of the VPSA position, which, to paraphrase Sandra’s words, involves attending students’ funerals, sitting next to their hospital beds, and being yelled at by internal and external stakeholders. Overall, Sandra described being disillusioned with student affairs and recognizing she, as a person, does not need to be defined by her title and field, she can translate her skills to be successful in any field and still “enjoy her life.” While I was writing this chapter, Sandra publicly announced she was leaving higher education and student affairs for a higher education adjacent position in the private sector.

Case 2: Marion Kennings

Marion Kennings is a 68-year-old, Black woman with 44 years of professional experience in student affairs. During the interview process for this study, she retired from her second VPSA position, which she held for 23 years at a public, R-2 or mid-to-large size university in the northeastern region of the United States. Within this position, Marion oversaw enrollment management, residence life, athletics, campus auxiliary services, the Dean of Students Office, health and counseling services, disability services, the Title IX Office, and the

campus police department. During her extensive tenure at this institution, Marion described the elevation of both student affairs' stature and her power or influence at the university. By the time of her retirement, Marion was the "go-to" vice president:

When people would talk about the fact that I was the VP that everybody would go to when they wanted something and I think part of that was the longevity that I had as the quote unquote Senior VP, even though I didn't have that title, I had the history, I had the contacts, I had the knowledge. And so, I did have more power than probably other people did, people would respond to my request where they might not respond to somebody else's.

Marion explained possessing power from not only her title but also from her extensive institutional knowledge, student affairs experience, contacts, and most importantly positive reputation and high regard across campus. Marion believes her power and reputation largely developed because of her willingness to speak with everyone and her ability to develop relationships with staff at all levels of the organizational structure or institutional hierarchy, which she described as, "that female leadership experience of treating people like people." Despite Marion's nuanced commentary on her use of women's leadership styles, Marion commented that neither her racial nor gender identity had any effect on her career. Yet, she saw them as assets that she could emphasize or tools she could use in particular situations. In describing her work with student conduct, Marion stated:

But if I needed to use it [racial or gender identity], I would use it. And so, I never looked at them as obstacles, I always looked at them as assets, helping me do things in a way that things needed to be done. You know, as women, we can often take a different route to the answer than the stereotypical behavior of a man...I think we [women] can get

people to react differently to things.

Marion also credited having a supportive supervisor, in this case a woman president, in elevating both her own and student affairs' profile and influence across the institution.

Marion also recognized the significant influence mentors had on her career trajectory and professional development. Marion explained her professional mentors were always White men who taught her how to navigate student affairs and how to recognize and utilize the power she held. Marion went on to explain she never perceived her gender and race as limitations or challenges to overcome because she "learned to play the game their way." In other words, Marion believed by learning how to be a student affairs professional from White men and she could both mirror their approaches and recognize when their approaches needed to be adjusted to better serve her needs. Marion also never doubted she could be successful in higher education because she saw other women doing it. However, she recognized that most women in the field of her age did not have the opportunity to work for and see women in high-level positions as she had over the course of her career.

In her most recent role, Marion's supervisor, the university's president, shaped the gender dynamics at the institution by intentionally increasing representational diversity within institutional leadership. In comparison, when Marion first started there, institutional leadership was solely comprised of White men who had been at the university for nearly their entire careers. In fact, when Marion started, she and the university's president were the only women in executive leadership positions. But as these longstanding institutional leaders retired, the president hired more women to fill these roles. After her first year, Marion could not recall a time when there were less than two women on the president's cabinet. Marion shared, "women had the power" at this institution. However, Marion recognized a woman-powered or woman-led

institution is a rarity in higher education, which she was fortunate to benefit from and experience only two times in her lengthy career. Once at her most recent institution and the other at the only other institution where she stayed for longer than five years.

In her first memory of working at this previous institution where she served, at different times, as the director of student activities, director of residence life, associate dean of students, and, lastly, as dean of students, Marion described being shocked by the number of women in leadership:

But the best part was I walked into the president's office, and there were five or six women in there. And that was who was handling this whole issue. It was all women.

And I thought, that's one time that struck me, you know, and that was going back to 1985, so it's very unusual. But women ran that show at that point.

Following her time at this institution, Marion transitioned to her first VPSA role at a small-to-midsize, public, regional college in the northeastern region of the United States, which presented a strikingly different and more challenging institutional culture. At this institution, Marion was both the first woman and the first Black person to fill the VPSA position. She was also the first Black person, and she suspected the first woman, at the institution to hold a presidential cabinet position. Although Marion was somewhat accustomed to being “the first” as she was a member of the first class of women to attend her undergraduate institution, was one of the first women to serve as a resident assistant (RA) there, and, later, was her alma mater’s first woman associate dean of students (a role specifically created to have more women in student affairs leadership to serve women students), she struggled to feel a sense of belonging at this institution and to build institutional support for changes from students, faculty, and staff. Marion described being deeply unhappy at this institution and left after three and a half years when prompted by her mentor to

make her next career move in pursuit of personal happiness rather than exclusively for professional development or career advancement.

Most of Marion's career transitions were either internally motivated by her desire to learn new skills and advance her career, as was her rationale for leaving her professional position at her alma mater, or her dissatisfaction with her employing institutions' geographic locations, which were primarily rural and offered minimal opportunities for a rich social life. Marion frequently mentioned her desire to work in an urban environment or a suburban environment near an urban center, so she could have easy access to her other passions and interests, namely theater and fashion, and to serve more diverse student populations. Marion credits both the location and innovative nature of her most recent institution as the reason she happily stayed there in the same role for over 20 years, which was uncharacteristic for Marion who previously quickly moved through positions. Marion did not initially intend to remain in this role or remain a VPSA for the duration of her career instead she described aspiring to be and preparing to become a college or university president; however, once in this VPSA role with a clearer view of what the university president position and responsibilities entailed, she swiftly realized she no longer wanted to pursue the presidency. Marion did not believe the president's role was compatible with her personality:

It's just not who I was. I was not the type to go out there and raise money. I wasn't into the schmoozing and the small talk and all of that, that you needed to do as a president.

So, I said, "Nope, this is where I am going to be."

Subsequently, Marion was satisfied to remain in this VPSA role; however, she continued to introduce broad changes to the student affairs division to keep herself challenged and, more importantly for Marion, to better serve students.

Despite being an RA and, ultimately, having a long, successful career in student affairs, Marion was not drawn to pursue student affairs as her career. She described “falling into” student affairs as she continued to accept and fulfill student affairs positions out of financial necessity while she tried to figure out what she “wanted to be when she grew up.” Marion reflected on her early desire to go to law school and pursue a legal career; however, she explained, as a first-generation student, she did not believe she could afford it and worried about acquiring student loan debt, so she decided to become a residence hall director while simultaneously earning her master’s degree in counseling, which was paid for by her employer. Marion did not fully acknowledge or, as she described, “settle into” student affairs as her career until 15 years later, after serving in varying student affairs roles at four different institutions and earning another master’s degree in an unrelated field. At the time, Marion was fulfilling her second director-level role in student affairs.

Although Marion was initially reluctant or slow to proclaim student affairs as her chosen field and career path, she described feeling drawn to make a difference in students’ lives and being fulfilled by her work. Marion shared:

The best thing about my job was waking up in the morning and realizing every day, you get the opportunity to make a difference in somebody's life. And as a VP, you have even more of those opportunities, because you get to put your finger in so many different places that can make that change.

Marion emphasized finding student affairs work rewarding even when it was most challenging, such as when she had to decide whether to expel a student, when handling a student death, or when managing the institution’s COVID-19 action plan. She also described gaining a deep satisfaction and sense of fulfillment from her professional development work with early and mid-

career student affairs professionals. Marion mentored countless students and staff, dedicated financial and human resources to the division's professional development opportunities, taught in student affairs graduate preparation programs, and was prominently involved in student affairs professional associations. She even served as a national association president for a time. When asked about these extensive commitments and her work ethic, Marion recognized that her career was her life and she saw no need for any distinction or separation between her personal and professional lives. In fact, Marion rejected the idea of work/life balance and the pressure to change her workstyle to be a more balanced role model for her staff. Instead, Marion emphasized that she enjoyed working, she enjoyed staying late at the office, and she enjoyed answering emails on vacation, and that it was her choice to do so. She explained she did not expect others to make the same choices; however, she urged women who aspired to be VPSAs to "go for it" and not limit themselves to traditional gender roles or traits.

Marion's commitment to the field, desire to positively influence individuals' lives, and success in implementing broad, constructive change was acknowledged and appreciated by both students and colleagues who wrote and spoke publicly about her significant influence on them and on the institution on several occasions, especially during her retirement celebrations. Marion emphasized that her decision to retire, contrary to popular assumption, was not motivated by COVID-19 burnout rather it was planned prior to the pandemic; however, she chose to delay her retirement out of a sense of duty to assist the institution and its students through this challenging time.

Case 3: Terry Hunter

Terry Hunter is a 66-year-old, married, White woman serving as both the SSAO and dean of students at a public, small-to-mid-sized regional, comprehensive university in the midwestern

region of the United States. Terry has been at this institution since 2001 and moved up from assistant dean of student conduct to her current role by advocating for herself and taking on whatever additional responsibilities were asked. Terry felt she secured her current position by arguing for the institutional necessity of the SSAO role and for her ability to fulfill it. Terry was well posed to assume the SSAO role because she just completed her doctorate, possessed 10 years of institutional knowledge, and had broad support from faculty and staff across the university. At the time, Terry was the only student affairs professional employed at the institution with a doctorate degree. In this combined SSAO and dean of students' role, Terry oversees an extensive number and eclectic set of offices, including residence life, academic advising, career services, student activities, health and wellness, disability services, veterans' services, student conduct, student support services, access programs, the campus food pantry, and others. Terry also serves on the local hospital's board of directors as a patient advocate, a role she took on after her husband had a negative experience following a major surgical procedure. Despite her many public roles, Terry first introduced herself in terms of her personal roles, namely being a mother of four children, rather than by her professional title and institutional affiliation.

Terry also distinguished herself by having a significant gap in her professional career; she chose to pause her career outside the home for 14 years to focus on raising four children rather than "splitting focus" between her professional and personal lives. Immediately prior to taking a break from the field, Terry worked as an assistant dean of students at her alma mater, a prestigious private, religiously affiliated university in the northeastern region of the United States. Terry described generally enjoying her time working at this institution, particularly interacting with students, and advising student government; however, she quickly recognized she

would have limited advancement opportunities there because she was a woman and, at the time, the institution was completely led by White men. In describing the institution, Terry shared:

I mean it's kind of that real, like religious, good old boys' network, totally. And so that's when I started to feel it more like, oh, I'm in this position and I will never move up at [institution]. I mean, it just was very obvious to me that I was not going to become the dean of students at [institution], because I was the wrong gender. And I don't know to this day, I don't think they've ever had a woman dean of students.

Although Terry did not explicitly mention the lack of advancement opportunities as a motivation for resigning and becoming a stay-at-home mom, the lack of advancement opportunities did seem to dampen her resolve to continue working after having her first child. Terry explicitly mentioned her commute and childcare costs consuming most of her salary as her primary motivators for quitting and taking time away from the field. Terry also mentioned feeling she could not fulfill both her professional and parenting expectations if she attempted to do both roles. During this pause, Terry completely disconnected from higher education and student affairs, "I mean, I didn't read *The Chronicle*. I didn't do anything for 14 years."

Upon reentering the workforce, Terry initially worked part-time for about a year in the disability's services and academic advising offices at a small community college on the east coast of the United States prior to starting at her current institution. Although she was there for a short time, Terry credits this part-time work with reacclimating her to the field and the major changes that occurred in higher education between the late 1980s, when she left, and the early 2000s, when she returned. Terry was particularly taken aback by the effect computers and other technological advancements had on student affairs work, the expansion of disability services, and

the increased attention to and concern for students' mental health, which she found and continues to find emotionally and mentally draining.

Despite these significant changes, Terry was motivated to return to work in student affairs because she perceived it as providing her and her husband greater flexibility to relocate their family. Terry saw a fulltime position in student affairs as a conduit to moving their family out of a metropolitan or urban area, which held the most employment opportunities for her husband, to a rural community without worrying about their job prospects and income. Terry specifically looked for rural communities where she could rely on the local higher education institution for employment and financial security. Terry also drastically limited her search to rural areas within driving distance to athletic training centers, so her children could continue to pursue their unique sport. Although Terry intentionally selected a rural institution, she acknowledged the university's location made it more difficult to pursue doctoral coursework and access professional development opportunities.

Terry and her husband decided that upon her return to the workforce, he would retire from his career to manage the household and be available fulltime for their children, particularly for their youngest who was eight years old at the time: "And so, my husband said he'd stay at home...so we switched roles." Throughout the process of this study, Terry emphasized having a supportive spouse at home was crucial to her professional success because she neither felt pressured to stop working and leave work nor felt the need to worry about her children:

...even when my kids were young, you know, my husband was home. So, I never felt like I have to get home, I have to cook dinner, I have never had this pressure to get out and get to my other life. You know, it was normal for me to get home at 6:30, bring a ton of work home with me, and do more work after the kids went to bed. I mean

that was my life, so that's okay...But I wouldn't have done that if I didn't have a spouse at home. I mean, I think you can't almost, [but] I never had to make that choice. But I'm sure it would have been, I wouldn't have worked as long hours if I didn't have a stay-at-home dad in the picture because then I think you're pulled, then you really have to think. I never had to think about work/life balance, somebody was there.

Terry explained she was fortunate to never have to split her focus between work and home because she had the capability to leave the workforce while having children and had a supportive spouse at home fulltime when she elected to return. She also explained she never would have returned to fulltime employment without her husband agreeing to stay home because being a mother and making sure her children were taken care of was always her top priority: “mother has always taken priority for me, and I wouldn't have gone back to work if my husband hadn't been willing to stay home because that was the most important thing to me.” Even though her children are now adults with children of their own, Terry still considers being their mother her top priority and the most salient aspect of her identity. For instance, Terry recently “laid the groundwork” to take three months off work to help her daughter recover from cancer treatment. Although Terry wound up not needing to take this time off, she used this example to emphasize both her commitment to mothering and her commitment to dedicating herself completely to the task at hand, either her work or her family.

While Terry felt fortunate to have a support system that allowed her to prioritize work without having to simultaneously balance professional and familial or personal responsibilities, she recognized her unique experience hindered her ability to fully understand and have both patience and empathy for her employees’ work/life balance challenges and their, subsequent,

work ethic, professional choices, and behavior. For example, Terry described her conflicting feelings over her staff leaving the office at 5 PM:

I still to this day feel that little bit of anger when everybody's out the door at five. It still ticks me off. And then I have to say, "what the hell, they're supposed to be out the door at five," but I still have that [anger] in me...So that's my problem, that's a personality flaw.

On several occasions, Terry shared her annoyance with the field's preoccupation with work/life balance and the pressure to shift professional expectations. Terry shared, "When you talk about work/life balance, I don't get that...You're at the job, you should just do the job." Terry felt her staff's unreasonable expectations included, everything needing to be perfect, not wanting to experience any discomfort, not wanting to do anything they do not want to do, and not being expected to do anything difficult. At the time of this study, Terry described finding herself particularly frustrated with her staff's increased requests for emotional support animals in the office and their overall reluctance to return to in-person work, which she believes is an essential component of student affairs work.

With regards to students, Terry was also concerned with their hesitation to return to campus and its potential ramifications. Terry worried the institution would become so desperate due to low student enrollment and the, subsequent, loss in revenue that institutional leadership's judgment would be clouded, and institutional values would shift from focusing on what's best for students to "what's best for the bottom line." Terry interpreted her impatience with and anger over what she described as "this kind of stupid, extraneous stuff" rather than serious potential downsides of the SSAO role, such as "when a student dies, or there's a major catastrophe," as a sign that she is "getting to the end of my shelf life" or the end of her time in student affairs. Terry

mentioned thinking more and more about retirement, which she was previously uninterested in, because of both her abovementioned impatience and her anxiety over upcoming institutional leadership change. Specifically, Terry has some anxiety about her supervisor's upcoming retirement and described her own retirement as her "safety valve" in the event her values misalign or conflict with those of the incoming provost.

Despite her recent weariness with some aspects of her work and her becoming more comfortable with the idea of retiring, Terry never regretted nor questioned her decision to pursue student affairs as her career:

I never regretted for one minute that I went into this field, okay. Never ever have I said, "Oh, I should have done that instead," I've never said that. I don't know why it just seemed like such a natural fit for me. And so, so I've really enjoyed it.

Terry had a traditional or linear career trajectory in student affairs except for the significant gap in her employment history. Terry discovered student affairs through her undergraduate involvement and then attended a top-ranking graduate preparation program. Subsequently, she fulfilled roles in student activities at a variety of institutional types before pausing her career to focus on her children. Terry continually described feeling truly fulfilled in her career, particularly when she had the opportunity to innovate and introduce student-focused initiatives to improve marginalized students' retention and academic success:

I really love when we can help a first-generation student, or a low-income student be successful, and a student with a disability, and they graduate... That's the rewarding part, right, is that you do have an impact on students. And sometimes you have an impact on students that you don't even realize... That's what I love, like you can really have an impact and you might not even know it.

While reflecting on her career trajectory, Terry again emphasized that she would not be a SSAO without her doctorate degree and could not be a SSAO without a partner willing to take on all domestic responsibilities. She explained women in student affairs need to be realistic and decide, early on, what they want in their career or what level they would like to achieve and what they are willing to sacrifice to get there.

Case 4: Rebecca Hayes

Rebecca Hayes is a 44-year-old, White woman serving as the dean of students, which is the SSAO role at her institution. Rebecca has been at this institution, a public small-to-mid-sized, regional, comprehensive, master's university in the midwestern region of the United States, since 2003 when she started as a graduate intern and within two months transitioned to a fulltime professional role in student activities. Throughout her nearly 20-year tenure at the institution, Rebecca was regularly asked to take on additional roles and to shepherd major institutional change, such as restructuring the student activities and engagement departments and creating a student success office. In her current role, Rebecca oversees a modest sized student affairs division including enrollment management, student life, counseling services, student conduct, disability services, Title IX, access programs, and others. She supervises 25 to 30 fulltime staff members and manages a \$2 million-dollar divisional budget.

Prior to her current position, Rebecca filled a series of appointed, interim roles at the institution. While moving up through her institution's organizational chart or administrative hierarchy, Rebecca simultaneously pursued and earned a doctoral degree at a top-ranking higher education graduate program. Rebecca's first interim role particularly stood out as significant in her mind because it put her on track to become the SSAO at the relatively young age of 40 years old and helped her transition out of student activities and mid-level student affairs professional

positions. Before assuming this initial interim position, Rebecca described feeling bored of working in one functional area for the entirety of her student affairs career and feeling stagnant by the lack of advancement opportunities in student activities. She credits this significant career move to her newly found self-awareness, confidence, and recognition of the demands associated with student affairs work after giving birth to her son: “I think having a baby got a little fire in my belly like okay, hey, I’m working 60 hours a week, but I could be working for a better job and better pay, and I have a kid now.”

Rebecca shared the story of how she came to create this position. The day before she left for maternity leave, she was approached by her new interim supervisor and asked to take on multiple extraneous projects that were left incomplete by her previous supervisor. Rebecca immediately agreed to assume these extra tasks, seeing them as a learning opportunity and a way to diversify her student affairs experience in hopes of transitioning to a new functional area in the future. However, while preparing to return from maternity leave, Rebecca had what she described as an “epiphany” and questioned whether this professional development opportunity was worth taking on additional labor without compensation or recognition while caring for a newborn child. Rebecca’s concerns were amplified when she considered the opportunity cost associated with this “learning opportunity.” Rebecca believed this extra labor would cost her significantly more time away from her infant and husband, increase her childcare needs and, subsequently, the price of childcare, and take more mental energy. Rebecca described her thought process regarding the true cost this extra labor would have on her as a new mother:

Okay, so I have to fly by the seat of my pants to get from here to daycare pick up on time, so I’m not charged an additional \$5 every seven seconds for a late fee...And I’m thinking to myself, you want me to stay late, so okay, all right, so do I stay late, and my

husband has to do everything? And, no extra money comes in, right? Or do I have to do all my stuff, go get the kid and my husband, and I do all that work, get him to bed and then when it's time to relax instead I go do my extra work and then I'm really tired because I'm now in a cycle of not only working 60 hours a week, but I'm also now working 70 hours a week plus the baby like this isn't worth it to me.

Following this reevaluation, Rebecca met with her supervisor and explicitly asked if she would receive additional compensation and a title change along with this extra work.

Rebecca recognized her motivation and rationale for advocating for herself was intricately related to gender. She shared, “particularly women [take on extra] in the hopes that their work and their outcomes are recognized,” a behavior she now chose to reject. Fortunately for Rebecca, advocating for herself and her needs resulted in being able to craft her own position and receive a \$20,000 salary increase. She described feeling as if she “entered the old boys’ club” by successfully negotiating for the first time in her career, which is a skill she believes women do not regularly practice, are not taught, and are discouraged from developing or learning. Rebecca went on to explain the long-term ramifications of women, especially those working in temporally demanding fields like student affairs, failing to negotiate higher salaries and improved benefits packages with their employers:

If you look at data, men and women are often offered the same [pay]...and the woman evaluates the offer and says, “Thank you so much,” and accepts. The man says, “you know, I'm very excited about this opportunity. I'd like \$52,000.” And they [employers] say, “okay,” because they know they had room to play. But the woman didn't think she could ask for more, right? And so now even that \$2,000 doesn't feel like [a lot] whatever, but you have compounding interest over time in terms of those raises, right...And that

gap is widening, right? And the flexibility that comes with more money means you have better childcare, so he can show up at seven in the morning for the meeting and she says, “I can’t I have to take my kid to school,” right?

Rebecca emphasized the flexibility and security that comes with a higher salary is crucial for women and mothers to move up in student affairs because “you cannot appear to be out worked” by anyone. However, student affairs’ low compensation makes it difficult for women to justify the intense temporal and physical commitment necessary to “do the job well.”

Rebecca explained whenever she faced sexism or believed she was treated differently because of her gender, she would “outwork” both men, who had stay-at-home wives taking care of all the domestic responsibilities, and non-parenting women. She advised women aspiring to be a VPSA or SSAO to have a strong support system, particularly a supportive partner, who will not only share but also take on most childcare and other domestic responsibilities, such as cooking and cleaning. Rebecca explained she never would have considered, pursued, and could not remain the SSAO without her husband taking on the “the brunt” of caring for their son. Rebecca expounded as a woman in the field with high career aspirations, she constantly felt pressured to prove herself and develop a reputation as the “hardest working person on campus,” “johnny on the spot,” or the “go-to person on campus,” especially before deciding to have a child. She explained feeling worried she would be perceived as less committed and less reliable after having a child, so she consistently stayed late, answered emails around the clock, and earned her doctorate before starting a family.

Rebecca described her fears being validated despite her high-ranking position. As SSAO Rebecca stood out as one of only two women on the president’s council and the only woman with a young child. She shared an anecdote of being uncomfortable when called out of a cabinet

meeting to pick up her second-grade son at school because she was the only professional in this position due to her gender and her child's young age:

I can tell you that I know that there are others in the room who are parents, some of whom are dads that have partners who are at home and who bear that responsibility. I'm thinking of a couple particular folks, and then I know there are others whose children are older, so they don't have the same urgency of obligations right. So, it is hard because nobody else was in those shoes at that time, right?

In addition to covert or less obvious instances of gendered treatment at her institution, Rebecca also shared overt experiences, such as working for a former supervisor who explicitly and frequently referred to women as “bitches” and excluded Rebecca and other women from important, decision-making processes. Overall, Rebecca described both her institution and student affairs as an “old boys’ club” that continues to favor men’s career advancement. Rebecca believes student affairs requires women to either work harder than their men peers for a chance at becoming VPSA or reevaluate and adjust their professional aspirations to be satisfied with a mid-level student affairs position or leave the field.

Currently, Rebecca is both fulfilled and challenged by her SSAO position. On the one hand, Rebecca appreciates that her positionality or positional power allows her to simultaneously make widespread changes across the university and be a positive influence in the individual lives of students through individualized interactions and interventions. Rebecca shared, “it's rewarding to not only be able to influence on the ground but to be able to influence big-time policy direction. Things that I think are going to have a long-term and sustained impact for our students...” Rebecca also emphasized the flexibility the SSAO position affords her, such as having the ability to work remotely and flex her time to accommodate her son’s schedule. On the

other hand, Rebecca described feeling challenged and stressed by the responsibilities and time commitment associated with being the SSAO. Rebecca finds managing the institution's Title IX office and institutional response to sexual violence and misconduct, student mental health services and response team, and student conduct especially draining. Rebecca also described her discomfort with "always being on call" and being expected by both her supervisors and her staff to consistently answer her phone and emails regardless of the time. She explained that she does not believe in work/life balance and instead aims for "work-life integration," yet she struggles with creating and modeling appropriate boundaries. Rebecca explained, "I laughingly tell people, I can work any 80 hours a week I want my choice, right?" She also shared an anecdote about needing to find WIFI and respond to emails while touring Paris with her husband. In a more serious tone, Rebecca elaborated:

I'm in a field that can eat you alive, where your job becomes your life and the entirety of your life and, you know, just based on the nature of my work, I don't get to be off per say. So, if we get a call on our 24/7 counseling hotline that a student is suicidal, and it's midnight, then I'm going to get the call, and I'm going to have to wake up and address it, right?

Additionally, Rebecca described being stressed by having to teach her staff how to develop appropriate, professional boundaries both with the students they serve and between their own personal and professional lives. She described feeling conflicted about work/life boundaries, she feels it is her responsibility to teach her staff this important skill to stop perpetuating problematic behaviors and burnout in student affairs, but she also believes working outside traditional hours are an appropriate expectation and requirement of the field. In addition to struggling with her position's encroachment on her personal and familial time, Rebecca also struggled with her work

physically encroaching on her home and family. She shared multiple instances when she was threatened by students and required a police presence at her home to ensure her and her family's safety despite her home being over 40 minutes away from campus.

Even with feeling, at times, exhausted from the mental, emotional, and temporal demands of her role, Rebecca values her ability to be a change-maker on campus and recognizes the significance of being the institution's first-ever dean of students and the first woman SSAO. Rebecca believes she would be satisfied remaining in this role at this institution for the next 20 years or until her retirement. However, she also described always being ready to leave and continually updating her resume in case she is either forced out by institutional leadership or chooses to leave of her own accord because she no longer wants to navigate the institution's political landscape. Rebecca is also open to the idea of serving as SSAO at another institution, namely a large, research university, in the future to keep her engaged with, challenged by, and always learning more about student affairs work.

Case 5: Gina Smith

Gina Smith is a 56-year-old, White woman with 34 years of student affairs experience at three different institutions across the midwestern, eastern, and southern regions of the United States. She is currently in her eighth year as VPSA at a mid-sized, rural, doctoral/professional university or regional comprehensive university in the midwestern region of the United States. While introducing herself, Gina initially emphasized her roles outside of work "because they are sometimes more fun." These roles include being a mom to an 8-year-old daughter, being a wife to a former student affairs professional turned stay-at-home dad, volunteering at her local church, and serving on several nonprofit boards of directors. Gina is also very involved in the community, particularly community art-based initiatives.

Although she holds many roles outside of work, Gina explained she “lives to work” and must actively choose to put down her phone, stop answering emails, and engage in her home life because she feels fulfilled and gains such satisfaction from her work. She described her student affairs career as “a great way to make a difference...every day I go to work, and it matters.” Related to her work, Gina also has a longstanding reputation and extensive history of involvement in student affairs professional associations and currently serves on one association’s national executive leadership board. She also served as an affiliate faculty member or adjunct professor at three different higher education and student affairs graduate programs and taught both master's and doctoral-level courses. In listing out all her current involvements and reflecting on her previous ones, Gina explained she “always said yes” to any opportunity that arose, and any extra roles or tasks asked of her because she saw them as a conduit toward her professional development and competency, and an investment in making herself more competitive and marketable in the job market.

Throughout her career, Gina’s professional aspirations fluctuated between viewing the VPSA position as the pinnacle of her career and the role she would retire from or using it as a stepping-stone in pursuit of a college or university presidency. Gina recalled writing in her very first assignment in her master’s degree program that she wanted to be a college president despite not being fully aware or cognizant of what a college president was expected to do: “And so, I was really sure when I started that I wanted to be a president, hands down. [But,] I had no idea what a president did.” However, as Gina worked in the field and began to gain a better sense of the demands of not only the presidency, particularly the level of interaction and socialization involved, but also the demands and expectations of student affairs and higher education administration in general, Gina questioned if she could sustain the necessary level of

commitment for the entirety of her career, especially when considering and, later, experiencing motherhood.

While navigating state adoption processes, Gina and her husband saw firsthand the significant impact a “typical” student affairs career move can have on their family. After working at the same institution for 16 years, moving up through the student affairs division, and earning her doctorate degree, Gina was interested in advancing her career and pursuing a dean of students position. However, there were no advancement opportunities available at her current institution, so Gina pursued and accepted a dean of students position in a neighboring state with the understanding that their geographic move would not negatively affect their adoption process. Unfortunately, after moving and starting her new role, Gina and her husband learned they would need to start the adoption process all over again in their new state. Gina also learned she neither enjoyed the dean of students role nor her new institution and described the experience as “demanding and difficult.” Despite being unhappy with her position and the institution, Gina decided she would not make any career moves until after they adopted their child out of concern they would be penalized and “age out of adoption [eligibility].”

Becoming a mom later in life prompted Gina to spend a significant amount of time carefully considering and reflecting on how her career and motherhood would interact. Yet, she described still being taken aback by how deeply, intricately connected her personal and professional lives became after becoming a mother. Gina described how now any career decision or work-related task will have repercussions for her family:

You know, if I'm not home [working], I'm going to still need to take care of our child, or someone still has to make food or do whatever is going on that night. And so, you need your family to be a part of your career as well.

Gina is currently still struggling with the temporal demands of her role and, subsequently, what she envisions for the future of her career. Gina acknowledged she could not be a VPSA without her husband deciding to step away from his career to take care of their daughter full-time, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic that added additional caregiving responsibilities, namely facilitating their daughter's virtual learning. Subsequently, she worried how she could manage a presidency while maintaining her current level of parental involvement. Gina also worried about the effect being a college or university president, which is such a public role, would have on her daughter. Gina explained she had no women role models with young children to look up to as most college and university presidents seem to have older or adult children who do not require the same level of care and attention. Gina also shared her daughter already negatively views and comments on her work habits. For example, Gina's daughter bemoaned that Gina "always has work calls" when they are playing together and that she is "always on her phone." Although Gina dislikes that her daughter perceives her work negatively and sees Gina's work as infringing on their time together, Gina continues to work at the same level because she believes it is an expectation of the VPSA role and student affairs professionals to always be available and responsive to staff, colleagues, and supervisors.

Gina described feeling uniquely pressured to work "around the clock" as both the only woman vice president at the institution and the only parent of a young child amongst institutional leadership. Gina shared navigating this internal tension between her personal and professional responsibilities throughout her time as VPSA. Before even being offered the position Gina explicitly told the search committee that she had an infant, but she emphasized "it [being a mom] is not going to keep me from being a good vice president." Gina explained while many of her women colleagues felt they did not get positions or were disregarded for promotions because

they were pregnant or had young children, this was not her experience. However, Gina still feels pressured to prove that her personal life will not hinder her work. Gina elaborated that while there are more women than men in student affairs and higher education, it is rare for women, especially mothers, to move into leadership positions, so she feels both fortunate for achieving this high level and pressured to work as if she did not have a child. For example, Gina regularly multitasks by answering text messages while watching her daughter play at the park, returning to work after putting her daughter to bed, and waking up at three o'clock in the morning to respond to emails while her child is sleeping. Gina also explained a deep sense of responsibility to treat her students and prioritize their needs as if they were her own children:

I feel this sense of responsibility for, for helping them [students] get where they want to go. I can't do it for them, but I can help them think through what doors they need to think about going through or you know what kind of resources they need, or who they need to talk with or what connections we can make them.

Both before and after being a mother, Gina believed it is an expectation of student affairs professionals, particularly those professionals who are salaried and at high levels of the institution, to show their students the same care and concern they would show their own children. Gina acknowledged this expectation is exacerbated for women professionals who are assumed to be more nurturing than their men colleagues. Overall, Gina feels the nature of student affairs work not only lends itself to traditionally feminine characteristics associated with women but also demands it of its professionals. Yet, the field also expects professionals to work as if they have no other personal, gender-related responsibilities, such as mothering.

Although Gina feels women, such as herself, typically possess characteristics and personalities that naturally align with and serve them well in student affairs work, Gina also felt

her effectiveness and positional power were, at times, hindered or diminished by her gender and her colleagues' perception of gender. For instance, Gina shared her men colleagues' reactions when she informed them about a new student affairs initiative, which would bring about a significant "cultural change to campus." One colleague stated, "I don't agree with it. I don't want to do it, and I'm not going to support it," despite her division neither needing his nor his staff's support or assistance to implement the change. Gina believed the other vice presidents who were all men expected her to ask for their feedback and permission to make changes in her own division while she was only informing them of the change to be courteous.

Additionally, Gina shared throughout her career, men colleagues and supervisors often perceived her "niceness for weakness" and described her as neither assertive nor decisive enough for her position. She found men often interpreted her collaborative approaches to leadership as indecisiveness and inexperience. But Gina believed in "allow[ing] people the time and the space to find what the answer is" rather than dominating the conversation and making all the decisions for her staff. Gina also shared how she and other women are often ignored in meetings and forced to work harder to be heard, yet they must remain stoic in the face of this poor treatment and disrespect:

I have been in situations where I've been the only woman in the room. And so, you're trying to figure out how do you translate this into the conversations happening because the words and the way I'm doing it are not being heard. So, you have to work twice as hard sometimes to get people to understand what you're saying. And then, you know, God forbid, you have any kind of emotion that you show at any particular time because then that's a connotation for many of weakness, or that somebody did something to you, and it's like, no, you're just making me mad (laughs).

Gina also described needing to be cautious as a woman professional about taking on tasks beneath her position and trying to be helpful and “gracious” out of fear that these tasks and behavior would become expected of her and would devalue her position:

And so, when you're sitting around the table, and you're one of one or two women in the room, or maybe you're the only woman who's not a secretary in the room, you know, I'm careful...I'm not the person who gets coffee in the room. I'm not asking people if they need things, you know, I'm not making appointments, because I think there's just an assumption sometimes that, “oh, you'll take care of it. You're the organization person.”

And I'm like, “nope.”

Gina is adamant about not taking on these tasks or “institutional housekeeping” because early on in her career she experienced pressure to behave, dress, and work in stereotypically feminine ways. She described this time and these experiences as her “formative years in the field,” which taught her how things looked and how people were perceived had a greater effect on student affairs professionals’ work experiences and careers than what job descriptions or institutional policy explicitly stated. As a result, she gleaned women needed to be cautious about not being pigeonholed into outdated gender roles, namely being seen as merely secretarial or support staff.

Gina also discussed the shared experience or phenomenon of the imposter syndrome amongst women student affairs professionals. She recognized she often questioned herself and her professional competency whenever she sought out a new role and regularly had conversations with other women student affairs professionals who did the same. Yet, in supervising and socializing with men professionals, she did not see them doubting themselves in the same ways instead they were confident in their ability to take on executive leadership positions despite lacking skills in what Gina considered crucial areas for VPSAs. Gina wondered

aloud if women were socialized, taught, or predisposed to the imposter syndrome, which can have tangible, negative effects on their ability to move up or advance in student affairs.

Although Gina described instances when she experienced differential treatment due to her gender identity, Gina also credited her gender and racial identities for her relatively smooth professional trajectory or what she described as “successful” and “positive experiences” in student affairs. Gina explained her identity reflects the identity of most student affairs professionals and allowed her easier access to and an assumed inherent understanding of the field. Her identity also allowed her to imagine the possibility of having a career in student affairs because she saw a high number of professionals who looked like her existing in the field. Gina expressed:

Well, I know that if you look at this field, there are a lot of White women...So, I think I was very much the norm in that. So, it probably allowed me, or I know it allowed me to understand the culture more...there's just a lot of White women in the field, not necessarily [in] leadership, but in the field. So, I probably understood the norms better. I could assimilate quicker...And there's also a lot of other White women to look at, to say, “Gosh, I can be you because I see you, I see what you're doing.” And so that's always in your mind, to be able to say that seems like a path I can take where if you don't see somebody who looks like you then I think it can be harder.

Gina astutely acknowledged the privilege her identity offered despite experiencing pressure to adhere to gendered expectations or behave in more traditionally feminine ways. At this point in her career, Gina is focused on using this privilege and her positional power to help develop early and mid-career professionals. She discussed creating professional development opportunities for

women staff members to gain exposure to and skill-development in areas they are often excluded from in the field, which are necessary for career advancement.

Case 6: Shauna Sanders

Shauna Sanders is a 47-year-old, Black woman in her second year as VPSA at a large, public, flagship, R-1 university in the midwestern region of the United States. In this role, she manages over one-third of the campus. Specifically, she supervises three associate vice presidents (AVPs) and oversees their respective functional areas including campus life or the student union and activities, residence life, dining services, student health and wellness services, multicultural student affairs, disability services, academic support services and the writing center, the Dean of Students Office, and any other offices or areas that address students' cocurricular needs or, as Shauna described it, "anything outside of the classroom." Shauna is the first woman to hold the VPSA position and the highest-ranking woman of Color (WOC) and person of Color (POC) at the institution, which adds additional pressure, responsibilities, and obstacles for her to navigate.

Leading to her vice presidency, Shauna had a "non-traditional" career path as she spent most of her 20-year higher education career working on academic affairs initiatives in state higher education systems and in professional associations rather than working in student-facing positions and progressively moving through student affairs functional areas and divisions on individual college or university campuses. Additionally, Shauna worked in the federal government for several years prior to earning her master's degree in counseling and pursuing a career change to student affairs and higher education. Shauna shared that she was initially inspired to pursue a career in student affairs while working on state education policy reform and questioning if she should pursue further education and, if so, what she should study. Prompted by

her supervisor, a White congressman who Shauna described as one of her first professional mentors, she realized she had the “best times” of her life as an involved undergraduate student and wanted to help students have a similar positive experience and reap the benefits of a college education. Shauna was motivated to “make sure that other little Black and Brown kids and people who look like me have those opportunities.” After graduating with her master’s degree, Shauna started her student affairs career working at a community college, which contributed to her interest in pursuing doctoral education, which she started soon after, and ultimately led to her dissertation research on the experiences of transfer students of Color at predominantly white institutions (PWIs). Shauna also credited her boyfriend at the time for pushing her to pursue her doctoral degree despite her initial hesitation to return to graduate school. His rationale or argument was she needed a degree to legitimize her knowledge and allow her to advance in the field. Shauna soon agreed she needed a doctorate degree after being frequently dismissed and ignored by colleagues.

While Shauna described student affairs as her passion, she quickly transitioned to academic affairs after two years because she felt she could not meet student affairs’ high expectations and accommodate its demanding schedule while simultaneously pursuing a doctoral degree. In comparison to student affairs, academic affairs provided Shauna slightly better compensation and benefits, and allowed her to continue to work with students but did not require night and weekend obligations. Shauna attributed her pivot to and work in academic affairs with making her a successful VPSA because she can “break down the silos” between academic and student affairs, build relationships with faculty, and better educate institutional actors on the purpose and value of student affairs:

...because I had some experience in academic affairs, I think that has really helped my career long-term and it's really given me kind of some insight into how some faculty members, not all, but how they view student affairs, and how I have to educate them about what we really do and why it's imperative that we work collaboratively.

Shauna often described the VPSA role as a political one requiring good communication skills and authenticity, which she feels are discouraged in student affairs. Instead, Shauna believed student affairs professionals, particularly women, are taught to emphasize masculine approaches to leadership and supervision, such as being authoritative and displaying a polished professional persona.

Shauna reflected on the shared experience of women in higher education and student affairs, including herself, being discouraged from being their “true selves” and instead taught to “be manly...to try to be more stoic, and not show the caring and empathetic side.” Shauna rejected this narrative, explaining she is so successful because she is always her authentic self and continues to show her caring, compassionate, or empathetic nature, which she feels is not only an advantage for student affairs professionals but also a requirement of this type of work. Shauna argued the longstanding advice that women must behave and lead in traditionally masculine ways does women a disservice and is likely a contributing factor for the lack of women leaders in student affairs. Although Shauna was adamant about being authentic in all aspects of her life and work, she also acknowledged that as a woman, particularly a woman of Color, she still needed to “play the game” of student affairs, which required a certain type of dress, tone, and behavior. For example, Shauna recounted needing to often pause and stop herself from visibly reacting in meetings when student affairs was mischaracterized. Overall, Shauna

explained she always needed to be perceived as the “consummate professional,” which often reflects White, masculine work norms.

Despite being successful in securing a VPSA position and transitioning back to on-campus student affairs work after spending over seven years away from higher education institutions, Shauna was initially hesitant to apply and questioned if hiring managers and search committees would recognize her transferable skills and the valuable perspective, she could bring from her “non-linear” student affairs career path and higher education tangential experiences. Shauna described ultimately overcoming her self-doubt and pursuing VPSA roles because she was driven by both her desire to return to “boots on the ground” student affairs work and college campuses, and her aspiration to be a college or university president: “I knew the next step to president was a vice president position, and I really wanted to go back into student affairs.”

Shauna often struggled with self-doubt or the imposter syndrome throughout her education and career despite also describing herself as out-going, gregarious, and authentic person. First, as an undergraduate, Shauna initially questioned if she belonged at a PWI, but with the encouragement of the institution’s director of admissions, she later became a tour guide, presidential ambassador, student leader of the Black Student Union, and took on other very visible roles on campus. Then, again, she questioned if she should get her master’s degree and her doctorate. In describing her struggle with imposter syndrome throughout adulthood, Shauna said “it’s been 20 years in the game, and I think I’m just now getting over imposter syndrome. It’s taken me 20 years, almost to be like, I do deserve to be here. I am enough. I am okay.”

In her current position, Shauna described the additional pressure and expectations levied on her as a woman of Color. She shared feeling responsible for coaching students and staff members of Color on how to successfully exist within and move through the institution, which is

made more difficult by the institutional context. Specifically, the university is a PWI located in a racially homogenous area within a conservative state. Shauna explained feeling uniquely pressured to be not only a mentor and role model for the institution's students of Color population but also be their advocate in institutional decision-making and their ally amongst institutional leadership. She shared:

I put a lot of internal pressure on myself because I know people are watching and it's not just White people on campus, it's the people of Color who are like, "You're our leader now." So, they're looking at me to like, "okay, let's see, we got a new Black woman in the administration building, let's see what she's all about? What is she gonna do?" So, I kind of feel this pressure sometimes of performing, you know, I believe in doing all things well and working hard and all that, but I put a lot of pressure on myself to be successful, and to meet the expectations of others.

While Shauna acknowledged much of this pressure is internal rather than an explicit condition or requirement of her position, she did share several instances when White colleagues expected her to do additional labor because of her race and gender and relied on her to "speak for all Black people," which makes her job even more difficult. For instance, Shauna was left to co-author the institution's statement on the conviction of Derek Chauvin for the murder of George Floyd despite having a chief diversity officer and communications staff members who typically compose statements of this nature on the president's behalf or in collaboration with the president. In addition to explicit instances, Shauna described feeling watched whenever discussions of race and, to some extent, gender arise. She felt "all eyes move" to her to gauge her nonverbal response and await her input. Even while working remotely, Shauna described seeing colleagues' eyes darting back and forth on their Zoom screen looking for her to respond. She shared, "on

90% of my Zoom calls, I'm the only person of Color on these calls and I'm used to it, it is what it is...but don't always look for me to be the spokesperson for all Black people.”

Shauna explained how she continues to navigate the same gender and racial stereotypes she has throughout her career and her childhood despite her positionality in the institution:

I am still battling with stereotypes, what people think of me, as a woman, as a woman of Color...I've always been in PWIs, I've always gone to predominantly white schools, so I'm used to it...But there are challenges that come with that, and I feel sometimes that I've got to work twice as hard.

For example, Shauna described continually feeling questioned and pressured to communicate the value of her and her division's work to her colleagues despite having her president's full support, which she ponders is due to her gender, being the first woman in the role under the institution's first woman president, her race, as the highest ranking Black person on campus, her age, being a fairly young VPSA, or a combination of all three. Shauna was particularly struck by the behavior of the provost, a White man, who regularly disregarded Shauna's input during leadership meetings and made disparaging remarks about student affairs work. Yet, he relies on Shauna to handle all student concerns. In reference to the provost, Shauna shared, “he still probably thinks that I do food, fun, and festivities, but when the crap hits the fan, oh, he's calling me.” Shauna also shared when she first started as VPSA her colleagues were very antagonistic and defensive toward her out of concern she would make sweeping transformational changes that would alienate the institution from the conservative state legislature, which implies their perception or judgement of young, Black women.

Despite the added labor and some negative experiences Shauna shared related to being a Black woman VPSA, Shauna also described the fulfillment and satisfaction she derives from

being able to be a role model for woman of Color at the institution. Shauna reflected on the importance of representation and how she can be that for students, “I’m often reminded, in various situations, as the saying goes, representation matters. It’s important, especially in a place like [Institution] where our numbers [woman of Color] are so few and far between.” She shared a student’s speech from a recent event during which the student, an Indigenous woman, described Shauna’s impact on her:

She [the student] was just like it was so important for me to see a woman in your role and I’ve been considering a career in student affairs now because of you and I want to serve students and be a guiding force, she’s just going on. And I’m bawling, like I’m just trying to pull it together and it just meant so much to me. And I’ve had several other women, particularly young women of Color, who have come up to me and they were like, I needed to see you.

Shauna also shared several instances when Black women students, faculty, and staff stopped her on campus and in the community to share how happy they were that Shauna had joined the institution. For instance, Shauna described meeting two Black women students while shopping who were surprised and elated to learn that Shauna was the new VPSA. Shauna also described running into a Black woman faculty member and her family while out to eat and the gratitude the professor shared for Shauna’s presence and work. The professor said, “I need to tell you, I’m just so grateful for your leadership and that you’re here.” While reflecting on these interactions, Shauna tearfully shared she knew she was making a difference both in her work and by being the first woman of Color in this role: “I’ve seen the reaction that I’ve had, particularly for young women of Color, particularly for that age, for that group of people...I know that I’m making a

difference here. And that's why I say the representation matters.” It was these types of moments and interactions that motivate Shauna and help her through the difficult aspects of her position.

Conclusion

Although it is regularly assumed that women dominant student affairs and experience little resistance to advancing to or securing a VPSA or SSAO role, these participants underscore the continued novelty or scarcity of women in senior leadership as many of them were the first woman in their roles and sometimes the first woman to fulfill a senior leadership position across the institution. These women’s accounts of and reflections on their career trajectories provide rich cases to consider how gender and its manifestation in the student affairs field and in higher education institutions interact with women’s professional choices, namely how they chose to behave in the workplace and their career-related decisions (e.g., pursuing doctoral education and selecting a new position). These participants were able to navigate the gendered aspects of the field and gendered experiences to achieve their current positionality as VPSA or SSAO, which provides insight into how aspiring women student affairs professionals may do the same. However, participants’ cases also show they were not immune to gender’s negative influence on their professional experiences and career trajectories. Participants’ accounts highlight how gendered roles and responsibilities affected their career paths, such as Sandra leaving an institution because of continual negative gender-based treatment and Marion leaving her first VPSA position because of a poor institutional fit as the first woman of Color VPSA, or Terry searching for and accepting offers at institutions that better served her children.

Gender also influenced these participants’ experiences to varying degrees. As some participants discussed above, they experienced being spoken over or disregarded in meetings, being overlooked for promotions and made to prove themselves, being pressured to assume

additional unpaid labor, being discouraged from showing emotions in the workplace, and other instances of gender's implicit and explicit influence or impact on women in student affairs. All participants mentioned at least one, if not several, instances when they felt they were treated differently because of their gender. These instances reflect Acker's (1990) work on gendered organizations, namely the five processes of gendered organizations, which I will discuss in-depth in Chapter 6 Discussion. In the next chapter, Chapter 5 Findings, I provide a thematic analysis of these cases, highlighting how gender acted as an external and internal force on participants.

Chapter 5: Findings

In the previous chapter, I presented participant data through the construction of individual cases or participant profiles. Each case included an overview of participants' respective career trajectories leading up to their current position and their experiences in the VPSA or SSAO role. In these cases, I centered instances when participants perceived gender influencing their experiences and professional choices working in student affairs. By comparing participants' cases, I found gender was both an external and internal force or influence on participants' professional experiences and career trajectories, which I discuss in-depth in this chapter. I begin by deconstructing gender as an external force on participants. Gender acted upon participants through other institutional actors' treatment of women professionals, workplace culture, and professional expectations with gendered implications on women pursuing and fulfilling the VPSA or SSAO role. Then, I examine gender as an internal force, which involves participants' internalization or rejection of gendered professional expectations and leadership styles.

Gender as an External Force

Gender externally acted upon or imposed itself on participants in several ways: (1) the ways institutional agents, such as colleagues and supervisors, reacted to and treated participants because of their gender identity; (2) the institutional and workplace culture participants described operating within as women in higher education and student affairs; and (3) professional expectations with gendered implications for women professionals. These external components had a significant influence on participants' professional experiences and their choices. For some participants, their gender amplified, or enhanced treatment associated with other marginalized aspects of their identities, namely race and sexuality.

Institutional Actors' Reaction to and Treatment of Women Professionals

All six participants described being viewed and treated differently at various points in their careers because of their gender or womanhood. This differential treatment ranged from implicit and mild incidents, such as microaggressions or comments about their appearance and women in general, to explicit incidents including, at the extreme, verbal abuse. Participants' colleagues or peers, supervisors, and other institutional agents' perception and treatment of women often appeared in the form of infantilization, which is rooted in gender stereotypes and traditional treatment of women in the workplace (Leskinen & Cortina, 2014). Five out of six participants, Sandra, Shauna, Terry, Rebecca, and Gina described being infantilized or treated like a child at different times throughout their careers by colleagues, supervisors, and other institutional actors, regardless of their actual age, professional experience, and credentials. Some participants were explicitly referred to or publicly addressed as a child, while other participants perceived or felt they were being treated this way.

As briefly referenced in Chapter 4, Sandra was referred to as “kiddo” in her first, public introduction as VPSA. She shared, “The first time I was introduced here to the faculty in person...I was introduced by one of my colleagues on the president's cabinet as *kiddo*. Now, that's loaded...” Although Sandra acknowledged she could not be certain if her colleague's comment was motivated by her gender or another aspect of her identity, she was confident her colleague's introduction was intended to diminish her institutional status and draw her experience and qualifications for the role into question. Sandra emphasized how insulting it was to be called “kiddo,” especially in front of faculty, when she, “was a doctor at the time, right PhD in hand, and a colleague.” Sandra perceived the provost's word choice implied she was young and inexperienced despite Sandra having 17 years of professional experience and possessing a

terminal degree in her field. Sandra believed her colleague intentionally introduced her to faculty in an infantilizing way to position himself above her and diminish her role on campus despite their roles being equally situated in the university's organizational structure. Sandra thought this interaction set the tone for future negative interactions with faculty who seemed to look down on her and student affairs.

Similarly, Shauna described her colleagues' reaction to her in her first professional student affairs role, "they were like, 'who is this *young girl* coming in trying to run stuff?'" At the time, Shauna thought her colleagues were merely poking fun at her for being the youngest director at the institution and took their teasing as a sign she was an accepted member of the community. However, upon reflection, Shauna questioned if she experienced ageism and sexism at the institution. She now recognized her colleagues were likely upset a young woman was hired for a director position with little experience in student affairs beyond graduate school and were intentionally singling her out to make others question her competency. Shauna explained their perception of her as a "young girl" also derailed her initiatives because she struggled to get institutional buy-in or support. Instead of supporting her new initiatives, Shauna's colleagues seemed to use the image of her as a "young girl" to rationalize asking her to complete lower-level tasks, such as managing the institution's early social media presence. Due to this patronizing treatment, Shauna felt she was unable to achieve her professional goals and develop her desired skillset within the role, which motivated her to quickly leave the position.

Terry also described being perceived and treated as a "little girl" by institutional actors. Terry explained students' fathers often expected a man rather than a woman in this leadership role. Terry described how students' fathers were regularly taken aback when learning she was the SSAO and often demanded to speak with her supervisor, whom they assumed was a man,

when she did not fill their requests or give them the answer they wanted. She shared, “they’re like, ‘hotshot *little girl* let me talk to your boss.’” Terry expressed some frustration and annoyance with this behavior, but she did not believe it had any major effect on her ability to do her job. However, Terry did recognize and comment on the significant influence her supervisors’ perception and treatment of women had on her ability to be effective and to advance within the division. Terry described being sheltered from important aspects of her job due to her former supervisor’s perception of women as fragile. She shared how this former supervisor seemed to exclude her from important decision-making processes because he perceived her as a “little woman” who was either in need of protection or did not have the capacity to make complicated decisions. Terry explained:

my supervisor...he was very old school, a good old boy, kind of macho veteran, you know, nice guy, but I think sometimes he treated me like a *little woman*, and nothing that I could necessarily put my finger on, but I just got the feeling that he didn't include me in some stuff, you know, decision making. He didn't listen to me very well about ideas that my group had to make things better. He didn't really want me to be too involved, frankly. So, if I had been a man, would he have listened to me?

Although Terry could not describe specific examples or behaviors that highlighted her supervisor’s patriarchal behavior, she experienced the very real effects or implications of it. For instance, based on her supervisor’s example and role-modeling, Terry believed her men colleagues felt justified treating her the same way, namely disregarding her input and excluding her from decision-making, which often happened during social events. Terry explained she was also unable to develop specific skills relevant to her job and unable to advance until this supervisor retired and she was no longer under his “protection” or more accurately his control.

After he left, Terry described being able to develop greater relationships across campus and advocate for herself, ultimately, leading to her promotion to SSAO.

In comparison to Terry who described her supervisor as excluding her from aspects of her job because of an outdated perception of women as fragile and a misguided desire to protect them, Sandra described her current supervisor, the university's new president, as deliberately and maliciously leaving her out of decision-making processes that directly affect her division. Sandra believed the new president was intentionally leaving her out to undercut her authority and influence on campus and, ultimately, communicate student affairs was neither as important nor as valued as the institution's other divisions. Sandra shared the president removed and redistributed multiple offices from the student affairs division to the provost office without any forewarning. He also elevated the chief diversity officer, who initially reported to Sandra, to a vice president level removing another three departments from Sandra's purview and portfolio. Although Sandra agreed with these decisions, she was completely unaware of these changes until the morning they were publicly announced. Sandra shared:

I had a lot of power and influence under the former president, they hired me. I led the COVID response. I was active outside of student affairs really having an impact across the institution. Under our current president...my influence has already been, it's gone, it's gone.

Sandra was convinced the president's actions were "deeply gendered." Sandra believed her supervisor perceived women as followers rather than leaders and had trouble trusting her and other women professional to make decisions. Sandra also noted all the staff members her supervisor brought with him from his previous institution and appointed to senior leadership roles were men.

Sandra also described several past experiences when she felt intentionally left out of aspects of her then role, associate director of residence life, because of institutional agents' perception of women professionals and their competency. Sandra explained being overlooked during a major residence hall renovation project despite her title and being responsible for overseeing the project. In this instance, Sandra was touring the renovation with her staff:

I was walking through with a hard hat on but in a suit, keep in mind, and one of the male contractors said to the group, and I was the only woman in the group, "Well, we need to make some decisions. So let us know that the decision-maker is here." And everyone just stood there, and it was a great opportunity for one of my staff or someone to say *she's* here. So, I took a physical step forward. I will never forget this moment, a physical step forward and said, "that is me, I run housing here. Yep, I'm okay to pick tile." But, I often found people do not give me credit as a woman for understanding business systems and infrastructure systems.

In this quotation, Sandra described being overlooked by both the contractor who assumed women did not know and were not capable of making facilities-related decisions and, to some extent, her staff who neither indicated nor looked to Sandra when they were asked who the "decision-maker was."

In both her current and previous role, Sandra was also subjected to additional oversight and controls, which Sandra believed her men colleagues were not expected to follow. For instance, Sandra was not given full authority for staff hiring despite being the director of the department. Sandra shared being expected to present job candidates to her supervisor, despite him being uninvolved in the day-to-day operations of residence life. She was also pressured to hire his selection rather than candidates Sandra found more qualified. Sandra also described

being publicly scolded by a former supervisor in front of her staff and then chastised before the university's president, which made her feel like a child, and she assumed weakened her authority with both her staff and colleagues. Gina also described being subjected to additional oversight and being expected to seek approval from her men colleagues before implementing initiatives or changes in her own division.

Like Sandra and Terry, Rebecca also described working for several patriarchal supervisors throughout her student affairs career. Rebecca shared one of her former supervisors was known to regularly refer to women as "bitches" in front of both men and women colleagues and often undercut Rebecca's confidence in her professional capabilities and relationships by telling her she was not ready for a director role because her colleagues disliked her on a personal level. In describing this vice president's negative treatment and perceptions of women, Rebecca said, "Boy, you know, he wasn't very nice to me, and I haven't heard a man say that [about him], so I get the sense that he just had a different perception about men and women." Mirroring Terry's experience with her patriarchal supervisor, Rebecca also recognized she would be unable to advance at the institution until this supervisor retired: "I had become comfortable with the fact that I knew he was going to retire soon, but I'm not getting anywhere until he's out of there." As she was unwilling to leave the institution, Rebecca described being resigned to pausing her career advancement until her supervisor's retirement.

Under the supervision of her institution's current provost, Rebecca also described being intentionally excluded from different aspects of her role and made to seek approval for decisions that the former man SSAO was permitted to make on his own. For example, she was left out of executive leadership meetings because her supervisor did not believe the dean of students was a "real dean." This supervisor also publicly scolded Rebecca in front of her staff for allowing

faculty and students to refer to her as “dean” despite “dean of students” being her official title. Additionally, Rebecca’s supervisor limited her ability to allocate her division’s budget. Rebecca described being required to seek approval for a “10-cent student employee raise,” which none of the other deans were expected to do when deciding how much to pay their student staff. Rebecca questioned if she was under stricter control and supervision because of her gender. She commented on her supervisor’s alienation of women and favoritism toward men staff members; she noted, “it is not unbeknownst to me that the people who really flourished under her leadership were all men.” Rebecca noted she is still treated in a patriarchal manner or treated like a child despite her supervisor being a woman.

Under another former supervisor, Rebecca described a different form of patriarchal behavior, namely being sheltered, or protected because of her supervisor’s and others’ perception of women. Rebecca described being insulated from perceived danger on campus and emotionally sheltered from some of the “darker aspects” of the SSAO role by her supervisor and other men on campus who, she believed, thought women needed extra protection and care. For example, Rebecca described multiple instances when, unbeknownst to her, students made threats toward her and other administrators. In response, Rebecca’s supervisor and campus law enforcement officials consulted with her local law enforcement agency to develop a plan and provide a protection detail for Rebecca while at her home. These arrangements were made without Rebecca’s knowledge and input. Rebecca described being taken aback when looking out her window one morning and seeing a police vehicle parked in front of her house. Although Rebecca viewed and described this differential treatment favorably and appreciated their care and concern for her wellbeing, she acknowledged failing to initially make her aware of these threats and making decisions without her input could have negatively affected her ability to do her job. She

explained this extra care and protection could change the way colleagues and students view her and her capabilities. Rebecca worried instead of seeing her as a strong, confident, self-reliant professional, students, faculty, and staff might now see her as a “victim” or someone in need of protection. Gina described a similar fear whenever she felt the urge to show emotion or react to negative treatment from her men colleagues. Gina explained if she or another woman professional failed to remain stoic in the face of disrespect and emotionally responded, men colleagues immediately saw them as “victims,” which Gina felt disempowers women professionals.

Participants’ experiences underscored the implicit sexism and gender bias women professionals continue to face in higher education and student affairs. When participants confronted colleagues about these infantilizing remarks, they were often waved off as a joke about participants’ ages, which seemed more acceptable or palatable to comment on and disparage rather than explicitly commenting on their gender. Even as participants advanced to high powered positions, such as the VPSA or SSAO role, their accounts highlight how they continued to face gendered treatment, namely infantilizing and patriarchal remarks and behavior that subverted their positional authority.

Institutional and Workplace Culture of Higher Education and Student Affairs

Although the terminology or phrase, institutional culture, may seem to imply a singular location, participants described the persistence of an androcentric culture across multiple institutions and workplaces, which implies this culture is reflected across the student affairs field and higher education system. I include both higher education and student affairs because the VPSA or SSAO position bridges or connects the two. The VPSA or SSAO is a boundary-spanning position, they supervise student affairs professionals and were often trained in student

affairs, but they work alongside higher education administrators. They are typically the only student affairs professional at the institution's executive level and spend most of their time working within the broader higher education institution. Participants came to recognize the effects of gender on their professional experiences and career trajectories because their gender seemed to conflict with the culture of their institutions and the student affairs field. Participants recognized gender was intricately related to and reflected within their workplace culture, which was often communicated through gender demographics or representation, perceived institutional gender dynamics and practices, and the behavior of institutional leadership and other actors.

In describing the workplace culture of higher education and student affairs, Gina recognized long-established, men-dominated leadership, particularly at the vice president level. She shared, "it was pretty much White men, White men were the vice presidents..." All participants shared Gina's perspective and commented on the popularity of institutional leadership and VPSAs being, "a White man that had been there [at the institution] for years," which contributed to what participants described as higher education and student affairs' androcentric or male-dominated culture. Sandra shared this perceptive and described the student affairs field as, "this field of straight White men in many ways." Aligned with this perspective, multiple participants portrayed their institutions and student affairs as an "old boys' club" or "old boys' network," terms they used to express or capture this White, male-centered culture. Terry described her former VPSA and supervisor as a "good old boy" and explained how his and other institutional leaders' behavior perpetuated a male-dominated institution and workplace culture by excluding her and other women professionals from informal, social gatherings during which important university-wide decisions were often discussed and made. Terry shared:

It's definitely a good old boys' network and I don't play golf, I don't drink scotch, you know what I mean? So, I'm really not in that inner circle. And a lot of work here gets done on the golf course, I don't think that's just here, I think that happens a lot. So, you tend to [hear] all of a sudden, a decision was made, and you didn't have input, and you were supposed to, like, if you're on [the] executive committee you're supposed to, so that happens.

Although Terry's colleagues and supervisors did not explicitly exclude her because of her gender, she believed they used her failure to participate in traditionally masculine behaviors and preferences, such as playing golf and drinking scotch, to effectively exclude her from their social network and, subsequently, prohibit her from participating in institutional planning and decision-making. Consequently, Terry described the institution's change-makers or "movers and shakers" as "predominantly male" because women, like herself, could not access the spaces where decisions are made regardless of the power that should come with their positions and titles.

Terry also commented on how this "old boys" culture is not unique to her current institution rather it encompasses and applies to nearly all higher education institutions and the entire student affairs field. A sentiment echoed by Rebecca who shared, "Number one, I think there is still in some spaces a network of *old boys* that is hard to permeate and isn't as overt as it used to be. And I don't think it's intentionally covert. I think it's just a structure that is systematic..." In this quotation, Rebecca emphasized the subtlety of male-dominated culture at both her university and student affairs in general. Sandra also commented on the longstanding "old boys club" or male-dominance within the student affairs field evident by professional association leadership: "Just look at the past presidents of some of our professional associations,

what a pictorial representation of how this [old boys' club] has played out.” Sandra emphasized, “the patriarchy is real in higher education, and I don’t know when that is going to change.”

Participants’ comments highlight this culture is present across colleges and universities to varying degrees regardless of institutional type, regional location, and other factors. However, when comparing participants’ experiences this culture seemed to be more apparent or obvious rather than veiled within particular institutional types, namely religiously affiliated institutions and research universities. As referenced in Chapter 4, Terry described a former institutional and workplace culture as, “that real, like religious, good old boys’ network...” Marion explained her experiences working at a religiously affiliated institution in a similar way. She also described a misalignment of values and a lack of advancement opportunities, both tied to her identities, as her motivation for not only leaving the institution but also choosing to work at only public institutions for the duration of her career.

While Marion sought out public institutions to offer her more “freedom” to infuse her values and identity in her work and more advancement opportunities, Sandra shared her most negative and gender-charged interactions and experiences all occurred in public research universities. She wondered if there was a correlation or connection between an institution’s distinction as a research university and its alignment with and perpetuation of practices that advantaged, rewarded, and centered men and traditionally masculine behaviors. For instance, Sandra shared after an extensive search with a diverse and talented applicant pool, her current institution, a land-grant research university, hired a straight, White man as president. She shared, “we just did a presidential search here. 200 applicants, 200 applicants! That's crazy to me...200 applicants. And we ended up with a White guy, he's a straight White male. How did that happen?” Gina also described being struck by this “old boys club” mentality or culture when she

started working at a large, research university in the southeastern region of the United States.

Gina quickly learned it was commonplace for men professionals, administrators, and institutional board members to openly commented on her and other women's appearances, which they framed as compliments. At this institution, Gina learned she needed to carefully manage how she was perceived, both her physical looks and her behavior in the workplace, because women professionals were viewed more harshly and held to higher standards than men. Shauna also described having to carefully manage her reactions to colleagues and outward appearance to continue to be perceived as a capable professional and remain amenable to her institution's conservative culture.

Rebecca, who worked at a single regional comprehensive university for the entirety of her career, also described identifying this "old boys' club" when applying for positions and negotiating compensation for internal promotions. While reflecting on her career trajectory, mainly her transition from student activities to an interim role working with her institution's former SSAO, Rebecca recognized she and other women colleagues approached job searching in a standard way, meaning they saw a job posting, applied for the position, and went through the subsequent steps. In comparison, Rebecca believed men colleagues seemed more accustomed to accessing their social and professional networks for opportunities, which advantaged them over their women counterparts. However, Rebecca felt she gained access to or "was entering an *old boys club*," when she was able to advocate for individualized treatment and was given permission to develop her own position and job description. Later, when she asked for an increased salary to reflect her new position, Rebecca's request was initially met with shock and questions of her dedication to the institution, which highlighted her tenuous and limited admittance to the "old boys club."

Although she did not use the phrase “old boys club,” Marion described student affairs and former institutions’ cultures in a similar way. In describing higher education and student affairs, Marion said, “it’s a man’s world out there.” Marion described first recognizing and experiencing the male-centric culture of higher education as a member of the first class of women students at her alma mater. She explained the institution, “didn’t know how to manage women” and initially attempted to enforce patriarchal restrictions on women students, namely a curfew. Later, like Terry, Marion returned to her private, religiously affiliated alma mater as a student affairs professional and perceived the persistence of this culture. In fact, Marion was hired to fulfill a role created to improve women’s representation on staff, to better serve women students, and to comply with the institution’s accrediting body. Marion explained, “they [the institution] were cited by [the accreditation agency] as needing to have more females in student affairs. So, they created that role with a woman in mind.” Although the institution was designated as a co-educational institution for over eight years, Marion perceived institutional leadership as resistant to and unsuccessful in hiring women professionals, which communicated to current and prospective women students and employees that the institution valued and prioritized men students and professionals over women. Despite recognizing the institution prioritized men and struggled with gender disparities, Marion appreciated being socialized within this culture early on in her career because she learned what was valued, what was rewarded, and how to behave in the field, skills she described utilizing to advance her career and succeed in likeminded, masculine-oriented institutional cultures. Marion explained this role allowed her to learn how to exist and succeed within the male-dominant culture of student affairs and higher education, yet she found this culture tiresome after finding it in a subsequent institution. At this subsequent institution, Marion was again the first woman in her role and now the only woman

vice president. There, Marion felt her supervisor, the college president, and colleagues wanted her to be a visible sign of diversity but maintain the institution's patriarchal status quo.

Women-Led Institutions and Culture

Participants were also struck by the commonplace or omnipresent male-centric culture of higher education and student affairs when they entered a rare woman-led institution, which sometimes deviated from male-centric workplace culture at the institutional level. In an earlier role, Marion described being surprised when she entered a meeting and saw all women leading the institution's response to a student death. Marion highlighted the significance of women leading an institution, especially in the 1980s. Marion also described the uniqueness of working under three, different women presidents over her career:

I actually had the privilege of working for three female presidents. Very unusual. Maybe not as unusual today as it was back in the in the '80s and '90s. But I think because of that it's my experiences are probably different from many other people.

Similarly, Gina noted being struck by working for two women VPSAs over her career, which she believed was both a different experience from many of her contemporaries and abnormal to see in higher education and student affairs.

Although Marion is no longer surprised to see women leading colleges and universities, she described how other institutional agents on campus remain surprised to see women in leadership, which underscores the persistence of higher education's male-dominant leadership and culture. Marion shared a conversation in which a colleague explained the gender dynamics at her most recent institution to another administrator: "buddy, look around it's the women who have the power around here." Similarly, Shauna described being struck by her current

institution's leadership, which was the first time she experienced a woman-led workplace in her career:

when I try to kind of think back to different institutions where I've worked, most of the presidents have been male, most of the leadership have been male and so, it's different. I feel like there's a switch just the way in which we [women] interact with each other is different. I often wonder how some of the men feel because we have our senior leadership team: the president and three senior vice presidents. So, it's the president who's a woman, myself, Senior VPSA, there's a Senior Vice President of Finance, who's a woman, and then our Senior VP and Provost, and he's the only male of the group.

In this quotation, Shauna commented on how women professionals behave and interact differently when operating in a woman-led work environment. She also wondered aloud how the provost feels being the only man on the institution's senior leadership team and how men across the institution feel working in a woman-led institution. Shauna's questions underscore the continued abnormality or distinctiveness of women's leadership in higher education. Terry also described being pleasantly surprised to learn the institution's new president was a woman who was interested in hiring more women.

Although participants, namely Terry, Shauna, Marion, and Gina, positively described their experiences working within women-led institutions at rare points in their careers, participants also described still experiencing negative treatment due to their gender identity even within women-led institutions. For example, Sandra and Rebecca both described working for women supervisors who treated them in patriarchal and infantilizing ways. Rebecca described one woman supervisor as completely discounting student affairs, dismissing Rebecca's position, and supporting only men's professional development and advancement. Rebecca also described

needing to seek approval for every division-level decision. Sandra also commented on the overwhelming culture of the institution remaining structured against women's advancement despite being led by a woman president. Lastly, Shauna described being continually undercut and disregarded by her university's provost despite him being the only man in senior leadership. Participants recognized and noted having women in leadership positions neither ensured a positive change in the institutional culture nor a systemic change to higher education and student affairs' culture.

Professional Expectations with Gendered Implications for Women Professionals

Along with the androcentric workplace and institutional culture described above, participants also navigated professional expectations that had unique, gendered implications on them and other women working in student affairs. Predominantly, participants reflected on three professional expectations: (1) student affairs professionals must relocate to pursue career advancement regardless of geographic location preferences and personal needs; (2) professionals, particularly women professionals, must continually prove their worth and justify their qualifications; and (3) professionals must always be willing to assume more responsibilities or take on additional labor. These expectations have gendered implications or unique consequences for women professionals and often conflict with the societal roles, responsibilities, and expectations placed on women, such as caregiving, marriage, and motherhood.

Expectation to Relocate for Career Advancement

While reflecting on their career trajectories, participants detailed their experiences searching and applying for student affairs positions, and their experiences moving between roles. All six participants shared their distaste for professional expectations within the student affairs job market or job search that failed to consider individuals' needs, particularly the suggestion

that to be successful and “taken seriously” student affairs professionals must be willing to put aside geographic location preferences and associated support systems in pursuit of career advancement. The expectation to “move anywhere” is heightened for professionals who wish to pursue high-ranking student affairs positions. Despite participants’ aversion to and antipathy for this expectation, all but one participant, Rebecca, moved across various states and geographic regions for career advancement opportunities including their current VPSA or SSAO positions. These moves had significant effects on participants and their personal lives.

Both Sandra and Gina expressed regret and sadness over leaving previous institutions where they felt accepted, comfortable, and productive to advance their careers. Sandra described her experience working at a former institution with “great people, great minds” as a rarity in her career. She shared:

Only once or twice now in my 27 years have I been with such a collective group of amazing people at the same time that we created something. I thought we got to do that all the time in this field, so when you have those moments, I've learned now not to take them for granted.

In addition to an enjoyable professional life, Sandra also described appreciating the area because it was where she met her wife, married, and became a stepmother. However, Sandra felt pressured to continue to advance in her career and pursue a director role, which was neither available at her current institution nor available at any other in-state institutions. Ultimately, Sandra made the decision to accept a director role at a large, midwestern research university. This move not only caused Sandra to lose a level of comfort and collegiality with her colleagues but also significantly disrupted her family. Although Sandra’s wife was able to work remotely, she had to navigate relocating her medical practice, obtain licensing in a new state, and assume a

loss in income from losing clients. Their daughter also had to adjust to a new school and new cultural and social contexts.

Gina also described leaving an institution and state she and her husband loved because she believed she “*needed* to be a dean of students” and could neither pursue the role nor gain the skills she needed at her current institution. In accepting a dean of students position out-of-state, Gina and her husband lost their monetary and temporal investment in their previous state’s adoption system and jeopardized their ability to adopt and become parents. Gina was extremely unhappy with her new role, institution, and state, yet elected not to leave for at least three years to avoid being perceived badly by fellow student affairs professionals, and to avoid starting the adoption process over again in another state. Sandra’s and Gina’s experiences and choices underscore the sacrifices women professionals often make to pursue limited career advancement opportunities in student affairs.

Sandra and Gina also shared pursuing a career in student affairs and adhering to its professional expectations forced them to live away from their families, particularly theirs and their spouses’ aging parents. Being geographically separated from their parents and in-laws, caused participants to feel guilty over being unable to spend time with them and anxious about being unreachable or unable to help in an emergency. Sandra recognized and discussed how this common physical separation between student affairs professionals and their families causes significant emotional strain. Sandra shared she and her wife regularly check-in on and care for a friend’s mother because their friend, a fellow student affairs professional, works out-of-state and is unable to provide that care herself. Shauna shared these feelings and described intense sadness over living several hours away from her mother who raised her as a single parent and inspired her to pursue a career in higher education. Shauna felt conflicted over choosing a career that

necessitates her being away from her mother and her community, which she pursued a career in student affairs to serve. Sandra, Gina, and Shauna also commented on how the COVID-19 pandemic accentuated the problematic nature of this expectation. The pandemic eliminated participants' ability to travel further isolating them from their support networks and limited their ability to care for their aging parents, which they described as an expectation of daughters. Gina also explained the emotional strain and logistical difficulty of raising a young child without any local family members to rely on for support. This difficulty was exacerbated during the pandemic as children's schools and daycares closed, and parents like Gina and her husband became responsible for managing their daughter's virtual learning.

The lack of local, familial support due to moving for career advancement made it more difficult for participants to meet the demands of the VPSA or SSAO role and had major ramifications on married participants' familial structure and household income. Gina, Terry, and Rebecca all described a career in student affairs as unsustainable and impossible for women without the full support of a spouse or partner who is willing to make professional adjustments and sacrifices to assume more traditionally feminine roles and responsibilities, namely childrearing. Both Gina and Terry's husbands quit their jobs to stay-home fulltime and Rebecca's husband created stricter professional boundaries in an attempt to create a more egalitarian relationship and equitable distribution of household and child-related responsibilities. Sandra shared although her wife continued to work throughout Sandra's student affairs career, she worked remotely, which allowed her to be the primary caregiver of their daughter and allowed Sandra to feel confident dedicating more temporal, mental, and emotional energy to her career. All four married participants explained they simply could not do their work and be mothers without a supportive spouse given the circumstances and professional expectations of

student affairs. Marion and Shauna, both single women without children, suggested women who wish to pursue a career in student careers, particularly those who want to become a VPSA or SSAO, must have a fully supportive partner, remain single, or make a difficult choice between their professional and personal fulfillment.

While all participants, except for Rebecca, described how the expectation to move for career advancement regardless of personal circumstances had significant implications on their personal lives, Marion, Shauna, and Sandra described how this expectation was especially emotionally draining and isolating because of the intersection of their social identities. For Marion and Shauna, both Black women, they discussed how frequent job changes and relocations were uniquely challenging given their gender and race. Marion and Shauna described the unique burden of having to “uproot” themselves to advance in student affairs as single, Black women. Both shared a sense of loss and a lack of community because the high-level student affairs positions available to them tended to be at PWIs in rural areas, which made them extremely visible as the only executive women of Color and often one of only few people of Color on-campus. These frequent moves also negatively affected their ability to make connections and develop social networks.

Marion described being unhappy with the rurality and lack of representational diversity at her employing institutions and job prospects for much of her life and career. Four out of five of Marion’s employing institutions were in rural areas and all were PWIs. She shared, “Yeah, I didn’t do that well [with location] for a number of years until I finally got here [most recent institution].” Marion described feeling particularly unhappy and lonely in her first VPSA position at a small-to-mid-sized, public, liberal arts college in a rural area of the Northeast. In

explaining her rationale for accepting this position despite the institution's location and demographics, she shared:

I knew it was an extremely rural area, which was not my preference. But it was a position and in an institution that was doing well, that was stable, where I could learn to be a vice president...it was a very deliberate plan of moving there, not expecting to be there for the rest of my life, not expecting a lot out of life.

Marion was resigned to accepting this position and working at this institution at great personal cost to advance her career, which she described being taught to do by mentors and former supervisors, all of whom were White men.

After reaching a senior leadership position in student affairs and speaking with her mentor, Marion realized she could make her next career move for personal fulfillment rather than professional gain because prioritizing her personal preferences and needs would no longer damage her career. Marion recognized she needed to pursue a position at an institution in a location where she could build a life outside of work:

When I make that next step, I really need to think about what the things were outside of work that were going to make me happy, and how to incorporate them into that decision-making. Because the other thing, I realized I could have a horrible personal life, but a very good professional life. I could have a good professional life well the other way around...but it couldn't both be bad.

Although Marion expressed feeling personally fulfilled in retirement and satisfied with her career in student affairs, she suggested aligning with student affairs' professional expectations was not conducive for women developing sustainable, longstanding relationships outside of work.

Like Marion's first VPSA role, Shauna's current position is at a rural PWI where she is the only executive, woman of Color. Shauna also described lacking a personal life because of both the geographic area, institutional composition, and the responsibilities of the role: "unfortunately, much of my life revolves around the work I do. I spend a significant amount of time, on weekends, even at night, I call it second shift...most of my life is really consumed with work." Shauna also shared missing access to a vibrant Black community, which she had access to prior to reentering student affairs and taking on a VPSA position.

In comparison, Sandra described how this expectation was challenging, nerve-wrecking, and, at times, isolating due her identity as a gay woman. Earlier in her career, Sandra reflected on losing a romantic relationship and connection to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) community due to the frequent moves associated with advancing in student affairs. Sandra shared frequently moving jobs and locations as a single, gay woman was uniquely challenging and put her in the vulnerable position of needing to repeatedly "come out" and reveal her identity to new colleagues. Sandra recalled after marrying her wife she felt even more concerned about finding safety and acceptance within the institution, the surrounding community, and the socio-political context of the state because she felt their identities were more visible. Consequently, Sandra described being more willing to pushback against this expectation and set location parameters on her subsequent job searches. However, Sandra noted she was only more willing to push back on this expectation because she was further along in her career, more established in the field, and, subsequently, had more power and opportunities, which she recognized is not a universal experience for women professionals in student affairs.

Participants described feeling they had little choice but to move to advance their career, which involved often disconnecting from their social networks and losing familial support. For

married participants, all of whom were mothers, they explained following this expectation involved uprooting their families and, subsequently, effecting their spouses' careers and their children. Based on participants' described experiences, this expectation was additionally challenging for those participants with other marginalized or target identities, particularly for this participant pool: racial identity and sexuality.

Expectation to Prove Themselves and Earn their Position

Participants shared being expected to prove themselves and earn their positions in greater ways than men colleagues. Terry and Rebecca both described uncomfortable experiences applying for and receiving permanent positions while fulfilling the role on an interim basis. Although the expectation to participate in a "full search" as an internal candidate rather than be appointed to the permanent position is a common practice, Terry and Rebecca primarily saw this onerous being placed on women professionals while men colleagues were appointed to similar roles. In describing her experience applying for her current position, Terry shared, "my gender played into that [decision to make her apply]." Terry also highlighted her institution's inequitable and disparate hiring practices between men and women by sharing a private conversation about her candidacy for the dean of student position, which she was made privy to by the institution's lawyer:

So, when I was the acting dean of students... they said, "Okay, well, we're doing a search"... they were talking about how they were going to do a search for the dean, but they hoped that I would apply because they wanted to give it to me. And she said, "Well, you just appointed this man to this position without a search. And you just appointed this man to that position without a search." And she had three examples and she said, "so why

would you make Terry go through a search?” And they were like, “right, yeah, we shouldn't do that.”

Terry went on to describe how executive leadership’s initial stance to make her apply for the role was tied to her gender and student affairs’ “old boys club”.

While Terry ultimately was appointed to her SSAO position, Rebecca described being forced to participate in a full search. In retrospect, Rebecca shared she appreciated the experience and felt it made her more effective because institutional actors seemed to respect her more for “earning” the role. However, Rebecca was initially taken aback that her supervisor wanted her to “compete” for a position she was already successfully doing rather than giving her the position as an acknowledgement of her work. In describing the conversation with her supervisor and his rationale, Rebecca shared:

So, he posted this dean of students’ job, I applied, I went through a rigorous process. He said, “You know, I really encourage you to apply. But I want you to know that in order for you to be effective in this role, you have to compete, you know, you can't just be promoted into everything, you have to compete. I can't imagine somebody doing a better job than you, but you have to compete.” I had to pause if I'm being honest, but I knew that he knew my skills...So, I went through the whole kit and caboodle... I did all the things, and eventually was selected as the dean.

Rebecca explained her supervisor’s emphasis on her needing to “compete” for the role seemed to be gendered and related to her supervisor’s assumption of how others at the institution view women professionals and would view Rebecca. Specifically, Rebecca believed her supervisor worried others at the institution would respect her less because she was “just promoted into everything,” yet men at the institution were appointed to high-ranking positions without concern.

As Terry and Rebecca described navigating the expectation that they must “earn” their positions through institutional hiring processes, Gina and Sandra described having to prove that they had a right to their positions on a regular basis in almost daily professional interactions. Gina explained she regularly must remind her colleagues she has the experience, expertise, and skills necessary to be effective in every aspect of the VPSA position despite their perceptions of women professionals: “there are individuals whom I work with who think women are not as prepared as men for certain things. I think those are things like union negotiations, and physical plant kind of things.” Gina went on to say she deliberately mentors her staff, particularly women staff members, to gain skills in these areas, so they cannot be similarly questioned. Sandra also described colleagues being surprised by her competence: “I have found at times people have said things to me in this position and in previous positions. I am very good with numbers. I have incredible business acumen. I have found people to be like, ‘Oh, wow, she knows her stuff.’”

Expectation to Complete Additional Labor

All six participants discussed having to perform additional, often, unpaid labor throughout their careers to fulfill the basic requirements of their positions, to be viewed favorably by colleagues, and to remain competitive in the field. This additional labor ranged from working outside of traditional business hours or answering emails overnight to taking on auxiliary positions in addition to their fulltime roles. All six participants described being pressured to take on additional work without compensation or reward at different points in their careers, which had unique implications for women professionals. This unpaid labor was either framed as a learning and professional development opportunity that would benefit participants’ careers or as a necessity for their students.

Sandra described being pressured by a former supervisor to take on leadership of the student union in addition to her role as associate director of residence life. Her supervisor initially presented the position as a “cool experience” and a step toward preparing her for a future VPSA role. However, when Sandra asked if she would receive a title change or compensation for taking on a second fulltime role her supervisor replied angrily, implied she was ungrateful for the opportunity, and dismissively said he could always give the position to someone else. Sandra believed attempting to advocate for herself had lasting negative effects on her relationship with her supervisor and her reputation on campus. Ultimately, Sandra felt she had to leave the institution to avoid being terminated, which would significantly damage her career. Rebecca described a similar instance when a former supervisor refused to promote her or give her a raise in acknowledgment for her additional work. Rebecca also commented on how her supervisor and the field in general reward and acknowledge men and women’s contributions differently. She shared:

He knew I did good work, he complimented me all the time on my work, right? But when a man does good work, they get promoted, or they get a raise, when a woman does it, she gets a high five and told you're a good team player. And I'm like, hey, I've been here since '04 I have demonstrated time and time and time again that I'm committed to the institution and that I'm a good team player. Now, please! Many of my [fellow] directors did get a raise, right, and student affairs doesn't pay that well.

In this quotation, Rebecca highlighted a gendered pattern within her former supervisor’s reward structure and compensation practices. Men were given tangible, often, monetary rewards while women, like Rebecca, were either simply given compliments or their work and effort was

reduced to being a “good team player,” which implied it was an expectation of them and their role.

Gendered Implications of Additional Labor. In a later experience at the same institution, Rebecca described being asked to take on several projects which were left uncompleted by the previous SSAO. Rebecca initially agreed to take on these projects without consideration of the potential drawbacks. However, while on maternity leave, Rebecca realized the negative effects assuming this additional work would have on her family and her physical, mental, and financial wellbeing. These projects would require Rebecca to either spend more time in the office and, subsequently, increase her daycare needs and cost, or require her to work after putting her infant to sleep, which would further diminish her sleep. Upon this realization, Rebecca asked her new supervisor for either compensation for her extra hours or an adjustment to her current role that would allow her to fold these projects into her current position. Fortunately, unlike Sandra’s abovementioned experience, Rebecca’s supervisor considered her request and gave Rebecca a new interim title and a \$20,000 raise to enable her to take on these projects without splitting her focus between two fulltime positions and her child. Rebecca was the only participant who received additional compensation and formal acknowledgement for taking on additional labor.

Terry also experienced additional labor being thrust upon her without any initial compensation or true acknowledgment of her contributions. Without any discussion, Terry’s supervisor assumed she would take on the leadership of the college’s counseling center despite it being outside of the student affairs division and her purview. Terry led the center for over five years without a salary increase or title change in addition to her SSAO position. Terry described institutional leadership’s stance as “okay, Terry is just gonna do this.” Unlike Sandra and

Rebecca, Terry did not feel compelled to advocate for herself. She recognized she was in a privileged position in being able to work additional hours without pay because her children were out of the house, and she did not have to balance the same financial, temporal, and physical, demands as working mothers of younger children. She also recognized she was privileged to be unconcerned about her finances because of her high-level position, associated salary, and limited expenses at this point in her life. She did not have the expenses and financial concerns of younger professionals, such as student loan debt, a mortgage, or children's college funds. Although she was personally unconcerned, Terry's acknowledgement of the considerations other women professionals must make when navigating additional unpaid labor highlights the existence of these gender implications.

Four out of six participants described the effects this expectation had on their children and spouses. For example, although Terry and Gina described enjoying doing additional work to benefit students, both shared this expectation negatively affected their ability to be present when spending time with their respective children and spouses. Terry shared her 27-year-old daughter, who is currently undergoing treatment for brain cancer, commented on Terry's disengagement while spending time with her family: "sometimes my daughter comments on it. Sometimes when on a Sunday or something, and everybody's over, and she'll make some comment about you're not even listening. Yeah, it's true, I'm not." Similarly, Gina's 8-year-old daughter commented on her mother's working at home and expressed dissatisfaction about Gina "always being on the phone." Rebecca also shared how she feels expected to "always be working," which takes time and energy away from her son and husband. Both Terry and Sandra shared their spouses regularly ask them when they will retire because the demands of the VPSA or SSAO position and student affairs, in general, take valuable time away from them and their families. To avoid

this conversation and feeling guilty for working at home, Terry described intentionally working on her phone in the evening to make it less obvious she is working during their quality time.

Participants described being confronted and affected by gender throughout their student affairs careers, which at times negatively affected their professional experiences and changed their career trajectories. Specifically, participants described being regularly subjected to supervisors, colleagues, and other institutional agents' negative perceptions of women professionals' competency and damaging treatment related to their gender, namely infantilization. Participants also discussed operating within a persistent, far-reaching, androcentric institutional and discipline or field-specific culture throughout their careers. Lastly, participants felt pressured to navigate and align with problematic professional expectations to advance, secure, and continue to be effective in the highest-ranking student affairs position on their respective campuses, which had negative implications and consequences on these women professionals' personal lives and fulfillment.

Gender as an Internal Force

Gender acts as an internal force through participants' internalization and presentation of gender including their adoption of or resistance to socially constructed ideas of gender, including traditionally feminine gender roles, expectations, and behaviors. As participants experienced, confronted, and were affected by gender externally, they concurrently navigated internal gender forces or processes and presented their own feelings and perceptions of womanhood through their feelings of imposter syndrome, their need to always be working, and their leadership or supervisory style. These internal forces affected how participants chose to present themselves or behave in the workplace and influenced their professional aspirations.

Feelings of Imposter Syndrome

Participants regularly encountered and were subjected to gender stereotypes or negative commentary and assumptions of women professionals' competency. As with individuals of other marginalized identities, women can internalize and assume some of these negative messages or deficit perspectives on their gender, which was the case for participants in this study. Participants described their internal battle or struggle with imposter syndrome, a terminology coined by Clance and Imes (1978), to capture "feeling like an academic or professional fraud" (Womble Edwards, 2019, p. 18). For the purposes of this dissertation, imposter syndrome involves internalizing socially constructed, negative perceptions of women and their capabilities, which led women professionals to question their place in student affairs. All six participants described struggling with their confidence, questioning if they belonged and had a right to their position, and "feel[ing] worthy of the praise they receive on the basis of their academic or professional accomplishments" (Womble Edwards, 2019, p. 19), which was directly related to their gender.

Throughout both interviews, Gina described battling self-doubt and wondering if she is an effective VPSA. She explained she constantly asks, "what are the things I need to work on? Or what are the things I need to do?" On the one hand, Gina believed her introspection and self-doubt helped her continually improve and develop. On the other hand, Gina's supervisors and colleagues often perceived her self-examination or self-doubt as weakness and indecisiveness. She went on to emphasize, "at least for myself, and many of my [women] colleagues, we will, you know, replay a conversation in our head multiple times thinking, what should I have done differently? You've beaten yourself up." Sandra also described persistently questioning her capabilities and second-guessing her professional choices. She also sometimes questioned if the negative treatment she encountered from supervisors and colleagues was somehow her own

fault, which she related to her feelings of being an imposter. These are behaviors Sandra both engages in herself and feels women professionals are conditioned and taught to assume. Sandra shared, “I’m very intellectual, in my head, a lot of processing constantly in my head...I also think, like many women, the imposter syndrome can be very large...I live it many times... unfortunately I go to a place of what did I do?” Shauna also described battling imposter syndrome throughout her career. She explained feeling like a fraud because she did not see herself reflected in student affairs. In other words, she felt her social identities, namely her gender and race, made her stand out and feel out of place in student affairs leadership, which heightened her feelings of insecurity and being a fraud. Shauna shared, “when you’re new and you’re coming in and you’re like...I am the only person of Color, I know I’m going to say something [wrong] or that’s going to make someone people around this table feel uncomfortable.” Now, after 20 years in higher education adjacent and student affairs work, Shauna feels she is just beginning to overcome her imposter syndrome: “it’s been 20 years in the game and I think I’m just now getting over imposter syndrome, it’s taken me 20 years, almost to be like, I do deserve to be here. I am enough. I am okay. But I do think there’s pressure [as a woman].”

Related to feelings and a possible repercussion of imposter syndrome, participants chose to hold themselves back from pursuing opportunities, such as pursuing a college or university presidency. Despite their high-level of professional accomplishment, all six participants described questioning if they could and should pursue a college or university presidency, the pinnacle of leadership in higher education. Ultimately, Marion, Sandra, Terry, and Rebecca changed their career aspirations and elected not to pursue a college or university president position. In comparison, Gina and Shauna continue to consider the possibility and worry

remaining in the VPSA role for the rest of their careers might be perceived as settling. Gina also worried if she elected to remain a VPSA and not pursue a presidential role, she would be failing women who aspire to be a college or university president. Gina described feeling undue pressure and responsibility to be a role model for other women student affairs professionals. Yet, she simultaneously wondered aloud if she had the bandwidth, capabilities, and preparation for the role: “am I ready? Is it the right time? Does this make sense? Is this what I want to do?” She also wondered if following her ambition and becoming a college or university president would harm her family, namely her daughter’s development and her marriage by putting their family in such a public position. Rebecca also initially believed she had to pursue a college or university presidency to justify earning her doctorate, but she now questioned if the college presidency “was for her” and if it would be too much to ask of her husband and son.

While all participants wondered about their viability for a college or university presidency, Shauna, Sandra, and Rebecca also initially questioned their preparation and viability for the VPSA or SSAO role. For example, Shauna described being “concerned,” “apprehensive” and “really nervous” to apply for VPSA positions despite her extensive, related experience and terminal degree. After receiving positive feedback from several hiring committees, Shauna began to be more confident and see her non-traditional career path as an asset. Sandra and Rebecca shared a similar experience of never considering or seeing the VPSA position as an option or possibility prior to pursuing their doctorate degrees.

Participants also commented on how common imposter syndrome appeared to be amongst women student affairs professionals. All six participants observed and commented on how women professionals confronted imposter syndrome more frequently than their men colleagues. Gina shared, “But I think as women, oftentimes, we are having those conversations

with ourselves, are we strong enough? Are we smart enough? Are we good enough? Do we have enough time?” Gina astutely recognized her own and other women’s experiences with imposter syndrome as a symptom or repercussion of women professionals beginning to adopt or believe others’ perceptions of their capabilities.

Participants also described regularly witnessing women colleagues and staff holding themselves back, limiting themselves, and sometimes changing their career paths because they questioned or doubted their abilities. For instance, Sandra explained women professionals, herself included, were quick to preemptively exclude themselves from consideration and career advancement opportunities because they doubted themselves:

I oftentimes find myself and others who identify as woman, as female, we'll look at a job description and see, here's two things out of 100 I can't, I don't do, I can't do. That is very real. I do that, other [women] do that, who I've worked with.

Marion reiterated this perspective and elaborated on how women in student affairs limit themselves by being “trapped by what we think our specific gender roles or different gender possibilities are.” Gina shared a conversation she had with fellow women VPSAs at a leadership development course focused on preparing student affairs professionals to pursue a presidential position. They wondered, “if they were ready” and “if they could do it.” Yet, Gina and her colleagues did not hear their men colleagues and classmates doubting themselves and their capabilities instead they perceived men colleagues to be overly confident. Gina explained, “And when we talk to our male counterparts, it's like, ‘well, of course, I'm ready.’” Sandra also recognized this disparity in men and women’s professional confidence. She noticed and described men in the field as overly confident and more willing to apply for positions than women whether they are qualified or not: “I will find some male members on my staff, like

‘yeah!’ I mean, they’re three levels down right and they’re like, ‘yeah, I think I’m ready to look at presidencies.’ No, nah, nope.” Sandra also shared a similar interaction with a man graduate student who tried to convince her, he could help her be, “more successful as a vice president.”

The Need to Always be Working

As participants described being made to prove themselves and “earn” their positions to counteract supervisors’ and colleagues’ perceptions of women professionals, participants also described feeling an internal pressure, drive, or motivation to prove to themselves they earned and were worthy of their positions. Five out of six participants described feeling they must always be working to prove to themselves they had a right to their professional success. Participants described pushing themselves to counteract their own internalized, negative perceptions of women professionals. For example, Rebecca explained whenever she anticipated she would be treated differently because of her gender she preemptively worked harder. She shared, “I just work harder. I outwork 90% of people, right. I mean, I just do.” Rebecca sought to develop her reputation as “the hardest working person on campus” to not only counteract others’ misconceptions about women professionals, particularly those about working mothers, but also for herself. In this pursuit, Rebecca deliberately sent out emails overnight, so her colleagues and supervisors knew she was working:

I want the Chancellor to know I’m working at 11 o’clock at night. You know what I mean? I want to make it really clear I’m working as hard if not harder than everybody else. So, I don’t schedule send...I want everybody at this institution to think she works her ass off. And, I have that reputation now.

Rebecca elected to send her emails immediately rather than scheduling them to go out in the morning as her men colleagues did to document her work ethic and dedication to the role. She

explained men colleagues were privileged in being able to schedule email distribution because they were already assumed to be hard workers and did not have to prove it, but Rebecca believed women professionals' work ethic was continually questioned, especially women professionals with children. Rebecca hoped if she had a reputation as the "hardest worker on campus," institutional agents would be less likely to question her or doubt her capabilities after having a child. Gina was also passionate about being seen as a hard worker and vehement that motherhood would not affect her professional life. In fact, she promised the search committee when applying for her current role that motherhood would not be prioritized above her work. Over eight years after receiving the position, Gina still feels she must always be reachable and always working to prove to herself that the hiring committee made the right decision in giving her the position over non-parenting women and men applicants.

Although not a mother and, subsequently, not concerned with her perception as a working mother in student affairs, Marion also described her internal motivation to "always be working." Marion explained she had no interest in work-life balance and saw her work "as her life." After reaching the pinnacle of student affairs leadership, Marion was driven to become the "unofficial senior vice president" or the "go-to vice president." Marion shared, "working a 12-hour day works for me because that makes me happy." Marion and Terry both explained they felt privileged to be able to work all the time because they have a career they love, which allows them to make a difference. Similarly, Gina and Shauna both described feeling they owed it to their institution, students, and staff to continually work because they were one of few women who were able to rise to an executive leadership role in student affairs.

Related to the perspective that they must always be working, participants also shared they "always say yes" to opportunities, a philosophy and approach they credited for their success in

the field. Gina shared, “I said yes and that became a common theme over my career, every time there was an opportunity, I said, ‘yes,’ and had the opportunity to move up and get some different experiences.” Likewise, Terry shared, “I said yes to everything...everything that was thrown at me...if I was asked to do something I did it, if an opportunity was provided, I took it. I didn’t think.” Terry and Marion shared the perspective that if a woman professional is unwilling to “say yes” she will be unable to advance. This “always say yes” perspective is an internalization of the expectation that student affairs professionals, particularly women professionals, must be willing to take on additional labor.

Leadership or Supervisory Style and Professional Behavior

Participants’ both reflected and resisted traditionally feminine behavior and expectations, at different times, through their leadership or supervisory style and professional behavior. In some instances, participants described being mindful to avoid completing traditionally feminine tasks in the workplace, such as secretarial or administrative tasks. For example, Gina adopted a hard stance against “getting coffee,” “making appointments,” and “taking notes at meetings,” because she did not want colleagues to assume or expect she would complete these lower-level tasks as the only woman executive. Gina also worried completing these types of tasks would not only diminish her authority, but also weaken student affairs’ positionality at the institution. Gina felt she must resist her “natural inclination” to be helpful and friendly because she did not want to set a precedence and perpetuate an antiqued assumption of what women can and should do within the workplace. Sandra also pushed back against expected feminine roles in the workplace after recognizing she was being taken advantage of, often by men colleagues. Sandra described being expected to set up appointments for the president and provost to meet with students and to track down students who missed class on behalf of faculty, tasks that neither fall within her

professional responsibilities nor rise to the level of needing the VPSA's attention. Sandra shared earlier in her career she would be uncomfortable resisting these requests; however, at her current level, she no longer feels compelled to answer all administrators' and faculty members' requests instead she refers them to the appropriate office and staff member.

Like Gina and Sandra, Rebecca also described recognizing she needs to set stricter boundaries and be more measured and formal in her interactions rather than friendly and overly accommodating. She shared she barely has time to do her actual work because faculty and colleagues are constantly asking her for help and getting her involved with low-level student-related tasks because they know she will do it: "I've sort of unintentionally now I think, encouraged the behavior because I'm always there. I'm always responding and always on, they want an immediate answer, they know they can go to me."

Participants also had to decide whether to align with or present themselves in stereotypically feminine ways in the workplace, such as mothering students. All six participants, regardless of their parenting status, felt pressured at times to fulfill a mothering role on campus. Participants were split between resenting and resisting this expectation (e.g., Sandra, Marion, and Rebecca) and aligning with this expectation and adopting a mothering approach in their work (e.g., Gina, Rebecca, and Shauna).

Sandra described her staff relying on her to fulfill the mother role, be their defender, and "take care of everything" from their own parking issues to minor student concerns. She shared, "my staff will come to me at times and say 'hey, Sandra, this happened I need you to take care of it.' No, no, not my job." Rather than fulfill these requests and "do it all" as she and other participants were more apt to do earlier in their careers, Sandra resisted the inclination to "take care of it for them" and instead sought to develop "problem-solving skills" in her staff. While

Sandra resisted mothering her staff, Marion took a hard stance against students looking to her to serve as a mother figure and expecting that she would be, “more sympathetic and believe every story they tell because mom believed every story they told, and mom felt for them.” Marion went on to explain the expectation to nurture was accentuated for her as a Black woman. She shared how Black men especially reached out to her for protection and preferential treatment, “it was always men, it was always the young men, young African American men who expected to get over because I’m Black, you’re Black. No, you did the wrong thing. It doesn’t matter what color we both share.” Although she deeply cared for students, Marion did not believe it was her job to parent students, instead she believed it was her responsibility to challenge them and prepare them to succeed.

In comparison to Sandra, Marion, and Rebecca who described resisting the mothering role, Terry, Gina, and Shauna leaned into it and adopted a mothering approach to their work. Terry explained, “I did take some of the kind of 24/7 parenting you do [as a mom] into my job, for good or for bad, but I just think, you never turn it off.” Gina explained even before becoming a mother she aimed to treat students “as if they were their own children” and expected her colleagues and staff members to do the same. Both Terry and Gina also leveraged being mothers to connect with parents and gain their trust. Although not a mother, Shauna also described serving as a nurturing, motherly figure for her students, particularly for students of Color who she believed often feel alone within her PWI.

Benefits of Embracing or Presenting Gender

While every participant recognized and experienced professional challenges related to their gender, they also saw their gender as an asset in their work and elected to, at times, embrace leadership styles and supervisory approaches associated with women or femininity. Participants

commented on the benefits of adopting women's leadership styles and employing qualities or characteristics traditionally associated with women, such as being nurturing, relational, and emotionally intelligent, in their work. Gina shared over the course of her career, she shifted her leadership style from a masculine, authoritarian approach to a more feminine, collaborative approach: "I am definitely much more collaborative [now]...I want people to feel like they had a voice." Gina shared she was taught and initially internalized the idea that "[women] needed to look and act like men" to succeed. However, after entering the field and being struck by how "things are done in a very male oriented way," she recognized being a woman positioned her to offer an alternative perspective and contribute differently than her men colleagues. For example, she described being able to develop positive relationships with faculty and staff at every level of the institution and serve as a mediator by utilizing her interpersonal skills, which helped cultivate more equitable decision-making processes and allowed everyone to participate rather than just "the loudest voice." Shauna also recognized the benefits of women's approaches to leadership, namely their ethic of care or ability to show compassion for students and staff, a perspective shared by Rebecca and Terry. Rebecca described, "carry[ing] a lot of traditionally female characteristics, [I'm] very nurturing, very caring, I think...we [women] have a terrific ethic of care for staff...[and] the ability to demonstrate care and support to our students." Rebecca saw her "traditionally feminine characteristics" as strengths and central to her leadership and supervisory styles. She described, like Gina, being able to develop relationships with everyone on campus "from the janitors to the chancellor," which she believes contributed to her earning the permanent SSAO position.

Unlike the other participants, Marion acknowledged and attributed much of her professional success to emulating the professional behavior and leadership styles of her White

men mentors. Yet, she agreed women professionals see the value in building relationships and are more social than men, which advantages them in this work. Marion elaborated, “I think that's the female leadership experience of treating people like people, [and] more often than not that gives you a little bit of power, because people are more willing to work with you and respond to you.” Terry also described how her institution’s first woman president leveraged feminine characteristics, namely being caring, empathetic, and compassionate. Terry described admiring, “the way in which our president leads is much more caring. There's a sincerity...she genuinely is concerned about the health and safety of our students, she really wants to do what she can...a very compassionate leader,” which stood in contrast to former men presidents. Terry shared, “And I've seen, I've experienced working for male presidents who just didn't operate in that same way not to say they were bad people, they just operated differently.”

Participants extensively discussed the unique qualities, perspectives, and strengths women professionals bring to student affairs work, particularly within senior leadership roles. In presenting and bringing these traditionally feminine characteristics to the forefront of their leadership style and professional behavior rather than emulating masculine, authoritative attitudes and approaches, which Rebecca jokingly referred to as the “I’m the boss, applesauce” technique, participants believed they stood out and were ultimately able to better serve their students, staff, and institutions.

Conclusion

Participants’ experiences existing and advancing within student affairs in pursuit and fulfillment of the VPSA or SSAO position captured how gender acts as an external and internal force on women student affairs professionals throughout their careers. Gender concurrently affected participants as they simultaneously confronted gendered perceptions, treatment, and

expectations directed at them from others, their institutions, and their field, and from within themselves. These gender forces contributed to and, in some ways, shaped participants' professional experiences and career trajectories as they elected to either conform to or reject societal and professional expectations of women. Gender externally acted upon participants through patriarchal and infantilizing treatment from colleagues, supervisors, and other institutional actors, the androcentric culture within higher education and student affairs, and problematic professional expectations hoisted on women student affairs professionals. Participants experienced gender as an internal force through their internalization of negative perceptions of womanhood evident in their feelings of imposter syndrome, their need to always be working, and their decisions to either embrace or reject traditionally feminine tasks and qualities in the workplace. Although most of the participants' interactions with these gender forces were negative, participants retained that their gender or womanhood was an asset despite all the challenges.

Chapter 6: Discussion

My findings, discussed in the previous chapter, reflect how gender was a consistent external and internal force on participants' professional experiences and career trajectories. Gender externally imposed itself on participants through institutional actors' reaction to and treatment of women professionals, institutional and workplace culture in higher education and student affairs, and professional expectations with gendered implications for women professionals. Gender as an internal force was evident through participants' feelings of imposter syndrome, their need to always be working, and their rejection or embrace of traditionally feminine leadership or supervisory styles and professional behavior. These findings extend the conversation of women's unique experiences seeking and working within traditional higher education and academic roles (e.g., faculty, department chairs, deans, presidents) to their working experiences and career advancement in student affairs, a feminized field within academia. Furthermore, these findings and my overall dissertation work contributes to the literature on women in higher education and student affairs by centering the role gender, namely gendered organizational behavior, has on women's professional experiences and career trajectories. By adopting a critical gender and organizational theory lens, which are underutilized in the literature, I highlight the implicit influence of gender on the perpetuation of inequities in the student affairs field and higher education workplace.

In this chapter, I analyze my findings through the lens of Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations and situate them within the literature. I begin by identifying how Acker's (1990) five processes of gendered organizations appeared in participants' professional experiences and career trajectories. I use Acker's (1990, 1992, 2012) work to frame my discussion and understanding of how participants perceived the influence of gender on their

professional experiences in their past and current positions and on their career trajectories. Informed by this study, I also provide a brief critique of Acker's theory of gendered organizations and recommendations to build on or improve Acker's work. Then, I provide recommendations for practice to reduce the negative effects of gendered organizational behavior on women in student affairs. These recommendations for higher education institutions and student affairs professional associations are intended to improve women's professional experiences and ability to advance in the field, particularly for women seeking the VPSA or SSAO position. Lastly, I offer recommendations for future research focused on the influence of gender on women student affairs professionals and propose improvements to Acker's theory of gendered organizations.

Acker's Five Processes in Women VPSAs' Experiences and Career Trajectories

My thematic findings cut across several of Acker's (1990) five processes of gendered organization. Gender as an external force directly reflects four out of five of the processes—divisions along gender lines, gendered symbols and images, interactions between and across gender or gendered interactions, and gendered social structure—and contributes to individuals' gender internalization and performance, the fourth process of gendered organizations. For example, within gender as an external force, institutional actors' reaction to and treatment of women professionals, namely infantilization relies on higher education and student affairs' perpetuation of gendered symbols and images and gendered social interactions between and across gender. Gender as an internal force essentially reflects individuals' gender internalization and performance or individuals' gender identity and expression. I utilize Acker's (1990) five processes to help make sense or illuminate women VPSAs' or SSAOs' perception of gender on

their overall professional experiences and career trajectories, and their experiences and choices in their current role.

Divisions Along Gender Lines

Participants perceived gender's influence through the institutional and workplace culture of higher education and student affairs, which is grounded in a dichotomy, distinction, or separation between men and women professionals. Acker (1990) described this distinction as divisions along gender lines or a gendered segregation of labor (Tiao, 2006). When considering the culture and gender composition of higher education broadly, student affairs stands out as a feminized field (Hamrick & Carlisle, 1990; McEwen et al., 1990; Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2011) within the overall masculine or male-dominated structure of academia or higher education (Acker, 1990; Briton, 2000). Student affairs is seen as a women-dominated enclave in higher education because women are more likely to pursue a career in this field than men and are more concentrated in this area than other areas, divisions, and fields within higher education (Ford, 2014; McEwen et al., 1990; Sallee et al., 2020).

As referenced in both the data and findings chapters, all participants recognized women's numerical majority and presence in the field. Some participants, namely Rebecca, Gina, and Terry, pursued a career in student affairs because they saw women working in student affairs roles at their alma maters and perceived it as a field in which women could succeed, a common narrative shared amongst women student affairs professionals (e.g., Ford, 2014; McEwen et al., 1990). However, when looking at the gender composition or make-up of solely student affairs, there are evident and persistent divisions along gender lines, particularly in the hierarchy of student affairs divisions (Ardoyn et al., 2019; Ford, 2014; Pal & Jones, 2020; Vongalis-Macrow, 2016) and in the type of work or labor completed by professionals (Blackhurst, 2000; Jones et

al., 2015; Stewart, 2019). This division effected participants' professional experiences and career trajectories, which suggests the impact gendered divisions have on other women in student affairs. For example, participants (e.g., Gina, Sandra, and Terry) shared they did not often have women role models at the most senior level of student affairs, which communicated that women could only advance so far in the field and caused them to worry about the plausibility of this career aspiration or goal.

Participants all commented on the hierarchical or structural division between men and women student affairs professionals with men being overrepresented and found in upper-level student affairs positions, namely the VPSA or SSAO role, and women being overrepresented in entry and mid-level positions. For example, Gina stated, "if you look at the field, there are a lot of White women...not necessarily in leadership, but in the field" and Sandra shared, "there tends to be more women...within the lower levels." This distinction is extensively acknowledged and documented in previous research (e.g., Atkinson, 2020; CUPA-HR, 2022; Duffy, 2010; Glazer-Raymo, 1999; M. S. Hughes, 1989; Johns, 2013; Jones & Komives, 2001; Pritchard & McChesney, 2018; Selzer & Robles, 2019; Stimpson, 2009).

In keeping with this hierarchical division or separation, participants' reflections on their professional experiences and career trajectories revealed they were mainly supervised by men professionals over the course of their careers despite being members of different generational groups and moving through the field at different times. With men persistently fulfilling a preponderance of upper-level positions, it set the tone for the field's and higher education institutions' "old boys' club", or male-dominated culture, which was discussed by Terry, Rebecca, and other participants. The "old boys' club" or "old boys' network" is grounded in gender divisions at the institutional and field-levels as those in power reproduce systems and

practices that keep them and those individuals like them in positions of power or authority (Seo et al., 2017). This hierarchical separation reflects the employment patterns of women and men in student affairs (Turnbow, 2019) and other feminized fields (Budig, 2002; Kanter, 1975; Synder & Green, 2008; Williams, 1992); specifically, men working in student affairs and other feminized fields “ride the glass escalator” or process through the field to high-level positions at a quicker pace than women (Smith, 2011; Williams, 2013; Wingfield, 2009).

Participants also recognized women and men are separated across student affairs’ functional areas, which cemented a division of labor with men handling more business-oriented work and women handling more emotion intensive and student-centered work (Blackhurst, 2000; Stewart, 2019; Selzer & Robles, 2019). This gendered segregation of labor or type of work sets men and women student affairs professionals on different career trajectories, which better position men professionals to transition into senior leadership roles (Selzer & Robles, 2019). For example, men professionals’ typical roles within their offices allow them to more easily develop skills that are expected of senior leadership, such as budgeting and finance (Selzer & Robles, 2019). In comparison, women student affairs professionals find it more challenging to acquire leadership positions because student-centered work and its associated skills are less valued by institutional leadership and women have less opportunities to develop skills in areas deemed necessary for the VPSA or SSAO role (Selzer & Robles, 2019). This phenomenon was reflected in Rebecca’s experience of feeling “stuck” in a mid-level position in student activities, a popular functional area for women in the field. In this role, Rebecca struggled to diversify her professional experiences and competencies in hopes of advancing to a dean of students and SSAO position. Rebecca and other women in student affairs typically lacked access to

opportunities that allow them to develop competence in areas that are seen as more masculine and are more valued by higher education institutions (Cosimini, 2011; Selzer & Robles, 2019).

Divisions along gender lines, particularly women's concentration or stagnation in entry and mid-level student affairs positions, is also, in part, a result and gendered implication of field-specific professional expectations, such as the expectation to move for career advancement. Every participant except for Rebecca had to navigate multiple long-distance moves for career advancement in student affairs and to acquire their current VPSA or SSAO position. Although five out of six women in this study adhered to and managed this expectation, they acknowledged the significant negative ramifications this expectation had on them, particularly for those participants of multiple marginalized identities (e.g., Marion, Shauna, and Sandra). Amongst other consequences, participants described losing their sense of community and support systems. Jones and Taylor (2012) also found career-motivated relocations had a greater impact on women professionals with children and those with eldercare responsibilities like Sandra, Gina, and Terry. For both Gina and Sandra, their relocating for a VPSA position affected their daughters, specifically requiring them to leave the only home they've ever known, adjust to new schools, and acclimate to a new regional culture. Gina and Sandra both commented on how following this expectation also limited their ability to care for their parents or in-laws.

Although most participants followed this nomadic expectation to advance their careers, women professionals are more likely to have familial responsibilities, which limits their ability to move or geographically relocate (Jones & Taylor, 2012). For many women working in student affairs, this expectation and its ramifications deter them from pursuing career advancement and contributes to women's high attrition from the field (McKinnon-Crowley et al., 2022; Pal &

Jones, 2020), which widens the division between men and women's positionality and representation in student affairs.

Gendered Symbols and Images

The six women VPSAs or SSAOs in this study confronted gendered symbols and images embedded within student affairs and higher education throughout their careers. For example, within the institutional actors' treatment of and reaction to women subtheme, five participants described being subjected to infantilizing or belittling treatment from colleagues, supervisors, and other institutional actors, which is documented in general literature on women in the workplace (e.g., Leskinen & Cortina, 2014; Leskinen et al., 2015). Participants described multiple interactions when they were explicitly referred to as a child or equated with a child. I describe the social interactions themselves in more detail in the following subsection focused on Acker's second process of gendered organizations—interactions between and across gender. However, in this subsection, I emphasize how participants' infantilization was rooted in the perpetuation of gendered symbols and images.

Infantilization heavily relies on gender stereotypes and reduces women to culturally created images of who they are and what they are capable of in the workplace (Leskinen & Cortina, 2014). Infantilization connects to the "traditional woman" (Leskinen & Cortina, 2014, p. 117) image, which assumes women are mothers and caregivers before they are professionals or workers. Organizational actors, namely supervisors, often ascribe to this image and believe women will behave in stereotypical or traditional ways, namely prioritizing motherhood over their professional responsibilities. Subsequently, organizations believe women will have limited productivity compared to men who are more reflective of the ideal worker image, namely a White, cis-gender man who is wholly committed to their work and organization with neither

external responsibilities nor bodily concerns (Sallee, 2012; Ward & Wendel, 2016; J. Williams, 2001). The conflict between the ideal worker and traditional woman images often results in organizations, namely supervisors or management, preemptively deciding women “are unsuitable for certain jobs due to their family orientation” (Leskinen & Cortina, 2014, p. 117). Gina’s and Rebecca’s accounts of their anxiety around being perceived differently in the workplace and being held back or overlooked for advancement opportunities and leadership roles after becoming mothers derives from confronting the traditional woman image and subverting the ideal worker image. Both participants feared harming their professional reputations and their careers because as mothers they were perceived as no longer being able to commit seemingly unlimited time, energy, and labor to their institutions (McKinnon-Crowley et al., 2002). This fear was shared by participants in Fochtman’s (2010) dissertation study on 10 mid-level and upper-level women and mothers in student affairs and referred to as the “mommy-track” by McKinnon-Crowley et al. (2022). The “mommy-track” is a negative terminology used to communicate when women professionals either elect to or are moved out of a fast-paced career trajectory or advancement process to focus on being a mom. The “mommy-track” is significant because it signals a deviation from the ideal worker image, which is based on linear, male life patterns (Costello, 2012; Fochtman, 2010, 2011; Wolfinger et al., 2008) and assume workers have a woman partner at home to handle all domestic and childrearing responsibilities (Acker, 1990; CohenMiller et al., 2022). Gina and Terry were able to mirror this ideal worker image more closely than other participants by having a partner willing to stay-home fulltime and manage their households and children.

Infantilization also relies on the historical image of women as children (Leskinen & Cortina, 2014; Leskinen et al., 2015). As discussed in Chapter 1, particularly within the women’s

historic involvement and positionality in student affairs section, women students and student affairs professionals have long been viewed and treated like children and subjected to patriarchal treatment from higher education institutions, namely men administrators (Hevel, 2016; Hoffman, 2011; Patton, 2016; Rentz, 2004). For example, as mentioned in Chapter 1 Introduction, the first residential women students at Duke University were initially housed behind a locked fence (Hevel, 2016), symbolizing that women needed to be sheltered and protected. Although a century after Duke University admitted its first class of women, Marion's experience as a member of the first class of women at her undergraduate institution mirrored the earlier experiences of women in coeducational institutions and highlighted higher education's perception of women as children remained intact. For example, Marion's institution also attempted to surround the women's residence hall with a locked fence, instill a curfew, refuse to provide women students keys to their building, and hire a security guard to patrol the building. These policies and practices did not apply to men residential students. The fence and locks were physical symbols of the institution's patriarchal approach to women students. Marion's undergraduate experience conveyed how academia sees women as children in need of protection and shelter, and how institutions perpetuate this imagery.

While Marion's undergraduate experience conveyed how higher education institutions saw women students as children in need of protection and shelter, other participants' more recent experiences captured the perpetuation of women's childlike image in a professional context. As described in Chapter 5, Sandra's qualifications were covertly drawn into question when she was referred to as "kiddo" by her employing institution's provost in her first, public appearance as VPSA. The provost's use of the word "kiddo" was not only infantilizing and patronizing but also a form of sexism, namely linguistic sexism, which has lasting negative effects on how women

are perceived in higher education and the workplace (MacArthur et al., 2000). Lakoff (1973) and Richardson (1981) argued by infantilizing women and equating them with children, they are seen as incapable of making decisions. In drawing a connection between Sandra and the image of a child, the provost undercut her authority with the faculty, which is especially damaging to women in higher education who are already seen as lesser authority figures than men (Messner, 2000).

This imagery also negatively effects women professionals' self-efficacy or how they perceive themselves and their competency in the workplace (MacArthur et al., 2020); for instance, Shauna believed her colleagues saw her as a "hotshot little girl," which contributed to her feelings of inadequacy and motivation to earn a doctorate degree as a means of legitimizing herself in the workplace. Shauna's motivation for legitimacy were shared by participants and popular amongst women student affairs professionals (Atkinson, 2020), particularly amongst women of Color professionals (Miles, 2012). Gendered symbols and images, in this case the "traditional woman," "ideal worker," and "childlike" images, are ultimately reflected in organizational logics or behavior, which are captured by Acker's (1990) fifth process of gendered organizations and discussed later in this chapter.

Interactions Between and Across Gender

Participants experienced social interactions that both implied and enacted the "dominance [of men] and subordination [of women]" (Acker, 1992, p. 253), which are commonly referred to as gendered social interactions (e.g., Lester et al., 2017). These interactions occurred both across gender groups (i.e., between women and men) and, to a lesser extent, within gender groups (i.e., between women). Most participants experienced covert gendered interactions, such as being subjected to infantilizing comments and microaggressions from supervisors, colleagues,

students' parents, and other institutional actors rather than overt gendered interactions, such as sexual harassment, which is in keeping with the contemporary experiences shared by women student affairs professionals and higher education administrators (e.g., Blackhurst, 2000; Mena, 2016; Pal & Jones, 2020).

Although participants did not label these covert interactions as microaggressions, participants shared gendered interactions that can be defined in that way. Locke and Trolian (2018) building on Pierce's (1970) original definition, described microaggressions in higher education and student affairs as, "ordinary verbal, behavioral, and/or environmental slights and indignities that can be intentional, unintentional, or even unconscious, yet communicate a derogatory and hostile stance toward an individual or group" (p. 70). Some examples of microaggressions from participant data include Rebecca's former supervisor using the word "bitches" in the workplace, Gina's men colleagues complimenting hers and other women's physical appearance, and Sandra's contractor assuming a woman cannot oversee facilities or construction projects.

Participants also recounted instances when men colleagues and supervisors ignored them and spoke over them in meetings and presentations. For instance, Sandra's colleague cutting her off and physically pushing her aside during a presentation with student staff members and Shauna's colleagues ignoring her suggestions in her first professional position. Although Marion was reluctant to share detailed descriptions of negative social interactions, she broadly described being ignored and slighted by colleagues in her first VPSA position because of her identity. Both Shauna's and Marion's gendered social interactions were complicated and enhanced by the intersection of their gender and racial identities. Women of Color student affairs professionals, particularly Black women, regularly face microaggressions targeted at their gender and race in

the field and in their employing institutions or workplaces (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; West, 2020).

Despite infantilization being considered a covert or implicit form of gendered interactions, Leskinen and Cortina (2014) still consider it a form of gender harassment and allude to its significant negative effects on women in higher education and in the workplace. Men infantilize women in the workplace often subconsciously to undercut women's place in the workplace and reassert their own dominance as men in feminized fields (Burke, 2014). The infantilizing, gendered interactions described by participants is often a form of subconscious backlash or resistance from men professionals who may perceive women's advancement as a threat to their own positions (Seo et al., 2017). Sandra, Shauna, Terry, Rebecca, and Gina described infantilizing treatment from predominantly men supervisors and colleagues rather than women supervisors, which signifies greater and more frequent gendered social interactions across gender groups.

However, participants also mentioned negative gendered interactions with women supervisors who adopted more masculine leadership styles and perpetuated organizational behavior that favored men. For example, Rebecca described her current woman supervisor singling her out, treating her like a child, and double-checking her work, which her supervisor did not do with Rebecca's men colleagues. In addition, Sandra's most intense and negative workplace experiences, such as being publicly scolded, occurred at a women-led institution. Women's presence in institutional or organizational leadership does not ensure a change in organizational culture (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). In fact, some research found women supervisors tend to treat women staff members worse in the general workplace (Derks et al., 2011; Schieman & McMullen, 2008; Staines et al., 1974) and in student affairs (Seo et al., 2017).

Cosimini (2011) found gendered social interactions between women in student affairs often lead to competition and serve as a barrier to women professionals' advancement to the VPSA or SSAO position.

Participants also described how being excluded from gendered social interactions between men colleagues and supervisors affected their experience in the field and career trajectories, which connects to participants' perception of student affairs as an "old boys' club." The "old boys' club" idea is built on solidarity between men in the workplace (Seo et al., 2017; Sheppard & Aquino, 2014), which is often observed through in-group versus out-group social interactions. Terry was deeply affected by her exclusion from these social interactions. She found it "demoralizing" to learn institutional decisions were made during conversations and social gatherings that excluded women professionals. Terry also described how this exclusion stalled or delayed her career progression. Terry perceived her supervisor knew her men colleagues better because of socializing with them outside the office and was more willing to mentor them and provide them opportunities to develop their skills and contribute to the institution, which reflects the negative ramifications of women's exclusion from men's social interactions and networks (Kanter, 1975). Sandra also described being excluded from the university's male "inner circle" led by its new White man president, which was a main motivation for Sandra's decision to eventually leave her VPSA position and the field.

Women in feminized fields are additionally disadvantaged by this form of exclusion because men's tokenism in the field makes it more likely they will socialize and have direct access to leadership and all the professional advantages that provides (Kanter, 1975; Lewis & Simpson, 2012; Zimmer, 1988). Women in feminized fields also do not typically have access to institutional or workplace support networks and formal mentorship opportunities when compared

to women in widely known male-dominated fields, such as science and engineering (Hughes et al., 2022). Except for Marion, participants described a lack of mentorship for themselves and other women pursuing the VPSA or SSAO position. Participants did not have their own gendered social network or opportunities for social interactions within their gender group (i.e., women to women). Four out of six participants also described a lack or dearth of women role models in student affairs as few women advance to the VPSA or SSAO role, particularly women with children. Previous literature often mentions a lack of mentorship as a barrier to women's career advancement (Blackhurst, 2000; Marshall et al., 2016; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). Participants also described the loneliness of the VPSA or SSAO position because there is no one else on campus who shares their role and with whom they can commiserate. While men VPSAs or SSAOs may also experience loneliness in this role due to its boundary-spanning nature, this loneliness is enhanced for women VPSAs or SSAOs because there are also fewer women in other senior levels of higher education institutions (Pritchard & McChesney, 2018) with whom they can connect.

Individuals' Gender Internalization and Performance

Participants and other women professionals in student affairs were found to alternate between internalizing and resisting societal, institutional, and cultural ideas surrounding gender in how they chose to behave in the workplace and in their career path decisions. For example, participants' feelings of imposter syndrome described in Chapter 5 reflect their internalization of negative gendered messages about women and their competency. Chandra et al. (2019) defined imposter syndrome as "the feeling of fraudulence experienced by successful individuals who believe their achievements are underserved" (p. 26). Nearly all participants described feeling inadequate, doubting themselves, and questioning their place in student affairs at various points

throughout their careers. For example, Gina described second guessing her decisions and questioning if she is an effective VPSA. Gina and other participants' feelings of imposter syndrome is common amongst women in higher education (e.g., Atkinson, 2020; Crouch et al., 1991; Spicer-Runnels, 2019). Crouch et al. (1991) found women higher education administrators were more likely to face imposter syndrome than men in other fields because of the gendered messages they receive about what and who are valued within higher education institutions, which is also an aspect of Acker's (1990) fifth process of gendered organizations. Women student affairs professionals also tend to struggle with imposter syndrome because they often do not see themselves reflected in the field and institutional leadership (Belieu, 2021), which connects to previous gendered organizational processes (e.g., divisions along gender lines, and gendered symbols and images).

Participants' feelings of imposter syndrome also impacted their career trajectories, namely the pace of their career advancement and their professional aspirations. For instance, participants described their initial hesitation to pursue both the VPSA or SSAO position and their later reluctance to apply for a college or university president position. This hesitancy was often a result of participants' acceptance of external messages about women and their professional capacities. Participants also recognized it was common amongst women in student affairs to limit themselves and delay their career progression out of self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy, which they did not recognize amongst men colleagues. Participants' perceptions were in keeping with empirical research on men and women's employment patterns in student affairs (Turnbow, 2019), namely men are more likely to apply for positions they may not entirely qualify for and advance through the field at a faster pace than women colleagues. Women professionals were also less likely to put themselves forward for internal promotions and positions because they tend

to adhere to the idea that their good work and qualifications will be recognized and reward by external authorities (Atkinson, 2020), which Fitzpatrick and Curran (2014) labelled the tiara syndrome and Rebecca described as her approach to her career prior to becoming a mother.

Although participants overcame their imposter syndrome and ultimately pursued senior leadership positions in student affairs, many women student affairs professionals do not and instead forego leadership positions in the field (Blackhurst, 2000; C. Hughes, 2004; Nobbe & Manning, 1997). Many women professionals, particularly mothers working in student affairs, elect not to pursue upper-level positions because they no longer perceive these positions as appropriate given their external, gendered responsibilities (Broido et al., 2015; McKinnon-Crowley et al., 2022). Participants also struggled with rectifying their career aspirations and ambition with motherhood. For example, Gina described in detail her internal conflict over whether it was appropriate to pursue a college or university presidency as a mother of a young child. All the mothers in this study struggled with prioritizing either their professional role or their parenting role, which captured women student affairs professionals' role conflict between ideal worker and mother (McKinnon-Crowley et al., 2022). Empirical research (e.g., Pyke, 2013) found men in higher education do not have the same concerns. In changing their career aspirations and trajectories, women professionals internalize gendered expectations and make professional choices in accordance with these gendered expectations and traditional gender roles (Hart, 2016).

The women VPSAs or SSAOs in this study also internalized feelings of inadequacy and a need to prove themselves or earn their position, which is common amongst women in higher education and student affairs (Hart, 2016; Marshall et al., 2016). Participants' professional behavior and internal motivation to "always be working" also reflected their internalization and

attempted adherence to the masculine aligned ideal worker image or construct. Marshall (2020) and Sallee (2012) explained the student affairs workplace culture perpetuates ideal work norms by expecting professionals “to put work before all other responsibilities” (Marshall, 2020, p. 279). Although participants understood their gender and associated gender roles conflicted with this expectation, they attempted to downplay this conflict and embody the ideal worker image by often prioritizing work over quality time with their families and personal fulfillment. Participants also described the importance of working outside of traditional business hours and having their work documented and recognized by colleagues and supervisors. Participants not only internalized ideal work norms in their own professional behavior but also applied these expectations on both their staff and on other aspiring women student affairs professionals. Terry, Gina, Sandra, and Marion particularly struggled with staff members’ and early-career women’s focus on work-life balance and instead suggested women must be willing to “make sacrifices,” such as either prioritizing work over domestic responsibilities or being satisfied with a mid-level position.

Participants’ professional behavior, namely their internalization and adherence to masculine work ideals conflicted with Marshall’s (2020) work on women student affairs professionals’ navigation of ideal worker norms. Marshall (2020) found women professionals who attempted to align with the field’s ideal worker norms struggled professionally and experienced a lack of self-care and a “loss of self.” In comparison, participants were successful in securing a senior leadership position and described a sense of fulfillment with their professional choices. Except for Gina, participants also described some form of daily self-care. For Sandra, Terry, and Shauna self-care included exercising before work each morning and resisting their inclination to answer phone calls or emails during this time. For Rebecca self-care

included waking up early and reading mystery novels and for Marion self-care included gardening and going to the theater. However, many participants did not implement these self-care activities until they achieved the VPSA or SSAO position.

While all six participants described a shared willingness to always be working in pursuit of fulfilling masculine ideal worker norms, they simultaneously resisted taking on traditionally feminine roles in the workplace, namely secretarial tasks. Participants both resisted and resented institutional actors' requests and assumptions that as women they should and would handle administrative logistics, such as scheduling meetings, managing calendars, handling technology, and taking notes. Williams and Dempsey (2014) referred to these types of tasks as "office housekeeping" and found successful women professionals across fields were expected to complete administrative tasks and unskilled labor. Similarly, Harley (2008) found women faculty members are disproportionately expected to complete "institutional housekeeping," namely departmental service and student advising (Bird et al., 2004; Hart, 2011, 2016; Terosky et al., 2014). In addition to resisting these traditionally feminine tasks in the workplace, participants sometimes resisted displaying or acting in feminine ways to avoid being taken advantage of and perceived as less competent by men colleagues and supervisors. For instance, Gina explained as the only woman executive leader on campus, she must resist the urge to be helpful or overly friendly. Rebecca and Sandra also explained the need to set boundaries with staff, colleagues, and faculty who casually expected them to "take care of everything," which both participants connected to their gender. They believed men professionals would neither be approached with nor expected to complete tasks below their station. Literature on women's differential treatment in higher education, particularly the different gendered experiences of men and women faculty

(e.g., Bird et al., 2004; Hart, 2011, 2016; Terosky et al., 2014) supported participants' perceptions.

Participants also varied in their resistance or adherence to the gendered expectation of mothering in the workplace. Terry and Gina believed in mothering their students and leveraged their motherhood or mother identity to connect with students and parents, which led them to display a more traditionally feminine approach to or performativity in their work. In comparison, other participants resisted the pressure to perform or behave in mothering ways, namely being overly nurturing, empathetic, and understanding, because they believed being seen as a mother would negatively affect colleagues' and staff members' perception of their competency, authority, and effectiveness, and, subsequently, have negative ramifications on their careers. Marion was particularly outspoken in her resistance to fulfill the mother role on-campus and astutely commented on how it was complicated by the intersection of her racial and gender identities.

Through her strong resistance, Marion referenced the historic pressure placed on women of Color, particularly Black women to assume care work (Miles, 2019). Marion's resistance is also rooted in her recognition and rejection of the extra caregiving and advocacy work student affairs places on Black professionals, particularly Black women (Stewart, 2019). Marion's rejection of the mothering role also aligns with her professional behavior and approach to student affairs work, which she acknowledges primarily mirrors the style and approach of her White men mentors. Marion aligned with the ideal worker expectation of prioritizing work over everything else but did not accept the expectation that her work as VPSA should be different because of her gender and racial identities. Marion rejected the idea she should be more responsible for women students and students of Color because she identifies in similar ways. Instead, Marion argued she

was equally responsible for all students and should be held to the same professional expectations levied against White men VPSAs. Unlike Marion, Shauna believed she had a responsibility to specifically serve students of Color, particularly Black women students. In describing her work ethic and professional behavior, Shauna assumed the additional work hoisted on Black student affairs professionals (Stewart, 2019). For example, Shauna described personally delivering a handwritten note to a Black woman resident assistant's room when she learned this student wanted to meet her and discuss pursuing a career in student affairs. Shauna also shared multiple instances when she had unplanned, informal meetings with Black women students whenever they approached her whether on or off-campus.

Lastly, all participants acknowledged the benefits of displaying feminine characteristics or qualities in their current VPSA or SSAO position, particularly noting their relational or intrapersonal skills, emotional intelligence, and ability to bring unique perspective to a male-dominated organization. The benefits of women's leadership in the workplace are beginning to be well documented in organizational and workplace literature (e.g., Eagly & Carli, 2003; Longman & Madsen, 2014). However, when analyzing participants' career trajectories and reflections on how they positioned themselves to be competitive and ultimately secure the VPSA or SSAO position, participants appeared to be more closely aligned with a traditionally masculine approach to their work and career. For example, participants except for Rebecca prioritized their career advancement over institutional fit and location preference, which is in keeping with student affairs' gendered professional expectations. Additionally, participants mainly rejected the idea of work-life balance instead describing work as their life for much of their careers, which aligns with the ideal worker construct and image (Marshall, 2020; Sallee, 2016; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2016; Wilk, 2016). For instance, Marion shared, "I have always

said that there's no such thing as work life balance... it's a farce, and that it's crazy to try to think you're ever going to achieve it.” Similarly, Sandra said, “I do not believe in work life balance, it doesn't exist.” Participants who most closely followed ideal work norms and adhered to field-specific expectations despite the negative effects on their personal lives seemed to be marginally more successful. Specifically, Marion, Shauna, and Sandra all secured high-level and senior leadership positions at more highly regarded and competitive institutions (e.g., research universities). This suggestion supports Bierema’s (2003) findings that women must operate in masculine ways to advance in student affairs and higher education.

Gendered Social Structure

All participants were successful in securing a VP/SA or SSAO position, which is notable given women’s limited representation at the highest level of student affairs (NASPA, 2014; Pal & Jones, 2020; Townsend & Twombly, 2007; Turner et al., 2013), particularly for women of Color (NASPA, 2014; West, 2020) and working mothers (McKinnon-Crowley et al., 2022). Yet, participants’ professional experiences, career trajectories, and choices underscore student affairs’ gendered, read masculine, social structure or gendered substructure (Acker, 2012). Participants’ cases document and allude to their interacting with several formal and informal organizational logics that uphold and perpetuate the field’s gendered social structure. For example, participants’ experiences within the student affairs job market, and how they moved through or advanced within the field, alludes to student affairs’ and higher education institutions’ hiring and evaluation practices, which inherently favor men. Except for Sandra, who often utilized personal and professional connections to find new positions, participants mainly moved through, advanced within the field, and acquired new positions through the traditional or standard job search process, which is typical for women professionals (Burke & Carter, 2015). Rebecca

shared applying for over 30 entry-level student affairs positions without a single interview invitation early in her career. However, men professionals are more likely to advance in the workplace and field through informal channels, namely their social networks or connections (Ballenger, 2010). Terry and Rebecca both experienced and recognized their respective institutions' gender bias in the hiring process when they were initially told they had to apply and go through the formal hiring process to move from an interim to a permanent standing. Yet, men professionals in similar situations were appointed. Although Sandra was able to professionally benefit from social networks earlier in her career, she also witnessed men's favored positionality in student affairs' hiring process when she was pressured to hire a man candidate. Men in feminized fields, such as the professional Sandra was pressured to hire, also have greater access to social networks and leadership, which provides them additional advancement opportunities (Ballenger, 2010; Zimmer, 1988).

Participants also referenced interacting with informal organizational logics, such as organizational gendered messages that devalued student affairs and student affairs professionals' contribution to the institution and its students. For example, Shauna shared she and her work are regularly undercut and devalued by the university's provost who refers to student affairs as "food, fun, and festivities." Institutional actors' devaluing of student affairs reflects societal views of feminized fields and care work (Wingfield, 2009). Student affairs' feminized nature and work conflicts with higher education, which is male dominated and values masculine-oriented work like research (Hart, 2016). Participants were often concerned with contradicting negative views of student affairs and improving the division's institutional standing to secure additional or continued financial support and justify their existence. For example, Terry had to argue the value of keeping the student affairs division and hiring a SSAO to her institution's provost and

president. Rebecca also had to justify her salary by documenting how her work directly benefits students. Participants' discussion of funding highlighted another organizational logic, organizational budgeting and finance, which communicates what the institution values. To prove student affairs' worth to stakeholders, participants were forced to ascribe to a "culture of assessment" (Schuh, 2013). Although participants did not reference many formal written organizational logics, such as job descriptions and performance evaluations, they faced informal organizational logics, which reproduced gender in their daily work.

Analyzing women VPSAs' or SSAOs' professional experiences and career trajectories through Acker's five processes of gendered organizations highlights the centrality of gender and its continued influence in student affairs despite its feminized reputation. This analysis provides a starting point to improve women student affairs professionals' experiences in the field and increase their representation at the most senior level by identifying the often-hidden ways gender is operationalized to disadvantage women in the workplace, which is provided in the recommendations for practice section later in this chapter. Below, I provide a brief critique of Acker's theory of gendered organizations and propose improvements to the theoretical framework informed by this study.

Recommendations for Acker's Theory of Gendered Organizations

Analyzing my findings and participants' challenges working in student affairs and securing a VPSA or SSAO position through the lens of Acker's (1990) five processes of gendered organizational theory allowed me to recognize how gender is systemically embedded in student affairs and higher education; however, extensively utilizing Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations over the course of this study, also allowed me to recognize some limitations and potential areas of improvements for this theoretical framework. I present three

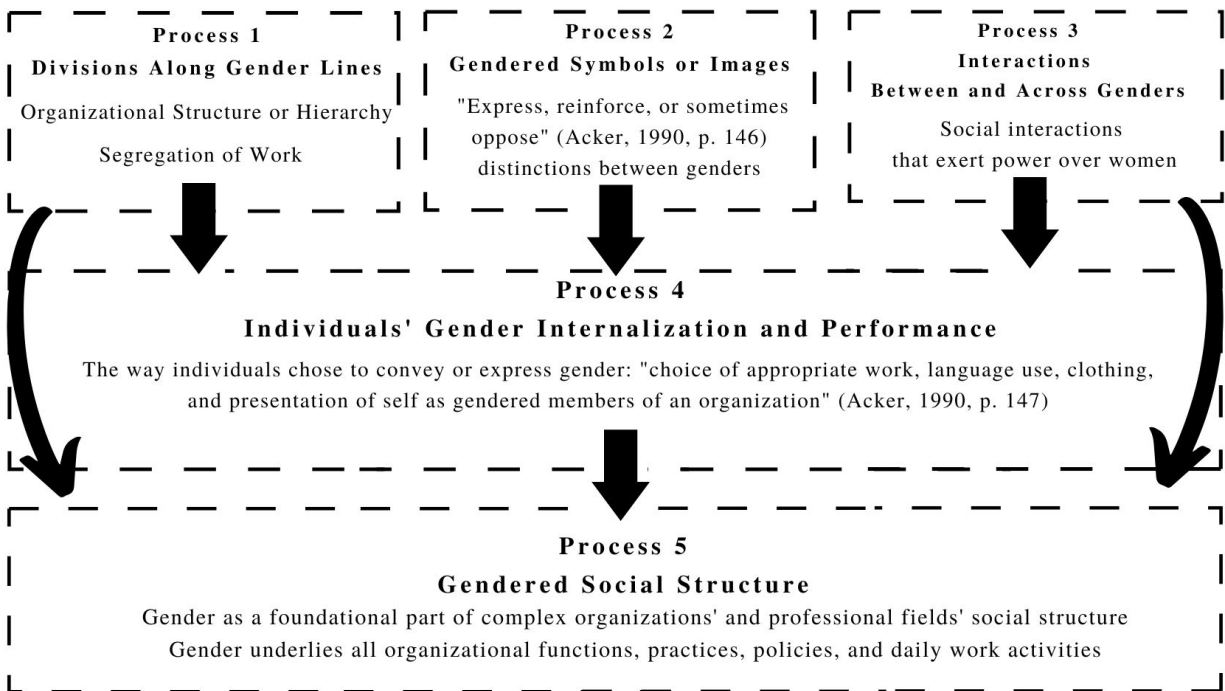
critiques of Acker's work on gendered organizations and propose recommendations to build on this work and improve its utilization in future empirical research.

First, Acker's (1990) fifth process of gendered organizations, gendered social structure, was intended to outline how gender is a foundational part of organizations' and fields' social structures; however, the process was inexplicitly removed in Acker's (1992, 2012) later explanations of the theory and often overlooked or left out in other scholars' use of the theory. When used in this study, I recognized the fifth process functionally summarized the proceeding four processes rather than added a different component or aspect to understanding how gender is operationalized in student affairs and higher education or how student affairs divisions and higher education institutions are gendered. In future deployments of the theory, researchers must carefully consider the value of either including or excluding the fifth process and should include a brief rationale for their decision. Ultimately, I elected to include the final process as a culmination or conclusion to accentuate student affairs' and higher education institutions' deep-seeded use of gender.

Second, Acker's theory of gendered organization depicts a web of intricate interrelated or connected processes that both provides evidence or examples of organizations' use of gender and explains how gender advantages men and disadvantages women; yet, the interdependent relationship between the processes is often lost or overlooked and can be confusing in theorists' explanations of the theory. This confusion can be avoided through the creation and use of a visual representation or figure depicting the theory. I propose the following figure:

Figure 1

Acker's Five Processes of Gendered Organizations



In this figure, the processes are delineated with a dotted line representing their fluidity or interconnectedness. The permeable barrier or boundary between processes also allows for examples of gender operating within organizations to reflect more than one process. For example, men and women in an organization might be expected to adhere to different dress codes or wear different uniforms, which both solidifies visible divisions along gender lines – process 1 – and serves as a gendered symbol or image – process 2. The arrows included in this figure capture the connection between the processes and highlights how processes 1, 2, and 3 both culminate in process 4 – individuals' gender internalization and performance – and directly connect to process 5 – gendered social structure.

Third, as mentioned later in this chapter, Acker (1990) argued to eliminate the systemic use of gender in organization, particularly social institutions like higher education institutions,

would require a complete reconceptualization of work and restructuring of organizations. Subsequently, Acker (1990) does not provide detailed or specific recommendations for counteracting gender in organizational behavior and individual professional experiences. Conceptually, I understand Acker's (1990) argument and rationale for supporting radical, transformational change to eliminate gender in organizations rather than smaller, measured improvements to reduce gender's negative effect in organizations, particularly for working women. However, through this study, I recognized the need for immediate, tangible changes to improve women student affairs professionals' working experiences and career trajectories rather than focusing solely on the "big picture" or ideal of reconceptualizing and restructuring of major social institutions, namely higher education, work, and gender. I propose to gain the most from Acker's (1990, 1992, 2012) work on gendered organizations, researchers must provide actionable recommendations. My stance or perspective on providing necessary recommendations following the use of Acker's work in empirical research is reflected in the following section.

Recommendations for Practice

Overall, I gained a deeper understanding of how gender operates and affects women in student affairs and how some women VPSAs or SSAOs were able to navigate gendered organizational behavior throughout their careers. Based on this new understanding and insight, I offer five recommendations to address gender and mitigate its negative effects on women in the field, particularly for women who aspire to the VPSA or SSAO position. With Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organization in mind, I provide recommendations for higher education institutions and the student affairs field rather than for individual women student affairs professionals. As Acker (1990) argued, women's experiences and differential treatment in the workplace are not a result of their characteristics, qualities, competencies, and actions rather it is

a consequence of an organization's implicit gendered behavior. Therefore, the onerous to fix gendered organizations, and improve women's professional experiences and career advancement should not fall on women who are disadvantaged by the system, particularly women in low-level positions. These recommendations for practice shift the responsibility for career advancement and improved work experiences from individual women, which is prevalent in the literature, to higher education institutions and student affairs professional associations that set the standards, norms, and expectations of the field.

As discussed throughout this dissertation, women student affairs professionals operate within societal institutions and fields, namely higher education institutions and the student affairs field (Curry, 2000; Jones et al., 2015; Ropers-Huilman, 2003), that reflect, perpetuate, and are built on socially constructed ideals of gender (Acker, 1990; Scott, 1986). Gender underlies organizational culture and logic or institutional policy and practice (Acker, 1990, 2012) making it challenging to completely eradicate gender and its effects on women student affairs professionals. Acker (1990) believed to completely remove gender from organizational behavior and gender's adverse effects on women workers, "would probably require the end of organizations as they exist today, along with a redefinition of work and work relations" (pp. 154-155); however, organizations in their current form can take tangible steps toward reducing gendered behavior and improving experiences for women workers. My recommendations are primarily focused on increasing women's representation in the VPSA or SSAO role and supporting women student affairs professionals early in their careers, so they are better positioned to pursue the VPSA or SSAO role. In other words, these recommendations aim to address issues in women's leadership pipeline and increase the representation of women in VPSA or SSAO roles across the higher education system.

Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions

Participants described experiencing an “old boys’ club” or androcentric organizational culture, feelings of imposter syndrome, and the need to always be working, which were partially related to a lack of women role models at the highest level of student affairs and higher education institutions. Participants stressed the few women they saw in the VPSA or SSAO position and other high-level positions were either White, unmarried women with no children or White married women with adult children, which conveyed only a particular type of women could advance in student affairs. Participants learned women who most closely resembled or behaved in ways aligned with the ideal worker image were more likely to succeed, which led participants to, at times, not only question their place in the field and doubt their professional competency but also continually seek to align with masculine work norms. To counteract these gendered messages about who can succeed in student affairs and higher education, institutions should implement policies and practices to increase women’s representation in senior leadership roles, namely the VPSA or SSAO position.

Recognize and Address Gender Bias in Hiring

To begin, institutions should start by reviewing the process women experience entering an employment relationship. Specifically, institutional actors, likely human resource professionals and hiring managers, should review the institution’s hiring practices to remove and safeguard against gender bias. As this study involved examining women’s career trajectories or career paths in student affairs, participants described their experiences in the student affairs job market and their transition or movement between positions, which involved finding, applying, and interviewing for positions. Both Terry and Rebecca described experiencing gender bias in their institutions’ internal hiring process. As described in my findings, Terry and Rebecca were

initially made to go through a formal hiring process to move from an interim to a permanent position when men in similar circumstances were appointed to their positions. Sandra also identified gender bias in the hiring process when she was pressured to hire a less qualified White man. To safeguard against gender bias or undue advantages to men in the hiring process, which Terry, Rebecca, and Sandra recognized firsthand and the literature described as common in feminized fields, institutions' human resources departments and professionals must be strict in their equal enforcement of policies.

Additionally, institutions should ensure the placement of a human resource professional who specializes in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) on every search committee. Hiring managers and search committees can also undergo specialized training on implicit bias, application review, and other relevant skills for committee work, such as effective communication. Placing a human resource representative on every search committee and training all search committees members to be more equity-minded and better communicators would also reduce the undue burden placed on women student affairs professionals to be more collegial and collaborative than men colleagues, to serve as mediators, and to manage all relational and emotional concerns, which were points of stress for Gina and Shauna.

Hiring committees and human resource departments should also widely advertise available positions, particularly making use of professional associations' communities or working groups focused on women professionals. For the VPSA or SSAO position, these professional association groups might include NASPA's WISA Knowledge Community, NASPA's Center for Women, ACPA's Coalition for Women's Identities, and Higher Education Resource Services (HERS). Widely advertising and particularly targeting outlets for women in student affairs helps to make women professionals more aware of advancement opportunities and

increases the diversity of the candidate pool. As participants described, they often had to broadly search for career advancement opportunities and relocation to less than desirable areas while men colleagues seemed to utilize personal connections or social networks to move more easily and quickly through the field.

Invest in Women Professionals

Participants also described struggling with the gendered implications of having to relocate and leave their respective institutions to advance their careers. Although participants remained in the field despite this expectation, the literature (e.g., Jo, 2008; Marshall, 2009; Pal & Jones, 2020) emphasized this expectation is a primary motivator for women to either leave the field or elect not to pursue an upper-level or senior leadership position. Institutions can help mitigate the negative effects of women needing to relocate for career advancement by attempting to retain their own talent, particularly women student affairs professionals. Institutions can retain women professionals and prepare them for advancement by offering professional development opportunities and supporting women professionals in their own developmental pursuits, such as providing tuition remission for doctoral coursework and funding their attendance at training programs focused on preparing mid-level professionals for the VPSA or SSAO role. For example, institutions should financially support and provide women professionals time to attend programs specifically focused on moving from mid-level student affairs positions to the VPSA or SSAO role. Popular development programs include NASPA's Women's Leadership Institution and NASPA's Alice Manicur Symposium.

Although some participants mentioned attending these women-focused professional development institutes and symposia, they emphasized the value of pursuing doctoral education in advancing their careers. Participants viewed their doctorate degree as the primary reason they

were offered their VPSA or SSAO position and described a doctorate degree as essential for women to be seen as legitimate in the field and be considered for senior leadership. For example, Rebecca shared faculty immediately treated her with more respect when they learned she was admitted to a doctoral program. Similarly, Terry was viewed as “the authority on students” once she completed her program. However, participants whose institutions did not fund their doctoral education struggled to remain enrolled while working in student affairs. While pursuing her doctorate degree, Shauna left student affairs for an academic affairs position with more traditional hours and better pay. In comparison, Sandra described being “all but dissertation (ABD) for a long time” because she did not have the time to work on her dissertation while working fulltime, which increased her student loan debt. By supporting women’s professional development, particularly through graduate school tuition remission or funding, institutions communicate they value and recognize women student affairs professionals’ institutional knowledge and contributions, which can mitigate women’s feelings of imposter syndrome, improve job satisfaction and retention in the field, and help move women professionals beyond mid-level positions.

Marion, Terry, and Gina also described some difficulty accessing professional development opportunities due to their institution’s geographic location, particularly when working at rural institutions. In response, institutions’ staff development offices should explore collaborating with student affairs professional associations at the local and regional levels to offer convenient, local professional development programs. Offering local professional development programs not only communicates the institution’s support for women professionals’ learning and development but also communicates the institution’s awareness of and support for

women's external roles and responsibilities, which may make it more difficult for women to travel for professional development opportunities.

Implement Workplace Flexibility and “Family-Friendly” Policies

Although increasing representational diversity in institutional leadership is an important initial step in changing institutional or organizational culture (Pope et al., 2014) and improving women's professional experiences (Marshall, 2020), it needs to be accompanied by broader recognition of gender bias in worker norms and expectations, ideological shifts regarding gender, and informed policy changes. Acker (1990) explained having women in leadership roles is not enough to change gendered organizational behavior. Participants recognized having women in leadership does not ensure a shift in institutional or organizational culture because women can also perpetuate masculine work ideals.

Participants also shared instances when they perpetuated ideal worker norms on their staff and enforced gendered organizational logics, which are built on “the traditional, linear male model in which the professional focuses fully on a career” (Marshall, 2020, p. 290). For instance, Terry described being disillusioned, disappointed, and dismissive of staff members' request to permanently work remotely because she believed professionals must adhere to strict physical boundaries between their personal and professional lives to be efficient and productive. Marion, Rebecca, and Terry also described rejecting colleagues' and staff members' requests that they adjust their professional practices, such as schedule sending emails, to role model work-life balance. Instead, participants often wanted to be recognized for “working all the time.” Although participants mainly supported ideal worker expectations and were successful in their careers by generally aligning with them, they also recognized how these expectations can be personally and professionally damaging to women professionals. As an alternative to perpetuating ideal worker

or masculine work norms, Acker (1990) proposed organizations can move toward more gender equitable workplaces by better aligning work responsibilities and expectations with workers' personal lives or "the rhythms of life outside of work" (p. 155) and blurring the boundaries between workers' professional and personal roles. Higher education institutions and institutional leaders can help reduce the temporal, mental, emotional, and physical conflicts between professionals' work and home lives through workplace flexibility policies and "family-friendly" and policies.

While the focus of this study is on women student affairs professionals, these types of policies would benefit all professionals regardless of their gender identities and roles. Workplace flexibility policies include flexible work schedules or "flextime" that allow professionals to work outside of traditional business hours to accommodate personal needs, telecommuting or remote work accommodations, and hybrid options. Flexible work policies and accommodations can benefit not only women professionals with children who are or choose to be the primary caregiver but also non-parenting professionals. For example, Terry described supporting and encouraging her staff members to use their "flextime" to do "whatever brings them joy" whether that is attending their children's recitals, spending time with their pets, or running errands. Rebecca also described benefiting from workplace flexibility policies herself. Specifically, she appreciates being able to work remotely while accompanying her son to the dentist. Rebecca shared, "I don't have to be in at a certain time. I am a beneficiary of that flexibility." This flexibility allows Rebecca to manage both her professional and parenting responsibilities without compromising either role. Institutional leaders including VPSAs or SSAOs should consider advocating for the expansion and continuation of workplace flexibility policies, which became more popular and necessary during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In keeping with workplace flexibility policies, institutional leaders should advocate for comprehensive parental and familial leave policies and encourage professionals to utilize these policies. Women student affairs professionals are often hesitant to take advantage of these policies because of negative professional repercussions, such as being perceived as less committed to their work and less concerned with career advancement (Joyce-Brady, 2004; Zacker, 2004). Terry, Rebecca, and Gina all struggled with how they would be perceived after returning from maternity leave and the potential negative implications others' perceptions of working-mothers would have on their careers. For Terry these concerns contributed to her decision to leave the field for over a decade while having and being the primary caregiver for four children. Institutional leaders, particularly VPSAs or SSAOs, can encourage professionals to take advantage of established policies by utilizing them themselves and being a role model or an example. Terry, Rebecca, and Gina did not have the opportunity to see women supervisors taking advantage of familial or parental leave policies nor did they see women professionals with children succeeding at high levels in the field, which contributed to their anxiety. Although participants mainly disliked the popular work-life balance conversation in higher education and student affairs, they supported and were beginning to use institutions' workplace flexibility and family-friendly policies, which allowed their staff to feel more comfortable and supported doing the same. For example, Terry was very transparent with her staff in preparing to take a family medical leave to assist her daughter through cancer treatment. Overall, these types of policies smooth the boundaries between professionals' personal and professional lives and responsibilities and are especially beneficial for women professionals who often describe conflicts between their professional and personal responsibilities. Previous studies (e.g., Nobbe & Manning, 1997; Marshall, 2002; Wilk, 2016) also suggest these policies increase women's job

satisfaction, which leads to greater retention and ultimately more women advancing to senior leadership positions in student affairs.

Additionally, institutional leadership, namely VPSAs and SSAOs, can help change professional expectations placed on early and mid-level student affairs professionals, such as the expectations to complete additional, often unpaid, labor and to always be working. Participants explained at their current senior-level they feel more comfortable resisting some of these problematic expectations. For example, Sandra and Rebecca no longer personally answer every email and instead forward the email to the appropriate office on-campus. However, over the course of their careers in pursuit of their current position, they experienced and felt the adverse burden of these expectations. Now that they are in a position to shape their own student affairs divisions, VPSAs or SSAOs can set more equitable and sustainable expectations for their staff. For instance, Terry felt guilty about and judged for missing work to attend her children's sporting events when she returned to work, and she never wanted her staff to experience those feelings or miss their children's milestones for work. In this pursuit, Terry described encouraging staff members to use their time off and developing a plan for them to attend these events while maintaining coverage for the office, which sometimes involved Terry covering the front desk.

Rebecca, Sandra, and other participants also commented on student affairs' low salaries coupled with high expectations, such as regularly expecting professionals to work 50 to 60 hours a week. Sandra shared this combination of low compensation and high expectations contributed to her disillusionment with the field and, ultimately, her decision to seek employment in the private sector. In response, VPSAs or SSAOs can advocate for additional funding or alternative ways to compensate student affairs professionals for work outside of business hours, auxiliary roles, and additional institutional service work. VPSAs or SSAOs can also campaign for the

creation of additional student affairs roles and the hiring of additional staff members to reduce individuals' workloads. They should also conduct a comprehensive review of professionals' workloads to reduce or redistribute tasks, particularly ensuring women professionals have opportunities to work on projects and develop skills that position them for leadership roles or career advancement rather than having women assume the majority of student affairs' day-to-day tasks. Sandra, Gina, and Marion suggested women student affairs professionals must be provided opportunities in their current positions to develop their competency in budgeting and finance, supervision, and law, policy, and governance if they hope to be competitive for a VPSA or SSAO position in the future.

Higher education institutions can also work toward undermining gendered organizational behavior by conflating organizational boundaries, particularly allowing workers to work alongside or closer to their children to form a more communal organization that values workers as individuals (Acker, 1990). In this pursuit, VPSAs or SSAOs could encourage a more family-friendly workplace culture within their respective student affairs divisions. Family-friendly cultures not only benefit working-mothers but also all professionals because it communicates support for professionals as whole people rather than as solely workers. To promote such a culture, VPSAs or SSAOs can bring their own family members to campus events to make their external identities visible in the workplace and encourage their staff to do the same. Although participants described being recently unable to bring their family to campus because of the COVID-19 pandemic, many described previous benefits of bringing their spouses, children, and their own parents to campus. For example, Sandra described typically bringing her wife to campus for homecoming activities, which allowed them to spend time together and made working over the weekend more enjoyable. Gina also shared previously bringing her daughter to

campus for sporting events and arranging for her daughter's school to have fieldtrips at the university, which allowed her to be both a visible presence on campus and an involved parent.

Recommendations for the Student Affairs Field

While institutional-level changes are critical to address the gendered organizational behavior experienced by participants and to improve the working experiences of women student affairs professionals in general, the field must also implement changes to address the root and mitigate the effects of gendered organizational behavior in student affairs. Providing recommendations for the student affairs field broadly is pertinent and appropriate for this study given my focus on participants' career trajectories within the student affairs field, which span multiple institutions. I direct my student affairs field recommendations to student affairs professional associations because they shape the field by establishing the required competencies, practices, and expectations for student affairs professionals, and they are expected to represent student affairs professionals and their interests to relevant stakeholders. Professional associations should be especially concerned with improving the professional experiences and career trajectories of women student affairs professionals given women's dominant numerical presence in the field.

Enhance Professional Development Opportunities

Professional associations should be concerned with the disproportionate representation of women VPSAs or SSAOs compared to the number of women who pursue a career in student affairs and enter the field. To address this concern and increase women's presence at the senior leadership level, professional associations should increase their investment in the professional development of women student affairs professionals. Professional associations already offer some professional development programs focused on preparing women for the VPSA or SSAO

role, which some participants attended (e.g., Gina, Sandra, and Marion). However, participants who attended these programs described them as having limited influence on their career trajectories. Participants also mentioned the associated costs as a barrier to their and their staff members' attendance. These professional development offerings are typically expensive, and location based, which limits who can access and utilize these resources. By limiting access, these programs reinforce gendered messages about who can and should pursue senior leadership positions in student affairs. They implicitly discourage women who violate the ideal worker norms by having children or other significant care responsibilities and subsequently cannot attend these programs. The financial cost also excludes many first-generation women and women from low-income backgrounds, which contributes to women's overall limited representation and makes it even more difficult for women of Color to access and benefit from these resources. Associations can make these programs more accessible and inclusive by offering a virtual or remote track for women to attend anywhere and eliminate travel costs. Associations should also consider offering these professional development programs alongside their national conference programs, so women professionals do not need to either arrange for multiple, costly trips or sacrifice their professional development by attending only one.

Participants mentioned the central role of doctoral education in advancing their careers. However, graduate education can often be too expensive and time-consuming for women professionals to pursue. Professional associations can help fill the need for additional education by collaborating with higher education and student affairs graduate preparation program faculty to offer expanded professional development or continuing education workshops. These offerings can focus on developing competency areas required for the VPSA or SSAO position, which women student affairs professionals are unlikely to receive in their day-to-day roles.

Professional associations should also critically examine the field's professional expectations for gender bias and address problematic expectations, such as those discussed in my findings. Professional associations can work toward changing problematic expectations, namely the need for women to prove themselves, earn their positions, and always be working, through collaborations with higher education and student affairs graduate preparation programs to socialize new professionals to espouse greater work-life balance and more sustainable approaches to student affairs work. Professional associations can also address these problematic expectations with current student affairs professionals through professional development workshops, blogposts, podcasts, and other easily consumed information mediums. These professional development offerings might include a series for supervisors in the field focused on teaching them how to support staff holistically, how to create sustainable professional expectations for staff, how to reduce gender bias in hiring and evaluation, how to overcome imposter syndrome, how to mentor staff, and how to both implement work-life balance techniques and encourage those techniques amongst their staff. These workshop topics reflect areas participants described struggling with themselves and as supervisors.

Create Mentoring and Social Networking Opportunities

Lastly, related to student affairs being an “old boys club,” many participants mentioned lacking access to a social network and professional support system throughout their careers, which slowed their career advancement and made working in the field more difficult. To address this challenge, professional associations could develop a robust mentoring program for women in the field. This program could match a small group or cohort of entry and mid-level women professionals with a woman VPSA or SSAO mentor. I suggest a small group or cohort of mentees for every VPSA or SSAO for logistical reasons, namely the limited number of women

VPSAs or SSAOs compared to the high number of women entering the field and to reduce the labor for women VPSAs or SSAOs who are already overtaxed. Professional associations should provide training and a learning-outcome based mentorship curriculum to further reduce the workload for women VPSAs or SSAOs who are willing to be mentors. Associations should also consider compensating mentors to role model valuing care work. This compensation could come in the form of professional development funds, resources, or national conference registration discounts.

Participants also described feeling lonely in their current VPSA or SSAO role and lacking a social network to process work incidents. Professional associations could offer virtual forums and networking opportunities to allow women VPSAs or SSAOs to feel more connected and get advice from others with a shared professional role and gender identity. Although participants were able to navigate gendered organizations to secure a coveted VPSA or SSAO position, their gendered experiences over the course of their careers highlighted areas in need of improvement to benefit current and future women student affairs professionals.

Recommendations for Future Research

Through this study, I highlighted the often hidden and underexamined influence of gender on women professionals in pursuit and fulfillment of career advancement and senior leadership positions in student affairs. I added a needed organizational theory perspective and critical gender lens to the experiences of women in student affairs expanding the literature and conversation. Specifically, my work illuminated how gendered organizational behavior, expressed through institutional agents, logics, and culture, cyclically affected women's ability to progress through the student affairs field and their professional behavior. My research also highlights multiple avenues for future research.

Expand Research to Center Women of Color VPSAs or SSAOs

Although I attempted to include the professional experiences and career trajectories of women VPSAs or SSAOs with a diversity of identities and lived experiences, my participant pool was limited in terms of racial identities. All participants except two, Marion and Shauna, identified as White women, which led to an overrepresentation of the experiences and career trajectories of professionals from a privileged racial identity. Approximately 51% of professionals in the field are White women, making them the largest racial and gender demographic group in the field (Pritchard & McChesney, 2018; Williams, 2021). Future research can and should focus on centering the voices and experiences of more women of Color who are significantly underrepresented compared to the number of White women and men in senior leadership.

Women of color professionals' career trajectories and working experiences are unique from White women professionals' experiences and a necessary focal area for future research. Specifically, women of Color's professional experiences must be explored through the lens and careful consideration of intersectionality a term and theory coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) that allows for the attention to and exploration of individuals' multiple social identities and positionalities (Strayhorn, 2017). For example, the women of Color included in this study (e.g., Marion and Shauna) described experiencing racism in addition to gender bias within their educational and professional experiences; however, due to the nature and ramifications of this study, the interaction or interplay between participants' gender and race, and the effects of embodying multiple marginalized identities on their career trajectories was not explored to the full extent. Future studies can and should consider how the intersection, interplay, or relationship between professionals' gender and race, particularly for women of Color who embody multiple

marginalized identities, influences individuals' career trajectories and professional experiences. Consideration of intersectionality is acutely relevant for student affairs given the disproportionate demographic make-up of the field, the lack of women of Color in senior leadership positions, and women of Color student affairs professionals' negative working experiences. Utilizing intersectionality as a theoretical framework or lens would allow future researchers to further explore the pressure and inequitable professional expectations (e.g., being responsible for diversity, equity, and inclusion work and all students of Color) women of Color student affairs professionals report experiencing due to their visual identities (e.g., gender and race) (West, 2020).

Within the larger area of research on women of Color, I particularly recommend future research focus on the professional experiences and career trajectories of Hispanic women or Latina VPSAs or SSAOs who I quickly learned are not only underrepresented in the VPSA or SSAO position (NASPA, 2014) but also severely unresearched and largely missing from the literature. Although some emerging scholars (e.g., Garibay, 2019; Pertuz, 2017) and student affairs professional associations (NASPA, n.d.-c) are exploring Latinx/o/a professionals' experiences working in student affairs, there remains little published research on and consideration of Latina's unique gendered and racialized experiences in high-level student affairs positions. The only women of Color who were notably represented in the literature on women in higher education and student affairs were Black women. However, more research on Black women student affairs professionals and Black women VPSAs or SSAOs is still needed to compete with the conflation of White women and women of Color's divergent experiences.

Relatedly, future research should consider how gendered organizational behavior is tied to Whiteness and how professionalism or what it means to be a professional in student affairs

reflects both masculine work norms and behaviors associated with Whiteness. As Gina recognized, her White racial identity allowed her to blend into the field, learn and reflect its norms, and advance more easily than her colleagues of Color. In comparison, Shauna shared being extremely cognizant of how her racial identity stands in contrast with the Whiteness of the field and its associated professional expectations, standards, and norms. The intersection of racial and gender identity, and the relationship between androcentric organizational behavior and Whiteness are important, relevant, and timely topics for future research.

Apply Different Methodologies to the Study of Women and Gender in Student Affairs

For this study, I conducted a qualitative study involving, amongst other data, two interviews and a reflection activity, which asked each participant to reflect on their career and recall their feelings and perceptions of past events. This methodological approach benefited from participants' perspective and ability to look back on the entirety of their career to point toward pivotal gendered incidents. However, this approach also relied almost entirely on participants' lens and how they chose to present or color their experiences. This drawback could be addressed in future research using different methodological approaches to study the influence of gender on women in student affairs.

For example, future researchers could conduct an extensive longitudinal study to follow women professionals' careers starting with their entry into the field through mid-level and beyond. This research design would mirror the approach utilized by Baxter Magolda (1999, 2004) in her foundational self-authorship study, which involved annual interviews with students over the course of 20 years. By annually interviewing a cohort or group of women student affairs professionals each year, researchers would obtain regular, "real-time" insight into women professionals' experiences and their shifting perspective on the influence of gender on their job

satisfaction, career advancement, and professional behavior. This research design could also expand knowledge on women who leave the field or choose to stay in mid-level positions rather than pursuing advancement in student affairs, which addresses the “success bias” of my study. Following women over the course of their careers regardless of the outcome addresses the drawbacks associated with focusing solely on women who remained in the field and rose to the VPSA or SSAO role.

Additionally, future research on women and gender in student affairs could benefit from ethnographic research. An ethnographic research design would provide not only insight on the daily work experiences of women working in student affairs but also the gendered nature of the field and higher education institutions. Ethnographic research allows researchers to “rigorously investigate the taken-for-granted, but telling facets of culture,” namely organizational culture and how the culture is embedded within organizational logics or institutional practices. Through extensive observations of women working in student affairs, such as women VPSAs or SSAOs, researchers can observe firsthand evidence of Acker’s (1990) five processes of gendered organizations rather than relying solely on participants’ reflections.

Comparative studies on men and women professionals’ experiences and career trajectories in the field would also be a rich area for research. Utilizing a comparative research methodology provides researchers an opportunity to compare the perceptions of multiple gender groups rather than relying on one group’s perception of the others’ experiences. A comparative approach would also allow research to engage in a direct comparison of the employment patterns and timeline associated with men and women’s career progression. In other words, this type of research would enhance the literature by documenting the different rate or speed with which men and women advanced in the field.

Lastly, although I am a qualitative researcher and preference qualitative modes of inquiry, research on women and gender in student affairs would benefit from updated quantitative inquiries. Quantitative studies are necessary to update collective knowledge on women's presence in and the gender composition of the field, particularly the number of women in upper-level student affairs positions. The most recent published work offering a national account of VPSAs' or SSAOs' gender composition and professional experiences is NASPA's 2014 Census Report. Although this census was previously conducted annually, data has not been published in over 8 years, which limits current knowledge on the unique professional experiences of women VPSAs or SSAOs. Overall, empirical research on women professionals in student affairs needs to be updated.

Conclusion

The purpose of this dissertation study was to consider how women VPSAs or SSAOs perceived gender's influence on their experiences working in student affairs and their career trajectories to ultimately improve the working experiences of women in students. Through a comparative case study of six women VPSAs' or SSAOs' individual experiences working in their previous and current student affair roles and their career paths, I recognized gender externally and internally acted upon and influenced women in the field. As these women worked and progressed within student affairs in pursuit and fulfillment of the VPSA or SSAO position, they encountered interactions from supervisors and colleagues, institutional and workplace culture, and professional expectations, which were inherently gendered. These women also had to navigate internalized components of gender, which affected or presented themselves through participants' feelings of imposter syndrome, their need to always be working, and their leadership or supervisory style and professional behavior. By applying an organizational theory

framework based on Acker's (1990) work on gendered organizations, participants' cases illuminate the often-hidden ways gender is perpetuated and operationalized to the disadvantage of women professionals within student affairs despite the field's inclusive reputation and designation as a feminized field.

Participants' ability to navigate gendered organizations not designed with their professional success in mind and secure a VPSA or SSAO positions is noteworthy rather than commonplace. These participants are especially remarkable given their additional social identities and roles. Four out of six participants are mothers, which normally decreases women's likelihood of remaining in student affairs and advancing beyond mid-level positions (Burmicky et al., 2022). Gina and Rebecca are especially unique given their relatively young ages and their being mothers of young children. Mothers of young children are even more likely to struggle to remain in student affairs let alone advance to senior leadership given the conflicting temporal demands (McKinnon-Crowley et al., 2022) and the negative perceptions of mothers with young children in the workplace. Shauna's and Marion's career trajectories are also notable as women of Color are less likely to be represented in VPSA or SSAO positions than their White women colleagues (NASPA, 2014). In fact, Shauna is the only participant to serve as VPSA at a R-1 institution, the institutional type least likely to have women in senior leadership positions (NASPA, 2014).

Despite rising to a senior leadership position and securing the VPSA or SSAO role on their respective campuses, participants continued to recognize and confront divisions along gender lines, gendered symbols and images, gendered interactions, gendered performance, and gendered social structures in their daily work. Participants' professional experiences and career

trajectories accentuates the persistence of gendered organizational behavior and its effects on women professionals at every career stage and organizational level.

This dissertation provides a necessary expansion to the conversation and literature on women in higher education by focusing exclusively on women student affairs professionals. I also centered gender in a way that is missing from previous research on women in higher education and student affairs. This work underscores how gender is embedded within the structure and practices of the student affairs field and higher education institutions and point toward tangible ways to improve women professionals' working experiences and ability to advance in the field.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Protocols

Within this document, I include my topic outline, which highlights the thematic categorization or breakdown of interview questions, and first round and second round interview protocols. These protocols include a proposed script or talking points, questions, and potential probes or follow-up questions. Following a semi-structured interview approach, I constructed these interviews around open-ended questions. Although I developed several potential questions and probes, I prioritize participants' own words and will follow participants' responses and lead. As a result, I may not ask each question verbatim nor follow the exact order offered in these protocols.

Topic Outline (will not be shared with participants):

1) Introduction/ Warm-up Questions Focused on Participant

Dual-purpose:

- a. To learn more about the participant and to build rapport.
- b. To gather insight on relevant background information, such as participants' experience in student affairs and their understanding of identity.

2) Questions Focused on Professional Experiences/Career Trajectory

- a. Through these questions, I hope to gather information that connects participants' professional experiences and career path with their gender identity.

3) Questions Focused on Current Position and Institution

- a. These questions center on participants' current position, namely evidence of gender affecting women's behavior and choices in their current positions.

4) Questions Focused on Professional and Personal Role Conflict

- a. I designed these questions to focus on the potential conflict between participants' professional and personal roles and responsibilities, which are regularly cited as reasons for women's high attrition and limited ability to secure upper-level positions in student affairs.

5) Questions Focused on Gender and Professional Experiences

- a. Through these questions, I build upon participants' responses and explicitly question the influence of gender or the effects of gender on their professional experiences, choices, and behaviors. Although gender may come up earlier in the interview, I utilize these questions in order to explicitly discuss gender with participants.

First Round Interview Protocol

Introduction Section/Script:

Good morning/afternoon/evening (use appropriate greeting based on time of interview),

Before we begin, I want to say thank you again for agreeing to meet with me and for your willingness to help me with my dissertation research. As you know, my name is Alyssa Stefanese Yates and I am a doctoral candidate at Michigan State University, studying higher, adult, and lifelong education. **I am interviewing you today in order to learn more about your professional experiences in student affairs. I am also interested in how you perceive your gender identity interacting with your professional experiences and career path.**

In the resulting dissertation paper, I will utilize pseudonyms and omit any identifying characteristics, such as the name of your institution, in order to ensure your anonymity. We can stop our conversation at any time, and you may elect to not answer any question or questions you choose. I want to emphasize that you are in complete control of your participation, it is free and voluntary, so please share as much or as little as you feel comfortable doing.

With your permission, I would like to audio-record and take notes during our conversation. I will be the only person with access to the recordings and my advisor will only have access to my fieldnotes (without any identifying items). Others will only see the completed paper, which will neither reveal your identity nor your institution. At any point during our conversation, you may tell me to pause or turn-off the recorder and/or to disregard something you shared. Additionally, following this interview, I will share a transcript of our conversation for your review, so you may make corrections, deletions, or additions. Based on this description, do you feel comfortable allowing me to record and take notes on our conversation? If so, can you provide verbal confirmation or permission for me to audio-record?

This interview will last about an hour to an hour and a half. Throughout the interview, I will ask you a few questions I prepared; however, feel free to expand on your answers and share whatever you feel is relevant, I am interested in you, your story, and your experience in the field.

Do you have any questions? Do you feel comfortable getting started?

Interview Questions:

Section One: Opening/Warm-Up Questions Focused on Participant

To begin, I would like to learn more about you.

- 1) Tell me about yourself (e.g., your position/role on campus, roles outside of work, identity characteristics)
- 2) Tell me the story of how you came to pursue student affairs as your career?

Transition Statement:

Thank you for sharing, (make connection/rephrase something participant shared, e.g. I also have a professional background in residence life) So, now that I know a bit more about you, I want to hear more about your career path or trajectory.

Section Two: Questions Focused on Professional Experiences/Career Trajectory

- 3) Walk me through your student affairs career, starting with your first professional experience until today.
- 4) Thinking back on your career path, tell me how your professional aspirations or career goals developed or changed.
 - a. What do you think motivated those changes? What influenced you to change your aspirations or goals?
- 5) How would you describe your experience working in student affairs?
- 6) Based on your experiences and career, how would you describe the field (student affairs)? What are its expectations of professionals, such as yourself?
- 7) Can you explain how your identity connects with your experience working in student affairs?

Section Three: Questions Focused on Current Position

- 8) Can you describe your current position? What does it involve and how does it fit within your institution?
- 9) How did you come to your current position and institution?
- 10) Tell me a bit about your experience as VPSA [or insert title at their particular institution] at [current institution].
- 11) What are the most rewarding and the most challenging aspects of your position?
- 12) What personal qualities, characteristics, or aspects of your identity assist you in fulfilling this position? Which, if any, hinder your success within this position?

Closing Statement:

Well, those are all the questions I have for you today. Is there anything else you would like to add or share with me? I will be sharing a transcription of our conversation shortly. Please feel free to comment on it, delete, clarify, etc. and send it back to me with your thoughts. **I will also be reaching out to schedule our second conversation in which we will focus a bit more on your insight into gender dynamics within your institution. I will also be in touch with my**

initial analysis, which you are welcome and encouraged to respond to. I will also send a short reflection activity and ask you to share a copy of your CV or resume.

***If participants did not share or self-identify throughout the course of the interview, make sure to gather participants' gender, race, age, educational attainment/degrees, and partnership status/familial structure (in their own words).**

Second Round Interview Protocol

Introduction Section/Script:

Good morning/afternoon/evening (use appropriate greeting based on time of interview),

It is great to speak with you again and I look forward to learning more about your experience working in student affairs. Again, I want to say thank you for taking the time to meet with me and for your willingness to share your insight and lived experience as a woman working in the field.

Today, we're going to build on our last conversation; specifically, the last time we left off discussing your current position, which I would love to hear more about. I also want to learn a bit more about how your position influences or interacts with your personal role and responsibilities. Also, we will focus a bit more on your perception of the effects of gender on your career and your current position.

Similarly, to our last conversation, I want to emphasize that you may stop our conversation at any time, and you may elect to not answer any question or questions you choose. Please share as much or as little as you feel comfortable doing. I will also again be audio-recording and taking notes with your permission. At any point during our conversation, you may tell me to pause or turn-off the recorder and/or to disregard something you shared. Additionally, following this interview, I will again share a transcript of our conversation for your review. Based on this description, do you feel comfortable allowing me to record and take notes during this conversation? If so, can you provide verbal confirmation or permission for me to audio-record?

This interview will last about an hour to an hour and a half. I do have a few questions; however, feel free to expand on your answers and share whatever you feel is relevant.

Do you have any questions? Do you feel comfortable getting started?

Section Four: Questions Focused on Professional and Personal Role Conflict

To get us started today:

- 1) Walk me through a typical workday for you, from when you wake up in the morning until you go to bed at night.
- 2) Tell me about your professional and personal roles and responsibilities.
 - a. Potential probe: Which of your roles (e.g., student affairs professional/title of current position, mother/caretaker, partner, etc.) takes priority and why?
- 3) How do your professional position and responsibilities affect your personal life and responsibilities? And vice versa? [May reference the reflection activity participants were asked to complete between the 1st and second round interview]

Transition Statement: As you know, I am interested in exploring women's career paths in student affairs; specifically, I hope to gain insight into how women, such as yourself, are able to navigate and succeed within the field in order to decrease attrition in the field and improve the presence of women in leadership positions. So, the next few questions will focus explicitly on your career path and how gender may or may not have influenced it.

Section Five: Questions Focused on Gender and Professional Experiences

- 4) Reflecting on your student affairs career, have you experienced any challenges related to your gender or have you ever felt you were treated differently as a result of your gender either in your current position or in previous roles? Can you describe this experience or these experience(s)?
- 5) (If applicable) How did you overcome or navigate these challenges or this differential treatment?
- 6) Has being a woman affected your experience within your role and has it affected the way you fulfill your professional responsibilities? If so, how? Can you provide a few examples?
- 7) What choices or experiences positioned you or best prepared you to be an institutional leader and to fulfill your current role?
- 8) What advice would you give women who aspire to be leaders in student affairs?

Closing Statement:

I cannot thank you enough for your thoughtful responses and your time. Before ending our conversation, is there anything else you would like to add or share with me? Is there anything else you hoped I would ask? Again, I will email you a transcription of today's conversation for your review and response.

* Note that this protocol may be revised, dependent upon what I learn in the first round of interviews and through document analysis

Appendix B

Research Questions in Relation to Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions
1) How do women VPSAs or SSAOs perceive the influence of gender on their professional experiences and career trajectories?	Interview 1 – Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7, Q9 Interview 2 – Q3, Q4, Q5, Q7, Q8
2) How do women VPSAs or SSAOs describe the influence of gender on their current role, namely their experiences and choices in this role?	Interview 1 – Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7, Q8, Q9, Q10, Q11, Q12 Interview 2 – Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7, Q8

Note. In positioning my interview questions, I considered the general theme of the question. This theme included any subsequent probes and follow-up questions. I also made these determinations based on how participants may answer the question; for example, within the question, I may not explicitly ask about gender, but participants may respond in ways that reflect their gender identity, especially if “woman” is a salient identity for them. These interview questions are first demarcated as either “Interview 1” or “Interview 2,” which indicates if I intend to ask these questions during the first-round interview or the second-round interview. Then, I labeled each question with the capital letter “Q” and the corresponding number listed on the provided interview protocols.

Appendix C

Copy of Consent Form

Research Participant Information and Consent Form

Study Title: Women Student Affairs Professionals: Traversing Gendered Organizations for Career Advancement and Leadership Positions

Researcher and Title: Alyssa Stefanese, Doctoral Candidate

Department and Institution: Educational Administration Department, Michigan State University

Contact Information: stefane7@msu.edu

EXPLANATION OF THE RESEARCH

You are being asked to participate in a research study on the relationship between women vice presidents of student affairs' gender identity and their professional experiences and career trajectory or path. Researchers are required to provide a consent form to inform you about the research study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to explain risks and benefits of participation including why you might or might not want to participate, and to empower you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to discuss and ask the researchers any questions you may have. You must be at least 18 years old to participate in this research.

WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO

Your participation in this study will include two interviews ranging in duration from an hour to an hour and a half and completion of a reflection activity, namely you will be asked to draw a career and life trajectory or timeline. The research will also analyze your curriculum vitae (CV) or resume, press releases that reflect your career milestones (if applicable), and news articles featuring you (if applicable). You will also be offered the opportunity to participate in participant validation or member checks, which involve reviewing your interview transcriptions for clarifications, additions, or deletions, and offering feedback on the researcher's initial data analysis.

YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW

Your participation in this study should be completely free and voluntary. You have the right to say no to participating in this research. You can stop your participation at any time, and you may elect to not answer any question you so choose. There will be no consequences if you decide to cease your participation.

COSTS AND COMENSATION FOR BEING IN THE STUDY

You will not directly benefit from your participation in this study. However, your participation in this study may contribute to an improved understanding of how women student affairs professionals are treated in the student affairs field and how women student affairs professionals are able to succeed within a gendered organization. Your contribution to this study may contribute to women's improved positionality and decreased attrition in student affairs. Additionally, your participation may contribute to a deeper understanding of the gendered behavior and expectations of the field.

POTENTIAL RISKS

The most likely risk of participating in this study is minimal, namely using your time. There are no risks to your employment as your identity will not be revealed.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

All information that identifies you will be removed (e.g., your name and the name of your institution). After such removal, the data could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from you [or your legally authorized representative].

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the researcher (Alyssa Stefanese Yates: stefane7@msu.edu) or her academic advisor (Dr. Matthew Wawrzynski: mwawrzyn@msu.edu).

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT.

Your signature below means that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Signature:

Date:

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

Appendix D

Reflection Activity

Women Student Affairs Professionals: Traversing Gendered Organizations for Career Advancement and Leadership Positions

Alyssa Stefanese Yates, HALE Doctoral Candidate, Michigan State University

Name:

Directions: In the space provided, please draw a timeline of your career or your career path starting with college until today. Note any significant life events or experiences that affected your career. Please also note job changes or transitions, pauses in employment (if applicable), etc.

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