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Black Women's Narratives Navigating Gendered Racism in Student Affairs

Stephen John Quaye *, Erin M. Satterwhite and Jasmine Abukar

Department of Educational Studies, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH 43210-1172, USA; satterwhite.18@osu.edu (E.M.S.); abukar.10@osu.edu (J.A.)
* Correspondence: quaye.13@osu.edu

Abstract: White people, Black men, and non-Black People of Color often expect Black women to care for others, often to the detriment of Black women being able to prioritize their own needs. This feeling is even more pronounced in helping professions, such as student affairs, and is consistent with a history of expectations that Black women care for others' needs. In this manuscript, we use Black Feminist Thought to explore racial battle fatigue and how Black women student affairs educators worked to center themselves and focus on their healing from gendered racism. We employed a narrative inquiry methodology to center participants' stories. Findings illustrate differences between self-care and healing, the importance of community, and efforts to support future generations of Black women. Our work builds on Black Feminist Thought as a theoretical framework and contributes to the literature on the particular ways racial battle fatigue manifests and strategies for healing in the midst of navigating gendered racism.

Keywords: racial battle fatigue; gendered racism; Black women; student affairs; healing

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1. Introduction

"Who would we be", Rachel Cargle asked, "if we weren't just trying to survive" [1]? The "we" in Cargle's question is Black women, who often busily take care of so many people's needs believing they cannot pause and focus on their own care and healing. In an interview for Harper's BAZAAR magazine, Cargle, a scholar-activist, posed this question and introduced The Nap Ministry, an organization Tricia Hersey founded in 2016 committed to seeing the revolutionary power of naps among Women of Color. Imagine a world in which Black women could see centering their own healing as an act of resistance, refusing to prioritize everyone else's needs, and instead, focusing on their healing and care.

For Black women in student affairs, centering their wellbeing seems even less possible given the demands placed on Black women working in a profession devoted to helping students [2]. Two research questions guided this study: (1) What are the particular ways racial battle fatigue manifests among Black student affairs educators? (2) What strategies do Black student affairs educators use to navigate racial battle fatigue? The purpose of this paper is to share stories of Black women student affairs educators as they contended with gendered racial battle fatigue and the strategies they employed to practice self-care and healing in the midst of navigating racism and sexism.

Prior to discussing relevant literature that bears on our study, we note that we are situating our work in the Psychological Framework of Radical Healing from French et al. [3]. This framework outlines five core elements that support people's healing from oppression: critical consciousness, strength and resilience, emotional and social support, radical hope, and cultural authenticity and self-knowledge. We discuss further the ways in which our work is situated within this framework in the Discussion section.

2. Literature Review

In this section, we situate our work in three bodies of literature: racial and gender microaggressions; racial battle fatigue and gendered racism; and healing strategies from gendered racism. We highlight major contributions from previous scholars' work in these three areas and then discuss Black Feminist Thought as a theoretical lens for our paper.

2.1. Racial and Gender Microaggressions

Historically, Black people in the United States have been subject to structural and institutional oppression that manifest in professional and public spaces [4]. Higher education is no exception, where whiteness and institutional racism impact Black women who operate within unchanging systems [5,6]. Within these systems of oppression, Black women contend with common, seemingly innocuous slights, which are microaggressions [7,8]. Racial microaggressions manifest when white people touch Black women's hair, make comments about how "professional" they are or how well they speak, and when white people attach Black women to stereotypes.

In 2010, Sue et al. [9] expanded the framework of racial microaggressions to include gender microaggressions as well. This particular type of microaggression manifests in Black women being seen as hypersexual and sexism toward Black women. In addition, when men see Black women as less than or inferior and expect Black women to take care of them, they reinforce another common gender microaggression [10].

2.2. Racial Battle Fatigue, Gendered Racism, and Othermothering

The microaggressions that manifest through continuous racist interactions are major contributors to racial battle fatigue (RBF). RBF is the "stress and exhaustion associated with racial microaggressions" [11] (p. 300). Manifestations of RBF are often psychological (e.g., frustration, hopelessness, and anger), physiological (e.g., headaches, grinding of teeth, shortness of breath, and trouble sleeping), and emotional/behavioral (e.g., loss of appetite, increased use of alcohol or drugs, and poor job performance). These stress responses can lead to a variety of serious health conditions [4,11,12], such as higher blood pressure [11]. A study conducted by Black researchers for the Study of Women's Health Across the Nation (SWAN) estimated Black women are approximately eight years older biologically than their white counterparts based on stress brought on by racism and sexism [13]. Black women's mortality rates have also increased steadily since the 1990s, linked to systemic oppression [14].

For Black women, scholars have asserted the importance of recognizing the multifaceted intersections distinct from Black men when studying oppression [15–18]. In higher education, Patton and Njoku [19] discuss how institutional policies and practices could result in psychological, emotional, and epistemological harm to Black women. Operating in spaces of white supremacy and misogynoir [12,20–22], Black women are also seen as stereotypes, like the Mammy or Strong Black Woman [16]. These views of Black women only further exacerbate the weight of RBF.

One way in which racial battle fatigue and gendered racism manifest is through othermothering, which describes the ways Black women often perform duties akin to childrearing, such as emotional support, taking care of others, and helping to solve problems [23,24]. In Guiffrida's [24] study examining Black students' relationships with Black faculty, the author found that Black students often described these relationships as more student-centered and advocacy-related, and students felt more emotionally supported. This point is important because Black women often engage in more unpaid labor in workplace settings, and this unpaid labor is often not rewarded in Black women's advancement processes [25]. In fact, they are often penalized for engaging in this othermothering, even if it benefits students [25].

In her study of 28 Black faculty, Griffin [23] found that Black faculty often felt obligated to support Black students' development; participants also discussed "the distinct closeness and sense of comfort they feel with Black students" (p. 175). The relationship between this

closeness, comfort, and sense of obligation underscores a form of othermothering, wherein participants spent more time engaging with Black students than their white counterparts. This othermothering is rooted in one of the core features of Black Feminist Thought, a legacy of struggle (described in greater detail below) [26,27], in which participants in Griffin's [23] study felt obligated to support Black students in succeeding given their "commitments to community uplift" (p. 180).

2.3. Self-Care, Coping, and Healing Strategies from Gendered Racism

Despite the gendered racism that Black women navigate, some have found ways to cope in the midst of this gendered racism. Ironically, many of the ways Black women navigate gendered racism have strong connections to racial and gender stereotypes. For example, researchers have identified John Henryism [28], the Strong Black Womanhood schema [29,30], and the Superwoman schema [31] as methods of coping with psychological and physiological ailments related to RBF. All three of these strategies draw upon historical and contemporary caricatures of Black people as extraordinarily strong, overly resilient, and self-reliant to illustrate how powering through the effects of oppression may manifest in dire health consequences.

John Henryism—the concept that describes Black people's high coping effort with environmental stressors [32]—can often lead to negative health effects among Black people. Because Black women are also navigating sexism, their health effects from John Henryism can be even more dangerous. The Strong Black Woman and Superwoman schemas (e.g., Black women achieving at work despite gendered racism, taking care of others), while seemingly positive as they demonstrate how Black women thrive even while contending with hardship and oppression, can also result in negative health consequences for Black women [16].

Conflicting evidence exists as to whether the aforementioned strategies are effective in preventing or alleviating mental health issues in Black women [30,33,34]. Perhaps the varied results of these coping strategies are related to the pervasiveness and persistence of oppressive forces that feed RBF. While characteristics such as strength and resilience are generally positive, as researchers, we problematize the necessity of these traits. When white people, Black men, and non-Black People of Color presume that Black women are always strong, they do not take Black women's pain, suffering, and needs seriously [35,36]. Further, positioning Black women as strong, resilient people obscures the culpability of the oppressive structures Black women navigate [37,38].

Beyond coping strategies, which are often temporary, Black women also work to engage in more sustainable healing strategies. Researchers have found that one approach Black women use to move toward healing is creating kinship networks with other Black women [39–41]. These networks provide space for Black women to discuss struggles and build communities of support to move toward healing. Researchers also illustrate the role religion and spirituality play in Black women's healing strategies given, again, the community that these spaces often provide [38,42,43]. Quaye et al.'s [44,45] work also distinguishes between self-care and healing. Self-care strategies involved unplugging from social media and finding safe spaces; whereas, healing involved building community with other Black people, examining the root of the cause for one's racial battle fatigue, and working to address that root issue.

Although Black women should not be in a position to find ways to cope more effectively in the midst of gendered racism, we seek to illuminate the particular ways racial battle fatigue surfaced among Black women and how they worked to actively heal, particularly in communal spaces. The discussion of collective trauma and oppression among fellow Black women can be healing in and of itself [46]. Further, receiving emotional and relational support while experiencing oppression can bolster mental health in Black women [29]. Given the contestation of individualized coping methods in the literature [44,47,48], we explore the possibility of collective healing for Black women student affairs educators.

3. Theoretical Framework: Black Feminist Thought

Having discussed the literature that bears on our study, in this section, we discuss Black Feminist Thought (BFT) given our centralizing of Black women and their experiences with gendered racism. Black Feminist Thought, as Hill Collins [26] conveyed, "consists of specialized knowledge created by African-American women which clarifies a standpoint of and for Black women" (p. 22). Although there are no singular tenets of BFT, we highlight what Hill Collins [27] referred to as "six distinguishing features that characterize Black feminist thought" (p. 29).

The first core dimension is a legacy of struggle given the dialectical relationship that "links Black women's oppression and activism" [27] (p. 29). Because Black women live in a society where white people, Black men, and Non-Black People of Color denigrate them, they share a common experience of struggling against racism and sexism. Secondly, although BFT contains core themes or dimensions, Black women vary in how they respond to the core themes. One such reason for this variation is that although Black women navigate racism and sexism simultaneously, their class and sexuality, as well as other social identities, position them differently from each other in society, meaning the ways they navigate these multiple systems vary [26,27].

An interdependence of experience and consciousness is the third dimension. This means that simply identifying as a Black woman does not mean one automatically develops a distinctive group consciousness. The fourth dimension is consciousness and the struggle for a self-defined standpoint [27]. "Expressing a collective, self-defined Black feminist consciousness is problematic precisely because dominant groups have a vested interest in suppressing such thought" [26] (p. 25). Given Black women's social location in the world, they hold a unique perspective on the way systems of oppression manifest to preclude them from living as their full selves. Dominant groups, such as white people, work to deny Black women from changing the world given their unique standpoint of the world. Yet, this struggle for a self-defined standpoint, which emerges from everyday, common knowledge as well as specialized, theorized knowledge, is essential for Black women's survival [26,27].

An interdependence of thought and action is the fifth dimension. When Black women articulate a BFT, they desire to move this thought into action by changing the circumstances that are oppressing them [26,27]. As Hill Collins [26] notes, there is no dichotomy between thought and action, but instead, "by espousing a both/and orientation that views thought and action as part of the same process, possibilities for new relationships between thought and action emerge" (p. 29). The final dimension concerns the connection between BFT and other social justice efforts, such as eradicating colonialism and xenophobia [27]. In the Findings section, readers see examples of these six features present in the participants' narratives. In the Discussion, we convey more explicitly the ways the stories from the three participants reinforce, complicate, and extend BFT.

4. Methodology and Methods

Data to address the two research questions come from a narrative qualitative study [49] on the experiences of 35 Black student affairs educators navigating racial battle fatigue. Rather than focusing solely on the racial battle fatigue participants experienced, we hoped to understand the strategies participants used to heal from racial battle fatigue. As the research team analyzed the data, we found noticeable differences in the experiences and approaches of Black women in the study as compared to their Black male counterparts. As such, we focus on Black women in this manuscript given the unique ways Black women student affairs educators navigate multiple systems of oppression (e.g., racism, sexism) and the ways these systems of oppression have historically positioned Black women as caretakers, making it often unacceptable for them to center their own needs.

4.1. Data Collection

To recruit participants for the study, the original research team (consisting of Stephen and, at the time, four Black graduate students) sent out a call via social media (Instagram,

Twitter, and Facebook) for participants who were at least 18 years old, self-identify as Black, and currently working in higher education and experiencing racial battle fatigue. Within 24 h, over 100 people responded to the call. Since the research team could not adequately interview that many people, they decided to conduct multiple phases of the study so as to not turn away those interested. For Phase 1, they reached out to the first 50 who responded to the call and invited them to participate; 35 ultimately completed the interest form and scheduled an interview.

The original research team conducted virtual interviews with participants that lasted 45–75 min in Summer 2017. Participants responded to questions about what racial battle fatigue feels like, places on campus where the experience of racial battle fatigue is most pronounced, and what self-care and healing look like for them.

4.2. Positionality

We hold different social identities that influence how we interpret the data from participants. Stephen is a Black, cisgender, nondisabled, heterosexual man. Given the privilege he is afforded as a cisgender man, he worked to notice this privilege in reviewing transcripts. Knowing his cisgender dominance meant he would make meaning of the transcripts through this lens, he noted instances where participants' words provoked a strong emotion in him. For example, Zuri shared a story about how non-Black People of Color also perpetuated her racial battle fatigue when they monitored her dress and mannerisms. This prompted Stephen to reflect on the ways he is also at times complicit in policing Black women and not holding Black men accountable for the ways we perpetuate harm toward Black women. "This transcript is really pushing me", he wrote in his Researcher Journal, "and I need to keep paying attention to how I and the Black men in my circle do harm to Black women".

Given his privilege and power as a cisgender man, he invited Erin and Jasmine to also analyze the data given their shared social identities with the participants. Erin identifies as a cisgender, heterosexual, Black woman who saw herself in many of the narratives, which upon first read of the transcripts in 2019 yielded a strong sense of camaraderie and empathy in these experiences. Having just recently left a job in student affairs as an entry-level professional herself, the emotions expressed in the stories were relatable. Erin strived to remain cognizant of these shared identities and her deep connections to the narratives throughout the analytical process especially when reinterpreting specific stories within these transcripts.

Jasmine is a cisgender, disabled, Black Latina from a working-class background. Given that she shared many salient identities with participants, she used her Researcher Journal to closely monitor how she responded to interviews. Having conducted the analysis during the uprisings in the summer of 2020, she was cognizant that her own RBF may manifest during the analytical process. For example, in response to Mercy's interview, she wrote the following in her Researcher Journal:

> Mercy's transcript was great from a research perspective, and a bit exhausting from a personal perspective. It was long, dense, and visceral in a way I wasn't expecting. I was planning to do four transcripts today, but this felt like doing four in one.

Although Erin and Jasmine share some social identities with participants, they both paid attention to not assuming meaning in participants' words or filtering understanding through their own experiences. They documented these reflections in their Researcher Journal to be mindful of how their biases and assumptions surfaced when analyzing the data.

4.3. Data Analysis

We (the current authors) re-analyzed the data for this manuscript with the two research questions at the forefront. Stephen led the original research team and invited Erin and Jasmine to analyze the data from the 24 Black women participants given their own identities

and perspectives as Black women. Stephen wanted a fresh perspective on the data to identify potential patterns and themes not identified by the original research team.

Because narrative inquiry centers on the stories of participants, we do not present themes in the Findings section. Instead, we present participants' stories more holistically and provide a fuller treatment of three participants' narratives. This mindset guided our data analysis approach. To analyze the data, we reviewed the transcripts from the 24 Black women participants and focused on the question: What is compelling about the participant's story? Our use of "compelling" aligns directly with the first research question about how racial battle fatigue manifests. We wanted readers to understand the deep-seated ways racial battle fatigue harms Black women's lives and the strategies they use to resist and work to heal from it (i.e., the second research question), even if that healing is, at times, fleeting or difficult. We do not use "compelling" to diminish or make invisible the stories of the remaining 21 Black women participants. Rather, pursuing this question allowed us space to determine, given our positionalities, what resonated with us most strongly in choosing to center three participants' narratives more fully. Given space limitations, we cannot adequately share the depth of all 24 participants' stories. We do, however, share stories from other participants in previous articles [44,45].

This choice to seek compelling stories aligns with the narrative methodology employed for the study, where researchers identify poignant experiences and stories that provoke visceral emotions and feelings [49,50]. To point out how she identified compelling stories, in her Researcher Journal, Jasmine wrote: "Going back and looking at my initial reaction to the story, and if that reaction was a visceral or emotional reaction, then I felt the story was compelling". Erin noted:

> I went back through my Researcher Journal and I thought about the words I would use (powerful) and see how many times I used them. Things that I could either relate to or things that elicited some type of stronger reaction, like shock or why did that really just happen?

Finally, Stephen wrote: "I went back through journal/transcript summaries and noticed if it elicited a strong emotion, if something was surprising, or if I kept thinking about it afterwards". These three snippets from our Researcher Journals underscore how we made meaning of what was compelling as we re-analyzed the data from participants.

After identifying compelling stories from the data in the aforementioned way, we met and discussed our process and chose five participants by whom we felt most moved when analyzing their stories given our positionalities. We had considerable overlap in our five people and ultimately chose three to center in this manuscript: Mercy, Marian, and Zuri. After determining to center these three participants, we each read all three transcripts and highlighted portions in the transcript we deemed compelling. We then met again and discussed our rationale for what we highlighted.

5. Findings

Having discussed the data collection and analysis procedures, in this section, we share the Findings. We organize the Findings by sharing narratives from three participants: Mercy, Marian, and Zuri (pseudonyms). We share the compelling portions of their narratives that stood out to us. Prior to sharing each narrative, we discuss what each narrative highlights and what the three collective narratives offer to help readers see the core themes across the narratives.

Mercy's narrative underscores four primary areas: her struggles with coping with gendered racism; having to prioritize students' needs when she, too, was navigating her own RBF; the intersection between her class privilege and her gender and racial subordination; and setting boundaries as a healing strategy. Four particular points surfaced in Marian's story: needing to make herself palatable to white colleagues; racial battle fatigue even extending into her leisurely activities; the accumulation of gendered racial microaggressions that led to RBF; and connecting with other Black women as a healing approach. Finally, Zuri's narrative conveys the following: paying attention to her class and

age alongside her race and gender; having to monitor her dress as a form of professionalism; and healing as a continual and communal process. Collectively, these three narratives provide readers with details about what gendered RBF looks like; intersections of other social identities alongside participants' race and gender; and the fleeting but possible nature of healing from gendered RBF.

5.1. Mercy's Narrative

At the time of her interview, Mercy worked at a Historically Black University on the East Coast as an assistant director in residence life. She had been in this role for five years. Although she identifies as a Black, heterosexual, cisgender woman, she notes that her Jamaican ethnicity is important to her: "I introduce myself as Jamaican first, which is ethnicity". She continues, "Write that [Jamaican] in big, bold letters, in green and yellow ink. Just do black, green, yellow, black, green yellow", indicating her pride for her Jamaican heritage. Her identity as a Black woman also matters significantly.

> We used to think that Black men were the target but then you know, Sandra Bland and whoever else. The fact that I remember sitting at a stop light, coming to the realization that the fact that I'm a woman does not make me safe and I hadn't actively thought that before but it was in there.

In the quotation above, Mercy explains how her identity as a Black woman no longer makes her feel safe as she reflects on Sandra Bland's death.

During Mercy's interview, Stephen felt the heaviness in her voice. Stephen conducted interviews for this study in the Summer of 2017, six months into Donald Trump's presidency. Mercy notes the events of those six months and even prior to Trump's election weigh heavily on her.

> And so it has never been easy [being a Black woman] but over the last three or four years, it has gotten significantly and continuously worse. From police shootings to this current political climate to hate crimes against not only Black people but Muslims and the narrative around folks of Hispanic descent or folks from Mexico or wherever.

The police shootings Mercy names refer to police shooting and killing unarmed Black people. She continues, "I used to talk to white people about race all the time. I straight up stopped doing that. That's it. I'm not doing that no more". Rather than continuing to talk to white people about race, Mercy discontinued, noting the difficulty of these conversations. In fact, she goes even further and states, "I have straight up started cutting people out of my life".

In articulating what racial battle fatigue means to her, Mercy says:

> I guess most directly, just what it feels like to be Black in a climate like where we are. Not just in America, in other places, as well. You know, everywhere has their problems. But also, I have had this for the last several months, probably going on a year now, just this thought that keeps going around and around in my head. Like, where can I go? Where can I go? Where is safe? Where can I just not feel like. . . Where can I feel safe? Where can I go where I'll be understood, you know, my actions won't be misinterpreted or I won't be misidentified? Just where is that?

The question, "Where is that?" poignantly captures the depth of racial battle fatigue. Mercy conveys the perpetual feeling that racial battle fatigue is omnipresent and one cannot escape its debilitating effects. Mercy tries answering her own question by noting, "In some ways for me that place is home but even there, there's things that come up. I live in a neighborhood where there are hella Trump supporters". Even her home space, the space that should be one's respite, does not free her from racial battle fatigue. Mercy was also surprised by the depth of her feelings about racial battle fatigue:

> I was surprised at the response that I had. Like, I was terrified, and I could not get out of bed. If I was experiencing that and I lead a fairly privileged life. Thankfully. I have employer provided insurance and things like that but all this other stuff, how are other people dealing with it?

"How are other people dealing with it?" captures Mercy's concern for other Black women navigating RBF who do not have access to resources like she does, which recognizes her privileges. However, not being a citizen compounded her feelings. "It [racial battle fatigue] just makes me feel so helpless, and I'm not a citizen. I can't vote. If I see a problem, I'd like to be able to do something about it". Helpless is a word that comes to mind when reading Mercy's words. The feeling of helplessness contributes to a lack of agency.

Worth reminding readers is the context of Mercy's work. As a student affairs administrator in a helping profession, she often feels compelled to prioritize students' needs over her own. However, even without this student affairs context, white men, Black men, and NBPOC have historically expected Black women in the U.S. to take care of their needs. These expectations of Black women stem from gendered racism, and the context in which Mercy works only reinforces this historical expectation. Because Black students are also navigating their own racial battle fatigue, they often come to Mercy to process. She shares one such example.

> Whenever something like that happens, students come to my office and are like, "Doc, did you hear that so and so?" Or "Doc, did you so and so?" Ugh! And they never come like six at a time so we can have a conversation at once. They come one at a time. Two at a time and seven more are coming tomorrow. "What are we going to do? This and that. They shot so and so". Every time, somebody comes to my office to talk about one of these things whether it just happened or whether it's a court case or whether it's some development. Or somebody said something crazy to them and they feel some kind of way and they need to come process it. Every time I'm forced to have a conversation like that, I feel like there's no escape. There's nowhere to go. You literally have to live this.

Students need Mercy to have the solution for figuring out how to address racial battle fatigue, and she often is not in a position to have answers, which feels demoralizing. Having to support students exacerbates her own racial battle fatigue. In addition, the lack of response from institutional leaders also does not help. She comments:

> I would say though, I have not felt like the institution has done a really good job of, I don't know how to say it, making me feel like they're aware of... Awareness is not the right word. I don't know. I have just been dissatisfied with their response. I'll just say that. I'm not even quite sure what my expectations are but the emails that come out from the president are very academic. They're very, "This is what has happened. This is what's in news and this is what happened in court, yesterday. Please be aware that our core values are x, y, z, w, and we will live up to these". Okay. Your core values are on the website.

Although Mercy shares that she has a colleague with whom she can process her feelings, often using laughter as a coping mechanism, she offers a story one of her colleagues shared about a stranger at a gas station caring for them that was impactful.

> You know, one of my staff members actually, he told me that he went... He stopped at a gas station on his way home and a lady who was... It was on a day that I think it was the day that Philando Castile got shot or around that time. He was heading home and there was a lady pumping gas at a gas station and she said to him, "Please drive carefully". She don't know him from anywhere. She's telling him please drive carefully and that like, he knew there was a problem but it never occurred to him that it was so bad that a stranger would tell him. He's coming to me and telling me that and I'm like, "Yeah, I never thought about that either". I mean it's bad. Fear is a big part of it. Not so much fear for myself but

> fear for specifically my husband and these students because what can we do? If we do what we're told, we get shot.

Mercy's story above illustrates the widespread impact of racial battle fatigue—that even people one does not know express care and concern given the climate of police brutality that exists.

Mercy also discussed strategies she uses to practice self-care and work to heal from racial battle fatigue, although she notes this healing is a struggle. "It [racial battle fatigue] is too much and unfortunately one of the ways that I cope is to just try to put blinders on". Often ignoring racism because the pain is too consuming, Mercy notes a few times during her interview reaching her breaking point, which often necessitates prioritizing self-care and healing. She uses the analogy of traffic lights regarding her breaking point.

> Yeah. I learned that lesson [needing to take care of my needs] the hard way though. I learned that lesson the hard way. Typically, I get to the breaking point is when I know I need to relax. I don't have, okay, yellow light, warning, warning. Alright the yellow light is blinking. It's time for you. . . It's all the way to the red light before I recognize that something's wrong.

Self-awareness in knowing when she is at her breaking point helps Mercy cope, although she indicates needing to recognize when she is on yellow more readily.

> It's when those symptoms start to return that I realize that I'm completely stressed out. I'm better now at spotting them early, and at that point I can, "Alright, I need to take a break or I need to take some time off or we can't have this conversation now". But that came from years and years and years of struggle.

As such, this awareness helps Mercy know when she needs to rest and recharge.

Although she communicates putting blinders on and struggling to identify earlier when she is on red, she did, in fact, identify some specific, concrete strategies she uses to combat racial battle fatigue. For instance, she says:

> I mean to be quite honest and maybe this is terrible but I have turned people away. I'm like, "You know what, I cannot discuss this with you right now because I am all in my feelings and I cannot. I literally cannot. So, I'm really sorry but we're going to either have to talk about something else or you're going to have to come back tomorrow".

Although Mercy conveys feeling guilt when she turns students away, she does so in order to care for her needs. As such, creating healthy boundaries is one tangible strategy Mercy incorporates to address racial battle fatigue. She continues:

> So, I'm used to carrying that amount of stress and in some ways that has, maybe inoculated me a little bit but if I am at this point, it's bad. You know, it's really bad. So, things are happening and walking into my office, to me it's kind of like a safe space in some ways but I used to keep my doors open and now I don't anymore. I manage much more carefully who comes in and "I don't have time to waste with you right now because I have some things to process". You know, because they would come in and sit down. I have couches. I have a refrigerator. There's water. They'll just come in, "Hey Doc, so and so. Oh, I got a good grade in my class". "Alright, cool". And we'll talk about whatever. I need some time to myself. I mean, I'm sure it impacts the service that I provide.

"I'm sure it impacts the service that I provide" reinforces the earlier point about student affairs as a helping profession and the history of expectations of servitude among Black women and indicates the guilt Mercy still feels even though she knows boundary-setting is a healthy and needed practice.

Finding activities that she enjoys doing, such as reading and fixing furniture, also enables Mercy to practice self-care. "So, I'm an avid reader", she said, "When I get into a good book, that's it. 'Oh, it's dinner time, okay'. You know this is where I am".

> But know what I do, is I reupholster chairs and I love that. I'm sitting here right now thinking about I can't wait until I get home to get the chair that I'm working on. So, that gives me a sense, a place where I can go, some things that I can do. You know, it's repetitive stuff. Once you know how to do it, you know how to do it.

Mercy distinguishes the aforementioned strategies as self-care approaches—temporary fixes that address the problem but not ultimately the root of the issue. "When it comes to healing, I can't help you. I don't know", she verbalized, "In order for there to be any kind of true [healing], we talk about real impactful things. We have to go all the way down to the bottom of this thing and deal with some ugly truths that folks don't want to deal with". She further illustrates healing with an apt metaphor about a house's foundation.

> We have a rotten foundation and the house is tilting and you're able to tell me the house is not tilting and the house is tilting. So, we can stand here and argue about whether or not it's tilted or we can go try to find the problem and try to fix it. You can try to prove me wrong and I'll try to prove you wrong. Let's go look at this foundation.

Looking at the foundation can help one understand why the house is tilted in the same way that looking at the foundation can help one get at the root issue surrounding racial battle fatigue and work to tackle that root issue. The foundation might still be shaky but one at least has a deeper understanding of the issue, not the symptoms of it.

5.2. Marian's Narrative

Marian was a mid-level professional who had worked in higher education for seven years at the time of her interview. She classifies herself as a Christian, cis, heterosexual, Black woman and lower-middle-class with a bachelor's degree in health education and a master's in college counseling. She currently works at a southern, predominantly white institution as an associate director in residence life.

Marian's rationale for participating in this research stems from her newly-formed awareness of the term racial battle fatigue from a conference workshop. "I probably can't define what it [racial battle fatigue] is, but I know I feel it. I'm excited to see more people having this conversation". A major focus for Marian around RBF is a sense of feeling tired. The root of this exhaustion hinges heavily on her battle for authenticity with white co-workers. She provides an example of working with another Black colleague.

> I was just having a conversation with one of my co-workers who's like a really good friend, and we're talking about orientation, and we do this presentation and we almost sing and dance. We do this karaoke before we start it because we're just fun people. I said, "Are we really this fun or are we trying to make them [white people] feel comfortable?" So, it's almost having to question yourself, "Is this my true personality or is it the nice version of me 'cause I don't feel like scaring nobody?"

Marian then asks several poignant questions.

> Everybody loves the two Black people, but it's just that am I really this nice? Am I really this funny? Am I really this sweet and helpful and all these other things? Or I'm just trying not to be an angry Black girl?

Marian constantly second-guesses herself about how often she compromises her authenticity by making herself palatable to her white co-workers.

Her exhaustion even extends to the television shows she watches in her free time. "I don't even watch like *Dear White People*, I haven't watched it yet. I just can't. I can't. I can't. I'm around too many white people". The idea that Marian's racial battle fatigue extends far from work to impact even her leisurely activities, such as watching shows, is particularly powerful.

Marian's racial battle fatigue not only comes from interactions with her white colleagues. Even her experiences with Black men impact her. She shares an example of an

instance with a Black man with whom she works and her fear of him perceiving her as angry when composing an email.

> "Please advise of how to move forward". And I was like, "Wait, I'm telling him what to do. Let me delete that sentence". Because coming from me, that's a command, and I've been told by Black men on campus that I'm just zero to protest. That's been a comment. So, it's just always being conscious of what you look like, how you're talking, what your hands are doing, what, you know the dialect, I'm from Virginia, but I'm also from the hood a little bit. So sometimes it come out when I get excited, and I don't do all these pleasantries and whatever. It's just a constant struggle. It's like being on Broadway all the time and trying to stay to a script.

The reference to staying on script and being in a Broadway performance illustrates the depth of overthinking and exhaustion that Marian experiences from white people, and at times Black men, policing her actions. "I just know being a Black woman seems to be a lot more challenging than my Black male counter[parts]", she continued, "Some of the Black men, and I say some, and I'm probably just talking about one or two, attack me just as much as any white person on campus".

Additionally, her white colleagues' lack of willingness to be aware of and discuss police brutality and other racial issues has also been a catalyst for racial battle fatigue. Marian comments on showing up for students and colleagues as the only Woman of Color on her team and the mental toll that takes on her.

> I think just that constant with all of the shootings that are happening, with our students wanting to be activists, being afraid too with, in my own position, being one of the only Women of Color. I don't know. I can't specify one time, but it's just a lot of stuff just happens over and over. People getting shot, and then I'm turning around having to come to work and being told that I'm loud and I'm aggressive and all these things that Black people have to deal with. So, it's just, I don't know. It's not just one. I think that's the fatigue part, it's not just one. . . it's almost like a landslide and one little drop and then you look up and it's like "Wait a minute".

Marian powerfully captures the depth of her racial battle fatigue indicating the accumulation of many seemingly small racist actions that lead to the "landslide" of racial battle fatigue. More specifically, she shares that when police killed Philando Castile, no one with whom she worked even mentioned the shooting.

> I went to my Black co-workers and was just like, "Damn", and they was like, "I know". But nobody else knew what was going on. Nobody else knew anything or any of the new administration, with the Trump era going on. I don't know. 'Cause literally, you just have to almost shuck your job just to get through your day.

Marian's RBF is often exacerbated when she is unable to share her emotions. She notes engaging in therapy to cope with these emotions.

> To be 100% transparent, this is why I'm really interested in the topic, I've had to see counseling. Now, my master's is mostly in counseling, so I know the benefit of it. But still there's that stigma. It's almost like being in a sandpit, quicksand, whatever it is and just knowing that the more I fight is actually gonna make it worse. So, if I just sit here, then I won't move. Do you know what I'm saying? The thing is exactly the way with quicksand, the more you do, it's just gonna push you down further so, it's just that feeling of, "Damn, even if I'm not in student affairs, this is going to happen to me elsewhere".

The imagery of quicksand aptly describes Marian's experience of racial battle fatigue. Counseling has helped her name these emotions and see how to make sense of her experiences.

In addition, Marian articulates the historical treatment of Black women in indicating that even outside of student affairs, she would still experience racial battle fatigue given the expectation that she takes care of others.

In the midst of navigating racial battle fatigue through her years working in residence life, Marian found ways to reclaim some of her autonomy, particularly through her appearance.

> I would say in my younger days, I was very cognizant of what I was wearing, what I was doing, all these other things. Now, not to say my title has something to do with it, but like I'm an associate director now, and you see I walked in real smooth. I come in with my headwrap on, Black Lives Matter shirts and stuff, and I double dare somebody to say something to me now. But, I think I'm more comfortable in who I am now.

Reading the aforementioned words in Marian's transcript provoked joy in us as researchers as we witnessed the strategies she employs to move through racial battle fatigue.

Even with those strides, however, her appearance and potential stigma still haunt her at work. Marian expands on this point below, saying she is just unable to be her whole self. She even expresses fear of potential microaggressions and macroaggressions prompted by her appearance.

> It's like, you know, when you look at your meetings for the day and you know who you're gonna see, you know, whether we do it consciously or not, sometimes it determines how we dress. You know, "Is my dress gonna be long enough or short enough", you know what I'm saying? "What's my hair gonna look like?" Sometimes, I feel that I'm meeting with a big fro and forgot. Everybody giving these stares, and I be like, "You know what I'm saying?" It's like I really wanted my hair like this, it's cute, but I didn't want to do it because I didn't want to hear the comments. I didn't want somebody to reach and touch it. I just didn't feel like being petted or any of those things.

Having to constantly monitor her appearance in her predominantly white workspace is exhausting and exacerbates Marian's racial battle fatigue.

As for strategies for coping and healing from RBF, Marian admits that she is at a loss for good solutions. However, she mentions receiving support from other Black colleagues through a secret "Black Magic Group". This group provides her professional support as well as a place to feel like she can be herself. Marian values this group because she can vent and not have to filter her thoughts and opinions.

Unlike Mercy, Marian does not delineate between self-care and healing, but describes her healing process as "being real with yourself about where you are, knowing your triggers, and knowing, I hate to say this, but picking the battle". Marian specifically finds journaling particularly cathartic for her self-care and the support from her Black Magic Group. When those strategies do not work, she simply "called out Black", meaning taking a day without using her computer and phone in order to find peace.

Although Marian is still on the path to finding her way to cope with and hopefully start healing from RBF, she concludes her interview with this advice for others who may also be experiencing RBF.

> Oh child. I would say, if you lose yourself, it's hard to get yourself back. And, notice your work, is it worth it? I got a mug, and I got a cup, right? You're pouring so much into people and then this overflows, right? This is getting overflown with getting all this stuff and you're empty. You don't have anywhere else to fill yourself. Then, you just poured all yourself out and then once they're empty, you're like, "Well, where do I go?" You know what I'm saying? You're not helping anybody if you can't refill yourself. So, find your source of energy, whatever that is, and always recharge.

5.3. Zuri's Narrative

At the time of her interview, Zuri was an early-career student affairs educator working within multicultural affairs at an institution she referred to as a "predominantly white space". Zuri's participation in the study stems from a desire to move conversations about racial battle fatigue further.

> I felt like the conversations never went beyond how can we actually remedy this, and I feel like a lot of times Professionals of Color in higher ed always have to adjust who they are, the type of administrator they are in terms of fighting capitalism and depending on their identities, the oppressions that they face.

As her rationale for participation demonstrates, Zuri was often attentive to nuance, differentiation, and relationships between concepts throughout the interview.

She repeatedly made observations about structural and societal ills and how they impact people. Her definition of RBF encapsulates this line of thinking:

> I think [RBF] means structural barriers in having to be your authentic self at work, I'm thinking in the context of work. . . Anything, and not only the structural part, but how that plays out within our personal and internalized oppression as well. I think just what inhibits you from having or feeling like you had agency or control over how you navigate your professional life.

Zuri consistently names capitalism and oppression as structures related to both RBF and healing from RBF. In doing so, she also surfaces ideas related to multidimensionality and intersectionality, exemplifying the interconnectedness of all these issues.

> So, to me what we can do about it is, how do we change the culture and how we think about what our role professionally and how capitalism impacts that. . . I think race needs to be at the center but there are other things that also play into that, like gender, I can talk about how my gender has impacted the way that folks see my race and see me as a professional, and capitalism always has to be in that conversation in terms of who is seen as a professional, whose thoughts and opinions are valued, and even age as well, I think that all of those things compounded really tells a story more than just how your race plays into it. . . A cis Black man can navigate the institution in a different way that I can, you know what I mean? And to just talk about it in terms of blackness I think it's doing it a disservice.

Zuri advocates for structural solutions to combat the varied impacts of RBF. By adding this perspective to individual approaches to healing from RBF, she reinforces that this concept requires complex and multifaceted solutions.

> I just think it's really important to start talking about these things [RBF] and also complicate what it means for Professionals of Color, not only to teach us how to adjust and to make sure that we're taking care of ourselves, but like how can we structure universities and colleges in a way that we don't have to feel this way? So, I think it's really important, and I just think any opportunity to talk about it, to offer any insight or nuance I think it's really important.

Zuri also notes issues of power and agency throughout her interview, which may provide insight into her question of how to structure universities and colleges differently. For instance, below, she describes the impact of not feeling heard when interacting with those who have more formal power at the university.

> Whenever higher-level administration is at the table, I think that's where I feel [RBF] the most, and I think the way that [name of institution] is specifically structured and that a lot of the decisions are made at the top without our input, I think that makes it the helplessness, or hopelessness that I feel, I think it's exacerbated 'cause I know that my voice may not go as far, or that I'm being judged, you know?

Later, Zuri discusses wanting to break down the boundary between administrators and students. Perhaps then, coalition-building between those with varying levels of formal power is a way to generate the structural solutions for which Zuri advocates.

In addition to formal power, Zuri also notes how social power dynamics contribute to her RBF. As she recalls an incident at work wherein a higher-level Administrator of Color in her office deemed her attire unprofessional, Zuri highlights the identity interplay.

> And I'm very curvaceous, too, so I think just being a Black woman, and then also having these curves, it makes it, I think, a little bit more scandalous quote unquote to have certain clothes on. So that was always in the background of mind, now it's always, after that, I became very wary of what I wore to certain events, and I hate professionalism, I hate professional clothes, that's bullshit to me. So, I always try to fight that as much as possible, but I understand in certain setting I'll have to negotiate that because it will always be a risk to come in different, or non-professional attire, whatever that means. And then also viewing other white men who wear khakis and very casual clothes to work and nobody ever says anything to them, they move up levels, you know what I mean?

In reflecting upon this incident, Zuri describes how People of Color, at times, reinforce the oppressive structures around them and how this action affects Zuri's RBF.

> How People of Color often appropriate the rules around how to survive in an institution, I think really complicates how we think about racial battle fatigue, so I think it hurts even more when it comes from a Person of Color who also acknowledges the oppression that can come with talking about professionalism and how limiting that can be, especially for a person like me, I think it's worse, I think it hurts a lot more. . . I understand where they're coming from in terms of wanting to protect other Administrators of Color and teaching them the rules and the ropes on how to navigate the institution, but at the same time it's like, all right, then we're reappropriating this oppression too and not asking the right questions about why we think this. Especially when you're in a higher level, I can't challenge the VP [Vice President] of student affairs the way you can challenge them, you have a bit more leverage in doing that in terms of your name and your status, whereas me, they can just let me go.

Zuri's discussion of RBF and her experiences with it show nuance by blurring the structural and individual, and therefore, the personal and political.

The interconnectedness of the large, conceptual ideas and their symbiotic relationship with individual experiences paints a vivid picture of the overwhelming and persistent nature of RBF. This is perhaps best exemplified by a succinct yet profound question by Zuri. When asked about a time she had experienced RBF, Zuri responded, "Oof, when have I not?"

In order to combat and heal from RBF, Zuri distinguishes between healing and self-care that reinforce her attentiveness to structures.

> I've been thinking about healing for a long, long time, and I think it's a continual process. Especially, not just beyond the oppression that we feel at work, but also what we come with. I think finding that space to heal and talk about [trauma] in a place of work is really important. And then self-care, I always have mixed feeling about the words self-care as it's so tied to capitalism. I think about it in a very communal way, 'cause I think I depend on a lot of people to help me heal, to listen to me, to support me, so focusing on the self I think is important, but I think community care, I think is, in the context of working in higher ed, I think is more important to me and how we help each other take care of ourselves. When I think about taking care of myself, I think a lot about making sure my people are good, too, and that's a way of taking care of myself, 'cause often in the lens of others. . . 'Cause capitalism is really focused on the individual, like how you're taking care of yourself, but that doesn't do anything to change the structures, and we think about how we remedy solutions, or how we remedy issues on our campuses, to

> just think about ourselves and how we can take care of ourselves is. . . And how do we do that without having any money?

Capitalism often reinforces individualism, and therefore, Zuri's insistence on community care addresses some of the structural concerns she names. She reinforces the importance of community by emphasizing the mutual benefits of her personal relationship with her partner, her relationships with the students with whom she works, and the Administrators of Color network where she holds an executive position. Within these relationships and communities, Zuri finds the most reprieve from RBF.

Zuri indicates a desire to leverage communities as a place of imagination to counter structural oppression, stating:

> I think what would be really cool is how to create, how to start imagining those faces. We always talk about how do we imagine liberation? What does that look like for us? And really going to that radical space. I would love to have conversations or a community around that. . . 'cause community was always a point for me, and I wanted that so bad, and when I got into college it validated the experiences that I had growing up, like, "I'm not alone, I'm not crazy for thinking that". And I think when imagining a new university, 'cause you start critiquing the multiple ways that you've experienced oppression and it validates that, and I think for me validation is a part of that healing. And then also what your role is in imagining what a new world would be like.

Zuri's ideas regarding structures and community are perhaps best summarized in her advice for other student affairs educators struggling with RBF:

> I would tell them they're not crazy, breaking down what their experiences mean in the structural sense, validating their experiences and then I think just creating relationships. Like, how do we create a relationship? How do we support each other? I think that would be my next question or point of conversation; how can I better support you?

6. Discussion

In this manuscript, we highlighted the experiences of Black women student affairs educators contending with racial battle fatigue and their process for working to heal from gendered racism. In this section, we discuss the contributions of our work to Black Feminist Thought and the previous literature.

6.1. Contributions to Black Feminist Thought

Using Black Feminist Thought [26,27] enabled us to examine participants' experiences with the six distinguishing features of BFT at the forefront. Below, we discuss the theoretical contributions of our study in relation to BFT. As a reminder, the first distinguishing feature of BFT is a legacy of struggle. Readers see this legacy of struggle in Mercy, Marian, and Zuri's experiences navigating gendered racism. For example, Mercy discussed her experience of RBF was exacerbated when she reflected on Sandra Bland's death. Because the media focuses more on police officers killing Black men than Black women, hearing of Bland's death prompted Mercy to feel connected to Bland, emphasizing this legacy of struggle. This legacy of struggle was also reflected in the ways participants' colleagues expected Mercy, Zuri, and Marian to take care of others' needs. This history of prioritizing others' needs reflects a legacy of Black women's struggles [26,27].

Next, variation exists in how Black women respond to the themes in BFT [26,27]. Zuri, Mercy, and Marian share some commonalities in their experiences navigating gendered racism and working to heal from it, such as constantly feeling exhausted and struggling to determine how to develop sustainable healing practices. However, they also vary in their experiences given other social identities at play. Mercy's Jamaican ethnicity, for example, was important to her alongside her Black racial identity. Zuri acknowledged her age and class, and Mercy recognized her class privilege in being able to access health insurance and

resources for her mental health. These variations in participants' experiences reinforce the contributions of BFT and demonstrate its relevance today [26,27].

Mercy, Zuri, and Marian also illustrate an interdependence of experience and consciousness, the third BFT feature [26,27]. All three participants identify as Black women; however, simply identifying in that way is insufficient. They have consciousness about their experiences that developed from reflection, building connections with other Black women, and their lived experiences. Zuri, for example, named how People of Color sometimes reinforced norms around professionalism, thereby contributing to oppression against Black women in the workplace.

Consciousness and the struggle for a self-defined standpoint [26,27], the fourth dimension, was seen in how participants used their unique experiences to develop perspectives about the way the world works. They also underscored how white people, often, and, at times, Black men and non-Black People of Color suppressed Zuri, Mercy, and Marian's standpoint, which exacerbated their RBF.

Finally, participants' stories also extend the fifth (i.e., the interdependence of thought and action) and sixth features (i.e., the connection of BFT to other social justice projects) [26,27]. Participants wanted to heal from RBF even if they sometimes did not know how to heal. The strategies they utilized to heal reflect a merging of thought (i.e., reflecting on their circumstances) and action (e.g., boundary-setting, journaling, community with Black women, and therapy). Zuri, in particular, was also concerned about standards of professionalism. Her standpoint is tied to other social justice projects, such as classism.

6.2. Contributions to Other Literature

Participants' stories illustrate how white people, Black men, and non-Black People of Color colleagues continue to expect Black women to take care of them and perform the role of nurturer [35,36]. These expectations simultaneously magnify the aforementioned caricatures of Black women as Superwomen [31] while adding to their mental labor, emotional labor, and literal labor. In particular, our findings corroborate previous research about the emotional labor in which Women of Color engage [25]. Marian, Zuri, and Mercy negotiated their relationships in work settings with white women and men and Men of Color, needing to care for them, while performing their duties as student affairs educators.

Participants expected these expectations from their white colleagues; however, when Black men and non-Black People of Color also contributed to participants' racial battle fatigue by questioning participants' dress and mannerisms, these experiences exacerbated their racial battle fatigue [35,36]. This point was reflected in Marian's experience in which she how Black men sometimes reinforce the angry Black woman stereotype.

Participants' experiences are consistent with the racial battle fatigue framework, which describes psychological, physiological, and emotional/behavioral stress responses associated with racial microaggressions [11]. Specifically, participants discussed a perpetual feeling of being exhausted, colleagues questioning participants' professionalism, having to adjust who they are, and navigating Black violence and death on the news, all of which contributed to their racial battle fatigue [5]. Participants also navigated multiple systems of oppression, namely racism and sexism, making their experiences materially different than their Black male counterparts [13,21]. This finding is consistent with intersectionality research, which underscores how institutional policies and practices uniquely affect Women of Color [19], as well as the BFT framework [26,27] described earlier.

Mercy described coping with gendered racism by "putting blinders on". Her experience is consistent with the literature discussed above on coping, and how coping only alleviates the effects of RBF temporarily [29,30]. Mercy's experience, in particular, reinforces the Strong Black Woman and Superwoman schemas. Just "putting blinders on" enabled her to keep moving forward despite the pain from gendered racism.

Although healing often seemed fleeting for participants, they found ways to move from temporary fixes to healing. Mercy gave the apt example of a yellow light warning in knowing that she needed to take a break. She also mentioned setting boundaries with

students in knowing when she could not talk about an issue. Finally, she mentioned getting at the root of the issue as a healing strategy. Marian highlighted the importance of a Black Magic Group where she connected with other Black women to heal. Zuri also discussed healing as communal (i.e., "I depend on a lot of people to help me heal."). These approaches are consistent with scholarship about the importance of kinship networks for Black women's healing [39,40].

Our work also aligns with French et al.'s [3] Psychological Framework of Radical Healing. All three participants demonstrate their critical consciousness about oppression in their lives, the first element of the framework. Further, they embodied resistance to this oppression and worked to name who was responsible for the oppression, the second element. Emotional and social support, the third element, was reflected by participants building community with other Black women from whom they received such support. We did not see radical hope explicitly in participants' narratives, although one could interpret radical hope in their stories as they saw avenues for making change in the strategies they employed. Finally, they demonstrated cultural authenticity and self-knowledge in reflecting on their social identities and the ways they benefited from privilege even in the midst of navigating oppression. Zuri's desire to see healing as a continual process further links with this framework by noting healing is not an endpoint, but instead, a process one works toward each day.

7. Implications for Practice

Refusing to accept the mantra that Black women are not able to prioritize their care, participants in the present study worked to heal from gendered racism. Student affairs as a helping profession [2], the particular context in which participants worked, at times further exacerbated their feelings of gendered racial battle fatigue. The field centers on supporting students, which means Black women educators in the study often struggled to prioritize their own needs [48]. Participants were often the only Black women in their office, which amplified the solitary nature of their work. White colleagues, Black men colleagues, and non-Black People of Color colleagues can intentionally take on more responsibility for supporting students, especially during crises, so that Black women can focus on their own care and healing. This means paying attention to news of Black violence and death and monitoring the extra labor in which Black women engage [25].

In terms of creating policies, supervisors should monitor unwritten othermothering expectations among Black women. For example, sometimes in annual reviews, student affairs educators are judged by their collegiality. Such coded language about collegiality can reinforce expectations of niceness, politeness, and care, some features of othermothering. Removing collegiality or professionalism as expectations in policies can create more room for Black women to exist in their varied ways.

Participants also distinguished between self-care and healing, seeing self-care as more temporary fixes that did not necessarily address the root of the issue (i.e., racism). Instead, they craved community, as they saw how healing was only possible in the company of other Black women educators with whom they could vent, process, and share strategies for healing [29]. We elevate the importance of communal healing by sharing the findings of this study. When Black women gather in the company of other Women of Color, they can move toward healing, which has longer-term effects to counteract the symptoms of racial battle fatigue. Those with more power, such as supervisors, should intentionally create spaces within work environments where Black women can connect with other Women of Color to work on their healing. In addition, allowing room for Black women to create these spaces without fear of penalties is another action in which supervisors can engage.

Black women in the present study needed Black men and non-Black People of Color to show up in ways that supported them and alleviated their racial battle fatigue. This means not asking Black women educators to dress in particular ways deemed professional, addressing racism among white people, and taking on the onus for supporting students. Participants also discussed getting at the root of the issue as a method that facilitated their

healing. The root of gendered racial battle fatigue is racism and sexism. Those in positions of power can challenge racism and sexism in the workplace as well as create policies that reward Black women student affairs educators for their labor. Such rewards can mean extra time away from work, financial honorariums, and promotions. Cultivating workspaces where Black women are not judged for their hair or dress, as well as pushing back against those who engage in that kind of behavior, is another way to address gendered racism.

8. Conclusions

Given the pervasive sexism and racism with which Black women contend in their roles as student affairs educators, they worked diligently to find ways to prioritize their care and healing. Healing seemed difficult given the toll of racial battle fatigue on their emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing. Finding ways to connect with other Black women facilitated their healing process. We hope the insights gleaned from this paper enable those who work with Black women to challenge racism and sexism and create spaces where Black women can thrive, heal, and live as their full selves.

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