Hustle: Deconstructing Pressure and Workload for Black Undergraduate Women

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

Black women are consistently placed in positions which challenge our mental and physical health and safety. This is especially true for Black women who serve in leadership roles in predominantly white spaces. While there has been research conducted to examine the experiences and impact of these experiences on Black women working in corporate and academia, there is a significant gap in the research considering Black women who are students on undergraduate campuses. Participating in on-campus organizations prepares students to engage with the working world, and this study asks if the experiences Black women have as part of these organizations mirror their experiences after college. Through examining the pressure placed on these students with a specific focus on mental health, conflict, and forgiveness, this study seeks to understand these experiences and how to better support the Black women holding leadership roles in on-campus organizations.

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Process Analysis Statement

As I considered what I wanted my final thesis to focus on, I determined it had to be an issue I cared for deeply. I spent most of my college career doing the things I felt like I had to do or were expected of me without actually considering what I wanted. Reflecting on all of these experiences led me to the thesis topic I have been so blessed to focus on: looking at the impact of student organization involvement on the mental health of Black women. I have never needed research to tell me how traumatic engaging with student organizations can be at a predominantly white institution (PWI). As a Black woman who has been heavily involved since my freshman year, I have seen the toll it has taken not only on myself, but also my peers. Our experiences are regularly overlooked, a chronic misstep considering the way undergraduate studies are supposed to prepare students for life after college. Not only did this study provide critical information to be used to support students, but it was also a tool for me to process my own college experience while articulating a reality I know is true for so many women.

"Hustle: Deconstructing Pressure and Workload for Black Undergraduate Women" is a qualitative study focused on the experiences of Black women who are student leaders at a PWI, the ways in which their identity impacts their experience, how these occurrences manifest outside of undergraduate student organizations, and the implications of their experiences for individuals and institutions. The research which forms the foundation of this study was collected through an extensive journal article review before conducting focus groups. Preparing the literature review gave me fantastic insight into the best way to structure my research questions. There are so many different perspectives to consider with the topic I focused on, so the literature review was very helpful in directing my energy. The research process was difficult because there is not much research focused on Black women in leadership roles. While frustrating, I

appreciated being able to see first-hand the gaps in the literature my study began to fill. Conducting the focus groups was incredibly rewarding. Connecting with my peers in that setting and being able to hear their stories was heartbreaking and illuminating. While I was not surprised to hear the overlap as they discussed what it was and is like to hear their leadership roles, it was still frustrating to hear how neglected these women have been. I greatly appreciated the opportunity to see how the young women who participated in the focus group interacted with each other. Though it isn't ideal to bond over trauma, these women were able to clearly see themselves in the experiences of others, creating a sense of community that I hope helped them emotionally.

The process of carrying out this thesis reaffirmed for me the importance of magnifying the voices of those from historically marginalized backgrounds. While many of us within these communities can clearly articulate how we are harmed, it is evident it is not taken seriously. Specifically considering academia, I was not at all surprised, but certainly disheartened, to see the gaps in the literature. Researching and writing this thesis has reminded me why I care about the things I do. My view of the topic did not change, the process only made me surer that the mental health of Black women needs to be discussed more widely so those in power may put appropriate support systems in place. This project shines light on a group who is consistently overlooked while also expected to carry the weight of the world on our shoulders. The stereotype of the "strong Black woman" has existed for centuries, leading to unrealistic expectations that no one can healthily live up to. I sincerely hope this study provides the opportunity to bring the nuanced experiences of Black women student leaders to light in a way that will improve the collegiate experience for students in the future.

Only 36.1% of Black women hold a college degree in the United States, and if pandemic-era trends continue, this percentage will only decrease (Anthony et al., 2021). Black women who do seek to obtain an undergraduate degree face a multitude of hurdles throughout their application process and during their collegiate experience. Those who attend an undergraduate institution and become involved with student organizations may have a particularly difficult time, especially if attending a predominantly white institution (PWI). The research on Black women in corporate and academic leadership roles is not at all extensive, but it does exist. However, there is little to none regarding Black women student leaders in clubs which prepare them for leadership after graduation. Life on a college campus does not exist in a bubble: influences from the general environment, backgrounds of students and professors, and educational content all impact how students are treated and learn how to carry themselves. It is frequently said college prepares students for "the real world" with little regard for the fact that students on college campus are real people with real biases which affect how they treat one another. Therefore, it is imperative to investigate how Black women and femmes leading student organizations are treated and impacted by their involvement. Through examining the pressure placed on these students with a specific focus on mental health, conflict, and forgiveness, this study seeks to understand these experiences and how to better support the Black women running on-campus organizations.

Literature Review

In her 1986 essay, "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought," scholar Patricia Hill Collins considers how Black women use our unique "outsider within" status as a way to create new thought. Black women utilize their marginalization to better understand systems of oppression and to develop ideologies to

counteract these systems. Collins explains that the double marginalization Black women face on account of both their race and gender led to the development of Black feminism. She goes on to uncover the sociological significance of Black feminist thought and finds three universal themes: Black women's self-definition and self-valuation, the interlocking nature of oppression, and the importance of Black women's culture (Collins 1986, p. S16). Self-valuation involves choosing to value the aspects of Black womanhood which are frequently stereotyped. In doing so, Black women are able to subvert dominant ideologies. Additionally, Black women are always acutely aware of our position in the world due to the interlocking nature of oppression. Black feminism specifically considers the links between these systems. Finally, Black women's culture provides the values to which we self-identify. Though each of these key themes may manifest differently in the individual lives of Black women, they are still all present in the way Black women interact with themselves, one another, and systems of power. Collins further unpacks the ways in which Black women struggle to become "insiders" in many research fields, including sociology, because it places our lived experiences in the margins. Many fields will generalize their findings, leaving researchers asking, for example, "which women?" a theory applies to. This is something I significantly struggled with in my own research for this thesis. While Black women are not the only group with outsider-within status, we are an extreme case many groups can learn from. The perspectives outlined in this essay provide the theoretical framework for this thesis.

In a powerful article, "Staying Angry: Black Women's Resistance to Racialized Forgiveness in U.S. Police Shootings," Pearl focuses on the responses of Black women who have been asked to forgive, explicitly or implicitly, the officers who have killed their loved ones. Through analyzing interviews and press conferences with Esaw Garner, Lesley McSpadden, Valerie Castile, Samaria Rice, and Audrey DuBose, Pearl posits these women knew exactly what

they were doing when handling interactions with the media. The author explains the expectation for Black people, especially Black women, to forgive the brutality of the state that upholds both racist and sexist ideologies. By refusing to forgive and standing strong in their anger, these women enact a politic of resistance because they “insist on the emotional rights of Black women” (Pearl 2020, p. 2). Though the focus of this thesis is not police brutality, Black women being forced into forgiveness and withholding forgiveness as a mode of resistance are prevalent themes throughout this study.

In “Black Women Talk About Workplace Stress and How They Cope,” Hall et al. connect with Black women at various stages in their careers working in a wide range of industries. Employing a qualitative methodology, the authors utilize focus groups at multiple sites of Black women between the ages of 18 and 55, most holding bachelor’s degrees, to learn more about how Black women deal with workplace stress. They found that after the initial stressor of the hiring process, stressor themes include promotion, defending their race and lack of mentorship, code switching, being excluded, and coping with racism (Hall et al., 2012). Though I would argue all these stressors require coping with racism, the differentiation lies in the type of racism: overt or covert. The authors explain race and gender discrimination are chronic stressors, however there is little information about the effects of the two together because previous studies have not considered intersectionality. Defined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the 1980s, intersectionality is a framework used to “highlight the multiple avenues through which racial and gender oppression [are] experienced so that the problems would be easier to discuss and understand” (Crenshaw, 2015). Expanded to consider identities beyond race and gender, intersectionality considers how interlocking oppressions impact the lives of those part of marginalized communities. An examination in this study of how issues of racism and sexism

worked together to create more robust stressors would have enriched the data collected. Returning to coping methods, Hall et al. found Black women use both problem-focused and emotion-focused responses to cope with stress. Strategies include code-switching and spirituality, while also acknowledging the importance of self-care and staying healthy. While the population of this study is different, working to understand if stressors for Black undergraduate women are similar to those of Black women working in corporate America will be essential to drawing final conclusions.

In Holder et al.'s "Racial Microaggression Experiences and Coping Strategies of Black Women in Corporate Leadership," the authors focus on illuminating how Black women in corporate America handle their environments. People from historically marginalized groups are underrepresented in corporate America, and microaggressions (or "racist abuse" as noted by Ibram X. Kendi [2019]) are much more prominent than overt racism in the modern era. The authors interviewed 10 Black women who were corporate senior level managers and had at least a bachelor's degree. They found these women struggled to establish relationships with their coworkers because negative stereotypes influenced how they were viewed. Additionally, there was a significant lack of representation and tokenism occurring in these office spaces where Black women are visible. They noted it was exhausting to figure out what may or may not be racially motivated. In order to cope with these pressures, the authors found these Black women turned to spirituality, armoring, shifting, relying on a network, sponsorship, and self-care. Additionally, women who had a strong sense of self-empowerment were even better able to support themselves against microaggressions (Holder, p. 166, 2015). The findings of this study align well with what Hall et al. found in their focus groups, emphasizing the prevalence of these patterns for Black women in corporate America.

In “Shattering the Glass Ceiling: The Leadership Development of African American Women in Higher Education,” authors Davis and Maldonado consider how race and gender intersect to inform leadership development. In interviews with Black women who hold senior-level positions in higher education, the authors sought to better understand the leadership styles of these women and how they climbed the professional ladder. Davis and Maldonado note people are often prejudiced toward women when their idea of how a woman “should” behave does not align with leadership characteristics women may employ. Additionally, though academia has always been considered a respectable field for Black people to pursue, Black women have historically struggled to reach the highest levels of academia because of the “double-jeopardy” posed by both their race and gender. Davis and Maldonado quote bell hooks as saying, “Black women must recognize the special vantage point our marginality gives us and make use of this perspective to criticize the dominant racist, classist, and sexist hegemony” (2015, p. 59). Through the interviews, the authors found race and gender did indeed influence the leadership development of these Black women. The women who participated in the study noted their upbringing helped provide them the tenacity that allowed them to thrive in the environment of academia. Interestingly, many of the women reported having white men sponsors who would advocate for them professionally. All of the Black women interviewed emphasized the importance of mentorship to support up-and-coming Black women as they attempt to make a name for themselves in academia. A turn from considering the corporate world, Black women in academic setting still struggle with similar issues as their corporate counterparts. Highly involved Black undergraduate women will likely end up in either field, highlighting the need to consider how their time at an undergraduate institution mirrors life afterward.

Notably, Parajulti's research on the "punishment gap" in his article "The punishment gap: how workplace mistakes hurt women and minorities the most" focuses on the ways in which those from historically marginalized backgrounds are punished more severely for making the same mistakes as their white counterparts. Parajulti cites multiple studies to articulate this point, highlighting how between 2000 and 2014, women CEOs were 45% more likely to be fired from their jobs than men. Though these trends follow in multiple industries, they are not considered through an intersectional lens. Specifically, attention is given to "women" in leadership with no regard to race or racial minorities with a lean toward men. Discussion of Black women does not happen, only to mention that the punishment gap also exists in elementary schools where all Black children, regardless of gender identity, are seen as more mature. Importantly, Parajulti states it makes sense that those from historically marginalized backgrounds struggle to climb the corporate ladder because "they fall further when they fail" (Parajulti, 2019). This research further proves the higher standards to which those from historically marginalized backgrounds, including Black women, are held. The additional pressure created because of these unrealistic standards only adds to the stressors previously outlined.

There is a substantial gap in the research regarding student leadership development and involvement. Deal and Yarbough attempt to provide guidance in their publication, "Higher Education Student Leadership Development: 5 Keys to Success." The authors provide an incredibly high-level view of strategies that support student leadership development. Development initiatives must include a solid framework, a formative evaluation of students, meaningful leadership experiences, coaching, and access to tools. Deal and Yarbough provide this as a blanket framework to support all undergraduate students in their leadership journeys. While it provides a reasonable foundation, this framework does not consider the unique needs

that must be met for students from historically marginalized backgrounds. The aforementioned literature clearly illustrates common themes for the experiences of Black women who have matriculated through undergraduate institutions. A more comprehensive framework would provide support for those students, and that is part of the gap this study is attempting to fill.

Methods

A phenomenological study was employed for this study to answer the following research questions:

1. How does leading student organizations at a predominantly white institution impact the mental health of Black femme student leaders?
2. Are the experiences of Black femme student leaders similar to Black femme leaders in academic and corporate work environments?
3. How are Black femme student leaders expected to handle conflict within their organizations?
4. What are the best ways to support Black femme student leaders at predominantly white institutions?

The phenomenological methodology was utilized for the completion of this study to consider the lived and articulated experiences of the participants in the study bias-free (Neubauer et al., 2019). Phenomenology exists to “describe the meaning” of experiences, both the “what” and “how” of the way the experience impacted participants (Neubauer et al., 2019, p. 91). This is done by closely examining responses before “coding” them. These codes work to name themes that have become apparent in responses across participants to ascertain potential implications for the broader population. Since the goal of this research is to be bias-free, the phenomenological

approach also allowed the researcher to compare her own experiences to that of the participants. In doing so, deeper connections to the foundations of this study were established, providing an even greater opportunity to understand its significance.

The study was submitted to the university's IRB for approval and was deemed exempt. After submission, participant recruitment began. The vast majority of participant recruitment was done via social media, while some face-to-face conversations were held to encourage potential participants. A flyer advertising the study was sent in various GroupMe channels and posted on the researcher's social media. The GroupMe channels only contained students at the university where the study occurred, and the GroupMe channels are primarily comprised of Black students. From these efforts, eight people identifying as Black women who are student leaders expressed their interest in participating in the focus groups for the study. Ultimately, seven students were divided to participate in two different focus groups. Each focus group lasted for about an hour so participants could have ample opportunity to share their stories.

Focus group participants were notified their responses would be audio-recorded for transcription purposes and the file would be deleted after analysis. Additionally, their identities and the specific organizations they are a part of will remain anonymous. They were also notified general category of organization they are leaders in would be included in the study for clarity and to also draw comparisons. All focus group participants identify as Black women, have been students at the university for at least one year, and have or had been members of the organization in which they held a leadership role for at least one year. Participants also identified the demographic information of both the executive board they worked with and the general body of the organization.

Participant Profiles

Participant A spoke to her experiences as a leader in two different organizations: a large fundraising organization on campus and a sorority. She served as one of the vice presidents of the fundraising organization and the treasure of her sorority. The fundraising organization has a predominately white membership, with most identifying as white women. Participant A was the first Black vice president in the history of the organization, and their entire executive board was the most diverse it had ever been, also including their first Asian-American vice president, first male president, more men on the executive board, and another Black person on the board. Participant A is also a member of a historically Black sorority, and the current chapter membership is comprised of all Black women.

Participant B is the social media coordinator for an organization focused on celebrating a particular facet of the entertainment industry. The organization is predominately white with a "handful" of Black women. Participants identify as white women, Black women, nonbinary, and transgender individuals. Participant B described the group as "diverse, but not a large number of diverse people" specifically referring to the racial makeup of the organization and executive board.

Participant C spoke to her roles as the diversity and inclusion chair for a major-related organization and serving as the president of a fraternity and sorority life council. The major-related organization was predominately white with a predominately white executive board and an Asian woman who served as the advisor. The fraternity and sorority life (FSL) council has a predominately Black membership with an all-Black executive board. Men and women serve on the executive board under the leadership of Participant C, and a white man serves as their advisor.

Participant D is a chair in her business organization. There are 8 executive members, all identify as white men and women other than herself. Most of the faculty members she interacts with are white, however they do have a Black graduate assistant. Students outside of the executive board who are members of the organization are mostly white as well.

Participant E is the secretary for a ministry organization, as well as the diversity and inclusion chair for an organization within her major. The ministry organization and executive board is completely composed of Black women with a Black woman advisor. The organization related to her major is predominantly white. Though the organization is entirely woman-run, six of the eight executive board members are white women while the other two are Black women.

Participant F is a director within an organization closely tied to the university that works to be a safe space for college students to engage in activities on the weekends. The executive board is made of Asian and Black men and women, with three white women who serve as graduate assistance and a white woman who serves as their advisor. The organization does not have a specific body; instead the organizations they host are open to the entire campus and broader community. Thus, they frequently engage with students and others from a wide variety of racial and gender backgrounds.

Participant G holds leadership roles in two fine arts organizations. The organization in which she serves as the president has an executive board of three Black students, including herself, and one white student. Approximately 30% of the body members of the organization identify as students from historically marginalized backgrounds. In the second organization, Participant G serves as the public relations director. She is the only student from a historically marginalized background both on the executive board and in the overall organization.

The questions collecting demographic information about the participants and their organizations were posed as the first two questions of the study. In doing so, the researcher and participants were able to establish the critical context necessary with which to frame the rest of the study.

Findings

Q1: What kind of impact has holding your leadership role had on your mental health?

When asked about the impact of holding a leadership role on mental health, most participants reported a negative impact. Words such as "stressful," "overwhelming," and "strain" appeared in multiple responses. Nonverbal indicators showed much agreement between participants with these answers. For example, many participants nodded along, snapped, and vocalized subtly when someone made a point they identified with.

Participant B was the only student leader who did not report at least one of her student organizations causing a negative impact on her mental health. Even so, she identified with what other participants were saying and did not seem surprised by what others had to say about their struggles. Both Participants A and C explained the deterioration of their mental health caused them to leave at least one organization they were previously student leaders in. They found they were not taken seriously by other executive board members and did not feel as though their participation was still worth it. Participant C left the organization in which she served as the chair of the diversity and inclusion committee; however, she still serves as president of the fraternity and sorority life organization. She explained serving as president holds a unique set of stressors that she did not experience as a committee chair, and other participants noted they do not feel entirely similar pressures because their realm of responsibility is smaller. Importantly,

much of the strain Participant C feels in her role as president comes from people outside of her immediate organization. While she (mostly) feels supported by organization and board members, others related to fraternity and sorority life have expectations of her that do not necessarily apply due to the unique nature of historically Black fraternity and sorority life organizations. Additionally, she feels as though these organizations are “on the backburner” and receive much less attention from the university than the predominantly white organizations. Participant C also identified this as a mental strain on her because she must do extra work to find resources.

Participant A had the most robust response to this question due to multiple uniquely negative experiences she had with the fundraising organization in which she served as one of the vice presidents. She noted she spent up to 70 hours a week working on various projects for the organization and ensuring any loose ends were tied without any pay. She explained she constantly faced microaggressions and racism from fellow executive board members, and it took a climactic meeting where she began to cry for other executive board members and advisors to begin to take her concerns seriously. Participant A’s father passed away while she served in this role, and though she was out of class for three to four weeks, she could only step away from work for the fundraising organization for a week and a half. She digs deeper, saying, “It was like I wasn’t allowed to be a person.” This lack of concern for the individual appeared in multiple responses to this question as well. Most participants found they were primarily valued for the work they could produce for their respective organizations with little regard for how they were managing as individuals. This caused resentment and frustration in multiple participants, with Participant A saying,

> If you have this view of me that I'm an angry Black woman, I'll show you an angry Black woman. As much as I try to fight against your stereotypes, if you really keep pushing me I can be that way. I choose not to because I have things I want to protect.

The sentiment shared here reflects Pearl's idea of "insisting on the emotional rights of Black women" (Pearl 2020, p. 2). Though Participant A said she tries to contain her anger for the most part, at times, she finds it completely necessary to share. She and others expressed regret that sometimes, it took them getting angry or "coming out of character" to have their concerns respected.

Q2: What would you identify as stressors you face in your leadership role?

When considering the stressors participants face in their leadership roles, the stressors identified fell into two camps: those directly related to the role and the organization, and those related to how participants were treated in their role. All participants who observed a negative impact on their mental health were swiftly able to name stressors. Participant B shared that there are very few stressors in her leadership role, largely because she does not find her role to be taxing. She expressed that she is in a position where she can always ask for help and the primary leader in the organization is always very understanding if she needs to take a step away. No other participant shared a similar experience.

Participants A, C, E, F, and G noted stressors specific to the organizations they were and are leaders in. Meeting deadlines, achieving goals, time management, lack of participation, and stagnation all came up as themes between their answers. Participants C and E especially noted their frustration with the stagnation they see in their organizations. They feel as though they are doing everything they can to create forward movement, however it is difficult to motivate teams that do not seem to care or take them very seriously. The organization-related stressors made

everything Participant A experienced interpersonally more difficult to handle, saying, “It was hard to keep focus on why I’m doing this.” Participants who found motivation and lack of participation to be an issue saw an increase in this after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. For them, it was a challenge to get students initially involved in their organizations. Then, it has been even more difficult to maintain their interest and engagement after they have made the first commitments. Participant F highlighted that due to the decrease in participation with the same expectations for events, she and her executive board are given too many tasks at once to try to manage. There are not enough people with which to “share the burden,” making the completion of jobs much more difficult and draining.

All participants, except Participant B, discussed stressors tied to how they were treated while they held their role. Notably, multiple participants brought up the prevalence of microaggressions and “mansplaining” as frequent aggravations in their roles. Author Lily Rothman (2012) defines mansplaining as “explaining without regard to the fact that the explainee knows more than the explainer, often done by a man to a woman.” The tone is frequently condescending, Participant C specifically highlighted other executive board members would “explain things like I’m stupid.” This phenomenon was particularly frustrating for participants in the study who held higher ranking roles or who had been in the organization longer than those who were talking down to them. These experiences clearly support the findings regarding microaggressions by Holder et al. (2015). Black women in the Holder et al. study identified both stressors and the coping mechanism they utilize to deal with the stressors. Though coping mechanisms were outside the purview of this study, microaggressions causing a negative impact on both the experiences of these leaders and their mental health was a common thread between studies.

Q3: How do members of your organization respond to you when you're frustrated?

Participants had mixed responses when asked about how members of their organizations respond to them when they are frustrated. The themes "understood" and "disingenuous" were the most common among their responses. Some participants felt as though their executive board members, body members, and advisors worked hard to understand their perspective during times of frustration. These participants reported a higher satisfaction in times of conflict. Even so, most of this "understood" feeling came from the sense that others on the executive boards and in the organizations could clearly see the pressures placed on the women who participated in this study. Additionally, participants who are leaders in organizations where there are smaller executive boards found that frustrations were frequently shared or stemmed from closely related root-causes. Participant B noted that the culture of her organization has created a "safe space" where members feel comfortable airing their grievances and various frustrations without fear of retaliation or dismissal.

Multiple participants expressed their frustrations were and are often met with an inauthentic response or not addressed at all. They felt as though their personhood was denied, with Participant A saying, "I'm not VP [Participant A], I'm just [Participant A] as a person," when describing how she wished she was perceived in times of frustration. Participant C described rarely feeling "heard" or that members of her predominately Black executive board see her as "doing too much or being too assertive for asking them to do their work." She feels as though her frustrations are consistently downplayed because her team members don't identify with the pressure she is under, stating, "I feel like they don't care as much because they don't have the weight of the organization on them. Since I'm leading things reflect on me." When frustrations are related to how participants are treated on account of their race and/or gender

identity, some describe feeling "awkward" as "people try to walk on eggshells" around them in an attempt to be sensitive. These frustrations and concerns clearly align with the environmental and relational stressors experienced by Black women holding corporate leadership roles identified by Holder et al. (2015).

Q4: In times of conflict, do you ever feel pressured to "forgive" or "be the bigger person"? If so, where does that pressure come from?

Most participants found they feel pressured to forgive or "be the bigger person" in times of conflict, though this pressure comes from different internal and external sources. Some participants explained the compulsion to forgive in order to swiftly move on when a situation pertaining to their role. Participants F and G specifically named their roles and said they like to do what they can to quickly resolve conflict "so the organization can run smooth." Though they may not be satisfied with the state of the conflict, they feel as though they must sacrifice for the greater good of the organization. Other participants, however, noted the pressure to be the bigger person for them comes from their racial identity. Participant D reflected on power playing a role, saying sometimes it is easier to acquiesce because she does not hold the most power in the situation. At the same time, it is "also because they'll spin the 'angry Black woman.'" This clearly relates to Participant A's earlier sentiments when considering the negative impact her leadership role with the fundraising organization had on her mental health. In times of conflict, Participant A noted, "Sometimes I got tired of going high," referencing the oft-quoted former First Lady Michelle Obama (2016) saying, "When they go low, we go high." Participant A furthered that the pressure to "be the bigger person" in these scenarios is both external and internal: the external pressure stemming from the power difference between her and those she is engaging with, the internal because she "was raised better." Both the external and internal strain

vocalized by participants reflects trends in Parajulti's (2019) discussion of the punishment gap; namely, those from historically marginalized backgrounds must be more careful in handling issues in the workplace because "they fall further when they fail." Additionally, there remains a desire of some participants to reject forgiveness and protect their own feelings

Participants who did not feel either internal or external pressures to forgive when they were not ready did so for two reasons: either they do not experience much conflict within their organizations, or they felt a disconnect with the conflict. Participant C specifically said "they don't see conflict where I see it" regarding her various organization involvements. This disconnect decreases the desire to fully resolve conflict in a manner that would help participant C feel fulfilled. Participants B and E both specifically expressed there is very little conflict in their organizations, so it is rare for them to feel distress regarding forgiveness.

The focus on a power differential related to whether one is more inclined to forgive is an interesting pattern introduced by the participants. Each participant who felt as though there was a significant power difference between them and the individual or group they had conflict with were more likely to feel motivated to "be the bigger person." Participants who did not feel threatened by a significant power difference did not share the same pressure. The importance of the influence of power in these scenarios cannot be understated. Black women's "outsider within" status puts us at a unique juncture with power structures in the United States, and these patterns reach all levels—from the educational system to the workforce.

Q5: Do you feel supported by your campus advisor and administrative offices? If so, how do they support you? If not, what could they do better?

This question was inspired by the Davis and Maldonado (2017) study in which the researchers found multiple professionals in higher education who are Black women credited

some of their leadership development to having sponsors, specifically white men sponsors, who would advocate for them. The campus advisor has the potential to play the role of a sponsor, however they may not fill that role because of responsibilities to many students and a lack of interest. Additionally, advisors are the first advocates for students involved in on-campus organizations for concerns which may need to reach higher levels of university administration. Participants were again divided on this response, with some feeling fully supported by their advisors and others saying advisors "don't do anything." Participant E identified the layers by saying, "I do feel supported, but there's only so much they can do for us." The limitations placed on advisors by the university and by the nature of the issues faced by their students, especially their Black woman students, can make it difficult for them to be powerful sponsors and advocates. Participants emphasized that their organizations are mainly run by the students, with most advisors having very little input in day-to-day operations. Though most participants did not feel like they needed more advisor-specific help with running their organizations, they would have appreciated additional support in times of conflict or when they did not feel like they had an ally among their peers. While advisors may hear student concerns, they rarely act on them, causing further resentment and frustration among student leaders. Participants who cited more involved and attentive advisors did not necessarily have a better experience in their organizations than those without attentive advisors. Both those who had confidence in their advisors as advocates and those who did not still struggled in instances of conflict and with unfair internal and external pressures. Participants felt more supported by an advisor who was actively engaged in their issues and sought to understand more about their unique lived experiences. This was not expected of advisors, instead it was more of an exception to the rule. Regardless, while a sponsor

in the form of a campus advisor may have assisted these students in coping, they ultimately had to navigate the challenges they faced within their organizations independently.

Implications

In considering implications, it is imperative to return to the research questions which guided this study:

1. How does leading student organizations at a predominantly white institution impact the mental health of Black femme student leaders?
2. Are the experiences of Black femme student leaders similar to Black femme leaders in academic and corporate work environments?
3. How are Black femme student leaders expected to handle conflict within their organizations?
4. What are the best ways to support Black femme student leaders at predominantly white institutions?

It is evident that serving in a leadership role in a student organization at a predominantly white institution is detrimental to the mental health of Black women student leaders. The answers provided by participants illuminated the various stressors imposed on them while simultaneously receiving little external support. One participant noted the purpose of student organizations is for them to be enjoyable, and every other participant who reported a high level of stress and negative mental health agreed but found this unrelatable. The double marginality of the Black women in these roles compounds their stressors without a support system they can identify with and help them through issues specifically related to race, gender, and how they interact with power. Student organization involvement is not something that is officially mandatory; however, employers specifically seek out students who were involved on campus and consider them “more

hirable" (OSU). If organization involvement is a major differentiator for procuring jobs after graduation, most students will gravitate toward them. This is especially true of students from historically marginalized backgrounds who frequently need to do more for the same opportunities. Since student organization involvement is becoming more of a necessity, it is imperative to protect the mental health of the students in these positions. This is particularly true for young Black women in these roles who have fewer advocates and resources.

The conversations with Black women student leaders made it undeniably clear that the experiences of these young women in leadership roles mirror those of Black women in the corporate world and academia. Each study in the literature review – from understandings of microaggressions to understandings of racialized forgiveness – connected to some part of the participants' responses. On-campus organization involvement is frequently used to prepare students for life after college. Black women serving in various leadership capacities within these organizations are certainly getting a glimpse of what the professional world holds for them. This is not to diminish the experiences of these student leaders; rather, to illustrate that the problems they will likely face for the rest of their lives will start with their undergraduate involvements. Instead of learning how to learn and grow in a nurturing, supportive environment, many Black women student leaders must learn how to navigate hostility. Though negative experiences may help these women build "resiliency" to handle them later in life, it is a resiliency that should be wholly unnecessary.

Both the internal and external pressures imposed by and on Black women and femmes who are student leaders influence how they handle conflict. These women feel as though they may not be able to get what they truly need in resolving a situation because, in the process, they may be negatively stereotyped or not taken seriously. The lack of concern for the welfare of

Black women emotionally in this regard is cause for concern. These students spend significant amounts of their time working for student organizations, frequently with no pay. To have no real opportunity for redress when conflict arises is not only damaging, but simply unfair as well. Black women student leaders are held to a higher standard, both by themselves and by others. Participants expressed frustration with constantly feeling compelled to put their needs to the side to both preserve peace within their organizations and preserve how they are seen by others. The weight of constantly considering how one is perceived and altering one's behavior to present an "ideal" is exhausting.

When asked the best way to support Black women and femmes, a common response is "listen to them." While a fantastic initial step, listening is worth little when there are no actions taken to provide tangible support and create necessary change. As it stands for many Black women student leaders, the burden of advocacy rests squarely on their shoulders. There are few people within the system who are willing and able to help us. Often, this is out of sheer ignorance of the problem. Universities know the importance of student organization involvement to long-term outcomes for their students. Therefore, they must be intentional about ensuring their students engaging in these activities are protected both physically and mentally. Many Black women on college campuses are newly learning how to advocate for themselves in a professional setting. Mentors and advocates are essential to aiding in this process, so these resources must be made available to any student who may need them. Additionally, organizations and universities must hold those individuals who cause distress accountable. If white students, students who are men, and students from any other privileged class are continuously allowed to interact with others without investigating that privilege, there will never truly be a safe environment for students from historically marginalized backgrounds (especially Black women and femmes) to

develop into their fullest potential. Most of the dismissal experienced by the young women in this study came from their peers who had not been challenged to think critically about how race and gender identity influenced their treatment of these student leaders. It is not the responsibility of the Black women and femmes in these positions to educate everyone else. In creating a support system within the institution, protection for Black women student leaders will be easier to maintain.

The emotional needs of Black women who are student leaders on college campuses are often neglected, and this trend follows them into their careers. Seeking to deeply understand these experiences and their implications establishes the foundation necessary to move forward in creating positive change. Future studies would benefit from considering how the compounding pressure of holding multiple leadership roles impacts mental health. Additionally, a deeper look into intersectionality by examining the experiences of specifically queer Black women and femmes, Black women and femmes with disabilities, Black women and femmes with varying socioeconomic status, and other identities would provide even deeper insight into how to best uplift those who need it the most.

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BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

DATE:	**March 14, 2022**
TO:	**Emily Rutter**
FROM:	Ball State University IRB
RE:	IRB protocol # **1871506-1**
TITLE:	**Hustle: Deconstructing Pressure and Workload for Black Undergraduate Women**
SUBMISSION TYPE:	**New Project**
DECISION:	**APPROVED**
PROJECT STATUS:	**EXEMPT**
DECISION DATE:	**March 14, 2022**
REVIEW TYPE:	**Exempt Review**

The designated reviewer for the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed your protocol and determined the procedures you have proposed are appropriate for exemption under the federal regulations. As such, there will be no further review of your protocol, and you are cleared to proceed with the procedures outlined in your protocol. As an exempt study, there is no requirement for continuing review. Your protocol will remain on file with the IRB as a matter of record. All research under this protocol must be conducted in accordance with the approved submission and in accordance with the principles of the Belmont Report.

Exempt Categories:

	Category 1: Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, that specifically involves normal educations practices that are not likely to adversely impact students' opportunity to learn required educational content or the assessment of educators who provide instruction. This includes most research on regular and special education instructional strategies, and research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.
x	**Category 2:** Research that only includes interactions involving educational test (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met: (i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; (ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or (iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the humans subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by 46.111(a)(7).

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	Category 3: Research involving benign behavioral interventions in conjunction with the collection of information from an adult subject through verbal or written responses (including data entry) or audiovisual recording if the subject prospectively agrees to the intervention and information collection and at least one of the following criteria is met: (A) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of human subjects cannot be readily ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; (B) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or (C) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can be readily ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by 46.111(a)(7).
	Category 4: Secondary research for which consent is not required.
	Category 5: Research and demonstration projects that are conducted or supported by a Federal department or agency, or otherwise subject to the approval of department or agency heads, and that are designed to study, evaluate, improve, or otherwise examine public benefit or service programs, including procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs, possible changes in or alternatives to those programs or procedures, or possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those programs.
	Category 6: Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, (i) if wholesome foods without additives are consumed or (ii) if a food is consumed that contains a food ingredient at or below the level found to be safe, by the Food and Drug Administration or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.
	Category 7: Storage or maintenance for secondary research for which broad consent is required: Storage or maintenance of identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens for potential secondary research use if an IRB conducts a limited IRB review and makes the determinations required by 46.111(a)(8).
	Category 8: Secondary research for which broad consent is required: Research involving the use of identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens for secondary research use, if the following criteria are met: (1)Broad consent for the storage, maintenance, and secondary research use of the identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens was obtained in accordance with §46.116(a)(1) through (4), (a)(6), and (d); (2) Documentation of informed consent or waiver of documentation of consent was obtained in accordance with §46.117; and (3) An IRB conducts a limited IRB review and makes the determination required by §46.111(a)(7) and makes the determination that the research to be conducted is within the scope of the broad consent referenced in paragraph (d)(8)(i) of this section; and (iv) The investigator does not include returning individual research results to participants as part of the study plan. Note: This provision does not prevent an investigator from abiding by any legal requirements to return individual research results.

While your project does not require continuing review, it is the responsibility of the P.I. (and, if applicable, faculty supervisor) to inform the IRB if the procedures presented in this protocol are to be modified or if problems related to human research participants arise in connection with this project. **Any procedural modifications must be evaluated by the IRB before being implemented, as some modifications may change the review status of this project.** Please contact the Office of Research Integrity at orihelp@bsu.edu or Sena Lim, HRPP manager at 765-285-5034 or slim2@bsu.edu if you are unsure whether your proposed modification requires review or have any questions. Proposed modifications should be addressed in writing and submitted electronically to the IRBNet as a "Modification/Amendment" for review. Please reference your IRB protocol number 1871506-1 in any communication to the IRB regarding this project.

In the case of an adverse event and/or unanticipated problem, you will need to submit written documentation of the event to IRBNet under this protocol number and you will need to directly notify the Office of Research Integrity (http://www.bsu.edu/irb) **within 5 business days.** If you have questions,

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please contact the Office of Research Integrity at orihelp@bsu.edu or Sena Lim, HRPP manager at 765-285-5034 or slim2@bsu.edu.

Reminder: Even though your study is exempt from the relevant federal regulations of the Common Rule (45 CFR 46, subpart A), Ball State has elected to hold you accountable to these regulations to encourage best research practices. You and your research team are not exempt from ethical research practices and should therefore employ all protections for your participants and their data which are appropriate to your project.

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