“Damned if Ya Do, Damned if Ya Don’t”: A Critical Narrative Inquiry Exploring the Gendered Racism Experienced by Black Women Housing Professionals in Higher Education

Shaniquè Jazmine Broom

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A Critical Narrative Inquiry Exploring the Gendered Racism Experienced by Black
Women Housing Professionals in Higher Education

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Presented to
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Shaniquè Jazmine Broom
June 2022
Advisor: Dr. Cecilia Orphan
Abstract

Between 1999 and 2018, there was an 11% decrease in Black women staff and administrators at post-secondary institutions. This study utilized Black Feminist Thought and Sista Circle Methodology to uncover how Black women reflected on experiences of and coped with gendered racism at PWIs. Participants offered reflections on their relationships with Black women and men, white men and women, and students. Black women shared their reflections with discrimination and a deceptive institutional culture. Black women also discussed utilizing several coping strategies such as hyper-awareness, hypervigilance, enacting personal and professional boundaries, avoiding hypervisibility and engaging in personal and familial connections with the greater Black community. Lastly, Black women discussed utilizing resilience as an unconscious and omnipresent coping strategy. I offer several recommendations encouraging institutions to enact system change and calling for those that harm Black women, specifically Black men, and white women, to reconsider the hypocrisy in their support of Black women. I present a narrative of critical pessimism relating to institutional inaction regarding the mistreatment of Black women housing professionals at predominantly white institutions.

Keywords: Black feminist thought, Sista Circle methodology, Black women housing professionals, gendered racism, predominantly white institutions, resilience
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Chapter One: Introduction

To the Black women of the world, who love so hard and so loud and so deep but are often shown love, it at all, in silence.

Thank you.
I love you.
Loudly.
Asé.

As a residence hall director, I was under immense pressure. I was often solely responsible for hundreds of students’ lives and their co-curricular experiences outside of the classroom. I was frequently required to make split-second decisions that could positively or negatively impact a student’s experience within my community. Often, the decisions I had to make resulted in life-or-death scenarios as I responded to physical health and mental and emotional health emergencies. I was often one of the first people that Black students came to when they had negative experiences on campus. These negatives experiences include academic challenges, personal and development goal setting, or even various forms of discrimination.
One morning I woke up to numerous emails, text messages and missed phone calls. I was being called to support one of my Black female students who were in an emotional crisis. Of course, I happened to be the only Black woman housing director in the area, so this responsibility fell on my shoulders. The previous night the 2016 United States of America presidential election results had been confirmed. A young boy asked his mother that same year, “Is [presidential candidate] a bad person? Because I heard that if he becomes president, all the black and brown people must leave and we’re going to become slaves” (Desmond-Harris, 2016, para. 1). I was not the only person afraid. Black and Brown adults and children around the country feared for their imminent safety after the election results were announced (Costello, 2016). That night I cried myself to sleep while hearing the screams of joy from the students who were excited about the election results. Excited students ran up and down the hallway of the residence hall, belting cheers of joy and saying, “We told you he’d win!” Even as the hall director, I was too emotionally drained, albeit a bit afraid for my safety, to address the noise violation(s). So, I turned on my sound machine on 100% and cried myself to sleep, hoping that I would wake up and find that the previous night was a bad dream.

Blad (2016) reported that in response to the presidential election of 2016 and the divisive rhetoric during the Republican candidate’s campaign, students of color felt unwelcome, unsafe, and singled out by their peers. After looking at my phone, I took a few moments to calm down before going to the lobby. I called my mentor, another Black women administrator on campus, and I asked her how I was supposed to support this student through this uncertainty when I was uncertain of how I would continue to show
up as a Black woman at this institution. My student feared for her safety as a Black woman on a predominately white campus and did not want to attend the class for fear of what her white conservative classmates might say or do. I was afraid for my safety as well. As an expert of my own experience as a Black woman previously employed as a housing professional (Collins, 2000), I frequently felt silenced, like my perspectives and opinions were overlooked. I was afraid of how I would be treated by the students and their parents, especially as the first Black residence director for my hall which was built in 1960. My mentor told me to share my fears and apprehensions with the concerned student. My mentor reminded me that the support this student was looking for was unlikely to be an answer or an actual fix for her problem. As Black women, we often know this fear and apprehension we feel lasts forever. My mentor shared that the student may find support and validation in hearing that she was not alone in her fears and could support each other as we navigate the same institution.

The previous events and conversations that followed were some of the many instances where I was reminded that Black women experience higher education through a specific lens of gender violence and racism on campus (Howard-Baptiste, 2014; Patitu & Hinton, 2003). I also learned through praxis, the combining knowledge gained from learned theory and personal experiences with facilitated action (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), how Black women can learn, comfort, and challenge other Black women as we navigate racialized and gendered challenges on campus. As residence hall directors at predominantly white institutions, Black women face challenges every day beyond their role in an institution of higher education. Black women must grapple with racial and
gender discrimination that is often perpetuated by their students, parents, colleagues, and superiors (Howard-Baptiste, 2014; Steele, 2018). My research priority is to continuously center and amplify Black women’s voices, specifically those working in housing at predominately white institutions. My research will provide an opportunity for Black women to share their experiences and reflections upon those experiences in hopes that other Black women can learn from and feel validated by their narratives.

**Problem Statement**

Black women professionals attain higher education roles at higher rates than other racial minorities and exit the student affairs field at higher rates than other racial minorities (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019). From 1999 to 2018, there has been an 11% decrease in Black women staff and administrators at post-secondary institutions (NCES, 2019). In 2021, it was reported that university employees’ attitudes have shifted resulting in a significant number of employees, particularly people of color, to consider leaving the field (Ellis, 2021). It was reported that “staff members say they no longer trust university leaders to have their best interests at heart” (Ellis, 2021, p. 4). It can be assumed that these reflections of faculty and staff as articulated by Ellis, are similar to the experiences of Black women housing professionals who experience gendered racism within their role within student affairs. Black women play a significant role in enhancing student success, and their efficacy is unparalleled compared to other student affairs professionals (Watson & McClellan, 2020). In Fall 2018, it was reported that there were 16,438 Black women professional staff working in student and academic affairs or other services (NCES, 2019). Of the 182,831 professional staff
working in student and academic affairs, 16,438 identify as Black women in the US (NCES, 2019). As practitioners know, staff must reflect the student population accurately. Research shows that student interactions with a professional staff of color provide emotional benefits that significantly aid a student’s learning and development through formal and informal educational opportunities (R. Davidson et al., 2011; MacKinnon & Associates, 2004; Moran, 2001). Current research shows that Black women’s presence in higher education leads to support for students of color (Watson & McClellan, 2020). However, for students of color, specifically Black students, their interactions with Black women professional staff are more infrequent due to Black women professionals’ departure from the field, impacting the overall climate for students of color. Black women experience both racism and sexism and exist as members of two groups that have been particularly marginalized by higher education (Moses, 1989). These marginalized experiences primarily go unnoticed and unaddressed by professionals in higher education as Black women are often ignored and subsequently silenced by their colleagues and superiors (Choates, 2012; Howard-Baptiste, 2014; Steele, 2018). Given these racialized and gendered experiences, the intersection of race and gender, Black women should be prioritized in emerging literature.

A report from InsideHigherEd (2020) shares several stories of institutional staff and administrators who departed their roles in student affairs. For example, in this report, Lesley Lokko commented in her public resignation letter, her reasoning for departing her role and institution. She shared that she left as “the lack of respect and empathy for Black people, especially Black women, caught [her] off guard, although it’s by no means
unique to [her institution]” (InsideHigherEd, 2020, p. 13). Lokko also attributed her departure to self-preservation as she consistently navigated racism as a faculty member on campus (InsideHigherEd, 2020). In 2021, several administrative staff released announcements of their resignation from University of North Carolina Chapel Hill after the public was made aware that Black journalist and scholar Nikole Hannah-Jones was not granted tenure from the institution (Schlemmer, 2021). Hannah-Jones eventually was offered tenure after the public was made aware of her mistreatment. Black women administrators at the institution saw her mistreatment as a final straw after they, too, experienced a hostile work climate (Schlemmer, 2021). Professor and director of the Center for the Study of the American South, Malinda Maynor Lowery, attributed her departure to “accumulated, recognizable patterns of decision-making … which makes it difficult for [Black women] to thrive” (Schlemmer, 2021, para. 13). Black women professionals have left the field, but little academic research exposes reasons for their departure or decreased professional interest in student affairs. Likely, the lack of awareness from departmental leaders regarding the racism and sexism Black women face and their emotional and behavioral responses to these experiences contribute to a hostile working environment, and lack of support in the workplace contributes to their departure from the role (C. Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003).

Current literature exploring Black women’s higher education experiences focuses on faculty and their resistance to institutional discrimination and how they attempt to navigate white supremacy, systemic structures of oppression that impact their promotion to tenure, and the academy’s lack of representation of them in faculty roles (Davis &
Maldonado, 2015; Evans, 2007; Perlow, 2018). Howard-Baptise (2014) found that Black women professors felt ignored, invisible, and incompetent due to their experiences in higher education. Researchers have explored Black female students’ experiences and personal narratives and their reflections on mentoring and student support services (Zamani, 2003). Studies have focused on Black female students in higher education and how their identities shape their educational experience (Zamani, 2003). Patitu and Hinton (2003) facilitated research on Black female faculty and administrators in higher education and their experiences with racism and sexism. Still, these studies failed to highlight these women’s self-reflections to those experiences as a form of meaning-making and analysis.

While the research exploring faculty and students’ experiences and needs are valuable as it sheds light on the experiences of Black women, there is a need for additional research. Most research has focused on Black women who are students or faculty and not explicitly housing professionals. Research is needed to explore Black women housing professionals’ experiences and reflections, focusing on their critical reflections. This research is necessary to provide transparency in higher education about the experiences and reflections of Black women that can inform strategies for improving support for these professionals.

Understanding the experiences of Black women housing professionals in higher education requires the exploration of the barriers that the dual systems of oppression, both racism and sexism, create for them as they navigate higher education (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014; Hylton, 2012; Miles, 2012; Ravello, 2016). When interviewed about their higher education experiences, Black women often cite racism and sexism as issues they
navigate in the higher education workplace (Hinton, 2001). As found in a study by Patitu and Hinton (2003) exploring Black women faculty’s experiences and concerns at predominately white institutions, Black women in higher education reported being shut out of workgroups due to their race, gender, or sexual orientation. These unique experiences of gendered racism present challenges for Black women in higher education and, if unaddressed, can be a significant barrier to personal and professional success. Choates (2012) found that Black women senior administrators shared that they often felt invisible and had to work harder than their colleagues to be seen as credible in the workplace by their white colleagues and superiors. However, Miles (2012) found that Black women were less likely to hold senior-administrator roles even when they had similar qualifications as those in power. By exploring these discriminatory acts, student affairs professionals can uncover and explore Black women’s experiences and how to best support them. As stated by Andrews (1993):

The double whammy of race and gender, being Black and female, compounded by the attainment of a high level of education, predictably creates problems on both a professional and personal level. Black women must contend with the professional pressures associated with working in a historically White, middle- and-upper-middle class, male-dominated profession, as well as attempt to balance the demands of life outside the professional domain. (p. 182)

A study by Moses (1989) exploring the obstacles Black staff and students face at predominantly white institutions and historically Black colleges and universities found that Black female administrators were often overly represented in entry and mid-level positions. It was stated that Black women administrators were more often “stereotyped, resented, or even treated with disrespect because they are perceived as less qualified” (Moses, 1989, p. 14). Wiggins (2017) found that Black women found themselves
frequently negotiating their personal and professional life demands. Black women were expected to be self-sacrificing and show up for everyone but themselves in their personal and professional lives. After 32 years, little changed as Townsend (2021) study had similar findings supporting that Black women felt that they experienced mistreatment in their workplace as their superiors thought they were less qualified. Due to these negative perceptions in the workplace, Black women are expected to contribute to the field of higher education while being dismissed and not invested in by their department and the broader campus. For Black women to continue to experience the same negative perceptions three decades later points to a significant need for this additional and more in-depth research on the experiences of Black women in higher education.

A summary of testimonies from the African American Women’s Voices Project highlights that Black women often respond to these challenges by a sort of ‘shifting’ or resilience as a means of survival (C. Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). These shifts may be referred to as displays of strength, anger, or other references to their hard work and resilience. In performing these shifts, Black women are then portrayed negatively by the dominant culture in literature, especially within education, to control how others view them (Collins, 1991; Cooper, 2018). Further research is needed to identify “shifting” or resilience elements that the participants experienced when responding to gendered racism in the workplace. My study identifies themes and trends in the reflections of Black women housing professionals by acknowledging and exploring the participants’ resilience and strategies that Black women use to respond to gendered racism.
Collins (1991) posits intersectionality and ‘controlling images’ as subthemes of Black feminist thought (BFT). According to Scott (1991), Black women understand feminism through the oppression of their race, gender, and class. Scott (1991) introduces four Black women’s narratives that explore their experiences as Black women in America and their survival habits. These habits of survival reference the adjustments both externally and internally that Black women make in response to racial and gendered oppression, (Scott, 1991). Many of these adjustments made by Black women are in response to dominant public narratives and critiques on Black women and their emotions. There exists the controlling image of the Angry Black woman that, according to Harris-Perry (2011), is used to dismiss justifiable anger or frustration at pain or injustice.

Black women housing professionals play a significant role in the overall success of on-campus students (Watson & McClellan, 2020) yet experience discrimination in the workplace as a form of misogynoir. Misogynoir is a term coined by queer Black feminist Moya Bailey, captures the specific hatred, dislike, distrust, and prejudice directed toward Black women (Bailey & Trudy, 2018). Black women housing professionals are also vastly underrepresented in higher education literature. By exploring and understanding how Black women housing professionals experience and strategize in response to gendered racism in the field, practitioners can better support Black women at their institutions.

**Purpose of Study**

Research fails to address the experiences of Black women in higher education with a special focus on Black women housing professionals. Research predominantly
focuses on either the Black women’s experience of racism or sexism in the workplace. This research is then followed by separate literature that engages Black women’s emotional and behavioral responses to such negative experiences. Often Black women are left to process their experiences with racism in higher education alone, if at all (Choates, 2012; Steele, 2018). Black women’s processing may not always reference academic literature but is primarily facilitated through small, peer group engagement (Collins, 2000; Johnson, 2015).

In my exploration, literature covering Black women’s experiences focuses on racism and sexism and does not reference their individual expertise or reflections on these experiences. Allowing the Black women housing professionals to articulate how these experiences of gendered racism affect them can be a space for validation and transparency so that they can find support in each other and that their voices are no longer silenced or ignored (Johnson, 2015). This study provided a space for Black women who often report being ignored and having to suffer in silence to elevate their voices and share their experiences (Steele, 2018). Lastly, Black women housing professionals who are fighting for better work environments and better institutional/departmental policies can use data collected in this study to advocate for better work environments. Black women can reference these narratives instead of disclosing personal experiences to their colleagues or superiors, leading to further discrimination at their institution.

Black women’s narration of their experiences is often unheard of or is not evaluated by the academy. Black women often facilitate self-work, self-reflection and theorize on ways to dismantle systems of oppression in small peer groups (C. Jones &
Shorter-Gooden, 2003). Due to this communication occurs in small groups, other higher education professionals cannot understand the experience(s) and the impact these experiences have on Black women in their office, institutions, or field. The purpose of this study was to uplift and share the experiences of Black women housing professionals who experience gendered racism in the field of higher education. Additionally, this study will serve as a resource for all higher education professionals to reflect on the shared experiences of Black women professionals in the field. Throughout this research, I created a space for Black women to reflect and process any potential outrage or frustration at their treatment in the field. Utilizing a critical narrative approach supported by BFT, I answered the following research questions:

1. How do Black women housing professionals reflect on their experiences of gendered racism in student affairs?

2. What strategies do Black women housing professionals use to navigate racist and gendered environments?

In this study, I explored the ways in which Black women reflect on their experiences with gendered racism while working as housing professionals in higher education and the strategies Black women enact as they respond to such experiences of gendered racism. I was interested in understanding the similarities and dissimilarities in these response strategies and exploring how these strategies have impacted Black women housing professionals’ experiences as housing professionals, their career plans, and professional relationships.
Theoretical Framework: Black Feminist Thought

Within this study, I utilized BFT as a framework to conceptualize Black women housing professionals’ experience in higher education. I also utilized one of the core tenets of BFT, intersectionality, to address the power dynamics that directly impact Black women housing professionals in student affairs (Collins, 1989). Intersectionality articulated the overlapping of social structures, specifically race and gender, and how racism and sexism can be interpreted from the perspective of Black women. BFT examines how Black women face racism and sexism and how they are explicitly positioned by the society within the women’s liberatory struggle. BFT will allowed me to both understand and articulate the daily struggles Black women housing professionals experience as they navigate oppression and discrimination while working at predominantly white institutions. This study used the lens of race and gender to explore Black women professionals’ experiences in higher education and their emotional and behavioral responses to gendered racism.

Collins (2008) asserts that generally, controlling images limit how others view groups and influence individual self-perception. I explored several controlling images that may impact the perception other higher education professionals have of Black women housing professionals. Generally, the conceptualization of the strongblackwoman, Angry Black woman or mammy controlling image affects the Black woman’s ability to show signs of vulnerability and socially perceived weakness in

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1 *Strongblackwoman* is combined due to Joan Morgan’s conceptualization in feminist manifesto, “When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost.”
response to challenges (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Collins, 1991). *Strongblackwoman* is a race-gender schema that has underlying connotations of strength and self-sacrificing for the Black woman (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009). As found by Wiggins (2017), participants reported they felt they had to have ‘superhero powers’ to care for everyone around them and handle all their own personal and professional challenges. The Angry Black woman trope positions Black women as aggressive and overly manipulative in their pursuit of individual success (Pilgrim, 2002). However, the mammy trope, born from the exploitation of Black women during slavery, characterizes Black women as happy, jolly, and self-sacrificing of their needs and family to support the white family. The Angry Black woman and mammy controlling images will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Two. This study uncovered controlling imagery that was referenced in Black women’s reflections upon working in higher education. This study also uncovered the thoughts of Black women’s consciousness which id further contextualized by the theoretical framework, BFT.

BFT (Collins, 1989) provides an appropriate framework for understanding Black women professionals’ experiences in higher education. Black feminism asserts that Black women are uniquely positioned as experts on their experience and therefore, their narratives represent a collective scholarship that can be used to highlight Black women’s collective standpoint (Collins, 1989). Collins conveys the collective consciousness that Black women have demonstrated throughout history with her standpoint theory and highlights Black women were the best experts to tell their stories. By highlighting and exploring the intersecting identities of race and gender for Black women in higher
education, this study creates an opportunity for reflection, understanding, and evaluation of the racist and misogynistic departmental and institutional policies and procedures impacting their experience.

This study utilizes Black women’s narrative reflection to engage in dialogue that ultimately leads to Black women housing professionals’ institutional and systemic support and care in higher education. In my experience, Black women are often the first to advocate for other marginalized groups, therefore, are deserving of self-advocacy of their own gendered and racialized experiences. By facilitating this study, I am allowing Black women housing professionals the opportunity to share their stories and advocate for themselves against their mistreatment.

**Research Design**

Creswell (2009) suggested that research vocabulary must draw from a specific qualitative inquiry language to examine and understand the central phenomenon when conducting qualitative research. Qualitative research is used to recognize, explore, and understand people, specifically a study’s participants (Creswell, 2009). BFT supports a critical narrative inquiry as it will enable the researcher to explore Black women’s lived experiences as a form of meaning-making and use dialogue to highlight the participants’ claims and expertise (Collins, 2000). By approaching this study through the methodological lens of critical narrative inquiry and the epistemologies of postmodern constructivism and transformative emancipatory paradigms, I was able to explore and articulate the potential similarities and specific unique characteristics in experiences that Black women have had to navigate gendered racism in these spaces.
Critical narrative inquiry (Hatch & Newsom, 2010) allows me the opportunity to analyze the social and cultural perspectives of Black women housing professionals as they navigate gendered racism in their respective departments. Analysis of these perspectives were facilitated through a one-on-one, semi-structured interview and two sista circle sessions that served as a form of member checking to aid in the overall trustworthiness of the study. I also utilized sista circle methodology, which is described as “a qualitative research methodology and support group for examining the lived experiences of Black women” (Johnson, 2015, p. 43).

I utilized three major tenets of the sista circle methodology: communication dynamics, the centrality of empowerment and the researcher existing as a sista scholar (Johnson, 2015). Communication dynamics are characterized by highlighting both verbal and non-verbal communication and its impact on the overall nature of the session. Sista circles allow Black women the opportunity to find camaraderie in a space where their peers may understand them. This, in turn, enables the women the opportunity to feel empowered and supported. In these sista circles, Black women can feel validated for being their authentic and complete selves. Lastly, a significant component of sista circle methodology is the ability for the researcher to also interact and engage in the conversation and overall, the research. Within this methodology, the researcher’s role extends beyond that of an observer. The researcher can and is encouraged to engage in group dialogue. By utilizing the sista circle methodology, my goal was that this experience helps to provide reciprocity to Black women.
Significance to Field

Considering the limited nature of research that explores the experiences of Black women housing professionals in higher education, this study provided a foundation for further inquiry into the lives and experiences of Black women housing professionals. This study provided a narrative reference of Black women housing professionals’ standpoint (Collins, 1989). I used this study to amplify the voices and experiences of Black women housing professionals in academic spaces. By utilizing BFT and sista circle methodology, this study positioned Black women housing professionals as authoritative experts of their experiences and reflections. This dissertation provides current housing staff leaders with written narratives and reflections of Black women housing professionals. Those leaders who have Black women housing professionals on their staff will be able to reference this study’s findings to avoid perpetuating misogynoir against the Black women in their department. This study will serve as a point of reference for institutional and student affairs leaders to recognize destructive policies and institutional practices that result in inequitable treatment of the Black women, and likely all racial and gender minorities, on their campus.

Definitions of Terms

The following are a list of operational definitions that were used in this study:

- *Anti-Blackness* - as defined by The Council for Democratizing Education as a two-part formation that voids Blackness of value. First, anti-Blackness is seen as overt racism. Second, an unethical disregard for anti-Black institutions and policies is the product of class, race, and/or gender privileges individuals may
experience due to pervasive anti-Black institutions and policies (The Movement for Black Lives, n.d)

- **Controlling images** - ideological justifications of oppression that perpetuate racial, class, and gender inequality. Used to create negative imagery that conceptualizes Black women with stereotypical patterns of behavior, usually as a method to rationalize their discrimination (Collins, 1991)

- **Gendered racism** - coined by Essed (1991) to describe how sexism and racism intertwine to form a specific phenomenon that women of color experience, and more specifically in this study, Black women

- **Intersectionality** - an overlapping of social structures, specifically race and gender; the crossroads of social identities, specifically race and gender that are organizing features that mutually constitute, reinforce, and naturalize each other (Settles, 2006; Shields, 2008)

- **Misogynoir** - coined by queer Black feminist Moya Bailey, captures the specific hatred, dislike, distrust, and prejudice directed toward Black women (Bailey & Trudy, 2018).

- **Shifting** - displays of strength, anger, or other references to Black women’s resilience in response to racism and/or sexism (C. Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003)

- **Standpoint** - Notion that Black women are uniquely positioned as experts on their experience, and therefore, their narratives represent a collective scholarship (Collins, 1989)
White supremacy - a historically based institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by white peoples and nations of the European continent for the purpose of maintaining and defending systems of wealth, power, and privilege (Challenging White Supremacy Workshop, n.d.)

Overview of Dissertation

In this study, I contribute to literature expert analysis on the experiences of Black women housing professionals as they navigate gendered racism and predominantly white institutions. Chapter One offers a brief overview of the purpose of this study and general literature about these experiences. In Chapter Two, I present additional literature that outlines the experiences of Black women in higher education historically and literature that explores the specific controlling images that negatively impact Black women in society. Within Chapter Two I share this study’s theoretical framework, BFT and its theoretical contributions to this study’s goal. Lastly, within Chapter Two, I present literature that examines how Black women respond and cope with gendered racism in the workplace.

Within Chapter Three, I provide an analysis of this study’s participants, data collection measures, and literature that affirms the use of sista circle methodology within a critical narrative inquiry. Within Chapter Four I offer evidence of the experiences and reflections of Black women as they navigate gendered racism at their institutions and articulate methods to which they were able to cope with the experiences. This chapter is also organized by themes and subthemes related to each research question. For research
question one, I present that Black women offer reflections on their salient relationships, their perspectives of deceptive institutional cultures and how they confront their experiences through the lens of the controlling images of Strong Black Woman, Angry Black woman, mammy, and Jezebel. For research question two, I present that Black women cope with gendered racism by utilizing internalized coping strategies, engaging their relationships with their community, and practiced and unconscious strategies of resilience. Lastly, within Chapter Five I offer a discussion of the findings in relation to literature and practical implications.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

In this chapter, I explore literature that supports this study’s general purpose: to explore the experiences of Black women housing professionals in student affairs. First, I underline literature that addresses general points related to housing and residence life, gendered racism as experienced by Black women, white supremacy in higher education and predominately white institutions. Next, I highlight Black women’s experiences in higher education and student affairs. As a preview to this study’s theoretical framework, I explore literature that discusses negative controlling images that color the perception of Black women in society. To conclude this chapter, I introduce and thoroughly discuss the theoretical framework used, BFT, and its contributions of intersectionality and standpoint theory.

Housing and Residence Life Staff

Frederiksen (1993) argued that

the housing and residence life career field has become a primary provider of basic student affairs professional work experiences and in so doing offers an excellent experience foundation for other career fields within student affairs. (p. 176)

The housing role is a unique entry level role for professionals to receive practical training to prepare them for the student affairs profession by offering opportunities for crisis management and response, student engagement, programming, paraprofessional management, mental health, support, and project management (Blimling, 2010). Within this role, housing professional staff may be called upon first to respond to crisis such as
medical emergencies, fires, emergent mental health scenarios, and weather-related concerns (Blimling, 2010; Cendana, 2012). With this increase in responsibility, housing professionals are often susceptible to demanding work schedules and a diminished work-life balance. This coupled with unrealistic job expectations, low-salary, increased stress has been cited by researchers as reasons for professionals to leave the field (Buchanan, 2012; Totman, 2012). This job dissatisfaction often results in high turnover in residence life with residence life staff attributing their dismay to feelings of isolation in their role (Buchanan, 2012; D. Davidson, 2012).

Many student affairs professionals enter the field by working as entry-level housing professionals within their graduate studies. According to Drake (2020), graduate students face unpredictable housing instability usually resulting in graduate students seeking additional loans to pay for college or searching professional roles that provide adequate compensation during their schooling tenure. Housing insecurity can disproportionately impact graduate students of color (Drake, 2020). It can be theorized that graduate students of color enter entry level housing roles as an attempt to offset their unmet housing needs. While literature exists that discusses the general perceptions of housing staff, I was unable to identify research that highlighted the specific motivations and perspectives of Black women who chose to accept entry-level housing professional roles. My study provides a foundation for continued research to explore the motivations of Black women housing professionals to accept entry-level housing roles.
Gendered Racism and Coping Mechanisms

As previously asserted by Andrews (1993), Black women experience the double whammy of race and gender-based oppression, also referred to as gendered racism. Gendered racism refers to the oppressive experiences of racism and sexism combined that women of color experience (Essed, 1991). People who experience gendered racism are believed to experience psychological distress, which has caused Black women to develop coping strategies to combat these experiences (Lewis et al., 2013; Thomas et al., 2008). The experience of gendered racism is believed to cause specific stressors different from those experienced by men and non-Black women who may also experience gendered racism (Thomas et al., 2008). According to Lewis et al. (2013), those who experience gendered racism respond in three steps: acknowledgment and evaluation of the situation, deciding whether to engage or disregard the situation and lastly, utilizing coping strategies. These coping strategies can include resistance, collective community engagement and self-protection. Resistance can be displayed as Black women using their voices to call attention to the negative experiences to make long-term change.

Black women may find communities of support that help to validate their experiences and offer space for processing and venting (Collins, 2000). Historically, Black women have sought community and developed mentorship programs, support groups, and social/professional organizations to provide opportunities for them to build community and support (Collins, 2000; N. M. West, 2017). In addition, these spaces may serve as professional counterspaces that offer networking and collaboration for professional endeavors. N. M. West (2017) defines a professional counterspace as
a professional development opportunity intentionally designed by and for similarly situated, underrepresented individuals, to convene with one another in a culturally affirming environment, where the reality of their experiences are held central. (p. 285)

Through these professional counterspaces, Black women may share their experiences, therefore, contributing to the increased personal well-being of the participants.

Black women may activate self-protection as a coping strategy after responding to misogynoir or gendered racism. Examples of self-protection could be seen as avoidance or disengaging from the situation (Lewis et al., 2013; White et al., 2019), hypervigilance—being constantly alert of their surroundings and perceiving of dangerous situations (Utsey et al., 2002)—tapping into their family or other relationships (Harrell, 2000) and leaning into their spirituality and faith (Thomas et al., 2008). In a summary of testimonies from the African American Women’s Voices Project, Black women shared that they respond to gender and racialized experiences by a sort of “shifting” or situational resilience as a means of survival (C. Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). Many of these shifts can be seen as displays of strength or anger. In performing these shifts, Black women are then portrayed negatively in society, especially within education, to control how others view them (Collins, 1991; Cooper, 2018). This ‘shifting’ can also be understood as a form of adaptive resilience where an individual is expected to persist and adapt as they continue to maintain the essential functions and expectations of their lives (Folke et al., 2002, 2010; Walker & Salt, 2006). McMillan-Cotton (2019) highlights this idea that Black women are inherently viewed as being too much by society yet are seen as incompetent or not enough simultaneously. These coping strategies, coupled with the negative imagery of the Angry Black woman and Strong Black Woman as put forth by
McMillian-Cottom (2019), often result in Black women being forced to choose between two challenging options. This challenge can be viewed as Black women having a “darned if you do, darned if you don’t”\textsuperscript{2} mindset as Black women are critiqued even in their emotional response to racism and sexism. The experience of gendered racism and the subsequent coping mechanisms Black women housing professionals can also be understood by further exploring their experiences at predominantly white institutions and with white supremacy.

**White Supremacy in Higher Education**

As an introduction to the history of higher education in America, it is important to note that many of the founding institutions were built on stolen land from Native-American peoples (Tuck & Yang, 2012), built with slave labor from African-Americans (Wilder, 2013), and were founded on the principles of allowing restricted access to white men, preventing all other persons from attending (Karabel, 2005; Wheatle, 2019). Racial eugenics and white supremacy were used as justification to deny access to people of color into higher education institutions (Karabel, 2005). White supremacy is an historically based institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations and peoples of color by white peoples and nations of the European continent for the purpose of maintaining and defending systems of wealth, power and privilege. (Challenging White Supremacy Workshop, n.d.)

White supremacy has negatively plagued people on college campuses since their inception. While access to predominantly white institutions has increased over the years

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\textsuperscript{2} A common idiom implying the subject will experience a challenge for either decision that is being presented
for people of color, systemic challenges negatively affecting their experience and success still exist. Mustaffa (2017) coined the term educational violence to refer to the impact of formal and informal higher education against marginalized persons at the behest of higher education institutions.

In higher education institutions’ inception, enslaved Black people were used for free labor and served as material goods on campuses where Black people built the physical structures of institutions and served as cooks, maids, caretakers, and fieldworkers that ultimately allowed these institutions to flourish (Mustaffa, 2017; Wilder, 2013). However, education was centered as a goal of Black people, mostly by white abolitionists, to ultimately lead to emancipation for all slaves (Marable, 1984). Seen as a symbol of Black freedom, Black people began their pursuit of access to higher education spaces. This was a tumultuous journey as Black people consistently faced opposition as it was perceived that an educated Black person threatened the white working class and educated white elite.

Black people created their own educational spaces, historically Black colleges, and universities. Black people were perceived to have gained success and momentum with the enacting of education legislation (Wilder, 2013). Legislations such as the Second Morrill Land Grant Act of 1890 (Wheatle, 2019) provided additional funding to white land grant institutions if they did not consider race in admissions. Brown versus the Board of Education II ended the official segregation of schools. While these examples of legislation continue to be critiqued in literature to determine their effectiveness, these legislative acts were originally seen as marks of success for the journey to Black
education and opportunity. However, this journey was riddled with opposition from higher education leaders who often responded with criticism and intentionally halted their success (Mustaffa, 2017). Black bodies have consistently been oppressed and marginalized at predominantly white institutions. To engage in a conversation about racialized and gendered trauma experienced by Black women student affairs professionals at these institutions without addressing the historical context of oppression and marginalization would be disingenuous.

Higher education professionals of color do not neatly fit into the original goals of American education. As the earliest higher education institutions were built to center whiteness and stifle the growth and success of all other identities, Black people, specifically Black women housing professionals are oppressed and constrained by whiteness (Oluo, 2020). According to Oluo (2020),

> the amount of safety, security, and freedom that people of color and women (and other non-male identities) are able to obtain lies in the extent to which they gain social, political, and financial independence from patriarchy or white supremacy. (p. 49)

Within the context of this study, whiteness is not used as a pseudonym for white people, but as a designation to address the phenomenon that continues to perpetuate and uphold white supremacy (Picower, 2009). White supremacy and whiteness continue to exist as barriers that negatively impact the experiences of professionals of color, specifically Black women housing professionals.

Higher education continues to perpetuate notions of white supremacy and whiteness in its policies and professional structures (Nguyen & Duran, 2018). Examples of whiteness in higher education include race-neutral policies and procedures (La Noue &
Marcus, 2008), lack of infrastructure to support students of color and professionals of color (Zamani, 2003), and the field as a whole failing to recognize and acknowledge the history of racism and white supremacy within higher education (Dennis, 2001). However, within higher education, both white people and people of color can exemplify and perpetuate standards of whiteness (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Both white women and Black men contribute to whiteness in unique ways as a function of white supremacy. The way white women and Black men act can be further explained by the “one up/one down” identity (Accapadi, 2007), where individuals with one identity that is privileged and another that is oppressed find it hard to recognize when their privileged identity is operating within the dominant culture of whiteness. However, Black women’s existence and maintenance of Blackness and femininity are too far deviated from the expected superiority of whiteness and masculinity (Oluo, 2020), resulting in their unique racialized and gendered oppression.

White women have been found to perpetuate white supremacy in varying ways. Specifically, M. Williams (2021), shared a reflection as a white woman in student affairs highlighting that niceness, centering of white women’s emotions, and refusing accountability were characteristics in which white women contribute to white supremacy in the workplace. M. Williams (2021) discussed how social constructions of niceness penalize those who deviate from society’s perception of nice or those who are deemed disruptive. White women attempt to avoid scenarios of discomfort often avoiding acknowledging truth or calling out injustices. Black women are often negatively impacted in these instances as society’s perception of Black women tends to automatically deem
them as disruptive (Collins, 2000). Additionally, white women center their emotions in an attempt to express their feelings and perspectives in conversations of injustices, further pulling focus from those impacted by racism. Lastly, according to Accapadi (2007), “because white women hold both a dominant and a marginalized identity, [they] can be simultaneously helpless (by virtue of [their] womanhood) and powerful (by virtue of [their] whiteness)” (p. 211). White women in student affairs utilize their positional power, their womanhood, and their whiteness to intentionally and sometimes unintentionally cause harm to marginalized individuals (Dace, 2012; Matias et al., 2019).

In my experience, Black women in student affairs can often be caught in the crossfire when white women exalt their positional power to cause harm. Further discussion is needed that explores the relationship Black women have with white women as they reflect on their experiences as housing professionals.

As a result of white supremacy, Black men are found to be victims of white patriarchy and white supremacy (hooks, 2004). Black women reported experiencing misogynoir at the behest of Black men, which is a function of white supremacy (M. Bailey, personal communication, March 16, 2022). As a function of white supremacy, Black men often reinforce the patriarchy by dismissing the experiences and perspectives of Black women (McGuffey, 2013). In higher education, Black men dismiss Black women by silencing them, failing to believe them, and side with others who oppose them (M. Bailey, personal communication, March 16, 2022). Black men reinforce this patriarchy by manipulating their power and control over Black women to gain back power taken from them in the larger society (Dungee-Anderson & Cox, 2000). Literature
is needed that explores the experiences of Black women as they reflect on their interactions with white women and Black men within higher education. White supremacy, white fragility, and masculinity negatively impact the experiences of student affairs professionals of color, specifically Black women housing professionals.

**Predominantly White Institutions and Anti-Blackness**

Predominantly white institutions often fail in supporting and retaining staff of color (Turrentine & Conley, 2001). As previously mentioned during higher education’s inception, enslaved Black persons were forced to provide labor developing the campus buildings and managing the land (Mustaffa, 2017). While being the backbone of the campus buildings, Black persons were restricted from getting an education from the institutions they built (Mustaffa, 2017). According to Wilder (2013), “the academy never stood apart from American slavery -- in fact, it stood beside church and state as the third pillar of a civilization built in bondage” (p. 12). Predominantly white institutions have yet to make amends for their involvement in the slave trade (Asare, 2021). Predominantly white institutions continue to benefit from Black labor and perpetuate anti-Blackness across all facets of the institution (Dancy et al., 2018).

Almost a century later, Black faculty and staff are still experiencing discrimination at predominantly white institutions (Anthym & Tuitt, 2019; Antonio, 2003; Jayakumar et al., 2009; Steele, 2018). Factors that contribute to faculty and staff of color’s overall dissatisfaction include lack of representation, barriers to tenure or promotion, feelings of exclusion or isolation and racial or ethnic bias (Antonio, 2003; Jayakumar et al., 2009). Staff of color dissatisfaction can be further explained by the
reflections of gendered racism experienced simultaneously by Black women in these spaces.

In 2018, Steele investigated how the experiences of racism impacted staff members of color from a predominantly white, midwestern university within the United States, Steele interviewed a total of 18 current and former staff members, and their experiences were listed into four categories: acknowledging the impact of their negative environment, feelings of invisibility, support received or lack thereof, and navigating their institution. Steele (2018) found that staff members of color are greatly impacted by campus climate with feelings of isolation being prevalent amongst all participants. A limitation of Steele’s (2018) study is that participants varied between no contact to primary contact with students in their profession and that fewer student-focused staff were included. While this study incorporated the perspectives and experiences of staff members in addition to faculty, more literature is needed that explores these experiences in staff members working in housing as it is primarily student-facing.

Anthym and Tuitt (2019) explored the experiences of one Black administrator and one Black faculty member at a predominantly white institution in the west and how they coped with racial trauma. Anthym and Tuitt (2019) reviewed 15 years of unpublished professional and personal communications by both faculty and administrator utilizing Glaser’s (1965) constant comparative method to define the phenomenon experiences by Black faculty and administrative staff and offer a theory of those experiences. Through the 15 counter-narratives presented in the study, Anthym and Tuitt (2019) found that Black administrators and faculty members suffer in silence. Specifically, Black faculty
teaching diversity experience extreme challenges in the classroom as they navigate being the face of diversity education while simultaneously experiencing discrimination--existing in a metaphorical minefield (Andersen & Miller, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1996; Pittman, 2010; Wingfield, 2007). Anthym and Tuitt (2019) also found narrative communication supporting that Black faculty and administrators felt invisible and silenced after the 2016 presidential elections within the United States. While this study explored the narratives and reflections of one Black faculty and one Black administrator, further exploration may produce commonalities of experience as Black women housing professionals navigate similar challenges at predominantly white institutions.

In addition to experiences of racism and sexism, predominantly white institutions have shown that there often is a discrepancy between the advertised institutional rhetoric and the lived experiences of their constituents. Slay et al. (2019) facilitated a case study of a psychology department that presented a positive image of their department’s commitment to diversity finding that their students reported numerous instances that were contradictory to the department’s articulated values. Institutional rhetoric that deceptively lures in students by articulating an inaccurate commitment to diversity can further perpetuate and exacerbate gendered and racialized instances of discrimination for students.

**Black Women Administrators in Higher Education**

In 1980, Mosley facilitated one of the first studies on the experiences of Black women administrators. Prior to this study, much of the literature explored the Black administrator experience in higher education through the Black male lens. This study
gathered foundational information regarding Black women in the field and the specific roles they held, exploring the total number of Black women administrators at predominantly white institutions. Mosely sought to explore the types of roles Black women held. However, Mosley (1980) found that Black women administrators working in the field were considered an endangered species whose presence was dwindling in the profession (p. 296).

Mosley’s study identified a gap in the literature and called for additional research on Black women administrators. Within this study, Mosley utilized Moore and Wagstaff’s (1974) questionnaire as a reference and developed a questionnaire for his study. This questionnaire was divided into three categories: personal and status information, institutional, and personal attitudes, and opinions. There were 120 questionnaire respondents who attended institutions from the 1975 Summer Institute of Education Management at Harvard University. Mosley found that Black women reported that they were “overworked, underpaid, alienated, isolated, uncertain, and powerless” (Mosley, 1980, p. 296). From this study, Mosley had the following recommendations for implementation from his findings:

1. Call to action for white academia to “act immediately” and review its policies and practices that alienate Black women
2. For white women in higher education recognized the hypocrisy of their actions in gender equity but ignoring the needs of Black women
3. For Black men and women to further recognize that the other is not the enemy
4. Called for the agencies responsible for monitoring institutional hiring and promotional policies in higher education to give special attention to the status of Black women

5. Asserted that the organizations charged with reporting the status and experience of Black women stop hiding specific findings related to Black women’s plight

6. For Black women, administrators to seek to become more vocal about their experiences with racism and sexism

This study helped fill a foundational gap in the literature about Black administrators and is the foundation from which much of the current literature on Black women administrators stems.

Following Mosley’s study, Hinton (2001) explored the professional experiences of Black women administrators at predominantly white institutions and found that Black women administrators continue to face gendered racism in higher education. Hinton found that discrimination against Black women was often reflected as racism, sexism, and homophobia, further supporting the notion of intersectionality presented by Collins (2000), which will be discussed later in this chapter. Hinton’s (2001) study found that participants also mentioned spirituality and faith as coping strategies for their personal and professional lives. Following the publication of their dissertation, Hinton collaborated with Patitu (2003) on a study that explored the overall experiences of Black women faculty and administrators. Participants of this study shared that racism, sexism, and homophobia were among their top concerns as Black women in higher education (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). These findings support the purpose of this study as I wish
further to explore the experiences of Black women housing administrators as they navigate gendered racism through a lens of intersectionality, supporting any potential findings. Similar to Mosley, Patitu and Hinton recommended that institutions of higher education work to create spaces that are more attractive to Black women administrators and faculty.

Zamani (2003) examined the “historical legacy of exclusion and the struggle for inclusion by African Americans in higher education.” Zamani’s (2003) article further supports the notion that Black women experience an intersection of discrimination with both racism and gender discrimination and that the “inequities faced by African Americans as a group have been particularly oppressive for Black women” (2003, p. 7). Zamani (2003) offers several recommendations for programs and institutions to meet the needs of African American women (p. 14):

1. Increase recruitment, attainment, and retention of African Americans to these institutions, including students, faculty, and administrators
2. Develop and maintain programs and institutional policies that specifically address the needs of African American women
3. Allocate financial resources to support institutional efforts that address racial and gender bias
4. Provide intentional curriculum and classroom experiences that are more inclusive of African American women, particularly in white male-dominated spaces.
It is imperative that recruitment efforts exist to attract Black women into more roles in higher education and that institutions examine policies that hinder their retention, specifically the retention of Black women housing professionals.

Choates (2012) facilitated a qualitative study that explored the way in which Black women attained leadership positions within higher education. Using a narrative inquiry approach and the methodology of BFT, the study sought to identify how the influence of mentors impacted the participants’ career paths. In addition to the influence of mentorship, Choates (2012) wanted to understand how the impact of race and gender manifested in Black women’s journey. It was found that the women who attained senior administrative roles attributed their advancement to early preparation in their careers, gaining significant experience in various functional areas, volunteering, or serving on community boards, taking on additional assignments, and attaining terminal degrees for “credibility purposes” (Choates, 2012, p. 125). While the participants shared that mentoring played a significant role in their advancement, they mentioned a lack of Black women to serve as mentors (Choates, 2012). Lastly, participants shared that due to their race and gender, they worked harder than their colleagues, were often overlooked and felt invisible, and found themselves shifting (or code-switching) their behaviors to fit into the dominant culture of the workplace to become more accepted (Choates, 2012). These reported instances of code-switching are supported by C. Jones and Shorter-Goode (2003) who discuss shifts in behaviors as displays of strength, anger, or other references to Black women’s resilience. By performing these shifts, Black women are attempting to control how they are viewed and ultimately treated by society, usually without success.
In a qualitative study utilizing a web-based survey, Miles (2012) examined the status of Black women higher education administrators as compared to higher education administrators from other races and/or genders. Miles explored years of service, methods of social support, income level, and professional title to evaluate the level of professional success attained by Black women in higher education. Miles (2012) found that Black women administrators were less likely than their peers to hold senior-level roles even with similar qualifications. This study’s survey was only sent to a total of 671 participants from the South and Midwest. Of such, 229 identified as Black/African American, therefore leaving a large gap in research that captures the experiences of Black women administrators across the country. I theorize that as this survey was sent to individuals during the month of January and closed in early February, housing professionals were not likely greatly represented in the survey respondents due to likely overwhelming workload and professional responsibilities at the beginning of the term.

Wiggins (2017) facilitated an interpretive phenomenological analysis, grounded in BFT, that explored the lives of six Black women college administrative pertaining to their professional demands and pursuits and personal obligations. Wiggins sought to explore Black women’s mentoring relationships with other women college administrators. After three interviews, four themes were presented from the participants: hyper-awareness of self, importance of relationships with Black women, opportunity to give back through work, and negotiating the demands of their professional and personal lives (Wiggins, 2017).
According to Wiggins (2017), participants very frequently thought of themselves in relation to the expectations that others have of them. The participants frequently engaged in thought patterns that analyzed how they can engage or behave in certain scenarios, or self-monitoring. This self-monitoring occurred in order to meet expectations of the dominant culture in their workplace or to avoid the perpetuation of certain stereotypes, for example, the Angry Black woman trope, which will be explored in more detail later in this chapter. Secondly, participants found relationships with other Black women to be critical to their success. They were able to bond over their shared identities and perspectives on life. Specifically, the topic of “sister circles” emerged throughout the data. Additionally, some participants mentioned having challenging experiences with Black women colleagues. As a third theme, Black women mentioned the importance of giving back through their work as a result of their own personal experiences navigating life. The fourth and final theme was supported as some participants shared Black women are “expected to be all things to all others, to have ‘superhero powers’ by caring for everyone else and handling all matters placed before them” (Wiggins, 2017, p. 99). This has been more of the more comprehensive studies completed on the experiences of Black women administrators; my study will add to the literature the narratives of Black women housing professionals as it relates to their experiences at predominantly white institutions.

In a qualitative, phenomenological approach, Townsend (2021) explored the experiences of five Black women administrators in the United States. Participants all had three or more years of work experience at the director level or above at predominantly white institutions across the country. This study found that within their narratives,
participants shared stories of their authority being undermined, missed promotions given to less qualified colleagues, increased scrutiny in the workplace and constantly feeling like they needed to prove themselves (Townsend, 2021). Participants shared that their negative experiences at work were compounded with microaggressions from their colleagues and superiors (Townsend, 2021). Similar to Mosley (1980) and supported by C. Jones and Shorter-Goodwin (2003), participants felt a need to change or filter their personalities and behaviors. I anticipate that my participants who identify as Black women housing professionals may express similar commentary within their narratives.

As there is a dearth in the literature that explores the experiences of Black women housing professionals, this study will fill that gap and allow for Black women housing professionals to add their expertise and personal insight into higher education literature.

**Controlling Images**

Negative imagery pertaining to Black women is not a new phenomenon and is often conceptualized by scholars through a lens of oppressive and controlling images (Collins, 1991; Corbin et al., 2018). There are three main types of stereotypes that have been used to control the imagery of Black women in media and society: the mammy - the faithful and obedient servant (Collins, 1991), the Jezebel - the sexually promiscuous and immoral “whore” (C. West, 2008), and the Sapphire or “Angry Black woman” trope. The Strong Black Woman controlling image exists a metamorphosis and fusion of the controlling images that is ascribed to Black women in more contemporary ways. Each controlling image will be further discussed below exploring its context as it relates to Black women in higher education.
Mammy

The mammy controlling image grew from the economic exploitation of Black women serving as house slaves during the enslavement of Black peoples. During this time, Black women were expected to care for white children and their families. Often the treatment of the white children they cared for was significantly better than the treatment of their own offspring. According to Collins (2000), the role of mammy personifies the ideal Black woman specifically from the perspective of the white elite. The mammy is confident in her role and knows her place in both society and the white home. She is often portrayed as a loyal and self-sacrificing servant to white families (Jewell, 1993). Howard-Baptiste (2014) analyzed the mammy trope through a critical perspective that explored its role and personification in higher education. Specifically, Howard-Baptiste explored the reflections of a Black female professor as she reflected on what the author coined “Mammy Moments.” These moments are characterized explicitly as ways that students, staff, and others continuously communicate disrespect and distrust of Black women. Generally, Howard-Baptiste (2014) posited that as a reflection of the Mammy trope, Black women professors felt incompetent, invisible, and forcibly self-sacrificing as a component of their experiences and treatment in higher education. While Howard-Baptiste’s (2014) study focuses on Black women faculty, it is likely that Black women staff and administrators may articulate similar reflections in response to their work environment and peer interactions within their role.
**Jezebel**

Similar to the mammy controlling image, the Jezebel controlling image was born from perspectives from white people during the enslavement of Black people. Researchers used the Jezebel controlling image to explain the forced sexual relations between white men and Black women (Pilgrim, 2002). The Jezebel was hypersexualized and depicted as having “thin lips, long straight hair, slender nose[s], thin figure and [a] fair complexion” (Jewel, 1993, p. 46). Over time, this hyper sexualization has expanded to include Black women of all shapes, sizes, and skin tones. In addition to the hyper sexualization of Black women’s bodies, the Jezebel controlling image paints Black women as manipulative, animalistic and promiscuous (Collins, 2008). While not present in my search of the literature, I posit that the Jezebel controlling image helps to incite violence and the exploitation of Black women, specifically in student affairs. Additionally, I argue that the Jezebel controlling image incites imagery that asserts that Black women are unable to be controlled, therefore, exist as overly passionate and manipulative with their actions and emotions.

**Angry Black woman**

The Angry Black woman controlling image or Sapphire trope is believed to have originated from the characterization of a Black woman on the 1950s minstrel show *Amos ‘n’ Andy*, who showed a Black woman, named Sapphire, being sassy and bossy (Pilgrim, 2008; Thomas et al., 2004). In mainstream media, this controlling image categorizes Black women as “aggressive, ill-tempered, illogical, overbearing, hostile, and ignorant without provocation” (Ashley, 2014, p. 27). Over the last half of a century, this
controlling image has persisted, becoming even more pervasive. The Angry Black woman controlling image characterizes Black women as the lonely matriarch that is overly aggressive and often masculinized (C. West, 2008). The Angry Black woman controlling image perpetuates the idea that the Black woman emasculates her Black male partner, resulting in fathers and male figures absent from the home (Collins, 1991). Thus, Black women are left to be the sole caretaker and must succumb to the overwhelming pressures placed on themselves and their families by being cold, overbearing, and dismissive. This imagery has fielded the development of the Strong Black Woman schema as Black women must be strong to carry the burdens of their existence. A phenomenological study utilizing focus groups (Scott, 2013) explored the communication strategies Black women used “as they cross[ed] cultural borders to predominantly white environments” and how they “[understand] how and why they enact specific strategies” (p. 312). Scott found that participants utilized various communication strategies to refute the negative stereotypes that have often plagued them, for example, the angry Black women trope.

**Strong Black Woman**

According to Szymanski and Lewis (2016), Black women are “socialized to be strong, resilient and self-sufficient in the face of adversity” (p. 239). The assumption that all Black women are strong often leads Black women to conceal their negative emotions, resulting in internalized trauma and harm (Lewis et al., 2013). Thus, the Strong Black Woman controlling image was birthed in response to the intersectional oppression of both racism and sexism (Harris-Lacewell, 2001). The Strong Black Woman controlling image
can be further characterized as having birthed the notion of #BlackGirlMagic which centers the narrative of Black women being strong and resilient as empowering imagery (Barker, 2018). The #BlackGirlMagic is an extension of the Strong Black Woman controlling image but is referenced as empowering imagery to fuel resilience versus internalized oppression.

Black women face a tremendous amount of pressure from society to be resilient in the face of adversity. In several qualitative studies, Black women shared that they were overwhelmed by the pressure to always display strength (Abrams et al., 2014). This pressure often results in psychological outcomes such as depression (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009) and anxiety (Watson & Hunter, 2015). This burden often results in Black women not feeling support from their peers or feeling as if their emotions are invalid and unworthy of acknowledgment (Settles, 2006). Black women may feel the need to dismiss their yearn for support. Dismissing their need for support may serve as a coping strategy to mask the shame they may feel for needing help they likely would not receive if requested. This cyclical behavior begot further isolation and continued emotional distress.

**Theoretical Framework: Black Feminist Thought**

This research is grounded in the theoretical framework of BFT, emphasizing intersectionality and the theory of Black feminist standpoint. BFT was developed by scholar Patricia Hill Collins and helps to provide a foundation to understand the experiences of Black women housing professionals. The foundational notion of BFT is that Black women are particularly nuanced and experts, as they clarify the standpoint of
Black women’s experiences with racism and sexism, despite dominant culture diminishing Black women’s expertise of their lived experiences. BFT brings awareness that Black women have historically been marginalized in academic spaces, which I hypothesize will be confirmed by the narratives of this study’s participants.

Utilizing BFT aligns with the goals of this study which is to allow Black women housing professionals to share their experiences with gendered racism. According to Collins (2000), BFT asserts that Black feminism is an activist response to the intersecting oppression Black women experience. BFT exists to aid in resisting oppression, and if dialectical oppression did not exist, nor would BFT (Collins, 2000). My study is important to the literature as it further affirms that the Black women housing professional experience is not a monolith as posited by Collins’ (2000). According to Collins (2000), “Black women’s group location in intersecting oppressions produced commonalities among individual African-American women” (p. 25). Black women housing professionals share common experiences related to their race, gender, and employment that produce commonalities. While BFT emerges from a tension linking experiences and ideas, Black women may face common challenges, but not all of their experiences are the same as Black women’s other intersecting identities may impact the lens to which their experiences are viewed and interpreted.

This study is crucial to recognize that the Black women housing professional experience is not a monolith as posited by Collins’s (2000) first distinguishing feature. Black women housing professionals may have commonalities across their experiences with gendered racism in the profession but are not all the same (Collins, 1989, 2000).
However, these commonalities and differences in experiences help represent Black women’s housing professionals’ unique standpoint (Collins, 2000) as authoritative experts of their own experiences with gendered racism at predominantly white institutions.

By elevating the unique standpoint of Black women housing professionals, I can theorize, as supported by Collins (2000), that activism may be fostered as Black women, myself included, fight to bring awareness to the discrimination and injustices experienced by Black women at predominantly white institutions. Black women scholars have merged both intellectual work and activism (Collins, 2000) by bringing awareness to these experiences and offering recommendations that call for better support of Black women professionals in higher education (Howard-Baptiste, 2014; C. West, 2008). Bringing attention to the narratives of Black women housing professionals who experience racism at predominantly white institutions does not negate the gendered racism experienced by those who experience gender violence from other racial backgrounds. Black women housing professionals and their experience with gendered racism are uniquely positioned within the greater fight of inequity and discrimination within higher education (Museus et al., 2015).

I theorize that Black women housing professionals will find both validation and concern with the presented controlling images. First, Black women housing professionals may be able to see a plausible explanation for their mistreatment in the workplace. Black women, and in this instance Black women housing professionals, are expected to address all major crises within the residence hall while they are often silenced (whether indirectly
or directly) as it pertains to addressing their own personal concerns. Should Black women housing professionals speak up about any professional challenges they are experiencing in the workplace, they may find themselves labeled a troublemaker or chastised for creating hostile work environments. Suppose Black women housing professionals are silent in the face of adversity. In that case, this perpetuates the Strong Black Woman narrative and prevents Black women from getting the support they may need as they navigate challenges in the workplace. Both the Angry Black woman and Strong Black Woman tropes create a “damned if you do, damned if you don’t” cyclical effect that negatively impacts the experiences of Black housing professionals as they navigate gendered racism.

**Intersectionality and Black Women’s Standpoint**

A core tenant of BFT, intersectionality, articulates an overlapping set of social structures, specifically race and gender, that can be understood from the perspective of a Black woman. BFT examines how Black women face racism and are explicitly positioned within the women’s liberatory struggle. *Intersectionality* is a term coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) to name the “intersecting patterns of racism and sexism, and how these experiences tend not to be represented within the discourses of either feminism or antiracism” (pp. 123–124). In higher education, intersectionality is often misused and is often conflated with any discussion of multiple identities (Harris & Patton, 2019; Mitchell et al., 2014). According to Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality is not a new way to theorize the theory of identity or to be used interchangeably with intersections of
identity. Intersectionality irrevocably allows for the analysis of Black women’s experience through the lens of racism and sexism.

As posited in Collins’s distinguishing feature three, BFT highlights the phenomenon of “collective scholarship” to highlight Black women’s collective standpoint and historical scholarship engaged in the feminist works. According to Collins (1989):

Black feminist thought represents a second level of knowledge, furnished by experts who are part of a group and who express the groups’ standpoint...black feminist thought articulates the taken for granted knowledge of African American women, it also encourages all black women to create new self-definitions that validate a black women’s standpoint. (p. 750)

Black feminist standpoint argues that any knowledge that is gained about Black women is gained by identifying and understanding multiple factors related to their position in society or their standpoint (Collins, 2000). Black feminism asserts that Black women are uniquely positioned as experts on their experience. Therefore, their narratives represent a collective scholarship that can be used to highlight Black women’s collective standpoint (Collins, 1989).

While a dearth of literature exists on the experiences of Black women in higher education in general, there are gaps that fail to explore the specific experiences of Black women housing professionals. I identified areas in the literature focused on Black women in higher education, with most of the research focusing on faculty, students and general staff and administrators. In the next chapter, Chapter Three, I outline the methodological approach used in this study that allows for the exploration of the experiences of Black women housing professionals in higher education.
Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

Black women report isolation, lack of respect and validation, and feelings of hypervisibility/invisibility within the student affairs field during their professional experience (Lewis et al., 2013; Utsey et al., 2002; White et al., 2019). More research is needed to understand the experiences of Black women who work in housing. As practitioners know, staff must reflect the student population accurately. Research shows that interactions with a professional staff member of color may provide emotional benefits that significantly aid a student’s learning and development through formal and informal educational opportunities (R. Davidson et al., 2011; MacKinnon & Associates, 2004; Moran, 2001). However, for students of color, specifically Black students, their interactions with Black women professional staff are more infrequent due to Black women’s departure from the field, impacting the overall climate for students of color.

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Black women who work in housing at private, predominantly white institutions in the United States. Additionally, I explored the impact of gendered racism on Black women who work in housing. Further, I highlighted the strategies these women used to navigate gendered racism. Gendered racism, a term coined by Essed (1991) describes how both sexism and racism intertwine to form a specific phenomenon that women of color experience, and more specifically in this study, Black women. The research questions for this study are:
(1) How do Black women housing professionals reflect on their experiences of gendered racism in student affairs? (2) What strategies do Black women housing professionals use to navigate racist and gendered environments?

Within this chapter, I discuss the research design, qualitative methodology, and how gendered racism is best explored through a critical, qualitative lens, critical narrative inquiry. Briefly, I present a summary of this study’s theoretical framework, BFT, and elaborate on how BFT will be used to guide my methodology choices. I utilize a critical narrative inquiry approach further supported by sista circle methodology. I offer my personal reflexivity statement and my connection to the research being studied along with my primary research values, focus and researcher epistemology. Lastly, I offer details pertaining to participant recruitment, data collection and analysis efforts and discuss measures of trustworthiness.

**Research Design**

To answer the research questions and address the problem statement, this study utilized a qualitative methodology. Qualitative methodologies allow the researcher to describe a phenomenon focusing on and highlighting participants’ specific lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). Researchers can highlight the participant experience and the researcher’s effect and interaction with each participant by employing qualitative methodologies that emphasize reciprocity, such as journaling, focus groups and member checking. Qualitative methodologies create space for contextual analysis and understanding while recognizing that experiences are subjective and that numerous contexts and insights impact both researcher and participant interpretations of those
realities. For example, women of color across the diaspora may experience both racism and sexism. Still, Black women experience this collective gendered racism from a perspective of anti-Blackness, which is pervasive in education (Dancy et al., 2018).

According to Creswell (2009), the researcher’s vocabulary must draw from a specific qualitative perspective. Referring to language consistent with a qualitative perspective is crucial as it helps the researcher examine and understand the central phenomenon when conducting research. Several common terms such as behavior, inquiry, and exploration are common terms that convey a qualitative perspective. This study is a narrative inquiry that explores how Black women reflect on their experiences of gendered racism. As this study intended to answer questions related to the salient experiences of Black women housing professionals in higher education, a qualitative methodology allows me to gain a deeper understanding of an observed phenomenon of gendered racism in the professional setting (Creswell, 2014).

**Black Feminist Thought**

Black feminism allows Black women to examine how they face racism and sexism and how they are positioned within women’s liberatory struggle globally. Feminism is viewed in society as white women’s cultural property. Historically, feminism has excluded Black women in social movements such as voting rights, movements to combat sexual and domestic violence, and the issue of pay equity over time (Collins, 1989). Black feminism challenges mainstream white feminist assumptions by inserting inclusive frameworks that account for the lived experiences of Black women into the narrative of equality. Black feminism has led to Black women across various
backgrounds to organize and in turn, provide support and advancement for their race and
gender identities. Black women use dialogue and reflections of their race and gender to
construct knowledge. Black women reflecting on their race and gender as a construct of
knowledge presents the core concept of intersectionality—a term coined by Kimberly
Crenshaw and referenced as a tenet and theoretical framework in BFT as an essential
analysis framework for this study (Collins, 2000). Intersectionality addresses the power
dynamics that directly impact women of color, particularly Black women. BFT is well
suited to explore the intersections of Black women’s experiences in higher education.

Intersectionality—an overlapping of social structures, specifically race and gender—
allows for interpreting Black women’s experiences within the profession. This study used
the lens of race and gender to explore Black women professionals’ experiences in higher
education and their emotional and behavioral responses to gendered racism.

BFT (Collins, 1989) provides an appropriate framework for understanding the
experiences of Black women housing professionals. Collins highlights Black women’s
“collective scholarship” as it prioritizes Black women’s specific standpoint. Within this
theory, Collins conveys that the collective consciousness of Black women demonstrated
throughout the years positions them as critical experts and the best individuals to tell their
stories (Collins, 2000). Black women can highlight the intersections of their race and
gender to speak from a place of authority on their experience navigating both. Within this
study, a space for reflection and understanding is essential while also allowing
participants to evaluate the racist and misogynistic departments and institutional policies
which negatively impact their professional experiences.
BFT prioritizes the lived experiences of Black women, (Collins, 2000) as expert fact. This study used Black women’s narrative reflection to engage in dialogue that will lead to Black women housing professionals’ institutional and systemic support and care in higher education. As supported by BFT, Black women housing professionals and the discrimination they experience is situated within a greater discussion of racism, sexism, classism, and other discrimination perpetuated by institutions of higher education (Museus et al., 2015). In my experience, Black women are often the first to advocate for other marginalized groups. Therefore, I used the voices and narratives of Black women housing professionals, as positioned, and supported by BFT, to serve as a lesson and guide for Black women entering the field and other allies and colleagues to intentionally support Black women’s growth and success. BFT allows me to apply a critical perspective to the various experiences and realities, or “truths” that Black women have while working as professionals in student affairs.

**Critical Narrative Inquiry and Sista Circle Methodology**

Critical narrative inquiry is an approach which allows for the research focus to be drawn from individual stories. Common characteristics of narrative inquiry are the use of individual stories, the researcher’s involvement in the research process, and narrative inquiry’s emphasis on subjectivity (Hatch & Newsom, 2010). BFT prioritizes the use of stories, or counter narratives, to present Black women’s reflections (Collins, 2000). Both critical narrative inquiry and BFT complement each other as they center the importance of the researcher role and participant expertise. Narrative inquiry allows the researcher to produce, represent and analyze the personal experiences of participants. Clandinin and
Connelly (2000) define narrative inquiry methodology as an approach that starts and concludes “in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that made up people’s lives, both individual and social” (p. 20). In order to understand the meaning-making (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), Black women ascribe to their experiences and reflections, I utilize a critical narrative inquiry methodological approach.

Narrative inquiry allows the researcher to observe, through re-storying (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), patterns in social behavior that can help explain or summarize a social phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research presents an opportunity for collaboration between participant and researcher as prioritized by Collins (1991), as a component of BFT. As the Black women housing professionals are re-storying, both the participant and researcher collaboratively convey and analyze their perspectives and experiences through a critical lens. Narrative research has a socio-cultural foundation that emphasizes an environment’s influence on a person’s processing and development (Moen, 2006). By approaching this study through the methodological lens of narrative inquiry and the epistemologies of postmodern constructivism and transformative emancipatory paradigms, as discussed in the researcher epistemology, I was able to explore and articulate the potential similarities in experiences that Black women have had to navigate gendered racism in predominantly white institutions.

As a researcher, I emphasize the importance of highlighting multiple ways of knowing and truths along with their impact on meaning-making. Using narrative inquiry
allows me to highlight the lived experiences of Black women by creating an opportunity to articulate their experiences in their own voice. As a researcher, I recognize and embrace the interactive quality of the research-researched relationship, primarily use stories as data and analysis, and understand the way in which what we know is embedded in a particular context. (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 7)

Using a critical narrative inquiry methodology allows me to connect a critical approach to narrative inquiry to identify and critique the social and cultural perspective found in the narratives of Black women housing professionals. (Usher, 1996).

Critical narrative inquiry allows the researcher to analyze the social and cultural perspective of the narratives identified for research. As a way to analyze the social and cultural perspectives of Black women housing professionals as they navigate gendered racism, I utilized sista circle methodology, a type of critical narrative inquiry. Sista circle methodology is defined by its creator Dr. Latoya Johnson (2015), as a qualitative methodology that allows Black women to examine their lived experiences through group engagement. As a researcher and supported by Collins (2000), I find this methodology essential to incorporate as I believe knowledge is acquired through lived experience. By utilizing sista circle methodology, I center Black expertise and knowledge as supported by Collins’s (2000) articulation of Black women’s collective standpoint. I believe group dialogue and interaction allows for the collective sharing of knowledge and meaning making as Black women housing professionals discuss their experiences.

Within sista circle methodology, three major tenets exist including: communication dynamics, the centrality of empowerment and the researcher existing as a sista scholar (Johnson, 2015). Through various communication facets such as non-verbal
cues, Black women communicate beyond traditional and form mediums. For example, some Black women are fluent in physical body language such as head nods, side-eyes, and head and neck gestures, or through various nuanced articulations of the colloquial phrase “okay.” Sista circle methodology allows Black women to express themselves authentically and avoid the oppressive constraints of traditional research methodologies. By incorporating the sista circles within this study as a form of member checking, I captured audio and visual recordings, as permitted, of the re-storying (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of Black women as they share their lived experiences. The narration of these lived experiences allows me to collect rich qualitative data which was summarized for the study’s findings.

Furthermore, the sista circle is a space where Black women can feel validated, challenged, and empowered. Through the facilitation of a sista circle, Black women shared their knowledge and expertise while exercising agency over articulating their lived experience. Lastly, sista circles challenge the expectations of traditional research methodologies. Within traditional focus groups, the researcher’s role is to facilitate the group and listen as passively as possible (Hennink, 2017; Puchta & Potter, 2004). While the main source of data collection is one, one-on-one, semi-structured interview, using the sista circles allows me to create a space where the participants feel validated, challenged, and empowered. Additionally, the sista circle allowed women to share their knowledge and expertise with other individuals who are currently experiencing similar challenges. This sista circle session served as a form of reciprocity towards mutually beneficial outcomes for both researcher and participants (Pasque et al., 2012).
As prioritized within sista circles, the researcher’s role extends beyond traditional discussion with engagement in the group dialogue. BFT (Collins, 2000) and sista circle methodology work in tandem as the use of the sista circles allowed Black women, including the researcher, to process their lived experiences verbally with authority and through a lens of self-empowerment. The tenet supporting the researchers’ engagement in group dialogue highlights the value of reciprocity found in this methodology which complements and affirms my research philosophy and epistemologies of postmodern constructivism and transformative emancipatory paradigms.

**Role of the Researcher**

My assumptions regarding the purpose of research stem from my personal identities and experiences. As a Black woman, I have constantly challenged power structures and tried to deconstruct what is known or experienced through a lens of justice and equity. I believe this comes from the perception that what I know to be my reality or truth is frequently in direct opposition to society’s normative view or interpretation. For example, as a Black woman, I experience gendered racism, however, the perception others have of me or interpretation from society oftentimes fails to acknowledge either the sexism or the racism, and often both perspectives, and how they impact me.

My motivation to enter higher education was to mentor young women of color who would inevitably experience racism and microaggressions during their post-secondary careers. Unfortunately, during my time in this field as an educator, professional, and student, I have encountered more experiences of microaggressions/sexism/racism than I ever anticipated. As a Black woman, during my
time as a housing professional, I experienced vehement displays of racism, sexism, and misogynoir due to white supremacy and white mediocrity, the idea that white persons in this country have been conditioned to expect to feel superior, which perpetuates mediocrity (Oluo, 2020). How is it that, as student affairs professionals, we often are perpetrators of microaggressions against students/colleagues of color while also attempting to educate aspiring leaders to avoid these instances as both faculty and practitioners? Over time, this question has led to my passion for working in this field to hopefully play the game to change the game and provide radical avenues of support and intentionality for Black women in the field.

I hope that this research creates a spark in higher education that ignites and burns so bright that the voices of Black women are no longer silenced or ignored. I hope that this research makes its way to helping Black women heal their hearts by seeing validation in the words and experiences of my participants. So often, Black women are in isolation at institutions and experience these challenges in silence. This work shall serve as us, again, screaming from the proverbial rooftops. The primary purpose of this research is to create a literary reference for Black women to see both similarities and validations in their wounds and see images of hope and comfort in their experiences. We are not alone; we are a vocal and mighty group.

I initially felt as if I would be inundated with negative emotions and extremely overwhelmed with research and data collection for this dissertation. I originally felt as if I would feel the immense pressure of hearing and carrying the reflections of my participants negative experiences in addition to my own. What I realized upon starting
data collection for this study was that sharing space and reflections with my participants not only offered them validation and a place of respite, but provided me, the researcher, the same validation. I felt as if the racism and sexism that I was strategically and legally silenced from telling were no longer a weight I had to carry alone. I also found comfort in hearing the similar experiences of my participants that were like my own story. Using sista circle methodology and its prioritization of group engagement and researcher involvement I felt validated, challenged, and empowered.

The comfort I felt from this dissertation was not excitement that my participants experienced gendered racism while working at predominately white institutions, but that these experiences proved to me that I was not at fault. It was not my fault that institutional leaders were willfully racist and sexist and failed to support and encourage me professionally as a Black woman. My departmental leaders hired me for my passion and work ethic toward social justice. However, when that passion was directed against their racist and sexist behaviors, I became a threat that needed to be eradicated. My experience with this study not only affirmed that I was not alone but helped me heal from my own experiences with gendered racism. My choice to utilize both narrative inquiry and sista circle methodology was successful on all accounts.

**Researcher Epistemology**

My epistemology of the research coincides with postmodern constructivism and transformative emancipatory paradigms. Postmodern perspectives consider the research process to be “located within power structures, and the social identities of the researcher and participant [that] influence findings” (S. R. Jones et al., 2014, p. 209). In addition,
constructivism recognizes that there is no one truth and that truth is directly derived from personal experiences and interpretations (Prawat, 1996; S. R. Jones et al., 2014). The transformative emancipatory paradigms centers truth as an effort to elicit and pursue social change focusing on power, inequities, and social change (Chilisa, 2011) Within the context of these paradigms, I find this to be true in both my experiences and conceptual understanding of qualitative research. I believe the advancement of racism is attributed to both personal enactments and normalized perspectives of white superiority. This belief does not absolve systems of oppression of their contributions to racism through systematic oppression. However, I find that normalizing white superiority inherently creates an imbalance of power amongst races, which further perpetuates white supremacy in societal systems. It is my personal view that to challenge white supremacy, which at times seems impossible, we must do so by articulating the experiences and perceptions of those marginalized by said actions. By centering the voices and perspectives of Black women, I can prioritize and elevate their voices which are often silenced in white-majority spaces, such as, postsecondary institutions. According to Krieger (1991), the reality we see is based on our understanding of the world, which in turn is based on our knowledge of the self. As a Black woman with direct reflections of my own personal journey navigating gendered racism, I work to not overlay my own experiences onto the commentary of my participants. However, I acknowledge that the conceptualization of researcher bias is rooted in objectivity which is impossible to achieve in qualitative research (Brown, 1996). Researcher bias is likely a value that upholds white supremacy. My dual experiences as a Black woman and researcher largely contribute to my
motivation for developing this study and centering the voice of Black women. That is critical to the goals of this study and impossible to separate from the overall narrative of inquiry.

**Participants**

I sought participation in this study from participants that identify as Black women housing professionals at predominantly white institutions across the United States. Participants were asked to work as housing professionals or to have worked as housing professionals within the last five years. By exploring the experiences of current Black women housing professionals, I was able to capture current data exploring the experiences and perspectives of Black women as they navigated gendered racism in more current and contemporary higher education climates. I recruited participants by sharing a recruitment flier (see Appendix A, Recruitment Flier). Interested participants were able to select an embedded web link found within the digital flier, which populated a web-based interest questionnaire that asked participants to review the purpose of the study, study eligibility criteria, and important definitions as they relate to the study. Additionally, the interest questionnaire asked participants to review and acknowledge consent to participate in the study should they be selected. Lastly, the interest questionnaire asked participants to disclose contact information, demographic information, a brief commentary on their professional experience and disclose if they can participate in the study.

To identify potential participants for the study, I solicited participation using social media advertisements within several Black higher education professional pages. As
we are currently experiencing a global pandemic, social media allows me to reach the largest audience the fastest. I chose to advertise this study on Facebook groups Black Women in Higher Education, BLKSAP (Black Student Affairs Professionals), and the ACUHO-I Women in Housing Network. I chose to utilize these groups as they were developed by Black professionals to serve as online spaces of community support and community (Johnson, 2015). These networks focus specifically on supporting professionals of color as they navigate student affairs spaces and are estimated to reach the largest population of Black women online. As my study intended to capture participants from various geographical locations, utilizing online recruit strategies allows me to reach a larger, more diverse audience (Whitaker et al., 2017). Individuals within these aforementioned Facebook groups were asked to sign up if interested or share with Black women who meet eligibility criteria.

I facilitated purposeful criterion sampling followed by snowball sampling to identify interested participants. According to Patton (2015) purposeful criterion sampling is a commonly qualitative sampling strategy for research rich information gathering. Within purposeful criterion sampling participants are selected as they have the knowledge and experience needed for the study (Creswell, 2013). As mentioned above, I identified Black women housing professionals as they provided expertise as housing professionals who experienced gendered racism. Snowball sampling is a recruitment technique that allows participants to assist the researcher in identifying other potential subjects. Selected participants were requested to share this study with other individuals that they recognized to meet the criteria of the study. Both sampling methods allowed for
the facilitation of one-on-one interviews and sista circles that are developed based on the wisdom and expertise of Black women. This wisdom is developed as Black women are able to speak authoritatively over their lived experiences and articulate them in spaces where they may find validation and support. Snowball sampling allows interested participants to share this study with members of their community and further emphasizes the importance of Black women’s communities of support (Collins, 2000; Johnson, 2015).

While the sample population was not intended to be representative of the entire population, all participants are expected to share specific common attributes that determined eligibility for the study. As articulated by Creswell (2013), it is imperative that all participants self-identify. Within this study it is important that participants self-identify as Black women professionals that have experienced gendered racism in student affairs. I invited housing professionals who identify as Black women who work (either currently or within the last five years) in housing at predominantly/historically white institutions within the United States and have experienced gendered racism at such institutions to participate in this study. I choose to focus on experiences at predominantly white institutions as Black women are oftentimes one of few people of color within these spaces and frequently can experience these challenges in isolation (Antonio, 2003; Jayakumar et al., 2009). Predominantly white institutions of higher learning were founded and explicitly restricted access to persons of color, specifically Black individuals. While access to these institutions has increased for people of color over time, systemic challenges negatively affecting their experience and success still exist. This
study will call continuous attention to the negative treatment and experiences Black women housing professionals have at predominately white institutions.

I selected the first eight eligible participants for data collection accessibility and intentional saturation to participate in the study. By selecting eight participants, I am able to effectively manage the transcription, coding, and analysis of eight audio-interview transcriptions, eight reflective journal transcriptions and two sista circle transcriptions. I selected the first eight eligible participants; however, I ensured that participants represent various institutions, regional locations, and range of time as a housing professional by a representative selection of those characteristics (Creswell, 2013). I invited all individuals selected as interview participants to attend the sista circle sessions and encouraged them to participate at their level of comfort or anonymity.

I invited participants to participate in one, one-on-one interview, attend two group sista circle facilitation sessions and submit journal reflections. The sample population, as highlighted in Table 1, was relatively young with six ($n = 6$) participants identified as aged 21–34, with two ($n = 2$) participants identified as aged 35–44. As evidenced by Table 1, Black women shared their reflection on their experiences with gendered racism at institutions throughout the United States with the majority ($n = 4$) occurring at institutions in the South. Out of all participants four ($n = 4$) experienced gendered racism at a private institution, and five experienced gendered racism at public institutions as Momo provided reflections for two institutions where they served as a housing professional. Lastly, only three ($n = 3$) participants remain employed as housing professionals with five ($n = 5$) choosing to leave the department or profession.
Table 1

Participant Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Institution Type</th>
<th>Employed in Housing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Camille</td>
<td>21–34</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halle Berry</td>
<td>35–44</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keke</td>
<td>35–44</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall</td>
<td>21–34</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindsey</td>
<td>21–34</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Momo</td>
<td>21–34</td>
<td>West/South*</td>
<td>Public/Private*</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>21–34</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shantal</td>
<td>21–34</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Momo provided reflections on two higher education institutions that harmed them.

Data Collection Methods

In order to understand Black women professionals’ experiences with gendered racism in housing, I implemented a critical narrative inquiry methodology that includes the completion of one one-on-one semi-structured interview as one of the primary data sources for this study. I provided a digital weblink (details can be found in Appendix B, Study Interest Form) to the online interest questionnaire on the call for participants to the informed consent form to identify eligible participants. I selected participants that self-identified as Black, women housing (current or within the last five years) staff members who have experienced gendered racism. I asked participants to disclose an interest in participating in one virtual, one-on-one interview lasting 45–90 minutes each. Following the interview, I asked each participant to complete a reflective journal entry that allowed me to understand their emotions and processing of the interview experience. After completing the two sista circle sessions, participants were provided a $25 Visa gift card as compensation for their participation in this study. Participants that only completed two
of the three requirements (attending one interview and one sista circle or attended both sista circles) received a $15 Visa gift card. I invited each participant to submit their introductory participant profile that will introduce them as participants in Chapter Four.

**Interviews**

I conducted one virtual, one-on-one semi-structured interview (Patton, 1990) with each of the selected participants to gain perspective on their experiences with gendered racism in higher education and their reflections on such experiences. The semi-structured interview allowed participants to share their experiences (Creswell, 2013) with gendered racism in higher education, reflect on their emotional and behavioral responses to such experiences and reflect on how these racial or gendered microaggressions influenced them during their time in the field. During the interview, I asked participants questions relating to their professional experience, why they chose to pursue a role in housing. I asked participants to reflect on their most and least enjoyable parts of their role as housing professionals. I asked participants to generally reflect on their most salient relations with their colleagues, supervisors, and subordinates. These questions allow me to understand the nature of Black women’s experience with gendered racism from their expert opinion (Collins, 2000). Additionally, utilizing interviews allowed me to understand how Black women reflect on their standpoint (Collins, 2000) as it relates to their experiences with gendered racism and what coping strategies they applied as a result of experiencing gendered racism.

As participants are not from one consistent geographical area, I utilized audio recordings from Zoom and verbatim transcription through Otter in collecting data for
analysis. All audio recordings were stored on two encrypted flash drives. Upon completion and transcription of all interviews, I permanently deleted the auditor recordings from each flash drive. All transcription files will continue to be stored on two encrypted flash drives with all identifying information such as name, institution, program/department titles, peer names, etc., removed or provided participant selected pseudonyms.

**Reflective Journaling**

According to Russell and Kelly (2002), keeping self-reflective journals during the research process helps to facilitate reflexivity by using the researchers’ or participant journals to examine “personal assumptions and goals” and to clarify “individual belief systems and subjectivities” (p. 2) In addition to interviews, I requested that the participants complete reflective journals to further elaborate on their experiences. These reflective journals served as a way of acquiring feedback and perspective from participants about their time during the interview and allowed me the opportunity to confirm any interpretations from the interview transcriptions. I did not use the journal entries as data gathering, but I used the journal entries to ensure reciprocal relationships and the mitigation of researcher power dynamics inherently found in the study.

According to B. A. Smith (1999), written reflections allow an opportunity to create an audit trail of self-reasoning that contributes to the overall trustworthiness of findings. I provided the participants prompts that they could respond to for further reflection; however, participants were not required to use these prompts. I gave participants the option of providing written or audio recordings of their reflective journal
entries. I requested that the journals be submitted within two weeks of the one-on-one interview. Similarly, I stored all journal entries on an encrypted flash drive and deleted them at the end of data collection. After each interview, I also reflected on the experience through reflective journaling, which supported efforts to ensure trustworthiness and reflexivity (Russell & Kelly, 2002). Journal prompts can be found in Appendix E, participant reflective journal prompts. I allocated 15 minutes after each interview to reflect on how the interview went from my perspective, how I felt emotionally, and whether or not I began to recognize any themes emerging from data gathered. My reflective journaling did not include any identifying participant information and allowed me to reflect on internal and logistical reflections.

**Sista Circle Sessions**

Facilitating a sista circle session allowed me an opportunity to review collected data and identified themes from the previous interviews. The sista circle allowed for the participants to gain validation in their experiences and develop a network of support in other participants (Johnson, 2015). Participants in the study were invited to attend two Zoom facilitated sista circle sessions (facilitation guides can be found in Appendix E and Appendix F). These sessions lasted 60–90 minutes and were documented using audio recording. In order to protect anonymity, all participants were expected to utilize pseudonyms and were given the option to leave their camera off. During the conversation, I presented the main findings from the interviews as topical areas. Presenting the main findings from the interviews allowed the participants to confirm or disaffirm the presented findings and add any additional commentary to support the
identified theme. Following the sista circle session, I transcribed and analyzed the sista circle transcription with verbatim transcription through Otter. I also stored all audio and video recordings on two encrypted flash drives. Upon completion and transcription of the sista circle session, I permanently deleted all audio and video recordings from each flash drive.

**Data Analysis**

Critical theory helps guide and inform critical narrative inquiry, allowing researchers to draw on relevant critical traditions to inform their data analysis (Iannacci, 2007). In alignment with my research questions, theoretical framework and methodology, data analysis revolved around Black women housing professionals and their reflections on their experiences with gendered racism, in addition to specific strategies they used as they navigated gendered racism. I developed both research questions to provide space for Black women to articulate their authority over their lived experiences. By applying BFT and sista circle methodology throughout the study, I emphasize the collaborative relationship between researcher and participants as a demonstration of an ethic of caring (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015). Specifically, while utilizing BFT, I can ensure multiple truths are visible while incorporating and prioritizing the interest and values of my participants and the greater collective of Black women housing professionals (Patterson et al., 2016). Furthermore, by using BFT, this study can create “opportunities for self-definition and self-determination all while emphasizing the importance of [B]lack women’s lived experiences” (Patterson et al., 2016, p. 60).
I transcribed and coded all interview and sista circle transcription for themes using line-by-line coding originally followed by thematic coding to engage the data and highlight major themes and subthemes. Line by line coding includes applying identified codes to each line of qualitative data and allows the researcher to gather rich data interpretations (Charmaz, 2014). While commonly associated with grounded theory, I considered line-by-line coding to be particularly useful as I did not want to impose a pre-existing framework or analysis onto the data but let themes emerge from the data directly (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 1994). Line-by-line coding is grounded in my theoretical framework, BFT (Collins, 2000), and my epistemological commitment to allow Black women the opportunity to speak as experts of their lived experience. By utilizing line-by-line coding, I recognized the greater themes that emerged from my participants’ narratives and structured them into emerging themes. Interviews and sista circle transcriptions were audio-recorded and transcribed utilizing verbatim transcription. Interviews and sista circle transcriptions were also coded for themes using initial coding, focused coding, and axial coding (Charmaz, 2014).

I utilized open coding to identify emerging categories and information from the data as presented from the line-by-line review. I also noted any general words and repetitive points. While facilitating a line-by-line review of each transcript, I recognized that the participants shared narrative stories and reflections which was better suited for me to start with a more thematic coding approach where I assigned codes to groups or segments of sentences rather than line by line. I identified the emerging and most salient categories which included reflections focusing on participants’ journey to their residence
life role, their most and least enjoyable experiences, their collegial interactions and interactions with professionals and subordinates, their general reflections on their student relationships, identity reflections, coping strategies. I developed these emerging themes while reviewing the transcripts for general commonalities but were not in relation to the research questions.

Next, I utilized focused coding to identify recurrent or varying sub-categories emerging from repetition and interconnectedness across originally identified categories specifically focusing on the research questions of the study. By reviewing the original themes and repetitive words and themes highlighted, I was able to discover any relationships and connections between the themes. I found that participants offered the most salient reflections when discussing their relationships with their colleagues, supervisors, and students. I also found that participants discussed at great length their least enjoyable experiences within their role highlight peer interactions and crisis response as the most negative experiences.

Finally, I utilized axial coding to create a system of synthesis and organization within the categories and subcategories to produce a theoretical understanding of the data collected. I took the themes identified and prioritized and highlighted them. I synthesized the reflections from the participants to identify three general themes, professional relationships, deceptive institutional culture, and discrimination, and confronting challenging experiences that answered the first research question. I also synthesized the reflections to identify three themes that answered the second research question which were general coping strategies, personal and familial relationships, and resilience. With
any codes or themes lacking sufficient depth of analysis, I removed them from the primary focus of the study and may reference for further inquiry. By utilizing line-by-line coding, I was able to understand the commonalities and dissimilarities among Black women housing professionals as it relates to their standpoint of experiences of gendered racism (Collins, 2000).

**Trustworthiness and Member Checking**

As highlighted in BFT, meaning is both created and validated through the experiences as well as the critical and intentional reflection of Black women (Collins, 2008). As a researcher, it is essential that my interpretation and process for data collection are both trustworthy and an accurate account of information shared by each participant. Black women are often silenced and misinterpreted, so I was sensitive to the confidentiality of my participants and allowed them to tell their stories with intentionality, depth, and accuracy.

As Creswell and Poth (2018) explained, it is essential to ensure trustworthiness over time by maintaining documentation of memos that highlight emerging ideas, overall theme, and researcher lens of interpretation on data. As I examined the participants’ stories and reflections, I recognized the potentiality of my explicit and implicit assumptions and interpretations of their reflections. I explored my reflexivity in the study by utilizing a memo journal during data collection. I examined both my conceptual lens, explicit and implicit biases, and assumptions and how these may affect any research decisions or interpretations of this study. By utilizing a memo journal, I was able to make
relevant changes to language and structure of sista circle sessions to gather more specific and rich data.

To ensure trustworthiness, I utilized member checking and participant/researcher journals during data collection to prevent any deviation of phrases or inadequate interpretations (Maxwell, 1992). Glesne (2006) shares that member checking is the “sharing [of] interview transcripts, analytical thoughts, and/or drafts of the final report with research participants to make sure you are representing them and their ideas accurately” (p. 36). As supported by Glaser (2006), I utilized member checking during and after all interviews and during the sista circle session after all interviews were completed, transcribed, and analyzed. During each interview, I asked the participants for clarity on specific comments made, and after each interview, I sent each participant copies of their verbatim transcription for accuracy. During the sista circle session, I allowed the participants the option to have their cameras off in order to further protect personal and professional anonymity. This sista circle session allowed me an opportunity to present themes and sub-themes and general findings from data analysis for the participants to confirm or disaffirm for accuracy.

**Summary**

Within this chapter, I have highlighted and provided supporting literature for the study’s research design and methodology. I have briefly explored literature that supports the use of BFT and sista circle methodology as strong methodological approaches for elevating the voices of Black women housing professionals. I have also provided context on the data collection, data analysis and participant characteristics through a qualitative
and methodological lens. In the next chapter, Chapter Four, I present all research findings from the participant interviews and as affirmed from the two sista circle sessions.
Chapter Four: Findings

I utilize Black feminist frameworks and the sista circle methodology to uncover Black women housing professionals’ perceptions and understandings of their experiences with gendered racism while being employed at predominantly white institutions. I identified several themes and subthemes within this study that contribute to and extends Black feminist theoretical contributions within the context of Black women housing professionals and their experiences of gendered racism. Black women in this study answered guiding questions in individual and group settings about their experiences as housing professional staff at predominantly white institutions. Black women’s responses offered significant reflections and interpretations of how they perceived their treatment as housing professionals, interacted with their supervisors and colleagues, and coped with these negative experiences of gendered racism.

This chapter explores what the women shared as they reflected on their experiences as Black housing professionals at predominantly white institutions and how they coped with such experiences. I reference the two guiding research questions of this study to structure and concisely present themes related to the findings. Utilizing narrative research, the research questions are:

1. How do Black women housing professionals reflect on their experiences of gendered racism in student affairs?
2. What strategies do Black women housing professionals use to navigate racist and gendered environments?

This chapter is segmented into two sections. First, I introduce the studies participants providing both participant and researcher authored introductory participant profiles in which the participants introduce themselves. Second, I present the themes within two subsections that address the two research questions of this study. The first research question explored how Black women reflect on their experiences of gendered racism in student affairs. The themes I identified were exploring Black women housing professionals’ reflections of their professional relationships, specifically highlighting interactions with Black women, white men, Black men, and white women. Additionally, I present the theme exploring the deceptive institutional culture and negative experiences Black women housing professionals reflected on such as discrimination, deceptive institutional culture, and an overall lack of support for Black women in the workplace. The final theme for the first research question highlights specific ways in which Black women housing professionals confronted controlling images of the strong Black women, mammy, Jezebel, and angry Black women.

Lastly, I present themes related to the study’s second research question, exploring the strategies do Black women housing professionals use to navigate racist and gendered environments. I present specific coping strategies as a main theme, with several subthemes identified such as hyperawareness or hypervigilance, methods in which Black women housing professionals avoided hypervisibility, and the development and enforcement of personal and professional boundaries. The second main theme I found
was how Black women rely on their relationships and connections such as their Black community and spiritual faith to cope with gendered racism. Lastly, I present the third and final main theme of resilience and how Black women are resilient as a coping strategy in response to gendered racism in their role.

**Introductory Participant Profiles**

One component of their participation in this study was to submit the following profiles introducing themselves as participants within the study. I gave participants guidance to introduce themselves by sharing characteristics and personality descriptors about themselves avoiding any self-identifying information. Six out of eight participants drafted their own profile with two participants requesting for me to draft a profile on their behalf. Of those six, four chose to disclose their pronouns intentionally and directly. Each individual participant profile is as follows.

**Camille [participant authored]**

Camille is a 33-year-old, single Black woman who has worked only at predominately white institutions. Her story represents what it looks like for entry-level Black women to come into the student affairs field as a first generation college student. Camille found her passion for student affairs and higher education after undergrad when she realized she enjoyed being an RA and could see herself pursuing a master’s degree in the field. Camille has close ties to her faith and family that keep her grounded in her Student Affairs work. Camille is still in the field but has transitioned to academia; due to the trauma of residence life work, she had to leave the administrative side to regroup and reconnect. Due to her enrollment as a doctoral student, she has found liberation in
learning more critical theories that assist her in addressing and dismantling power surrounding gender and race. Camille tries to be restorative in her practices when dealing with racial and gendered injustices.

**Halle Berry [researcher authored]**

Halle Berry (Halle), is a 36-year-old, married Black woman. Halle has completed her master’s degree in education and has previously served in several housing roles both as a paraprofessional staff member and as a professional staff member. Recently, Halle left her role as a housing professional as a result of discrimination in the workplace. Halle ultimately accepted a role as a housing professional as a means to save money as she would not be required to pay for rent or for meals. Halle relies heavily on her faith and her strong relationship with her partner as a method of surviving toxic work environments.

**Keke [participant authored]**

Keke (she/her) is a 40-year-old, single Black woman who has worked primarily at predominantly white institutions. Her story provides a glimpse at the challenges that Black women encounter while working at these institutions. Keke found her passion for student affairs when she worked as a resident assistant as an undergraduate. She began her college career as a first-generation college student and is passionate about supporting Black students with their collegiate journey. Keke uses her expertise as a student affairs practitioner, along with her training as an executive leadership coach to help Black women amplify their brand, achieve their goals, and increase their net worth.
Kendall [participant authored]

Kendall is a 28-year-old married Black woman who has worked at both public and private predominately white institutions. The majority of her work has been in residence life [referred to as housing within this study]. Kendall began working in residence life as a resident assistant in undergrad and was encouraged by her mentors to pursue a career in the field after three years of service. The majority of Kendall’s collegiate career was navigated without significant representation of Black Americans in administrative positions; so, Kendall’s choice to remain in the field is largely based on their desire to be a visible representation for young Black women at predominantly white institutions that she felt she was deprived of. Kendall works to try to reform departments’ hiring practices, accountability structures, and conduct policies that perpetuate antiquated standards.

Lindsay [participant authored]

Lindsay (she/her) is a Black woman and current doctoral student in her late 20s born, raised, and wholly educated in the Midwest. Lindsay attended public predominantly white institutions for her bachelor’s, master’s, and current doctoral program. Lindsay found her passion for student affairs through participation in bridge programs, student leadership positions, and mentorship she received on campus as an undergraduate student. Lindsay’s educational plan is focused on higher education and student affairs with a desire to hold senior administrative positions. Lindsay did not anticipate a career in housing but found herself in need of a job and could not deny the benefit of the salary and housing accommodations. Lindsay felt extremely exhausted in the field by the end of
her housing tenure due to racialized and gendered discrimination coupled with a toxic leadership structure. Though Lindsay did not lose her passion for higher education research and student affairs administration, she is not ashamed to admit the baggage and scars she carries from her previous professional role. Lindsay intends to study the experiences of Black students attending predominantly white institutions to create evidence-based resources that will provide them with a high-quality and engaging college experience.

**Momo [participant authored]**

Momo (they/them) is a 28-year-old Black and non-binary individual who is strongly connected to Black womanhood. Momo initially entered student affairs and higher education with hopes to be the representation they never had. Their original intent was to cultivate space for marginalized people so that they know they are not alone and know that they have a support system while matriculating through their education. However, this journey has come with a price. This price includes having to navigate a system that was never meant for their success, showing up for students (sometimes to their own detriment), consistently being told that their quietness doesn’t “contribute to positive team morale,” experiencing harm by people who hold similar identities, and not being able to exist freely and autonomously. Momo often wonders if they made a mistake choosing student affairs/higher education as their career path. There are certainly many rewarding moments. But the harm that continues to be done outweighs those rewarding moments. Despite their experiences, Momo continues to have a passion for serving
others, contributing to the healing of underrepresented communities, and striving for freedom in every area of their life.

**Natalie [researcher authored]**

Natalie is a 24-year-old, queer, Black woman, born in the southern region of the United States. Natalie is currently engaged and plans to be married summer of 2022. Natalie currently has a “complicated relationship with religion.” Natalie completed her master’s degree in 2021. Natalie currently works in housing but has experience in student conduct, Greek life, student engagement and leadership, and diversity and inclusion. Natalie recognizes that their role in housing was a job that allowed her to help students that wanted to be helped as opposed to her experience with students in institutional conduct.

**Shantal [participant authored]**

Shantal (she/her) is a 32-year-old single Black woman who has worked primarily at predominately white institutions. Her story represents what it looks like for Black women to struggle and succeed while faced with racist and gendered adversity at predominately white institutions. Shantal found her passion for student affairs and higher education during her undergraduate experience and recognizes that her motivation for pursuing a career path in higher education was to exalt revenge to those that harmed her while seeking a pseudo-justice to her past wounded self. Shantal uses humor to mask some of the internalized pain and emotional strife she experiences daily as a direct result of racist and gendered personal and professional attacks in her role as a residence hall director. While Shantal has left the field, she constantly feels guilty that she was not there
to help “other Black girls that look like [her] face similar challenges that [she] has experienced.” She shares her experiences with gendered racism as being perpetrated by white women, Black men, and other BIPOC within her previous department.

I include introductory participant profiles to orient the readers to each participant’s identity and background. Many participants offer their perspectives as it relates to entering their roles as housing professionals and their emotional reflections on their experiences. Introductory participant profiles allow each participant to introduce themselves with authority and authenticity, further supported by the framework of this study.

**Research Findings**

Participants offered their reflections of their experiences with gendered racism as well as how they coped with those experiences. This section is segmented into two parts highlighting themes for each individual research question of this study. Within this section, I am intentional about providing a plethora of direct quotes from participants as this study centers and amplifies the voices and expertise of Black women as an expert in their experiences. Additionally, I have not edited the participant quotes and have left them in their intended voice which reflects the use of African American Vernacular English or Ebonics (R. Williams, 1975). Any edits to the participants’ quotes are provided for clarity and contextual understanding but are not intended to correct formality or to achieve proper English grammar which is tainted by white language supremacy (Inoue, 2019; Pritchard, 2017). White language supremacy assists white supremacy by using language to control reality and resources by defining and evaluating
people, places, things, reading, writing, rhetoric, pedagogies, and processes in multiple ways that damage our students and our democracy. It imposes a worldview that is simultaneously pro-white, cisgender, male, heteronormative, patriarchal, ableist, racist, and capitalist (Inoue, 2019; Pritchard, 2017). As a Black scholar and researcher, I find it important to maintain the authenticity provided by my participants and their choice to articulate in their preferred or most comfortable vernacular of speech.

**Reflection on Experiences of Gendered Racism in Student Affairs**

“Doing the most, yet not enough at the same damn time.” - Momo

“This job is more than housing, we the whole damn institution.” - Lindsay

The first research question of this study was how do Black women housing professionals reflect on their experiences of gendered racism in student affairs? Within this section, I choose to present the narrative centering the actions of others as opposed to centering the experiences of Black women. By centering these actions of others, I choose to intentionally highlight ways in which individuals from other races and gender identities support and harm Black women. Additionally, in centering the perspectives of others I intend for readers with these specific identities to see first-hand ways in which they may harm Black women. As indicated above in the quote by Momo, Black women felt that their experience while working as housing professionals at predominantly white institutions was a contradiction where they felt they were constantly expected to do a significant amount of work, but that work was never enough. Black women felt that when reflected generally on their experience as housing professionals their role was significant to the success of the entire institution. I further elaborate on these feelings by discussing
how Black women provided reflection on their relationships with colleagues and supervisors. Additionally, Black women reported having positive relationships with students within their respective institutions. Black women also shared their reflections of their institutional culture and negative experiences with discrimination, varying institutional rhetoric and lack of support. Black women spoke about their experiences in heightened racialized national events and their perception of their identity as it related to various controlling images such as mammy, Jezebel, Strong Black Woman, and the Angry Black woman.

**Professional Relationships**

Black women shared that their relationships with their colleagues, supervisors and students were both positive and negative. Black women’s relationships with colleagues and supervisors were primarily negative, while relationships with students were most frequently reported as the most enjoyable aspect of their job as housing professionals. I found that collegial and supervisory relationships were both areas of support and encouragement, especially from Black women and white male colleagues and supervisors, while many Black women shared that their experience with Black male and white women colleagues and supervisors proved to be the most challenging. While the majority of participants shared that their relationships with Black women, white men, Black men and white women were most salient for them, they reflected on experiences with other individuals from diverse races and genders. I considered reporting the participants’ supervisory relationships, but their reflections of those relationships connected more to how they were discriminated against versus the general nature and
reflections of those relationships. Instead, I focused on the general relationships, both collegial and supervisory. I categorized these reflections of the reflections that Black women had by race and gender. While Black women shared reflections on their experiences with colleagues who did not identify as Black or white, and who identified outside the gender binary, the relationships with Black women, white men, Black men, and white women were the most salient across all participants. Black women spent the bulk of the time, both in interviews and in each sister circle session, discussing their reflections on their relationships with Black women, white men, Black men, and white women. Further, I present the themed reflections Black women shared from their collegial and/or supervisory relationships with Black women, white men, Black men, and white women.

**Relationships With Black Women**

Participants reported having the most positive professional and personal relationships with other Black women. I asked the participants what their most enjoyable relationships were, and Momo shared that “the enjoyable ones that I’ve had have all been Black women. So, like there’s very little I have to explain because they get it, which has been nice.” Momo further explained that their relationship with Black women came naturally and often the Black women they had a positive relationship with were often experiencing the same negative treatment that they themselves experienced at the same institution, “it was also nice to just have a conversation about what it’s like to be Black in this department specifically and what it’s like to be a Black individual who are connected to Black womanhood.” Camille also affirmed that one of her Black woman colleagues
had a lasting impact and became one of her closest friends while she served as a housing professional, “it was great getting to know the women, specifically the Black woman who became one of my closest friends in the role.” Further, Lindsey shared that she and her Black women colleagues formed an informal support group where they would attend kickboxing courses together as it helped to “release some of the aggression [they] had after dealing with the bullshit.”

**Relationships With White Men**

Black women shared that they generally had good experiences with their white male colleagues and supervisors. Often their white male colleagues or superiors would report disparaging comments made by others on the team to the Black women. Black women theorized that white men would share these comments with them in a hope of allowing the Black women an opportunity to correct their behavior or be aware of comments made about them. Shantal shared an experience where her white male colleague would share comments about individuals on the team that spoke negatively about Shantal and share how he would correct their behavior in Shantal’s defense, he would always run back and tell me such and such said this and that. I told them how wrong they were. It felt good to know someone had my back even if I did think he was doing it for clout.

Shantal shared how she appreciated the efforts of her white male colleague who was always considering that he was not telling the truth or that he only stuck up for her to make himself look better as an ally and not actually to protect her. Momo shared that they
had a white male colleague that would often intervene in scenarios where the department or institution would harm Black women,

I’m very appreciative for him because I worked with him. Most of if not all of my res life career and so like, he’s always been that person to be like ‘I got it’ . . . do you need space . . . what do you need and so I’m very appreciative for him.

Momo reflected that their relationship with this white male colleague contributed positively to their experiences as housing professionals.

Camille shared that her white male colleague told her about an instance where her superiors had concerns about her physical appearance in meetings,

my colleague who was a white man, love him to death, told me that some people were talking about me. He was saying “I wanted to let you know that people are talking about you and the way you show up in meetings you know like slouching and how you are sitting.”

Camille shared that while her relationships with her white male colleagues were generally positive, she always recognized an ulterior motive behind their actions. For example, when working with the same white male colleague this individual would make comments in an attempt to protect her from backlash and publicly denounce injustice, but would also make sly comments that led Camille to believe he only attempted to protect her to advance himself professionally,

I think [his behavior] was really him looking for clout, you know. He would say little things and was frustrated because he was passed over for jobs and felt it was
because he wasn’t a person of color. I don’t know. I don’t really think race and equity was his top priority.

Camille felt that her white male colleague came to her defense to center himself as an ally for Black women. Camille also felt that her white male colleague would frequently make comments disparaging efforts for inclusion so much so that Camille considered his allyship was performative. Black women’s reflection on their interactions and relationships with white men were generally positive, however, Black women also acknowledged that they felt the relationships were performative.

**Relationships With Black Men**

Most reflections about their collegial and supervisory relationship between participants and Black men were reported by Black women as being negative or challenging scenarios. Momo shared an experience where their Black male supervisor was “extremely toxic” and made them feel uncomfortable with their actions and comments during every meeting. Additionally, Black women’s experience with Black men showed that they would often alienate or harm other Black women on the team while going above and beyond to support the white women on the team, Momo further reflected on their experience with their toxic Black male supervisor,

My first professional year of [housing] I worked for a Black man. He was terrible.

He was awful, truly awful. He made me uncomfortable, and I did not want to come to work. . . . It was very interesting to watch him always side with white women over like Black folks.
Shantal shared similar reflections where her Black male colleague often was given praise from departmental leadership for work, he had not done,

I literally would plan a program we were supposed to plan together, and I had to make sure it popped off well because as a Black woman shit has to be good if it has my name on it. This dude ended up getting a departmental award for the program and his other responsibilities on campus. I was heated. I’m like nothing would have been done without me but he gets the praise. Sure. And when I confronted him about me being the person to do all the work, he had the nerve to act like he didn’t know what I was talking about.

It is also important to note that in addition to Shantal perceiving and being frustrated by her Black male colleague taking credit for her work, she highlights an important phenomenon where Black women feel they must overperform in the workplace or face scrutiny. Shantal reflected that even though she shared her concerns with her colleague he chose to dismiss her concerns and psychologically manipulate her by pretending her concerns were not valid. Black women felt their relationships with their Black male peers and supervisors were overwhelmingly negative and challenging.

**Relationships With White Women**

Black women found their relationships with white women to lack depth. Natalie shared that her experience being supervised by a white woman was drastically different from her experiences being supervised by Black men and women and white men, “My experience previously being supervised by white women. Very different. They do not understand anything about me like there was zero connection.” When discussing her
relationship with her colleagues, Halle Berry shared an experience with a white woman colleague that was hired mid-year. From Halle’s perspective, a white woman was hired into the department and immediately berated Halle based on negative perceptions from other colleagues. Halle reflected on her experiences with the white woman by stating that she “was the most evil White woman of all time.” Halle further reflected about her interpretations of her experiences with white women as both colleagues and supervisors.

I’ve noticed that it seems like when white women have some expectation of me that they haven’t shared, as though I must meet their expectations or see them, versus us creating those expectations together and growing together.

Halle further noticed that her relationship with white women was often strained and lacked emotional depth. Halle felt as if her relationship with this white woman was limited as the white woman had expectations for Halle to live up to but failed to communicate these to Halle. Within relationships it is important that expectations be clearly communicated. This was affirmed by Lindsey as she reflected on her ability to form strong relationships with white women. Natalie stated, “I think from my experience, it’s really hard for me to connect to white [women] who I don’t know.” As shared by Shantal, “Honestly working with white women sometimes feels tokenizing. Like they are just my friend to say they have a Black friend.” Shantal reflected that she felt tokenized by her relationship with white women in her role. Black women shared their reflections of their interactions with white women as lacking emotional depth, intention, and connection.
Students

Black women reported having the most positive relationships with students, both paraprofessional staff (resident assistants) and students within the community. Black women enjoyed being a contributing partner in the growth and success of students within their residence hall community. Halle reflected on her ability to see the growth in her students since working with them years ago, “the best part was students. Being able to see their growth and see them turn into these beautiful young adults.” Natalie spoke of having a strong relationship with her students, “I had some enjoyable moments with my students and not just the ones I worked with.” Momo also affirmed that they had a strong positive relationship with their paraprofessional staff, “I’ve never had bad staff. I’ve had some of my favorite student staff working in housing, students I’m still connected to this day.” Keke shared that while she often had students that were challenging, overall students and her relationship with her students is what kept her motivated in her role as a housing professional,

Keeping the students at the forefront of my mind. I really connected with my students, even those that were a thorn in my butt you know [laugh] I really connected with them. It was important to foster a good relationship with them and remind them like you don’t have to be this way. You know I was really just helping them see the bigger picture.

Black women shared that their relationships with their students were critical to their motivation as housing professional staff. Black women shared reflections where their relationships with students caused them to think critically about the challenges, they
endured with experiencing gendered racism at their institution. Lindsay reflected on her positive relationship with her students,

The students. They was the best part for me. Anytime I ever had days or moments where I’m like ‘this is it, fuck housing, fuck this school, fuck these kids’ I swear every time I felt this way I either had an interaction with a resident or an RA that same day that reminded me of why I’m literally in this position.

Black women reported that students were overwhelmingly the most rewarding and enjoyable relationship of the role. All participants reflected on how they maintained and continue to maintain positive relationships with their paraprofessional staff members.

**Deceptive Institutional Culture and Discriminatory Experiences**

All participants shared that they experienced race and gender discrimination while being employed at their workplace. Four participants disclosed having participated in some version of institutional reporting (including racial and/or sexual/sex-based) harassment claims. Upon beginning their interview, Halle mentioned that she recently left her employer as a result of discrimination in the workplace. Halle also mentioned that the opportunity to participate in this study was extremely timely as she was still emotionally processing her experience. When asked additional questions about her experience with discrimination and reporting her concerns to human resources (HR), Halle mentioned that “[she] didn’t feel comfortable with HR because they were [her perpetrator’s] friend.”

Shantal shared she never originally intended to officially submit a report against their violators, however, was forced to do so as Title IX staff shared her complaint with her supervisor without her permission,
HR violated my rights by sharing details about my case with my boss before I even chose to actually officially report it. Then they started to harass and violate me, so I was forced to pursue a case as it was retaliation and I had to protect myself you know?

While Title IX offices are intended to support survivors of sex-based discrimination, the Title IX office at Shantal’s institution failed to support her as a reporting party and violated her rights as a complainant. This further exacerbates Shantal’s experiences with gendered racism perpetuated by the Title IX office at her institution. Due to the Title IX office alerting Shantal’s perpetrator about Shantal’s complaint against her supervisor without her consent, Shantal subsequently experienced retaliation from the supervisor leading to negative challenges in the workplace.

Momo also shared that their employer attempted to terminate them but lacked sufficient evidence, “they tried to fire me. Same way they made another Black woman before me leave [the institution]. I left first because I saw all the bullshit happening.”

Halle mentioned how her institution denied her accommodation request in an attempt to force her to quit her role, stating, “They den[ied] my ADA [Americans with Disabilities Act] accommodation [request] even though my physician said that they recommended it because of [my] depression and anxiety.” Black women were forced to endure various instances of institutional discrimination resulting in them filing reports with human resources offices, Title IX offices, and other employee conflict resolution offices. Out of all reporting instances that Black women shared during this study, none resulted in justice for the Black women housing professional reporting such instances. The institutional
policies, procedures, and departments failed to provide support to the Black women housing professionals within this study. Black women further experienced marginalization and gendered racism as institutional policies, procedures, and departments intended to advocate and protect them failed.

**Institutional Rhetoric**

Participants shared their recognition that their institutions’ articulated rhetoric was deceptive and contradictory to their lived reality as employees. Camille shared that her institution hired people of color and prioritized social justice on paper, “my institution took pride in being leaders in diversity and inclusion but caused so much harm it was wild.” but often perpetrated harm against people of color, both students and staff, with disregard to their emotional and physical wellbeing. Camille shared an experience where a Black female staff member was terminated from their paraprofessional role in the middle of the year while struggling with a personal family medical emergency,

She didn’t have nowhere to stay. I mean offer her temporary housing, what is she supposed to do? I told them I didn’t want to fire her. She is good at what she does. I know she messed up, but I didn’t agree with this termination at all.

Natalie shared how her institution expressed a commitment to diversity and diverse hiring practices, but divisional leadership was shocked when confronted with the lack of diversity within their housing department,

I actually saw my organizational chart from my RAs all the way up to our executive director of the department. Everyone was white except for myself. And when I brought that up, they were just like, oh, like we didn’t even notice.
Natalie’s department spoke about supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion within its mission statement. However, racial diversity was not present across the hired professional staff. Natalie was the only person of color in the department.

Black women’s negative experiences of gendered racism often were perpetuated by colleagues and supervisors most frequently during heightened racialized events impacting campus climates such as the United States presidential election of 2016 and the racial uprising in 2020. All participants offered unsolicited reflection on their experiences navigating the 2016 United States presidential election. Natalie mentioned that leaders at her institution reprimanded her instead of providing support when she expressed concern about working with a student displaying political paraphernalia on their body,

I got reprimanded. Because I didn’t want to be seen in public with one of my RAs who was wearing a Make America Great Again hat. And when I expressed that it was just like, oh, well, you’re still their supervisor, and you need to.

Momo also shared a reflection where their institution facilitated a professional development session where external presenters told professional and paraprofessional staff, they should be able to leave their racial identity out of supporting their students. Presenters shared this commentary during professional development meetings facilitated to the housing staff during the racial uprisings of 2020. Momo expressed great frustration with their institution allowing and not correcting external presenters for paraprofessional staff training who shared tone-deaf comments encouraging students, especially students of color, to leave their racial identity out of supporting their students. Momo reflected on the experiences,
it was tone deaf for them to bring in [external presenters] and to talk about that, especially [after] the 2016 election with you know, the idiot in chief that we had an office and all of the things that he’d been doing and talking about and living in a predominantly white area that was pro-[2016 U.S. president elect] with a lot of people of color, like folks were scared.

For presenters to request that students of color take a color-blind approach to supporting members of their community was directly against the institution’s communicated commitment to inclusion. Momo shared that the institution and department often expressed a commitment to diversity and inclusion which is contradictory to a color-blind approach as recommended by session facilitators. Generally, Black women found that their institution communicated verbally a culture of inclusion, equity, and diversity, but failed to have policies or practices that contributed to those values.

Lack of Support

Lastly, participants shared that overall, they experienced a significant lack of support from their department and overall institution. When reflecting about her experiences with receiving feedback from her superiors even though she considers herself to be receptive to constructive criticism, Camille shared “I think [departmental leaders] were just afraid to give feedback and were scared to give it to me. It’s like I love feedback, that’s my job you know.” Camille was open to receiving constructive criticism as a new professional with the understanding that feedback would allow her to advance and grow as a student affairs practitioner. By failing to give adequate feedback, the leadership within Camille’s department inhibited her ability to grow professionally. Halle
expressed concern when she shared that early in her tenure as a housing professor, she was expected to navigate a challenging crisis situation without any support from her supervisors or departmental leadership. Halle shared that “[assignments were] just thrown at [her]” and that she “was given no direction, no guidance on what [her superiors] wanted.” Halle was not provided adequate training to complete her job duties yet was expected to perform. Halle shared sentiments about being one of if not the only Black women in her department. Halle would feel ignored and oftentimes “felt the hate” towards her during staff meetings. This caused Halle to feel tokenized and often felt unprepared for meetings as her supervisors would intentionally withhold critical information from her that was essential to her to be successful in those meetings.

Shantal shared an experience where she was a live-in staff as a hall director and could hear students cheering in the hall once the election results were announced on November 8, 2016. That following day she struggled to receive support from her institution as she was the only woman of color the majority of her students sought comfort from,

It was like I was expected to show up and support my students, specifically my students of color and my Black women students. I struggled because I didn’t know how to support them. I barely could support myself and I barely had support from those above me. Most of my support at that time came from my co-workers. I also had support from the Black women outside of my department, but I was one of the few Black women working in housing, so I just had to get over it.
Shantal was expected to support students while she did not receive any institutional support as she struggled after the 2016 presidential election. Shantal expressed frustration with this juxtaposition but was one of the few women of color that students sought support from after the election.

As participants reflected on their experiences, they noted having undergone discrimination, a discrepancy between articulated institutional rhetoric and their lived experience and an overall theme of lack of support from their institution.

**Confronting Controlling Images**

Participants also shared commentary that can be viewed through a lens of controlling images most ascribed to Black women. These sub themes found can most accurately be described as emotional policing of displays of strength and anger, self-sacrificing and dutiful loyalty, and hyper sexualization. These sub-themes most relate to the Strong Black Woman, mammy, and Jezebel controlling images respectively. Black women shared that people in their departments, students, and professional staff, made assumptions about who they were or how the Black women should act in various scenarios. Participants shared how they were aware of the awkward assumptions but frequently had to choose to bite their tongue or react depending on the scenario.

**Emotional Policing**

As a sign of emotional policing, Black women housing professionals shared reflections where their supervisors expected her to be emotionless in a time of crisis. Halle shared that in a meeting with a superior who was a white woman, Halle was told by her white woman colleague that she needed to manage her emotions. Ultimately, Halle’s
supervisor saw Halle’s tears, not as a sign of emotionality, but as a lack of professionalism in the workspace,

[She] pretty much told me that I needed to work on my emotions and that it wasn’t professional to cry. Now what I do realize that it really pisses me off because she was actually a white woman. But what I really realized is when white women cry to get what they want that is not professional to me, and it really makes me red hot, but I feel like it wasn’t her place to tell me that to tell me how to feel or when to express my emotions, and to try to make me emotionless like her. Because that’s kind of what she is.

Keke reflected on the lessons she has learned while being a housing professional and asserted that because of her experiences managing crises, she was able to manage her emotions and “stuff things down” when needed,

I don’t freak out anymore you know I’m able to, you know based on the training that I have been through throughout the years, I’ve been able to manage my emotions when it comes to you know emergency situations. I can really step up and just say, what is it that you need me to do and do that for whoever, whenever.

Keke shared that while working as a housing professional she felt as if departmental leaders expected her, even more than her colleagues, to handle intense emotionally draining situations with little to no support,

You continue to work around the clock. We’re expected to be superhuman . . . nothing impacts us, we’re able to deal with all the racial issues and support all the Black students, we’re supposed to know the answers to everything. It gets tiring.
It was very exhausting the expectations of being Black, being a woman and working at institutions that are primarily white.

Keke shared her reflections that in her role she felt as if departmental leaders expected her to be superhuman, playing into the Strong Black Woman controlling image. Keke was expected to not react when dealing with racial incidents. Keke felt as if she had to support all of her Black students without the support of her colleagues and supervisors.

Similarly, participants shared they felt pressure and emotional policing to behave stereotypically sassy or audacious. Kendall shared that she felt the pressure from her department to display a certain behavior that was assumed based on her being a Black woman that they chose to hire. Kendall shared, “It’s almost as if they hired me and expected me to be that sassy Black woman and when I wasn’t they were real mad.”

While Black women shared that they felt pressure to display strength at all times, they also received validation from their colleagues, on occasion both Black and white, that acknowledged their resiliency and made space for them to be vulnerable. Shantal reflected on her experience after the 2016 presidential election,

I honestly sat in my apartment with [redacted] and [redacted] and sobbed. Like I cried so hard when the news projected that he won. I honestly felt scared. Like I was afraid to go to sleep. I was afraid to wake and have to see what the world was now going to be. But [they] held me as I cried. They told me it was alright to cry. They sat with me for hours until I couldn’t cry anymore.
Black women reported that they felt immense pressure to feel strong at times and rarely were offered spaces and interactions from their peers to show emotionality and vulnerability as they navigated gendered racism and crises within their role.

**Emotional Strength and Dutiful Support**

Participants also shared experiences where they were expected to be self-sacrificing and express dutiful loyalty to their departments and institutions. They were expected to display this self-sacrifice by managing and navigating intense crisis scenarios with little to no support, guidance, or acknowledgment of their emotional capacity. Shantal shared an experience where she was first hired into her role and on the first day of school was expected to respond to a student crisis resulting in a student death and manage parent communication and facilities management,

I was super excited to come to work [that] day you know. It was my first day of work in my big girl job and a student [overdosed] on heroin and I had to speak to their parents because for some reason everyone else was too busy. I just had to become completely numb to the situation because what else was I supposed to do? Cry?

Shantal felt that her emotional needs were unimportant and that her professional response was most important to her supervisor. Shantal felt that it was more imperative for her to be numb and dismiss her emotions, than to show a negative emotional response that would perceivably be ignored by her supervisors.
Similarly, Camille reflected on when she was responsible for navigating various crises scenarios while also being concerned that she would be terminated if she asked for help or failed to respond to them,

During my first year a colleague of mine got fired so I was left to manage about 1300 students by myself. Then during my second year, a student committed suicide and in my third year, a kid started a fire in my building. I just had multiple back-to-back crises.

Black women housing professionals felt that these experiences forced them to feel incompetent and that their emotional needs were not controlled but were invisible. Black women felt as if their emotionality needed to be sacrificed for the good of the department.

*Hypersexualization*

Participants were hypersexualized by their supervisors in their workplace reporting scenarios where their sexuality and perceived eroticism were reflected as sarcastic or demonizing commentary. Halle shared an experience where her reporting supervisor made an intendedly sarcastic remark about her implying her promiscuity. According to Halle, they said “I don’t know [Halle], maybe you were throwing that cat around in [a southern state]. At the time, I had no idea what that phrase meant. I don’t talk like that.” Halle was able to connect with her partner after this incident who let her know that this commentary was most likely inappropriate causing Halle to feel discomfort with her reporting supervisor and file a human resources report against them for this comment. Similarly, Shantal shared that her superiors would often question her motives and relationship with her male colleagues implying that her behavior of calling
out gender-based and sexual harassment in the workplace was due to her being or wanting to be in a romantic relationship with her Black male colleague,

She really told me maybe I was jealous. It also made me remember when I first started working there. She would often make little comments suggesting we should date as we were the only two Black professionals in the department. Like really?

These various controlling images are used to categorize and conceptualize the reflections Black women housing professionals have on their negative experiences with gendered racism in their role.

Black women reflected on their experiences in the workplace highlighting their relationship with Black women, white men, Black men, white women, and students as the most saliently discussed demographics. Additionally Black women spoke of their reflections as it related to their experiences of discrimination, varying institutional rhetoric and a general theme of lack of support they received as professionals. Lastly, Back women found themselves reflecting on their experiences as it related to four controlling images: Strong Black Woman, mammy, Jezebel, and Angry Black woman.

**Coping Strategies in Response to Gendered Racism**

“My coffee, prayer, and being vulnerable and opening up and sharing my experiences with my trusted friends and colleagues to get some insight and also get reminded that I am not alone on this ever so persistent experience of being Black.” - Keke
The second research question of this study explored strategies Black women housing professionals use to navigate racist and gendered environments. As stated above by Keke, Black women found that they were able to cope with the experiences of gendered racism by drawing on their spirituality and personal relationships with friends and colleagues. Based on the findings, Black women shared that their coping in challenging scenarios, and this case specifically their coping in response to gendered racism, manifested as the following themes: coping strategies such as hyper awareness, avoiding scenarios of hypervisibility, and enacting stronger personal boundaries. Black women shared that they relied on their communities and their relationships with their family and support networks, and their spiritual relationship with a higher power. Black women tapped into their resilience to cope with the negative experiences of gendered racism as housing professionals at predominately white institutions. I present participant quotes to further elaborate on the salience of each theme.

**Coping Strategies**

Black women reported that the coping strategies they utilized in response to gendered racism in their role included being hyper aware of their presentation, both physically and emotionally. Black women also were intentional to avoid scenarios of hypervisibility in the workplace, including self-policing their presentation and appearance. Additionally, Black women elected to create and enforce boundaries with their colleagues, supervisors, and students.
Hyperawareness

Black women shared that they were often hyper aware of how they showed up at work. This includes paying special attention to how they styled their hair and how often, who they interacted with, whether they only spent time with colleagues of color versus white colleagues, and how they interacted with various groups of people as they were often ostracized from larger group events but called out if they spent too much time alone. Black women were aware that any interpretation of their behavior could be used to harm or penalize them in challenging work environments. Camille shared a reflection about her time within her department. While she spent time with her colleagues, she realized that these relationships lacked depth and that her colleagues would and could sabotage her,

It was a really political school, so I feel like whether you were a person of color or a white person you had to really pay attention to what you were doing and when. Like anything could be used against you so I was always just super aware of what was going on around me.

Kendall shared that she was often hyper aware of being the only person of color in a meeting or room. When her colleagues would have conversations related to race Kendall felt that all the attention or focus on the room transitioned to her. While her colleagues did not explicitly call on her, Kendall said she felt that “all the eyes in the room would shift to [her]” making her feel uncomfortable. Similarly, Shantal shared that when she was the only Black woman on her team, she felt that everything she did was scrutinized more than her male colleagues. Shantal shared this made her feel
uncomfortable, but “[she] knew that [she] had to make sure all her i’s [were] dotted and t’s were crossed otherwise [she’d] get in trouble.” Keke shared similar sentiments as she reflected on her relationship working with white supervisors for the first time,

It was weird because you know I couldn’t really be myself and I was free to talk about what I wanted to talk about…I felt like I had to be on…be on guard. I had to watch what I say, what I wore, what my face looked like, everything.

Black women constantly were hyperaware of how they were treated by colleagues and supervisors within their role and felt they could not be authentic for fear of being further scrutinized at work.

_Hypervisibility_

Black women also discussed feeling as if they had to intentionally go out of their way to avoid instances of hypervisibility within their department. For example, many of the women shared reflections on being hesitant to make changes to their appearance in the workplace. Changes to their hair, makeup, body size, style of clothes could be a way for Black women housing professionals to be targeted by their colleagues and peers and further ostracized or alienated within their department. Kendall shared that the extra attention when she changed her hair, even to a simple style, would cause her to feel awkward or uncomfortable,

At some points, I would be so drained going into work if I had changed my hair. Because I was self-conscious about my hair. But I just knew I had to prepare myself for the “Oh my gosh, you changed your hair!” But literally, I just pulled my hair back in a ponytail.
Kendall mentioned wanting to avoid making major changes to her hair during the school year in an attempt to prevent this discomfort. Kendall shared that while generally she enjoys receiving compliments, compliments about her appearance in the workplace felt hollow or ingenuine. Kendall shared “Now don’t get me wrong. I love attention. I love when people give me compliments, I do but something feels weird about that.” Kendall mentioned that she frequently would stress over her appearance, and it contributed to feelings of hypervisibility in the workplace. Black women often felt their appearance was constantly a topic of discussion and would stress over changes to their appearance as they feared being put on the spot.

**Boundaries**

The final coping strategy Black women reported utilizing was enacting strict boundaries with their students, colleagues, and supervisors. Momo mentioned that their experiences with gendered racism helped them set explicit boundaries for how they show up at work and how they discovered what experiences they would or would not tolerate in the work environment. Momo stated that their experiences with gendered racism allowed them to discover “what [was] important to [them] as a professional, like, the things that are my non-negotiables.” Boundaries were used to protect professional relationships with colleagues and supervisors that were deemed manageable, or they were implemented to create boundaries within strained professional relationships. Camille shared that while she enjoyed working with her colleagues their relationships likely would not exist outside of her and her colleague’s professional role,
I realized I needed to treat my relationships like what they were…connected to a job. I spend so much time with these people. We eat together every day in the cafe. We laugh, we cry, but at the end of the day this is a job. These people don’t care about me, they don’t have my back.

Additionally, Black women shared that they were comfortable with enacting boundaries with their students to keep their personal life separate from their professional experiences, especially as they were required to live on campus. Lindsey shared that while she had a great relationship with her student staff they knew and would respect her boundaries,

If it’s 12 o’clock [a.m.] or after like 5 o’clock and I walk past that desk [students] know not to bother me at all. Don’t even look at me in my face. You don’t even know when I walk past that desk. Forget I even exist!

Shantal shared that she had to implement strict boundaries with her students to protect herself. Shantal felt that if she was seen commensuration with her Black students too much she would be reprimanded by her department,

I knew that if at the end of the day I kiki’d too hard with my Black students or had loose lips with any students honestly that that would be looked at as a problem and be used against me. It would be just another thing they lied about to send me to HR.

While these boundaries were self-imposed, Shantal’s reflections highlight that the institution made an unconscious effort to thwart relationship building between students and staff of color. By limiting, unconsciously or consciously, relationship building with
Black students, her institution perpetuated the function of white supremacy and control over Black engagement and relationships. According to Lindsay, “First of all, my students knew my boundaries. So, boundaries also helped dealing with negativity.” Black women found that enacting personal and professional boundaries helped to protect them from further instances of oppression while in their role as housing professionals in an attempt to mitigate or perceivably soften the impact of any future instances of gendered racism.

**Personal, Familial, Spiritual Relationships**

I found that personal and familial relationships were important to how Black women coped in response to gendered racism within their institutions. Black women found support within their relationships with their friends and family and more specifically the greater Black community and network at their institution, as well as within their spiritual relationship with God/general spiritual connection. Black women reported the importance of having a connection to their community of Black community consisting of family, friends, loved ones, that they could reach out to during their negative experiences. However, participants mentioned that in order to maintain healthy personal boundaries with their loved ones they had to seek another avenue of support. Rather than “burden” their family members, Halle sought the support of Black community spaces at their institution. “I had to stop bringing stuff home because it was impacting my relationship with my husband. We’re newlyweds and this was putting a strain on our relationship. I had to find another place to cope.” Additionally, Camille shared experiences with her co-workers that became an informal support system for her.
[My colleagues] would take random trips to the pumpkin patch every year and that was fun because every year we got to pick out pumpkins for free and they bought us one donut. It wasn’t a costly thing, but it is something we all looked forward to.

Camille describes that her experiences with her co-workers served as a space for her to forget the challenges she experienced during her workday. Kendall mentioned her informal group of colleagues who had similarities and were a support system for each other.

Something that was really enjoyable to me was a group of RDs I started with. Some of us are married, some went to grad school, some were single, but we are all in the same place and starting our first professional role in housing. It was nice being able to enjoy the journey with a group of people who understood.

Black women found that building a strong relationship and connection with the Black community at their respective institution was a strategy to cope with their experiences of gendered racism at their institution. Black women created these relationships and created radical avenues of support for themselves as they experienced gendered racism at their institution.

Spirituality was a common theme for the majority of participants. Black women sought comfort in their spirituality as a means of resilience and survival after experiencing gendered racism at their institution. Kendall shared that she prayed and focused on spirituality to help her get through the negative experiences in her workplace when asked how she coped with gendered racism, “So a lot of prayer, a lot of trusting
God. And that’s when I took that leap of faith and just . . . I say, God, I’m gone trust you.” Shantal discussed how as she was trying to heal from “a lot of the trauma” she experienced she prayed, meditated, and really sought comfort listening to Black women leaders in ministry,

Honestly every day riding the train to work I was listening to a podcast from Sarah [Jakes-Roberts] and hearing her story and being able to relate to it emotionally it helped me get through it. It was tough. I shut out friends sometimes, and really just focused on my spirituality because I knew I wasn’t in a good place.

Spirituality and prayer were a common coping strategy that Black women used in response to gendered racism. Keke continues to find herself using her spirituality and her relationship with God,

But I recognize that God has, you know, blessed me with certain talents, regardless of my pay grade. You know, people seek me to support them in their journey, and I’m much more happier in this space.

Black women’s faith and spirituality was a coping strategy enacted by several participants that served as a significant method to cope with gendered racism.

**Resilience**

Participants articulated using their adaptive resilience as a coping strategy in response to gendered racism. All participants shared that when I asked explicitly how they coped with these negative experiences of gendered racism, they rarely, if ever, thought intentionally about how they would survive or cope with scenarios of racialized
and gendered marginalization. All the participants shared perspectives that alluded to their methods of resilience in response to gendered racism not being enacted intentionally on their part. Participants shared that many of their coping strategies were hard to name at the moment because it was second nature to how they navigated the world as Black-identifying women. However, when I asked participants to reflect on their experiences and responses critically and intentionally, I found that many of their coping strategies were practiced from a young age when they had to cope with methods of marginalization and racial and gender oppression experienced outside and prior to their role as a housing professional ultimately resulting in them taking a more activist approach to addressing and fighting racial injustice. When I asked how she coped with negative experiences of gendered racism Natalie shared “I really don’t know honestly. It’s really hard to kind of put into words how I’ve navigated those relationships because I’ve had to do it my whole life.” Shantal asserted that she was able to cope after her experiences of gendered racism because the “pain fueled [her] passion to stop this from happening to other women or at least make [other women] not feel so alone.” Black women utilized these characteristics of resilience to survive and eventually find success during or after their mistreatment and continued marginalization.

Conclusion

Black women utilized several coping strategies, hypervigilance, avoiding instances of hypervisibility and developing strong boundaries, to attempt to thwart off instances of gendered oppressions as perpetrated by their colleagues and supervisors in
their role. Lastly, Black women spoke of their coping strategies as a form of resilience that had been ingrained and practiced by them since before, they could remember.

Within the next chapter, Chapter Five, I discuss and interpret the six themes I identified in this chapter. The discussions and interpretations I presented are in relation to each individual research question of this study. I further provided implications and subsequent recommendations for administrative practice, collegial and supervisory relationships.
Chapter Five: Discussion

In light of the attrition of Black women in staff roles, Black women play a significant role in the support and success of students, yet in this dissertation I found that Black women are offered very little support from their supervisors and are expected to navigate gendered racism perpetuated by leaders and colleagues of their institution. Within this study I chose to explore how Black women housing professionals reflect on those experiences of gendered racism, as well as to identify strategies that they utilize to cope with such experiences. I found that Black women reflect on their relationships with Black women, white men, and students the most positively, while their reflections on their relationships with Black men and white women being the most negatively represented within this study. Black women also shared their reflections on their experiences with discrimination, deceptively articulated institutional rhetoric, and overall lack of support from their departments and institutions. I further provide analysis to those reflections as they relate to the tropes of the strong Black women, mammy, Jezebel, and Angry Black woman controlling images. Black women shared that their coping strategies included: hyper-awareness, avoiding hypervisibility, setting boundaries within their personal and professional relationships, connecting with the Black community within their institutions, and deepening their faith and spirituality as it related to how they coped with gendered racism.
In the upcoming chapter, I reflect on participant data commonalities and dissimilarities. I also explain the rationale behind each presented theme and subtheme. Each section highlights any connection to the theoretical framework of BFT. Each section also provides any connection to affirmations or contradictions presented in current literature.

**Discussion and Interpretation**

The purpose of this study was to explore how Black women housing professionals reflected on and coped with their experiences of gendered racism and predominantly white campuses. This study explored two research questions which were (1) How do Black women housing professionals reflect on their experiences of gendered racism in student affairs? (2) What strategies do Black women housing professionals use to navigate racist and gendered environments?

Related to the first research question, I found that Black women reflected on their experiences by thinking critically about their relationships with their colleagues, supervisors, and students. Black women recognized how their professional experiences with discrimination, varying institutional rhetoric around inclusion and diversity, and the lack of support they received as professionals contributed to their experience with gendered racism. Many of the Black women reflected on their experiences being seen as strong or angry Black women in their department, how they were expected to survive intense crisis scenarios with little to no support, and how they were uniquely sexualized in the workplace. For the second research question I found that Black women utilized various coping strategies centering on the importance of their individual resilience, their
relationships with close friends and family, and their expert adaptability to cope with negativity.

**Professional Relationships**

Black women shared their reflections of their professional relationships within their role as housing professionals indicating that their relationships with Black women, white men, white women, Black men, and students offered the most salient and memorable interactions. Initially, I chose to highlight the differences between collegial and supervisory relationships, but found that based on the data, Black women shared their reflections on their supervisory relationships as connected to the institutional culture, highlighting discrimination and lack of support from the institution/supervisors. Throughout this dissertation, I intentionally center the voices, perspectives, and reflections of Black women housing professionals and their experiences with gendered racism. However, I chose to present this section centering the perspective of those that harm Black women intentionally. As I center the perspectives of those that harm(ed) Black women, I offer an opportunity for readers with similar backgrounds to understand directly and intentionally how their actions impact Black women, specifically Black women housing professionals.

Black women shared that when reflecting on their experiences as housing professionals at predominantly white institutions, there were differences between their professional relationships with Black women, white men, Black men, and white women. Black women shared that their most consistently positive relationship occurred with their students, both general students and their paraprofessional staff. Black women shared that
their experiences with Black women primarily (both supervisory and collegial) were positive and offered them a place of respite after navigating the challenging work environments. Having a positive relationship with Black women is affirmed by Wiggins (2017), who highlighted that Black women found their relationships with other Black women to be critical to their success.

Black women found that their relationship with Black men most often was negative or extremely challenging/toxic to navigate. This toxic relationship is affirmed by Townsend (2021) who found that Black women reported experiencing microaggressions and challenges from Black men colleagues specifically. When considering their relationships with white men, Black women shared they often felt a sense of professional protection provided by their white male colleagues. However, Black women often questioned the potential ulterior motives of the support their white male colleagues provided. Lastly, Black women shared overwhelmingly their relationships with their white woman colleagues and superiors often felt strained or lacked any emotional depth.

Black women are not a monolith (Collins, 1991), and the above thematic realizations represent the majority, but not all of, participants’ reflections on their experiences with their colleagues and supervisors. While Black women mentioned other types of relationships, such as interactions with parents or colleagues from other races, those relationships were not as salient as Black women’s reflections of their experiences with Black women, white men, Black men, white women, and students. In this section, I choose to focus on these relationships as they were the most salient for the majority of the participants.
Black women’s reflections centered on the importance of professional counterspaces, as articulated by N. M. West (2017), that offer Black women an opportunity to network and collaborate ultimately leading to their increased well-being. These informal counter spaces were reflected as informal groups and relationships with other Black women peers at their institution that offered a place where Black women could share their reflections and experiences as they navigated gendered racism. Thus, for this study, I utilized sista circle methodology to center and highlight the importance of group/peer dialogue as a method of collective sharing and meaning making for Black women.

Black women offered positive reflections of their interactions with their white male colleagues. Black women shared that their white male colleagues would often speak up for them in private settings in an attempt to protect them from further harm or marginalization within the department. Often, white male colleagues would alert Black women to negative commentary about their professionalism and their appearance from leadership or other colleagues. While Black women shared that their reflections of their experiences with their white male colleagues were generally positive, Black women could not help but feel that the protection they received from their white male colleagues was due to ulterior motives. These ulterior motives were hypothesized by the participants to include protecting Black women so that they, the white male colleague, could be seen as an ally to people of color in the department and receive accolades for their progressiveness or as a method to exert their white male dominance over people of color by serving as the “white savior” within the department (Cole, 2012).
As supported by Olumo (2020), white men may often choose to help individuals with marginalized identities, specifically within this study, Black women, by elevating themselves above Black women and their forms of marginalization. White men may insert themselves into conversations of marginalization by engaging in perceivably altruistic behaviors to protect those being oppressed. White men “recenter the goals of the group to maintain his social and political power or by quietly exploiting or abusing individuals he claims to help—or a combination of all three” (Olumo, 2020, p. 50). In this way, Black women’s perception of their white male colleagues’ behavior can be further explained by efforts to recenter themselves in discussions of oppression in order to maintain their social power. While research discusses the harm that white men can cause to those that are oppressed (Olumo, 2020), including developing and upholding elements of white supremacy in society, this study focuses on the salient perspective as presented by participants in this study when centers Black women’s relationships with white men as primarily positive.

In contrast to their experiences with white men, when Black women reflected on their experiences with their Black male colleagues, they noted that these experiences were most often negative and extremely challenging to navigate. bell hooks (2004) describes Black men as being victims to white patriarchy and white supremacy. Black men center their needs and often push the needs of Black women aside or diminish their significance for personal gain. Black women’s salient reflections of their experiences with Black men highlighted and affirmed the notion from bell hooks (2004) that Black men will often alienate Black women especially as Black men pursue power and control.
Black men often made Black women feel discomfort within their role as housing professionals. Black women reported that within their relationships with Black men, Black women felt they were looked over for praise and promotion which was subsequently given to Black men within their department. Black women shared that they perceived their Black male colleagues and supervisors to be underqualified which further perpetuated the misogynoir Black women expressed experiencing at the behest of their Black male colleagues and supervisors. Experiences of discomfort were characterized by several participants with Black men providing negative commentary about Black women participants both personally and professionally. Townsend’s (2021) study affirms the notion that Black women face marginalization and microaggressions perpetuated by their superiors that overlook them for promotions often given to Black women’s underqualified peers instead. Additionally, I found that Black women housing professionals reported Black men to have alienated or harmed Black women on their team, often siding with white women on the team. Support of white women is further affirmed by hooks (2004), who purports that Black men will often alienate Black women in order to gain and maintain power within the dominant society. Black women also shared reflections where they perceived their Black male colleagues to have received official departmental and university praise for professional work that the participants facilitated or professional work that was facilitated by other Black women in the department which was affirmed by Mosley (1980). N. M. West (2017) found that Black women felt that Black men saw them as competition in the workplace. As supported by N. M. West (2017) and affirmed within my study, I found that Black women believed
that their Black male colleagues and supervisors often saw Black women as competition or inherently problematic within their role as housing professionals.

Reflecting on their experiences with their white women supervisors, Black women reflected that these interactions often felt forced, lacked substantive interactions, or were ingenuine in nature. Three participants shared that when they interacted with their white women colleagues, the relationship was frequently tainted as the white women would often believe negative departmental rumors about the Black women and continue to perpetuate an existing negative narrative of interaction(s) with the Black women. Black women shared that their relationships with their white women colleagues and supervisors were difficult to navigate as Black women often had very little in common with them and felt that their relationship was often tokenized and trivialized. This reflection is supported by the literature that highlights how white women weaponized, intentionally, or unintentionally, their positional power in womanness and whiteness to cause harm (Dace, 2012; Matias et al., 2019). Black women housing professionals navigate challenging work environments while simultaneously experiencing harm from white women who wield their womanness and whiteness as direct or indirect threats.

Black women felt that their relationships and experiences with their students were the most positive and enjoyable memory from serving as a housing professional. While Black women discussed enacting boundaries with their students (discussed later in the section on coping strategies), students were the reminder and encouragement Black women needed to continue showing up as housing professionals. Black women shared
that they still maintained strong positive relationships with their student staff even after their professional relationship ended. One area that previous literature contradicts is the notion that Black women would experience distrust and disrespect from their students as posited by Howard-Baptiste (2014). While Black women had negative experiences with their students throughout their tenure as housing professionals, including challenging supervisory relationships, and challenging interactions after disciplinary actions, those negative experiences with students were not presented as the most salient reflections from Black women within this study.

**Deceptive Institutional Culture and Discriminatory Experiences**

As participants reflected on their experiences with gendered racism at predominantly white institutions, several experiences proved to be most salient for the majority of participants. Similar to the findings in the literature (Anthym & Tuitt, 2019; Antonio, 2003; Jayakumar et al., 2009), Black women found that they experienced explicit and numerous instances of discrimination while serving in their role as housing professionals. Several participants disclosed having navigated various institutional reporting (including racial and/or sexual/sex-based) harassment claims. The instances of harassment were primarily perpetuated by both Black and white male supervisors. Out of the several reported incidents shared by the participants, none of them resolved in the participants’ favor. As supported by Howard-Baptiste (2014), Black women must continuously navigate racial and gender discrimination that is often perpetuated by their students’, parents, colleagues, and as I affirmed in my study, their supervisors. Townsend (2021) found that Black women felt their supervisors considered them to be less qualified
than their peers while simultaneously ignoring and dismissing them. Further, I found that Black women housing professionals felt that they were looked over for promotions in their role and subsequently experienced increased scrutiny from their superiors after expressing their frustrations.

Black women reported that as a reflection of their professional experiences, their institutions articulated rhetoric around diversity, equity, inclusion, and belongingness, which did not match the lived experiences of Black women employed there. Black women stated that the articulated institutional culture was deceptive and inaccurate to their lived experiences and perspectives. One participant shared that at her institution, the school positioned itself as having a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion where they prioritized the diversification of their staff and faculty. While racial diversity is not the only important pillar of diversity, the departmental staff was not representative of the student body in terms of racial diversity, gender, or sexuality. Highlighted in Patitu and Hinton’s study (2003), institutions should work to create spaces that are more attractive and inclusive of racial and gender diversity. Institutions likely use more attractive or inclusive rhetoric as a professional lure to recruit professionals of color (Zamani, 2003). As supported by Ahmed (2010, p. 1), student affairs practitioners are “to be cautious about the appealing nature of diversity . . . and the ease of its incorporation by institutions.” When an institution’s rhetoric fails to match the lived reality for its constituents, especially people of color, a tension arises resulting in challenges for those individuals. This institutional deception and “bait and switch,” is affirmed by Slay et al. (2019). The institutions that were referenced in this study failed to support those with
marginalized identities based on the negative and discriminatory experiences as expressed by participants in the study.

Black women articulated a lack of support from their institution as housing professionals at predominantly white institutions. As affirmed by Townsend (2021), Black women felt that they experienced mistreatment in the workplace and were not supported or were not invested professionally by their department. Black women housing professionals were often expected to navigate their experiences with gendered racism alone and were left unsupported both professionally and personally by their departments (Steele, 2018). Additionally, offices charged with supporting marginalized individuals (e.g., Title IX, human resources, etc.) failed to support Black women, further perpetuating the finding that Black women are not supported at their institutions. Title IX and human resources offices have a responsibility to support and advocate for individuals who experience discrimination and failed to do so as articulated in the reflections of Black women housing professionals.

As Black women housing professionals navigate their professional careers, they encounter challenging experiences negatively impacting their reflections of their role. As supported by Anthym and Tuitt (2019), Black women felt as if they were invisible and expected to suffer in silence. Black women did not receive any support from their departments as it pertained to their professional work or any of the personal challenges they experienced with gendered racism. Black women were often left to navigate negative racial and gendered experiences alone.
Confronting Controlling Images

Participants reflected on their experiences with gendered racism indicating having had to endure emotional policing from their colleagues and supervisors. Additionally, participants reported that they felt they were expected to be self-sacrificing and dutiful to their role as housing professionals as well as forced to experience hyper-sexualization by departmental leadership. This section is broken into three sections further explaining the connections found in participant data to current literature and the controlling images of Strong Black Woman, Angry Black woman, mammy, and Jezebel.

Emotional Policing: Strong Black Woman

Black women are often scrutinized and expected to remain strong in the face of adversity (Szymanski & Lewis, 2016). Black women housing professionals shared that they were expected to handle intense crisis scenarios. These crisis scenarios often surpassed what was articulated to fall within their job responsibilities and professional authority. Black women were expected to respond to crisis scenarios while dismissing their own emotional needs. Black women shared that in these scenarios they were given no direction from their supervisors and that their supervisors did not inquire or engage in a discussion about how Black women coped after navigating these experiences. Emotional policing can be further contextualized by both the Strong Black Woman and Angry Black woman controlling images that are often used to characterize Black women’s emotionality. As supported by Lewis et al. (2013), Black women housing professionals were not provided support as they navigated significant crisis scenarios, but they were forced to conceal their negative emotions, which further resulted in
internalized trauma and harm. All participants reported having experienced some form of emotional policing while serving in their role as housing professionals at predominantly white institutions. Most of the instances of emotional policing Black women reported were perpetrated by white women in the workplace. These instances of emotional policing were perpetuated by both colleagues and superiors and ultimately resulted in the Black women housing professionals feeling as if they were unable to show vulnerability or emotions within their department.

While all participants reported having experienced emotional policing as housing professionals, not all participants interpreted or related to their experiences the same way. For example, Halle reflected on her experience with her supervisor, a white woman, who interpreted Halle’s emotions as unprofessional in the workplace. By contrast, when reflecting on her experiences, Keke shared that she consciously chose to internalize, and view anticipated emotional policing she experienced as a housing professional through a lens of survival rather than oppression. As posited by Collins (2000), the emergence of BFT recognizes that Black women may face common challenges but are not all the same. As highlighted here, Black women housing professionals have experienced similar challenges in their role but have related and reflected on those experiences.

The Strong Black Woman controlling image illuminates how Black women housing professionals experienced emotional policing as it pertained to their experiences of gendered racism at predominantly white institutions. The Strong Black Woman controlling image was birthed in response to both the intersectional oppression of race and sexism in society (Harris-Lacewell, 2001). The Strong Black Woman controlling
image often positions Black women as extremely strong and resilient, and often not showing vulnerability when faced with intense tasks or scenarios. In conjunction with the literature (Abrams et al., 2014; Collins, 1991; Cooper, 2018; C. Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Lewis et al., 2013; C. West, 2008), Black women housing professionals felt immense pressure to be strong and resilient, show little to no emotions, and take on additional responsibility without question beyond that of their job expectations.

While this finding of strength was supported in the literature (Abrams et al., 2014; Collins, 1991; Cooper, 2018; C. Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Lewis et al., 2013; C. West, 2008), one study reported that Black women felt the burden of displaying strength and resiliency that often came with a lack of support from their peers or experiencing invalidation from their supervisors in response to their emotions (Settles, 2006), which contradicted the findings of this study. Several participants in this study shared that while they felt pressure to display strength in their role, they experienced several scenarios where peers with whom they had a positive relationship would validate their emotions and offer them spaces of vulnerability. It can be concluded and theorized that Black women are often expected to show signs of strength and resilience, but only specific peer relationships present an opportunity for Black women to show signs of vulnerability and emotionality. Black women also seek the support of other Black women which show agency and resiliency.

**Emotional Strength and Dutiful Support: Mammy**

The controlling image of mammy in society subjects’ Black women to recognize and stay in their place in white society (Collins, 2000). As a characteristic of the mammy
controlling image, Black women are often portrayed as loyal and self-sacrificing to a fault (Jewell, 1993). Black women housing professionals reported being expected to manage challenging residential crisis situations while ignoring their emotional and physical needs for support, guidance, and emotionality. The mammy controlling image provides context for how Black women were treated in the workplace. Several participants reported instances where they were expected to respond to various on-campus crisis scenarios with no support or acknowledgement of their emotions. The compounding expectations of dutiful institutional support as supported by Wiggins (2017), resulted in Black women housing professionals feeling overworked and unable to pause to process and honor their emotional capacity.

As the mammy controlling image grew from the economic exploitation of Black women serving as house slaves who were often forced to neglect their own personal and familial needs (Collins, 2000; Jewell, 1993), Black women housing professionals’ reflections imply the continued exploitations of Black women in higher education. Black women housing professionals were expected to be self-sacrificing and dutiful to their departments often resulting in their needs and emotions not being addressed or prioritized. In line with Howard-Baptiste (2014), Black women housing professionals reported that they felt incompetent, invisible, and forced to be self-sacrificing as a component of their experiences as housing professionals which coincided with the mammy controlling image. Black women housing professionals articulated reflections that were in line with the mammy controlling image in response to their work
environment and peer interactions within their role as housing professionals at predominantly white institutions.

**Hypersexualization: Jezebel and Angry Black woman**

Similar to the mammy controlling image, the Jezebel controlling image was birthed from the perspective of white people during the enslavement of Black bodies and was used to often explain the forced sexual relations between Black women and white men (Pilgrim, 2002). Additionally, the Angry Black woman controlling image characterizes Black women as lonely, emotionally manipulative, and ignorant (Ashley, 2014). The Jezebel controlling image sexualizes Black women and their body and presumed promiscuity, whereas the Angry Black woman controlling image centers Black women as illogical and driven by emotional and sexual efforts of manipulating the Black man. As Black women housing professionals, participants reported experiences of hyper sexualization in the workplace. Black women shared reflections where they were called “sassy” or were assumed to be promiscuous by those in positions of power.

As articulated by Collins (2008), the Jezebel controlling image paints Black women as manipulative, animalistic, and promiscuous. Additionally, the Angry Black woman controlling image perpetuates the idea that Black women emasculate their male partners. Black women housing professionals shared in their reflections that they experienced hyper sexualization and were accused of being manipulative and promiscuous by those in positions of power. However, one participant identified as non-binary and still experienced mistreatment and scenarios of assumed hypersexuality in the workplace. As supported by Collins (2008), Black women, or in this study, those
assumed or treated as Black women experience hyper sexualization. One can theorize that hypersexuality and the assumed promiscuity being ascribed to Black women solely based on their gender, can also be ascribed based on their assumed gender and gender presentation.

As posited by Collins (1989), Black women’s experiences with gendered racism contributes to an overall view of Black women’s collective standpoint as articulated by BFT. Black women, while they all can experience different scenarios of oppression, all have navigated gendered oppression and can speak to their individual reflections on such experiences. The reflections centering on Black women’s experiences through the lens of the strong/Angry Black woman, mammy, and Jezebel controlling images offer an understanding of Black women’s group knowledge or collective standpoint, further highlighting the historical oppression and marginalization of Black women.

Next, I discuss the implications of the three themes relating to how Black women housing professionals coped with their experiences of gendered racism. Black women were able to articulate the use of coping strategies such as hyper-awareness or hypervigilance, hypervisibility, and boundary setting with those in their immediate professional community. Black women sought moments of connection and support from the Black community and relied on their resilience as they coped with gendered racism at predominantly white institutions.

**Coping Strategies**

To cope with the gendered racism they experienced at predominantly white institutions, Black women used several coping strategies: hyper awareness or
hypervigilance of their surroundings, avoiding instances of hypervisibility, and boundary setting with their communities, specifically both student and professional staff. Black women found that if they could attempt to control their surroundings, they could brace themselves from any subsequent negative experiences while serving as housing professionals and predominantly white institutions.

According to Utsey et al. (2002), examples of self-protection after dangerous situations could be seen as hypervigilance, or hyper awareness of one’s surroundings as a method to avoid negative treatment in the workplace. Black women were conscious of how they were viewed in their workspace both physically and emotionally. Black women previously reported feelings of hypervisibility and invisibility within student affairs (Lewis et al., 2013; Utsey et al., 2002; White et al., 2019). Moreover, my study confirmed that Black women housing professionals went out of their way to consider and avoid scenarios of hypervisibility within their control. Oftentimes, participants were unaware of instances where they were hypervisible, and this information was brought to their attention by colleagues. For example, Camille shared a reflection where her white male colleague alerted her to negative perceptions about her body language. Black women’s bodies and body language is continuously being policed in predominantly white spaces (White et al., 2019). Camille’s reflection further demonstrates the hypervisibility of Black women’s bodies.

Black women were hyper-aware of their appearance including their hair and style of fashion as well as were hyper-aware of how they interacted with colleagues, especially colleagues of color (Cooper, 2018). Both the hyper-awareness and methods to avoid
hypervisibility in the workplace resulted in Black women developing and enacting strict boundaries with their students and their supervisors. Setting and enacting strict boundaries can be seen as an attempt to avoid or disengage from the challenging situation (Lewis et al., 2013; White et al., 2019), and in this instance, Black women found that boundaries helped to prevent and mitigate future instances of gendered oppression they may have further experienced in their roles as housing professionals.

**Relationships and Connections**

Black women reported that another significant coping strategy was to rely on their connections with their friends and family, and most specifically the Black community and network at their respective institutions. Additionally, Black women found that their faith and their connection to spirituality were major coping strategies for them as they navigated gendered racism at their institutions. The connection to the Black community and their spirituality was a significant coping strategy for Black women housing professionals. All participants shared examples and reflections of them working with or seeking out the support of their friends and family in order to cope with their experiences of gendered racism. For many participants, they sought the support of established connections while others worked to identify individuals, specifically other Black women, on their campus that experienced similar marginalization and could offer validation to their experiences and reflections.

Furthermore, Black women articulated the development and maintenance of a strong spiritual connection as a method of coping in response to gendered racism. Participants found that through prayer, meditation, and their ability to trust in a higher
power, they were able to cope with their experiences of marginalization and ultimately find a sense of peace while navigating these experiences. Spiritual connection as a coping strategy was supported by both Hinton (2001) and Thomas et al. (2008) as their studies found that Black women leaned into their faith and spirituality in times of physical and emotional challenge within their personal and professional lives.

As Black women housing professionals experience gendered racism, one technique of finding and building a connection with their Black community and developing and maintaining a strong spiritual practice is of great importance. Collins (2000) highlights the importance of connection and collaboration as a means of survival for Black women experiencing marginalization and oppression. N. M. West (2017) spoke of professional counterspaces, where Black women sought community and developed support groups and social/professional organizations in response to their historical marginalization. As supported by Wiggins (2017) and by Harrell (2000), Black women saw the importance of connecting with and being in community with other Black women as a means of survival as well as the connection to their Black community as a method to negotiate the demands of their professional and personal lives to find balance and harmony.

**Resilience**

Adaptive resilience is the ability to experience adversity and adapt or thrive (Robinson, 2010), was highlighted as a coping strategy as the Black women utilized on their journey to cope from experiencing gendered racism at predominantly white institutions. This kind of resilience can be seen as Black women having learned from a
young age how to cope with and navigate gender-based and race-based oppression (Folke et al., 2002, 2010; Walker & Salt, 2006). Several participants in the study indicated that they were unable to articulate a verbally identifiable strategy for how they coped with gendered racism as it was how they navigated experiences of gendered racism for their entire lives. I discovered that the experiences of gendered racism and their pervasive nature impacted Black women long before their first role as housing professionals resulting in internalized coping strategies to navigate the specific scenarios of marginalization and oppression within their role.

Black women affirmed that one of their coping strategies was their resilience in the face of adversity, often resulting in individual efforts of activism and their pursuit of social change within student affairs and higher education. This finding is supported by BFT as it highlights the connectivity and collective historical experiences of oppression that Black women endure which fosters Black women’s activism (Collins, 1991, 2000, 2008). C. Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) presented the terminology of *shifting* to explain the code switching or resilience that Black women exude as a means of survival. Black women constantly shift their behaviors in the workplace to respond to instances of gendered racism. Similarly, to the above strategy of hypervigilance or hyper awareness, Black women utilize their resilience as a form of survival to control how others view them (Collins, 1991; Cooper, 2018).

**Implications and Recommendations**

Within this section I present two research implications as highlighted from this study. I provide recommendations for how these implications can be addressed within
higher education (institutional or student affairs) administrative policy, collegial relationships, and recommendations for continued research. The recommendations I present are to address and review institutional and administrative policies that alienate and marginalize Black women housing professionals, and for Black men and white women to engage in self-reflection around their hypocrisy and marginalization of Black women. I also discuss my perspective of institutional implementation of my institutional and administrative recommendations and a foundation for critical pessimism.

**Address Institutional and Administrative Policy**

A common thread throughout many of the reflections Black women provided in this study was systemic and repetitious institutional harm and discrimination that continues to go unaddressed. Within this study lies the indirect implication that university offices charged with addressing employee concerns in regard to discrimination, sexual and sex-based discrimination, and employee conduct are not successful at supporting Black women. As articulated by several participants, institutional human resources, Title IX, and conflict resolution offices have failed to adequately support and advocate for Black women housing professionals as they experience gendered racism from their colleagues and peers. As a Black woman, I too have felt failed by institutional departments whose purpose was to protect me. Within my sphere of reference, I have heard colleagues and mentors mention that while the institutional human resources offices and the Title IX office’s purpose on paper is to protect and advocate for those that have experienced challenge or harm, many feel as if these offices support and protect the institutions interest instead. By these offices protecting the interest of the institution(s)
over individuals they often cause and perpetuate more harm than intended. The following recommendations aim to serve as a starting point for institutions wishing to provide adequate structure and support for Black women housing professionals.

I recommend that predominantly white institutions and more specifically, institutional housing departments at predominantly white institutions hire anti-racist/anti-Blackness consultants to evaluate their institutions and departments. The anti-racist/anti-Blackness consultants should be contracted to conduct an external evaluation of institutional and departmental hiring practices, bias reporting process, faculty and staff retention rates, and experiences of marginalized persons on campus, specifically Black women housing professionals. Further, this consultant should have external oversight in an effort to create space for staff members to share honest feedback without fear of retaliation. The anti-racist/anti-Blackness consultants should also be encouraged and allowed to evaluate the institutions and departments longer for than six months, preferably 12–24 months initially. Extending the evaluation window will allow the consultants an opportunity to witness departmental changes from year to year. Many scholars have urged and recommended that predominately white institutions hire anti-racist/anti-Blackness consultants in the past, from my perspective there are often several systemic issues that impact the effectiveness of the consultant. Institutions may hire consultants, but often center the voices and expertise of racially privileged experts in the field. I strongly recommend that institutions hire Black women experts with expertise in anti-racist and anti-Blackness in higher education. For example, institutions should consider hiring experts such as LaWanda Swan, CEO and founder of Start by Talking.
Start by Talking is an anti-racism education media company that supports leaders and institutions as they interrogate their relationship with anti-Blackness and white supremacy. As institutions look to hire experts, they should also consider equitable compensations, appropriate and intentional implementation timelines, and clear, direct, and realistic goals of completion.

Furthermore, in addition to hiring an anti-racist/anti-Blackness consultant, predominantly white institutions and their departments, specifically housing departments should engage in an anti-Blackness/anti-racism audit. An example could be to utilize the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education’s anti-racism framework, to transform their institutional culture around social justice to be more inclusive and equitable for constituents, specifically, Black women housing professionals. The Anti-Racism Framework focuses on 10 priority areas, with four priority areas being most important to the recommendation of this dissertation. I recommend highlighting findings and implementing steps for resolution related to policies and procedures, hiring, retention, and promotion, education/training/employee development, and campus climate/culture.

While I offer these recommendations for predominantly white institutions to take clear and intentional steps at addressing and eradicating anti-racism and anti-Blackness on their campuses, I would be remis if I did not articulate my pessimism for implementation. I situate this discussion of critical pessimism as I reflect of the words of Dr. Cornell West (West, n.d., as cited in Smith, 2006, p. 160) and his visioning of critical hope,
Hope and optimism are different. Optimism tends to be based on the notion that there’s enough evidence out there to believe things are gonna be better, much more rational, deeply secular, whereas hope looks at the evidence and says, “It doesn’t look good at all. Doesn’t look good at all. Gonna go beyond the evidence to create new possibilities based on visions that become contagious to allow people to engage in heroic actions always against the odds, no guarantee whatsoever.” That’s hope. I’m a prisoner of hope, though. Gonna die a prisoner of hope.

While I wish that I could exercise critical hope regarding the experiences of Black women and gendered racism, I must exercise apathy and engage in a form of pessimism. Perhaps my pessimism is due to where I am emotionally on my healing journey after experiencing trauma, but I do not foresee a possibility of change. Predominantly white institutions across the country have caused significant harm and have consistently displaced and mistreated Black women. These same institutions often articulate a rhetoric that centers and amplifies inclusion and equity while systemically silencing Black women through non-disclosure agreements and other predatory tactics. Witnessing these behaviors first-hand does not leave me with hope, but with disdain. I am not hopeful. I am not optimistic. I am apathetic and pessimistic.

Research has consistently urged over the last several decades for predominately white institutions to make and implement drastic changes and support people with marginalized identities attending and working on their campuses, specifically Black women. In my experience, very few institutions have truly done the work. Institutional inaction and persistent harm to Black women including myself has left me with little to no confidence that there will be institutional change because of the findings of this study. Rather I recenter my studies purpose to serve as a space for validation and support of Black women housing professionals.
Another recommendation of this study would be for institutional human resources, Title IX, and conflict resolution offices to review the data from the Black women who report employee discrimination based on race and gender. Institutions and departments could gather data reflecting the experiences of Black women housing professionals during institutional transition and exit interviews. Institutional human resources, Title IX, and conflict resolution offices should review the retention and termination data for patterns that could provide context to the experiences of Black women. Several guiding questions of potential inquiry could be to highlight patterns uncovering: what departments have Black women left? Did Black women leave voluntarily, under non-disclosure agreement, or were they terminated? Institutions and departments can highlight what commonalities exist across multiple reports from Black women housing professionals. If institutional human resources, Title IX, and conflict resolution offices were to ask these questions they could uncover themes and work to address institutional and departmental challenges.

Further recommendations are for these offices to consider how their policies often result in punitive action being taken against the reporting party, in this case, most specifically Black women. As highlighted in this study, I found that out of several discrimination, harassment, and retaliation instances reported, none of these reported instances were found in the favor of the complainants who were all Black women. As leaders of the institution, it is imperative that institutional and administrative policy be refined to support the institution, which specifically and wholeheartedly includes the success of its employees and their physical and emotional well-being.
Believe and Support Black Women

As highlighted in this study, Black men and white women pose a significant threat to Black women housing professionals. As articulated by the participants in this study, Black women housing professionals primarily categorized their relationships with Black men as toxic and challenging and their relationships with white women as lacking substance and tokenizing. To this effect, I offer a recommendation that Black men work to see Black women in their department not as the problem or competition, but as an ally to advancing social justice. Additionally, white women should recognize the hypocrisy in their behavior when it comes to supporting and working with Black women. While white women work to center themselves next to the marginality of Blackness, they simultaneously reveal that the relationships they have with white women are strained which is further supported by M. Williams (2021). Black women housing professionals reported that they were often unable to develop strong positive relationships with white women as their verbiage and interactions lack emotional and conversational depth and often felt tokenizing. Both Black men and white women should engage in anti-racism self-reflective work to discover ways in which their behaviors negatively impact the experiences of Black women. The anti-racism work that Black men and white women engage in should also center intersectional oppressive behaviors and highlight intersectional identities, which can offer more in depth reflections on the oppression that impacts Black women.

I recommend that both colleagues and supervisors’ Black men and white women engage in self-reflection and personal accountability as they review the relationships they
currently have with Black women professionals. If white women and Black men housing professionals were to engage in these self-reflective behaviors, it could have a positive impact on the experience of Black women in their departments. It is not enough to say how important it is to believe and support Black women, but as professionals, you must work intentionally to uncover the ways in which you continue to perpetuate harm against Black women.

Traditionally within the implications and recommendations section of a dissertation, the researcher spends several paragraphs detailing what steps should be taken in order for their recommendation(s) to be enacted. In line with my researcher epistemology and the overall purpose of this dissertation, which is to support Black women, I will not take additional space within this study to detail, for free, to Black men and white women on how they can be better allies to Black women. Research highlighting the experiences of Black women in higher education has continued to be published since as early as the 1980s. Research highlighting Black women’s experiences offers recommendations pleading for Black men and white women to be better allies to Black women. It is for this reason, I recommend for Black men and white women to utilize the resources afforded to them including but not limited to the internet, social media, online and in-person consultants, and a plethora of free and virtual self-help tools and toolkits. If you recognize the need for you to do and be better, you can find access to the resources needed to help you do so. I encourage Black men and white women to avoid acting under the assumption that it is a Black woman’s responsibility to educate you on advocacy and allyship. As a Black woman writing a dissertation that highlights
how Black men and white women have caused harm, I have considered whether my aim was to “call in” versus “call out,” (Ortiz, 2021) those that harm Black women. Rather than come to a conclusion, I reminded myself that my aim was neither, I came to elevate the experiences of Black women housing professionals.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The scope and time limits of this study did not include all participants sharing in-depth commentary about their relationship with their supervisors and the power dynamics that impacted their relationship as subordinates. Exploring the power dynamics present within the supervisory relationship of Black women and their superiors could provide additional nuance in how Black women housing professionals reflected on their experiences with gendered racism. A more nuanced conversation about Black women’s relationships with their supervisors could be further discussed exploring the variation of those power dynamics by the intersection of race and gender of their supervisor.

A recommended area of future research is to further explore and understand the motivations of Black women as they enter the field of student affairs and accept professional roles and become housing professionals. It is common knowledge that many entry-level professional housing roles provide live-on benefits for their staff. As a few participants mentioned, accepting a role as a housing professional offered them financial security to pursue higher education at their institution. I recommend that further exploration of Black women housing professionals’ experiences to uncover the motivations and impact of those decisions to accept their first housing role could lead to a
more nuanced understanding of how Black women housing professionals experience gendered racism in their role.

An additional area of future research would be to explore the reflections of Black women’s experiences with gendered racism at predominately white institutions and the intersection of gender presentation. Hinton (2001) supported that Black women experience discrimination, often reflected as racism, sexism, and homophobia, which situates the importance of an intersectional approach to understanding gendered oppression. One participant of this study identified as nonbinary and offered a glimpse of their experience as a gender nonconforming individual who navigates the world with close relationality to Black womanhood. Exploring the intersecting identities and experiences of Black women and those who are in close relation to Black womanhood can further expound upon the reflections of Black women as they experience gendered racism as housing professionals.

Lastly, I recommended that Black women housing professionals’ resiliency be further explored to explain the persistent nature of resiliency as a coping strategy that exists and develops throughout the Black woman’s life and experiences with gendered racism. Black women housing professionals experience gendered racism from such an early age and as a result develop coping strategies that are unconsciously enacted in subsequent instances of gendered racism throughout their lives. As highlighted within this dissertation, Black women asserted that their experiences coping with gendered racism while serving as housing professionals occurred so naturally that they struggled to articulate what specific strategies they enacted. When I asked Black women to discuss
their coping strategies in response to their experiences of gendered racism, Black women stated that they rarely, if ever, thought intentionally about how they would survive or cope with scenarios of racialized and gendered marginalization. Black women housing professionals struggled to initially articulate specific ways in which they coped with gendered racism. Black women felt that it was challenging to put into words how they have navigated gendered racism because they have done it unconsciously [their] entire life. I theorize that these unconscious and omnipresent behaviors are learned through witnessing matriarchal figures in their lives experience gendered racism. After subconsciously learning these behaviors and strategies, Black women oftentimes unconsciously apply these coping strategies to instances of gendered racism they themselves experience. I recommend that future research explore and test this hypothesis, as well as further discusses the coping strategies enacted by Black women student affairs practitioners that experience gendered racism at predominately white institutions.

**Research Boundaries**

This study centered on the reflections and interpretations of Black women as experts over their experiences with gendered racism. To assert that this study has participatory limitations would be disingenuous to the entire theoretical framework of BFT that positions Black women as the sole experts over their lived experiences. I chose to reframe any perceived limitations of this study as intentional boundaries, sometimes referred to as delimitations, explored for the specific nuances of interpreting the experience of Black women housing professionals (Bryant, 2004; Glatthorn, 1998; Lacy, 2017). Participants in this study identified as Black women with one participant
identifying specifically as nonbinary with a strong connection and reference to Black womanhood as they navigated the world. Five of the participants have all recently left their role as housing professionals with three currently employed as housing professionals.

Methodologically, this study had design limitations that impacted accessibility. As this study was conducted in the midst of the global coronavirus pandemic, participants could have been limited by self-selection. Participants self-selected to participate in this study, and due to the mental and emotional demands of the pandemic, other individuals who may have considered participating may have been uninterested. The impact of the pandemic posed a methodological limitation as this study only explored the experiences and reflections of participants who have recently served in housing roles at predominantly white institutions. Lastly, while I initially intended to capture data related to participant body language and gestures during the sista circles as highlighted in Chapter Three, participants chose to have their cameras off for anonymity during the sista circle sessions.

In order to ensure reciprocity within the research process I requested that the participants submit reflective journals to incorporate their perspective into the studies research design. The methodological use of sista circles is inherently a form of reciprocity as it offers mutual benefits for both the researcher and participants as it allows both the researcher and participants to share their lived experience with authority (Pasque et al., 2012). I utilized member checking as it allowed the participants to review, reflect and critique the study’s findings and affirm accuracy. I shared the individual transcripts
from interviews with each participant and requested that participants provide feedback on any inaccuracies or any comments they wished to redact or further elaborate on. Additionally, after identifying original codes and themes I presented those at the sista circle sessions and provided space for participants to affirm or disaffirm my analysis. Participants responded by affirming the themes I had identified further elaborating on their perspectives.

Conclusion

We are in a period of reckoning with the student affairs field. Many employees are choosing to leave the field especially after experiences post the coronavirus 2019 pandemic (Ellis, 2021). Many people, especially people of color, are leaving these roles as they are no longer interested in experiencing racism, oppression, and deceptive marginalization tactics from their employers (Ellis, 2021). This study is significant as it explains why Black women housing professionals are leaving their role within student affairs. Black women are no longer interested in sitting idly by as they experience oppression and marginalization but are expected to keep departments from failing. As Black women continue to face oppression and marginalization, it is ever apparent that universities and institutional leaders pay special attention to the comments and reflections of Black women, especially Black women housing professionals.

As a Black scholar and former housing professional, the topic of this study was significant and personal to me. I entered the field of higher education as a confident professional, excited to enact change at the institutional level. I experienced so much racism, sexism, ableism, and other forms of discrimination that I ultimately made the
decision to leave the field for my mental health. While I found support from other professionals and colleagues, the decision to leave the field left me feeling immensely guilty. I felt as if I was a fraud, no longer aiming to serve the next generation of students of color. I felt that even completing this doctoral degree was unnecessary and that I no longer possessed the passion for education and student support that I once had.

This journey to complete my dissertation helped me find myself, refine my passion, and learn to live a full life outside of the confines and expectations of my career. I previously thought that my passion was fighting educational injustices and fighting for those who possess historically marginalized identities. I now know through my experience completing this dissertation that fighting injustice is not my passion but was an unfortunate byproduct of my existence as a Black woman. My true passion is helping Black women find peace and a life of ease. My passion is not to continue to fight, but to learn and teach how love can exist and thrive in a life of challenge.

With the methodology and findings of this dissertation, I have highlighted how the support and interaction between Black women can be self-healing (Collins, 2000) and offers a professional and emotional counterspace (N. M. West, 2017) to white supremacy and experiences with gendered racism. My study has affirmed that through group engagement, specifically sista circle group sessions, Black women find ways in which they can heal and cope with experiences of marginalization and gendered racism (Johnson, 2015). I implore Black women to continue to lean on each other and create spaces of healing within literature.
For Black women to continue to create spaces of healing, this can be facilitated through on-campus group engagement with formal or informal sista circles. I recommend that these sista circles either be a place for support, encouragement, and validation or can exist to offer formalized advocacy for Black women on campuses. I believe that through group engagement with other Black women in our community Black women can find validation, support, and healing as we navigate gendered racism. While I wish that I could say institutions would support Black women as we embark on this journey of support and discovery, their support is not guaranteed or likely at predominantly white campuses across the country.

To my Black women readers: I know as Black women it feels as if it is our responsibility to save the world; however, I believe our only responsibility is to save ourselves. I pray we can continue to find hope and work diligently to create physical and emotional spaces for validation and support as we navigate spaces that are not built for us to thrive. We are enough. We deserve peace.

Throughout this journey, I reflected on my own experience as a Black women housing professional that experienced gendered racism from my institution. As a final closing to this study, I choose to excerpt from a therapeutic letter I have written to previous housing departmental leaders that have harmed me. In doing so, I am cognizant and intentionally centering my voice and experience as a Black woman who has experienced gendered racism at predominantly white institutions.
A few years ago, I thought you broke me.

I felt like everything I went through made me forget who I was. I wasn’t lie. I was changed. I thought it made me guarded and unwilling to take risks. I showed up differently with my friends and my family. It made me hesitant and passive at work. I was no longer the confident employee who knew exactly what I brought to the table. I thought it made me forget who God made me to be.

But actually...

You taught me how to slow down and find what I love. It made me protective over my spirit. It made me learn how to truly show up authentically and unapologetically with those that I love. It made me learn how to be confident and decisive at work. It made me take time to discover who God would encourage me to be in her image.

You did not break me.

You just shook up the pieces. That experience forced me to stitch myself back together piece-by-piece with love, grace, intentionality, and perseverance.

This is not me giving you a pat on the back or positive accolades. You should be extremely cautious and nervous. Even though you tried to take me down I still shine. Even as you tried to silence me, I still speak. Loudly and boldly. Even as you tried your hardest to make me give up, I pushed on faster and further with the support of those that truly love me.
But now you and whoever else can keep trying to take me down and silence me.

While you try it, just make sure to call me Dr. Shaniquè Jazmine Broom.

This is just the beginning...
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Recruitment Flier

The purpose of this study is to uplift and share the experiences of Black women housing professionals who experience gendered racism in the field of higher education. Your insights will help to advance knowledge that supports Black women, specifically Black women housing professionals, at Predominantly White Institutions.

To participate in this research you must:
- Self-identify as a Black or African-American woman (including transwomen and non-binary individuals who closely relate to/identify with the experience of “Black womanhood”)
- Currently or within the last five years served as a housing professional at a predominately white institution

Participation in this study includes
- completion of an online interest form
- one (1) audio recorded virtual, one-on-one interview
- one (1) written or audio-recorded reflective journal prompt
- two (2) virtual audio-recorded sista circle group sessions

The interview should last 45-90 minutes, however, the sista circle group sessions should each last 60-90 minutes.

For your participation in the study, you will be provided a $25 VISA gift card after the completion of the sista circle session.

Visit
[Link to website]

or scan QR code if you are interested in participating

To learn more about this study, please contact:
Principal Investigator: Shanique Broom at Shan.Broom@du.edu
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Cecilia Orphan at Cecilia.Orphan@du.edu

This study has been approved by the University of Denver Institutional Review Board.
Appendix B

Study Interest Form Content

Thank you for demonstrating interest in participating in a study focused on the experiences of Black women housing professionals as they navigate gendered racism and predominately white institutions. The purpose of this study is to uplift and share the experiences of Black women housing professionals who experience gendered racism in the field of higher education. Additionally, this study will serve as a resource for all higher education professionals to reflect on the shared experiences of Black women professionals in the field. Please select the next button, where you will be given an opportunity to review this study’s informed consent form and acknowledge with your virtual signature your informed consent to participate in this study should you be selected.

The Study Criteria

Study Definitions

Informed Consent Form

- Informed Consent Acknowledgement

Contact Information (The researcher will need reliable means of communication to communicate with potential participants. Please complete the following prompts.)

- Full Name (First and Last) (short answer)
- Personal Email Address (short answer/email format required)
- Personal Phone Number (short answer/phone number format required)
- Pronouns (Short Answer)
Personal Demographics (The demographic information is needed to assist with identifying trends and descriptive information of the study’s participants. All names will be concealed by the use of participant selected pseudonyms.)

- Age (select 18+ - 99)
- Do you identify as Black or African American (Yes/No)?

Professional Experience

- Are you currently a housing professional, employed by a predominantly white institution? (Yes/No)
- Have you been employed as a housing professional at a predominantly white institution within the last 5 years? (Yes/No)
- During your time as a housing professional would you say you experienced gendered racism? (Provide definition) (Yes/No)

Study Participation

- Are you willing to participate in one, virtual, one-on-one interviews with the primary researcher to be scheduled to conclude before DATE (Two months after launch)? (Yes/No)
- Are you willing to complete reflective journals after each interview within two weeks of each subsequent interview? (Yes/No)
- Are you interested and available to attend two virtual sista circle on DATES (Three months after launch) and TIMES, where the researcher will provide themes identified from the data collected? This session will serve as an opportunity for you to affirm or disaffirm any of the findings. (Yes/No)
• Please provide a self-selected pseudonym you would like to be acknowledged by should you be selected as a participant of the study. Please refrain from referencing any personal details or utilizing any government or colloquial nicknames that can identify you. You may change this at any time during the study duration (Short Answer)
Appendix C

Interview Introduction Speaking Prompt

Hello, my name is Shanique Broom, and I want to thank you for taking the time to participate in today’s study. Within this study, I wish to highlight the challenges experienced by Black women professionals in housing as it relates to gendered racism. Gendered racism is a term that describes how both sexism and racism intertwine to form a specific phenomenon that is experienced by women of color. In this study, I am focusing specifically on the gendered racism that Black women experience.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you are free to let me know at any time if you revoke your consent to participate. This is the first of two interviews, which will last 45-90 minutes. I will be utilizing the audio recording from today’s interview to accurately capture your experiences and perspectives. I will subsequently destroy all audio recordings at the end of the research study. If you no longer wish to continue or answer a specific prompt at any time during our conversation, please feel free to request we move to the next question. Your responses will remain confidential and only referenced by the use of your self-selected pseudonym. Do you agree to participate? Can I begin recording?
Appendix D

Interview Protocol #1

- Can you tell me about your personal background?
  - Demographics:
    - Age
    - Race/Ethnicity
    - Nationality
    - Religious Affiliation
    - Region (West Coast, Midwest, East Coast, South, etc.)
    - Highest Level Education Completed
- Can you tell me about your professional experiences? (i.e., what roles have you served in, etc.)
- What are/were the most enjoyable parts of your job as a housing professional?
- What are/were the least enjoyable parts of your job as a housing professional?
- Why did you decide to pursue a professional role in housing?
- Keeping your racial/ethnic/cultural identity in mind, tell me about your relationship with your colleagues.
- Keeping your racial/ethnic/cultural identity in mind, tell me about your relationship with your supervisors.
• How do the above experiences impact the way you see yourself as a professional?
• What experiences come to mind when you consider how your identity may have played a role in your professional housing experience?
• Is there anything else you’d like to share with me?
Appendix E

Sista Circle #1 Protocol

Overview:

- Welcome/Shan Intro
- Ground Rules
  - Participation in the focus group is voluntary.
  - It’s all right to abstain from discussing specific topics if you are not comfortable.
  - All responses are valid—there are no right or wrong answers.
  - Please respect the opinions of others even if you don’t agree.
  - Try to stay on topic; we may need to interrupt so that we can cover all the material.
  - Speak as openly as you feel comfortable.
  - Avoid revealing very detailed information about your personal health.
  - Help protect others’ privacy by not discussing details outside the group.
- Resources in Chat - Please email me if you have found others that you use and want to share with the group!
- Individual Introductions - remember pseudonyms. You can share personal information at your own level of comfort. It is an expectation that everyone keeps what is shared here confidential, but I would caution against sharing information that could potentially cause your personal or professional harm.
  - Pseudonym name
Current role

Brief overview of your experience in housing

What made you sign up to participate in this study?

- Research question and theme discussion
- Group Question
- Wrap-up (summarize general discussion)
- Reminder Sista Circle #2 is DATE.

RQ 1: How do Black women housing professionals reflect on their experiences of gendered racism in student affairs?

- Common Themes:

  - How has your experience with gendered racism as a housing professional impacted how you show up at work today? In your personal life?
  - What type of support do you wish you had received while experiencing gendered racism in your role?
  - How would you describe the perpetrators of your experiences of gendered racism? Are there any salient identities or positions they hold?
  - What’s something you wish someone would have told you before you took a role as a housing professional?
  - Suppose you were given an opportunity to write a book about your experiences as a housing professional, what would be some of your chapter titles? Book title?
Appendix F
Sista Circle #2 Protocol

Overview:

- Welcome/Shan Intro
- Ground Rules
  - Participation in the focus group is voluntary.
  - It’s all right to abstain from discussing specific topics if you are not comfortable.
  - All responses are valid—there are no right or wrong answers.
  - Please respect the opinions of others even if you don’t agree.
  - Try to stay on topic; we may need to interrupt so that we can cover all the material.
  - Speak as openly as you feel comfortable.
  - Avoid revealing very detailed information about your personal health.
  - Help protect others’ privacy by not discussing details outside the group.
- Resources in Chat - Please email me if you have found others that you use and want to share with the group!
- Individual Introductions - remember pseudonyms. You can share personal information at your own level of comfort. It is an expectation that everyone keeps what is shared here confidential, but I would caution against sharing information that could potentially cause your personal or professional harm.
  - Pseudonym name
○ Current role
○ Brief overview of your experience in housing
○ What made you sign up to participate in this study?

- Research question and theme discussion
- Group Questions
- Wrap-up (summarize general discussion)

RQ 2: What strategies do Black women housing professionals use to navigate racist and gendered environments?

- Themes
- How do these resonate? Do you agree or disagree?
- Any you would add to this list?

Group Questions

- Did you utilize any resources and/techniques to navigate your experiences with gendered racism?
- Are you still working in this department/institution? What contributed to your decision to stay/leave?
- If you did leave your role/institution, how has your experience with gendered racism in your role as a housing influenced your career path? (Your response can include both steps taken and career aspirations)
- What advice would you offer Black women who are new to your specific department and institution?
If you would offer your supervisor (past or present) a piece of advice on supporting Black women housing professionals, what would it be?
Appendix G

Participant Reflective Journal Prompts

- How did you feel about sharing your story?
- Is there anything you shared that you feel you did not get a chance to articulate to the researcher completely?
- Is there any part of your narrative that you shared that you wish to further articulate or any part you are regretting discussing?
- Please share a participant introductory profile with me that will be used to introduce you as a participant during the findings section of this study.
Appendix H

Acknowledgements

(cont’d) To Dr. Apryl Alexander, I thank you that in a time of transition you saw my study and chose to support me! Your work at this institution and with Black students does not go unnoticed. I thank you for your physical and emotional sacrifice over the years. Thank you all from the bottom of my heart for support as I cross the finish line!

I want to thank my ride or -die homies, Dr. Keiondra Grace, Mikaila Harris, Alex Martinez, and Brandy Dillard. Thank you for listening to my ramblings and shenanigans while also being my besties. From random text messages to Marco Polo’s; thanks for being my cheering squad! To Dr. Sarah Pingel, Brandon Bishop, and Diana Madriz, thank you! Thank you for showing up and helping me cross the finish line. I want to thank my mentor and friend, Bridget C. Dunigan. You are such a phenomenal and brilliant woman. I find it hard to put into words all you’ve taught me about living in and surviving as a Black woman in higher education and for that…thank you. I would also like to thank Dr. Ally Garcia. I appreciate your love, support, and encouragement. You’ve gone above and beyond, and I am so blessed to have you in my corner.

I want to thank Steve Jenks and Jasmine Pulce for being my doctoral program accomplices and encouraging me every step of the way! I appreciate your support as a muse and ramble over any and everything from this study to pop culture. I’ll be waiting at the finish line to cheer y’all on!
To my participants, Camille, Momo, Shantal, Keke, Natalie, Lindsay, Kendall, and Halle Berry. Thank you for trusting me with your stories and experiences. Thank you for your vulnerability and your honesty. Black women, stay Black womening. Period.

I want to thank Rolo Hershey-Oreo Jones-Broom for coming in on this journey in the ‘leventh hour and supporting me with your sassy demeanor and side eyes. I could hear you cheering me on during all your early morning naps, snores, and barks as I wrote every word.

I’d also like to thank my therapist. While I will not mention your name here, you have been incredible. While that is your “job” and you would argue that I did all the work, your intentionally and tremendous skill at your job helped with many pages of this document and for that, I thank you.

To my family and friends -- your support and encouragement during this doctoral program did not go unnoticed. It takes a village and I appreciate you supporting me. While I do not list all your names here for brevity, your support is invaluable. Thank you.

I’d also like to highlight my intentions are not to dimmish the support the individuals I acknowledge here. My institution continues to operate as a function of white supremacy and fails to allow acknowledgements beyond one page prior to the presentation of research. In doing so, the University of Denver is dismissing the idea that for students of color and first-generation students this achievement is more than just an academic milestone, but a ground-breaking generational trauma ending self-sacrifice as endured and experienced by individuals other than the author.
While I continue to fight many battles of injustice and vehement displays of white supremacy, I was required to operate within the confines of white supremacy and list my acknowledgements within my appendices. It is my hope that through the efforts of allies within Morgridge College of Education, this regulation can be amended for future submissions. I hope those I thank above have seen the labor of their love and kindness within this dissertation.