

“AN EMPTY PROMISE”: EXPERIENCES OF STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS OF COLOR

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Abstract

Student Affairs Professionals of Color (SAPC) serve a critical role in the field of higher education. Using a phenomenological approach, this study gathered data from semi-structured interviews with eight SAPC from various backgrounds and institutions. Findings from this study illuminated how the participating SAPC experienced code-switching, student affairs fatigue, and professional crossroads. This study revealed a trend in which SAPC felt a lack of fulfillment and encountered unmet expectations in the profession. This research offers key recommendations for future exploration and practice to improve the field of student affairs and higher education for SAPC.

Keywords: Student Affairs, Higher Education, Professionals, People of Color

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“We talk so much about higher ed, doing the work and we’re changing lives ... but some of that feels like an empty promise when you look at the actual receipts of what’s happening...This job won’t love you as much as you love it.” -Krista,

Student Affairs Professional of Color (SAPC)

Introduction

We began this study by foregrounding one of our participants, Krista, and her anecdote regarding her student affairs experience and the current state of the student affairs field. There has been a significant exodus of student affairs professionals from the field for a myriad of reasons. Recently, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) reported low salaries and compensation packages related to education and experience requirements (88%), stress and crisis management responsiveness of their role leading to burnout (84%), as well as feeling both underappreciated and undervalued by the institution (81%) as some of the reasons student affairs professionals leave the field (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2022). Additionally, researchers found that job dissatisfaction can result from role ambiguity, role conflict, role orientation, role stress, job burnout, work overload, and perceived opportunities for goal attainment, professional development, and career advancement (DuBois & Mistretta, 2019; Marshall et al., 2016; Silver & Jakeman, 2014). While research on student affairs professionals primarily explores experiences with turnover, there is less research specifically related to the experiences of minoritized student affairs professionals (Briscoe, 2021).

Among these missing experiences is Krista’s description of an “empty promise,” in that the profession lacks a commitment to social mobility, diversity, and inclusion, and it does not provide student affairs professionals the same systemic level of care that is lent to students. This “empty promise” is situated in an environment that cen-

ters Whiteness in its working norms. The current state of student affairs work is exacerbated by staff working hours late into the evening, including weekends, which creates unsustainable working conditions that impede student affairs professionals’ personal lives and commitments (Isdell & Wolf-Wendel, 2021). In addition, there is a lack of acknowledgement that racism exists within the workplace, among colleagues, and leadership resulting in an aversion to understanding the benefits of White privilege in the profession (Isdell & Wolf-Wendel, 2021; Nguyen & Duran, 2018; Okun, 2021). Thus, ideal worker norms (Isdell & Wolf-Wendel, 2021) in student affairs can cultivate hypervisibility, isolation, and harmful working conditions for student affairs professionals of color (SAPC).

To understand individuals such as Krista, the environment existing in White working norms, and to complement the extensive literature that explains the attrition rate, we aimed to understand SAPC and how they experience a profession rooted in Whiteness and racism. We contextualized SAPC as individuals with minoritized statuses regarding their race and ethnicity, among other social identity markers (e.g., gender, sexuality, etc.) with which they self-identified (see Table 1). It is important to note that this study allowed each participant to represent their intersecting identities as they preferred, to discuss their experiences in the student affairs field. Furthermore, Kanagala and Oliver (2019) support that SAPC experiences can help the field “consider nuances easily missed when we do not engage with those who are able to help us see and understand” (p. 419).

Professional organizations such as NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education and ACPA-College Student Educators International (ACPA) have shifted their focus to address the lack of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts within the field (ACPA & NASPA, 2015), thus, making this study significant in underscoring the experiences of SAPC within the changing focus of the field, at large. Utilizing a phenome-

nological approach, we interviewed eight SAPC who worked at three Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) and five Predominately White Institutions (PWI), to understand their experiences. This study hopes to expand the research that exists to gain an in-depth understanding of what SAPC experience in the workplace. Therefore, our research questions were: How do SAPC make meaning of their experiences in a profession rooted in Whiteness? How do SAPC navigate racism in the student affairs profession?

Review of Relevant Literature

Prior to entering the field as professionals, SAPC endured isolation, tokenization, placement as cultural experts, and microaggressions in their Higher Education Student Affairs (HESA) graduate programs (Harris & Linder, 2018; Hubain et al., 2016; Linder et al., 2015). These experiences only intensify as they navigate and experience the student affairs profession, given their minoritized intersecting identities. SAPC play a vital role in institutional operations, and are an instrumental influence on college student growth and development by being responsible for mentoring, advising, and supporting minoritized students on college campuses (Garcia, 2016; Harris, 2019; Marshall et al., 2016). These tasks and responsibilities often add emotional and physical labor to their respective daily roles and obligations.

Furthermore, for SAPC who identify as QPOC (queer people of color), additional challenges are often navigated when coming out in a professional setting as well as when seeking affirming and healing spaces as queer student affairs professionals of color (Kangala & Oliver, 2019). These elements are compounded for SAPC as they experience additional microaggressions and oppression in the field (Briscoe, 2021; Burke & Robinson, 2019). As SAPC navigate the transition up to mid-level leadership and administrative roles, they endure racialized organizational cultural dynamics and hidden curricular rules of the student affairs field

(Bazner, 2021). The experiences of SAPC, unfortunately, do not change once they move into senior leadership positions in the field.

Leadership in the field of higher education further perpetuates issues of minoritized representation (i.e., race, gender, sexuality, ability, etc.). Pritchard and McChensey (2018) found that White people hold 71% of student affairs roles and 77% of senior administrative roles. The pervasiveness of Whiteness in leadership and other roles can have a profoundly negative impact on SAPC's ability to navigate and pursue mid-level and senior positional student affairs roles. Anderson (2021) found that even as students demanded to expand decision-making to people of color at the administrative level, the institution still lacked effort in policy changes to see this through. Furthermore, when conducting diversity work, specifically, SAPC expressed that their call to their work was both personal and professional, which complicates the needs and experiences of the demographic (Anderson, 2021). This reflects how resources, policy, and critical paradigms in the field do not currently support the units that are usually led by SAPC (Anderson, 2021).

More importantly, the profession is predicated by ideals and norms rooted in Whiteness. The student affairs profession has maintained professional worker norms through a "24/7 role and further perpetuated by academic programs, campus leadership, peers, and supervisors" (Isdell & Wolf-Wendel, 2021, p. 24). These cultural norms are interwoven into the field during graduate school and early student affairs professional career socialization (Isdell & Wolf-Wendel, 2021; Sallee, 2016). These ideal worker norms can cultivate harmful working conditions for professionals who experience burnout, fatigue, mental health concerns, and lack of career satisfaction, affecting professionals' ability to support students (Chesman, 2018; Isdell & Wolf-Wendel, 2021), holistically. As the student affairs field operates and functions, organizationally, in racialized and gendered ways (Poon, 2018), it perpetuates notions of White

supremacy culture and norms (Okun, 2021). These White supremacy norms are immersed within the values, culture, and ideals of student affairs (ACPA Presidential Task Force on Employment in Higher Education, 2022). The worker ideals and norms manifest in environments where racism exists in the workplace, among colleagues or leadership resulting in an aversion to understanding the benefits of White privilege in the profession. Despite this, SAPC are still tasked to address diversity issues within these environments (Isdell & Wolf-Wendel, 2021; Nguyen & Duran, 2018; Okun, 2021). Carbado and Gulati (2013) further stated that “within majority-White workplaces,” Black employees will manage their speech patterns to prevent from being associated with stereotypes (p. 48). In other words, SAPC must change the way they speak in a predominantly White workplace because of their vulnerability to discrimination pertaining to their identity. The emotional and physical labor of navigating Whiteness can pose harm to SAPC (Matias, 2014). Unfortunately, these inequities and issues are not well documented, as there is still a lack of literature regarding SAPC’s field experiences (Briscoe, 2021). Therefore, our study explored the lived experiences of SAPC in the field, how they experience Whiteness, and how they navigate racism.

Methodology and Method

For the purpose of this study, we utilized a phenomenological approach. A phenomenological study is characterized by further understanding a “lived experience” (van Manen, 2016, p. 26). “Phenomenology is the way of access to the world as we experience it pre reflectively” (van Manen, 2016, p. 28). Thus, we aimed to explore the essence of SAPC as they experience Whiteness in the field as well as how they navigate racism in the field. A phenomenological approach allowed us to examine the distinct and niche ways SAPC experience the student affairs field and the ideal worker norms rooted in Whiteness. Thus, we used an ap-

proach that would encourage the inclusivity of our participants and their shared stories, which may have included their community, as a collective.

Sample and Data Collection

For the purpose of this study, we utilized purposeful sampling to focus on individuals who identify as SAPC. With IRB approval, we obtained SAPC who met our participant requirements by utilizing convenience sampling to help us identify participants within our network (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participant qualifications included identifying as a person of color and having full-time employment in student affairs. We varied our interviewees by selecting individuals with different identities (i.e., gender, race, and sexuality), but we also selected participants based on differences within their student affairs positions (i.e., number of years in the field and institution type). For example, our participants identified as African American/Black, Hispanic/Latinx, Asian American, or mixed race.

Of the eight participants, five were from a PWI, three were from an HSI, and they ranged from having five to over twenty years of experience in the field. See (Table 1) for additional details regarding the participants and the other identities they felt were salient, which they were comfortable sharing with us. Having diverse perspectives on these different positions helped us see patterns between all interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researchers held a 60-minute semi-structured interview with each of the eight participants who identified as SAPC. The semi-structured interview questions (e.g., student affairs issues, belonging as a SAPC, challenges faced as a SAPC, navigating the profession) were developed considering our participants’ minoritized identities. This ensured cultural and professional relevance and inclusivity. Prior to completing the interviews, participants agreed to sign the consent form, and after the completion of the interviews, they were transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

We utilized interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to unearth emergent themes and patterns from the data method (i.e., semi-structured interviews) using a seven-step protocol process (Noon, 2018). IPA is a seven-step protocol to ensure data analysis. It includes: (1) reading and note-taking, (2) taking notes for emergent themes, (3) connecting to emergent themes, (4) producing a table of themes, (5) continuing to the next case, (6) creating a final table, and (7) writing up the research (Noon, 2018). The initial stage was completed by offering observations, notes, and reflections on the semi-structured interviews. This process was completed by reading and analyzing the interview transcripts for consistent themes across the data. We, then, created a themes table from each of the interviews and repeated this task to create a final themes table. IPA allowed us to explore the essence of SAPC who experience Whiteness and navigate racism. During each step of IPA, the researchers worked individually and met, collectively, to discuss the most prevalent themes that best explained the phenomena and experiences of SAPC.

Trustworthiness and Research Positionality

To gain overall trustworthiness we utilized various methods including member checking, checking for interrater reliability, and keeping accurate records of positionality and procedures in the analytical phase. After transcribing interviews, the participants received the transcription of their interviews to review and either make corrections or affirm what they shared. We also checked for interrater reliability by comparing codes and themes during the analysis process and yielding similar or the same comparable results. Having multiple researchers conduct the data gathering and data analysis allowed for a more concrete confirmation of emergent findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Finally, we kept accurate records of our procedures, particularly during the analysis phase. We

noted our data analysis process and positionalities. At the time of the study, each member of the research team identified as an SAPC and first-generation college students. One member identified as a Latina woman, one member identified as a Queer Latino Immigrant, and one member identified as a Black, queer, and non-binary. The research team acknowledged they felt an affinity towards the participants, as we have all navigated racism and the student affairs field, rooted in Whiteness. However, the researcher group attempted to mitigate their researcher biases through constant interrater reliability during the data collection and data analysis phases.

Delimitations

There are a few limitations to the study to be addressed. First, we only interviewed eight individuals, thus this study does not represent all SAPC experiences in the field of student affairs and higher education. However, it does illuminate some of the complex and hostile experiences these professionals endure, more broadly. It is important to highlight this research for colleges and universities to consider how to best support SAPC and advocate for their needs. Finally, we relied on the participants' voices and experiences as they shared them with us. We recognize that our positionalities and proximity in identity to our participants offers a strength within qualitative research to center the participants voices and experiences in this study.

Findings

The findings revealed that SAPC experience a heightened sense of Whiteness and racism given ideal working norms, which create unsustainable working conditions. Ideal working norms push student affairs professionals toward burnout, fatigue, mental health concerns, and decline in career satisfaction (Isdell & Wolf-Wendel, 2021). Hence, SAPC must navigate racism in a profession rooted in Whiteness, using code-switching and ex-

periencing fatigue which leads many professionals to consider whether to continue in or exit the student affairs field.

Code-Switching... I Really Try to Consider My Audience

All participants in this study noted a similar understanding of their communication skills within the student affairs field, as professionals of color. While it was apparent that the participants all drew from various communication skills, what was most salient in their field of student affairs was how these skills changed depending on context. The majority of our participants mentioned the term “code-switching,” which is the practice of selecting or changing linguistic elements in communication depending on the contextuality (Nilep, 2006, p. 1). These elements are typically connected to the social setting or the cultural diversity of the individuals present. Specifically, individuals distinguished this skill as them being able to use different styles of language depending on the professionalism of the situation or the engagement of students (Nguyen & Duran, 2018). For example, Soledad identifies as a woman of color, with mixed heritage, who has been in the field for over 18 years, and currently serves as an associate dean at a large public research HSI. She noted how her code-switching is a strategic form of communication. She stated:

I really try to consider my audience. This is probably something that’s funny but with my students, sometimes I try to be a little bit more genuine which, you know, students will laugh and be like, ‘yeah Dean Soledad swears.’ [...] And so I try to be genuine in my communication and I will maybe use more slang or every now and then of course I code switch for meetings with people in suits and ties. I manage my behavior very carefully, as my mentors have taught me to do, you know to manage my face and to be very aware of how I’m perceived and I would describe my com-

munication strategy.

This example demonstrates the benefits of code-switching for SAPC to be understood but can also affect their authenticity negatively and encourages the management of one’s own identity (MacCollister & Lane, 2022). Carmen, a Latinx woman, who is a director at a public community college, noted the difficult dynamics of being a woman of color and trying to communicate without being perceived as too “harsh or aggressive.” The participants discussed how the negotiation of their communication styles compromises their authenticity in the workplace. This can be negative as America, who identifies as a Black woman, has been in the field for less than five years, and currently serves as an associate dean at a private PWI, stated:

My fear is that that tone is going to be misunderstood and, again, because of who I am [Black Woman] and people may mistake me for having like, no that’s actually an attitude. I’m just like, I’m just responding to you. So I’m very I’m very cognizant of that.

This fear was mostly due to the deep negative awareness that most women have about the subject of code-switching in their profession (MacCollister & Lane, 2022). Other than gender, the race of our participants must also be considered. For example, it is noted that Black employees, who work in mostly White work places, tend to manage their speech to avoid stereotypes (Carbado & Gulaati, 2013). These examples exacerbate how diverse identities, including gender and race, face harmful working conditions not only because of ideal working norms but because of how student affairs sustains concepts of White supremacy culture and norms (Chesman, 2018; Isdell & Wolf-Wendel, 2021; Okun, 2021). Although the majority of the examples in our findings showcase women and their understandings of navigating Whiteness and racism, it is important to note that all partici-

pants, regardless of gender and race, experienced code-switching.

Student Affairs Fatigue... There's Just A Lot of Challenges

Participants noted diverse experiences in which they felt challenged as SAPC. Some participants noted that simply being in the field as a person of color and upholding intersecting identities was difficult enough. Others shared that being overloaded with diversity initiatives caused a lot of burnout. Finally, some discussed how they tried to resist systemic and oppressive structures to best support their students, which ultimately led them to fatigue. Overall, SAPC admitted to taking on a lot of emotional and physical labor when navigating Whiteness in the field, as themselves and for students (Matias, 2014). Dar, who identifies as gender queer and Black, has over eight years of experience, and currently works at a public HSI, shared their story as being a professional leader who works with LGBTQIA students:

The system's not really setup to support professionals like me. Let alone students ... I'm a first generation like student affairs professional like not necessarily like in the traditional sense but like as far as identifying Black and queer and leading an LGBT center, it's just not a lot of folks who've done that. There's just a lot of challenges. There's a lot of things that I have to navigate that I'm just learning like, 'Wow! Okay.' Figure out how to navigate them. There's not a roadmap. So, a big point ... So that's becoming more important to me. Not just myself, but like for the future generations, and also, there's pathways for LGBTQ students of color to get to college.

Dar's narrative illuminates the importance of representation of a student affairs professional from a marginalized background in an LGBT center. Dar's position in an LGBT center plays a vital role in ensuring that this student population has ade-

quate resources to matriculate in higher education (Kangala & Oliver, 2019). While Dar's position is crucial in the field, it is also taxing, both professionally and personally.

Many SAPC also noted that they are typically made responsible for most diversity work and initiatives. Some of the SAPC shared how they also incorporated social justice frameworks to resist systemic and oppressive institutional structures and led key initiatives to support students from marginalized backgrounds. These experiences resulted in enduring emotional labor (more than their White counterparts), feeling stress, burnout, and, ultimately, led them to face student affairs fatigue. For example, Brad, a queer Asian American assistant director, at an HSI with 10 years of student affairs experience, explained how, while advocating for students is a form of resistance, he faces professional tensions when doing so:

They're having lots of conversations in our office about this idea of advocacy and what our boundaries are and I've been a really big proponent of like, [...] this is very personal to us and we're also experiencing a lot of things that our students are experiencing. So it's hard for us to separate our personal lives from this professional life. [...] I can't partition my life like that and I had a really tough discussion with my current supervisor, who is like 'you have to know what you've got yourself into, right, like you are working for a university, you know that there are boundaries.' And so, again, it was that kind of talk about wanting to advocate for students but also like my own personal identities on campus without having to jeopardize my livelihood and what I want to do.

Brad's story refers to the importance of support and advocacy for students and how student affairs professionals are change agents at colleges and universities. Brad's excerpt also illuminates that the role of those who work in student support ser-

vices is to aid students to enact social change at colleges and universities while struggling to support their own professional and personal identities. Anderson (2021) references this struggle as both a personal and professional call to their work. This is compounded by the lack of policy changes toward giving people of color greater institutional decision making power to support the students mentioned.

Professional Crossroads... “I Aspire to Get Out”

When participants were asked about their aspirations, SAPC noted either feeling committed to their job because of their students or felt a desire to leave the field. Most participants stated that they felt compelled to stay at their jobs because of the commitment they felt toward their students. Carmen, the Latinx director from a community college, said, “I aspire to continue helping, primarily, students who are first generation students or students who are coming from underrepresented backgrounds because that’s, you know, that’s that’s where my passion lies.” Many participants who felt this way were personally connected to these students, because they shared an identity or similar struggle in the past and felt convicted to do this work. For example, Brad shared:

I’ve been thinking about this a lot. Like what pushed me into the student affairs and it’s so something I think about a lot is something I learned during my grad school experience like one of the first classes we had our professor told us, you know, a lot of us who go into student affairs, particularly of marginalized identities, go into student affairs because they’re working through some sort of baggage that they have, like something happened to them during their college experience, that they want to prevent like for others and so just is our kind of therapy to work through those and I can see that because my college experience.

This echoes similar studies in which graduate

students of color in student affairs programs expressed choosing the field due to a strong passion for advocacy work and prior experience in student affairs work as college students (Linder & Winston Simmons, 2015). Student affairs graduate students either felt compelled to be the support they never received or wanted to help others like them as they were once supported in college (Linder & Winston Simmons, 2015).

Conversely, various participants also stated their strong aspiration to leave the field for various reasons that matched the research shared in the literature review. Participants noted large amounts of stress, being overworked, feeling unappreciated, feeling undervalued, feeling uninspired, lack of belonging, having no professional opportunities for growth because of their identity, and feeling the pressures of politics and, therefore, not being able to be genuine in the profession, resulting in job dissatisfaction (DuBois & Mistretta, 2019; Marshall et al., 2016; Silver & Jakeman, 2014). America stated:

I aspire to get out and once I had aspirations of, yeah, moving up to a VP of student affairs or even president of an institution, but it’s so political that I’m just like, I don’t know how much of my soul I can sell.

Dar shared:

I mean I’m still on a quest to figure out like what like this work, you know, where’s the spaces for people of color within this work that feel safe and that feel whole and how I can do this work in a way that like doesn’t jeopardize my spirit, my dignity.

The following excerpt from Krista, who identifies as African American, has under five years of experience, and currently serves as an assistant director at a private PWI, explains this challenging time in more detail:

I think, right now, I'm at this crux of I'm at five years of the work and the jobs only get more competitive as you go up. And I don't know if I believe in this. I also don't know if I want to sacrifice so much of my personal life, but also my emotional energy to keep on in something that just is not, is not what I thought it was going to be, and not what we talked about. And I think that's where the struggle is for me, is that we talk so much about higher ed, doing the work and we're changing lives ... but some of that feels like an empty promise when you look at the actual receipts of what's happening. It doesn't feel like that's what's going on.

Krista alluded to the competitiveness and challenges that early to mid-level professionals in the field face when having to navigate and experience a variance of stress. This finding overlapped with the previous theme of feeling fatigue in this field. Krista shared that there is a lack of return on the investment of the labor and work of student affairs professionals that often leads to not feeling fulfillment in the field. This lack of satisfaction can lead professionals early on in their careers to contemplate staying or exiting the profession.

It seems that the participants who indicated an aspiration to leave the field were having a hard time finding the balance of their professional and personal selves within this field. Even Rico, who identifies as gay and Asian-American, has over 20 years of experience, and holds a senior level position in a PWI, is still uncertain of their future career aspirations. A majority of the SAPC interviewed detailed an uncertainty and mentioned feeling as if at a crossroads in terms of career aspirations in the field. While there were various reasons that SAPC were at a professional crossroads, our findings made it clear that ideal worker norms rooted in Whiteness, which created unhealthy working conditions, were at the crux of the issue (Isdell & Wold-Wendel, 2021).

Discussion

Findings from this study illuminated how SAPC experienced code-switching, student affairs fatigue, and professional crossroads. The experiences participants highlighted revealed the various highs and lows within work environments for SAPC and solidified the importance of further development, support, and care for SAPC. In particular, SAPC typically noted utilizing their skills and abilities to navigate the field, and this led them to go against the grain when possible. For example, code-switching (Nilep, 2006) was mentioned by all participants as fundamental to being able to navigate the field. Some participants denoted code-switching as strategic and useful while others felt it made them feel inauthentic when having to hide their true communication style to be accepted by those in authority. In particular, it was found that the participants who identified as women were very vigilant of their communication style as they feared not being recognized as professional enough based on their gender. This fear leads to fatigue for SAPC which is created by stress, burnout, and emotional labor. Previous literature explains how SAPC experience microaggressions and oppression in the field (Briscoe, 2021; Burke & Robinson, 2019), which supports these participants' experience relating to the marginalization of women.

SAPC noted deep commitment and care for their students and shared that they were personally passionate about serving students, as they would have wanted to be supported and or served. Anderson (2021) highlighted that SAPC felt the work was not only professional but personal. However, it is important to note that SAPCs lack the ability to truly embody their personal care for students when it requires them to advocate for students within a social institution where their employment is bound and repercussions exist. For example, Brad noted his fear of losing his job if he advocated for students regarding an issue about which he personally cared. Interestingly enough, student

affairs professionals are encouraged to support students to be themselves and develop (Marshall et al., 2016) and yet, SAPC were scared to take the advice we share with students because of the need to fulfill the western ideas of professionalism regarding not mixing the personal with the professional (Linder & Winston Simmons, 2015). Bazner (2021) suggested that SAPC endure racialized cultural dynamics and rules that these professionals must follow. Therefore, trying to navigate the field as a person of color and not being able to resist the social injustices that exist, causes stress and burnout. Moreover, as noted by participants, with the lack of diversity in higher education administration, SAPC are typically made responsible for diversity work and initiatives, which only causes more emotional labor to deal with.

The feelings of inauthenticity, being overworked, and the lack of support made many participants experience a process of professional discernment. When asked about their aspirations in the field of student affairs, most new (less than five years in the field) professionals noted that they felt uninspired, unsafe, lacking dignity, undervalued, overworked, lacking spirit to do the emotional labor, and at a crossroads to possibly leave the field, echoing research pertaining to the attrition rate in student affairs (DuBois & Mistretta, 2019; Marshall et al., 2016; Silver & Jakeman, 2014). It is clear that SAPC experience emotional and physical labor when navigating Whiteness (Matias, 2014) and the ideal working norms that are also steeped in Whiteness cause them to desire leaving the field.

Implications for Research

Researchers should use critical methodological approaches (e.g., narrative inquiry, arts-based research, case study) to analyze SAPC experiences in the field. Additionally, critical frameworks could be utilized to highlight the experiences of diverse populations in the field. For example, the Community Cultural Wealth Model can be

expanded to include SAPC and focus on the way they utilize cultural wealth in the profession (Yosso, 2005). Future research can investigate the mentor relationships SAPC cultivate as they find niche ways to disrupt Whiteness and ideal worker norms in student affairs. Other inquiries can be made about how the professionals would like the student affairs field to address retention efforts. Thus, researchers can explore various studies that consider retention strategies. In particular, their view of the field before completing their degree and then after obtaining a job can be very useful in understanding attrition rates and improving educational preparation in the field. Lastly, while participants identified as professionals who came from historically marginalized backgrounds, it is essential to examine nuanced identity intersections (i.e. Women of Color, Queer People of Color, etc.) to best capture their unique experiences more broadly.

Implications for Practice

The field must address and critique the assumptions that White professionalism poses on career trajectory and aspirations for professionals from marginalized backgrounds. Furthermore, institutions have to create professional opportunities for career advancement that are not limited to staff awards and recognitions, specifically for SAPC. While recognition signifies acknowledgment of dedication to the position and work, it lacks upward career mobility for SAPC. One recommendation would be to create a specific career advancement program for SAPC, that also provides professional development, resources, and mentors, ultimately addressing the findings in this study. This program should be presented to them during the hiring process and the institution should be transparent about their possible career advancement and what is required. Practitioners and senior-level administrators also need to address the emotional and physical labor that SAPC endure that takes a toll on their mental

health. Colleges and universities have to consider how professionalism operates and functions, from a White man's perspective, which inherently marginalizes SAPC and other minoritized groups (Linder & Winston Simmons, 2015). One recommendation would be to provide mental health support for current SAPC but, ultimately, dismantle the need for SAPC to be the responsible party to take on the burden of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives on their own. The labor should be distributed to all student affairs professionals to not burden SAPC and, hence, denounce the idea that only people of color can contribute to or work toward diversity. Some participants noted that they struggled with separating their personal and professional identities. Student affairs supervisors can benefit from using an identity-conscious supervision framework to help support and affirm professionals who hold marginalized identities (Brown et al., 2019). Graduate programs can also benefit by examining the unique needs of SAPC in their course curriculum. Higher education and student affairs graduate programs can integrate SAPC readings and narratives into their course curricula. Lastly, creating a student affairs think tank or institute can create evaluation and assessment strategies to help institutions identify issues and implement critical structures to improve the field's functional areas that lack an equitable lens and environment for SAPC.

Conclusion

Krista's narrative at the beginning of this project stated, "this job won't love you as much as you love it." This anecdote speaks to the overt and covert complexities that SAPC experience in this field and, more importantly, to demonstrate how they invest their whole selves into this profession, with little to no return. SAPC are often asked to become martyrs for making institutional change, at the expense of them experiencing and navigating racism in student affairs. The research echoes the clear dissonance between the asks of being

whole-hearted and authentic with the harsh reality of a lack of support for the intersectional identities of SAPC who are instrumental in mentoring, advising, and supporting minoritized students on college campuses (Garia, 2016; Harris 2019; Marshall et al., 2016). Unfortunately, these SAPC are met with ideal working conditions that are harmful for everyone and yet, are intensified by a profession that is rooted in racialized and gendered ways, that uphold Whiteness and racism (Isdell & Wold-Wndel, 2021; Poon, 2018; Okun, 2021).

When considering the attrition rate of 60-70% of professionals leaving the field within five years, we can make an inference of what drives SAPC to be part of that statistic (Silver & Jakeman, 2014). This statistic is still the grim reality of the field, given our socio-political climate and mass-exodus reality in the student affairs field. As student affairs budgets have decreased due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there is a tension that forces student affairs professionals to exit the field. Social media groups have expressed the harmful and hostile environments that student affairs professionals are enduring at colleges and universities (Eaton et al., 2021). This calls for institutions to address these employment shifts within the field. Institutions need to create supportive and retention efforts to address the harm that student affairs professionals have endured.

Facing a global pandemic in higher education has allowed us to view the possibility of change and adaptability under difficult circumstances. This solidifies that the field of student affairs can change and improve the lived experiences of SAPC. This study specifically unearthed that SAPC feel a lack of fulfillment and expectations in the profession and brings more nuance to a lack of research exploring student affairs professional experiences (Briscoe, 2021). It is important to value SAPC in this field as they are worthy and needed in the field of student affairs. By dedicating efforts to dismantle ideal worker norms, their aspirations to stay in the field may increase and the promise of having a satisfying career may be fulfilled.

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Table 1*Participant Table*

Pseudonym Name:	Self-Identified Identities:	Years in Student Affairs:	Current Institution:	Position Level:	Career Aspirations:
Soledad	First-generation, Woman, Mixed Heritage, Mother	18+ Years	Public Research University; Hispanic Serving Institution	Associate Dean	Continue in Field
Carmen	First-generation, Woman, Latinx, Mother	5+ Years	Public Community College; Predominately White Institution	Director	Continue in Field
Brad	First-generation, Queer, Asian-American	10+ Years	Private University; Hispanic Serving Institution	Assistant Director	Professional Crossroads
America	Woman, Black	5+ Years	Private Research University; Predominately White Institution	Assistant Director	Professional Crossroads
Rico	Gay, Asian-American	20+ Years	Private University; Predominately White Institution	Associate Dean	Continue in Field
Ashley	Woman, Latinx	9+ Years	Private University; Predominately White Institution	Director	Continue in Field
Dar	Second-generation, Queer, Black	8+ Years	Public Research University; Hispanic Serving Institution	Director	Professional Crossroads
Krista	First-generation, Woman, African-American	5+ Years	Private University; Predominately White Institution	Assistant Director	Professional Crossroads