Article

"I Am Never Enough": Factors Contributing to Secondary Traumatic Stress and Burnout among Black Student Services Professionals in Higher Education

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Abstract: Black higher education professionals are more likely to be under-represented and experience racial discrimination and to be approached by students with whom they share identity characteristics for support, compared to white counterparts. This study explored experiences of stress potentially leading to secondary traumatic stress or burnout and coping efforts in Black-identifying staff ($n = 35$), who were a subset of a larger sample ($n = 559$) representing twenty-two U.S. regional universities. Compared to the larger sample, Black respondents were more likely to be in their roles for three years or less, potentially indicating higher rates of turnover. The Sort and Sift, Think and Shift Method was used to conduct a qualitative analysis of participant responses to open-ended questions regarding role-related stressors, efforts to cope, and desired institutional resources. Many staff reported role challenges consistent with experiences of secondary traumatic stress and burnout, which they coped with by engaging in a range of mindful self-care practices (e.g., sustaining supportive relationships, finding meaning in their work, promoting their physical health, setting boundaries). Participants highlighted the urgency of the need for change to institutional infrastructure, policies, and practices to support manageable workloads and treat staff with respect. It is critical for institutions to take an active and intentional role in mitigating stressors that contribute to secondary traumatic stress or burnout by addressing racial battle fatigue, providing adequate resources to meet the needs of under-represented students, protecting the capacity of staff to utilize wellness resources on campus, enhancing role clarity and autonomy, and fostering a sense of cultural pride, respect, and accomplishment, as well as other mechanisms, to create a culture that promotes and sustains the wellbeing of Black staff.

Keywords: black staff; higher education professionals; secondary traumatic stress; burnout; coping; wellbeing

1. Introduction

Black professionals account for less than ten percent of staff in higher education and less than eight percent of administrators [1]. This population faces unique challenges due to racism and a lack of representation [2,3], further compounded for those who face multiple forms of oppression based on gender, age, and other factors that shape daily experiences and influence opportunities for advancement [4]. Chronic exposure to stressors in one's personal and professional life, such as perceived discrimination and institutional policies that reinforce inequity, can contribute to adverse mental and physical health outcomes over time through a process of accelerated biological aging known as weathering [5]. This

relationship is not explained by lifestyle behaviors such as diet, exercise, or substance abuse [6].

Given that the negative aspects of one's role as a helper in the higher education context are negatively associated with health-related quality of life [7], the wellbeing of Black personnel is of great concern. Whether due to a lack of sufficient access to mental health services on college campuses or stigma against those using mental health services, student affairs professionals are often the personnel who students turn to assist them with a range of mental health issues [8]. Students from marginalized populations are at a higher risk of experiencing trauma than the general population [9,10] and are more likely to turn to higher education professionals of color because of ease of access and shared connection [11]. Hence, Black staff may be more frequently exposed to secondary trauma than their white counterparts.

Exposure to student trauma in the context of their roles can result in a traumatic response in professionals known as secondary traumatic stress (STS). Aspects of their roles that are overwhelming, such as workload volume and the nature of colleague or student interactions, may contribute to burnout [11–14]. Individuals who continuously are exposed to trauma from others are at a higher risk of developing chronic diseases [15]. Job burnout is the result of chronic exposure to stressors within the organizational context, characterized by emotional exhaustion, feelings of cynicism or detachment from one's role, and a lack of a sense of personal effectiveness or accomplishment [13]. Compassion fatigue represents the negative impact on professional quality of life resulting from burnout and/or STS [16]. Higher education professionals of color additionally face racial battle fatigue, a concept introduced by William A. Smith to describe the physical, emotional, and mental stress incurred by professionals of color in institutions in which they are subjected to discrimination and other forms of oppression [17]. Quaye et al. found that when white colleagues are imperceptive to the experiences of Black student affairs educators in higher education, this further exacerbates the effects of racial battle fatigue [18]. Research has shown that students of color also experience physical and emotional exhaustion due to racial microaggressions embedded in the university climate and culture [19,20], negatively impacting their health [21]. It can be inferred that university staff, specifically Black student services professionals, who experience racial battle fatigue in the context of their own roles and then support students who have similar experiences within the institution would have a heightened response stemming from both the students' trauma and their own experiences of racism and marginalization, increasing their risk of developing STS.

While compassion fatigue is used to capture the negative aspects of being a helper, compassion satisfaction refers to the positive aspects of being a helper, such as finding meaning or purpose in one's role [22,23]. Compassion satisfaction is positively associated with the quality of service provided and negatively associated with turnover.

Several researchers have documented how Black professionals in student affairs and faculty roles cope with stressful experiences. According to West, Black female student affairs professionals coped with stress, lack of belonging, and experiences of being marginalized by leveraging their social networks and ultimately conceptualizing their own definitions of wellbeing and success [3]. DeCuir-Gunby et al. found that Black professors, researchers, and administrators coped with racism through open, transparent communication, maintaining boundaries, and leveraging relationships in personal and professional contexts [24]. Research conducted among Black student affairs professionals found that they implemented boundaries engaged in physical care and found solace in community, safe spaces, and therapy.

Mindful self-care (MSC) encompasses many of the strategies used by Black professionals in higher education in its six dimensions that promote wellbeing: mindful awareness, mindful relaxation, physical care, supportive relationships, self-compassion and purpose, and supportive structure [25]. Engagement in MSC practices has been associated with a decreased risk of burnout among individuals in helping professions, even when individuals report overwhelming workloads [26]. In a study of higher education professionals,

mindful self-care mediated the positive relationship between compassion satisfaction and health-related quality of life [7]. Organization-level strategies in higher education such as mindfulness-based interventions have proven helpful in enhancing skills to manage stress and promote wellbeing, as well as improving the quality of workplace interactions [27].

There is a lack of research that lends insight into how the labor of Black student services professionals in supporting students may contribute to experiences of secondary traumatic stress and burnout, as well as strategies employed at the individual and/or organizational level to address such phenomena. Our hypothesis is to explore how role challenges reported by Black student services professionals align with factors contributing to secondary traumatic stress and burnout and identify strategies used by this population to cope, as well as the nature of support they desire from their institutions to address role challenges.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Positionality Statement

All of our authors identify as BIPOC, either as members of the Black diaspora (PJP, GCB, TE, NG, and EF) or Mexican American (DS). Four authors (GCB, TE, NG, EF, and DS) are first-generation college graduates. There are several lived experiences that inform our approach to this study. Three of the authors are faculty and active members of the Black Staff and Faculty Association at a campus participating in this study (PJP, GCB, NG), while TE is in a full-time staff role supporting student wellbeing at a separate public institution. PJP's personal lived experiences with chronic illness and burnout inspired her to conceptualize this study to examine factors that aid or inhibit the wellbeing of staff in higher education. GCB is the Chapter President of the California Faculty Association, an anti-racism social justice union, and as an undergraduate was involved with the Educational Opportunity Program, one of the service areas included in our study. As Director for the Campus Institute of Black Intellectual Innovation, NG develops programming to nourish faculty and staff. For TE, the loss of a friend who worked with students of color in crisis to suicide left an indelible mark on how she thinks about the wellbeing of staff of color, their capacity to engage in self-care, and the role of organizations in contributing to or mitigating the harmful side-effects endured by helping professionals. DS and EF were students at a participating campus at the time of this study and have explored the wellbeing of staff across service areas.

2.2. Study Design

The qualitative data used for this analysis represent a data subset from a larger cross-sectional survey dataset examining professional quality of life with an emphasis on exploring mindful self-care, health, and professional quality of life among higher education professionals. The complete methods and quantitative results were published in a previous manuscript [7].

2.3. Study Setting

Black student services professionals, inclusive of administrators and programmatic and administrative professional staff, from comprehensive state universities participated in this study via an online Qualtrics survey. The service areas that were represented in the study were identified via literature reviews and preliminary conversations with university staff who provided direct non-instructional support to students prone to experiencing higher levels of trauma than the general population. These areas include programs supporting food and housing security; centers supporting under-represented racial/ethnic student populations, undocumented students, LGBTQIA+ students, men of color, women and/or gender equity, veterans, international students, current and former foster students, the formerly incarcerated, and students with disabilities; and academic advising, athletics, counseling and psychological services, educational opportunity and TRIO programs, fi-

nancial aid programs, housing and residential life, student conduct, Title IX, and broader student affairs/services.

2.4. Recruitment

Participants were recruited using both snowball and convenience sampling approaches. To ensure that a representative sample size was garnered, online reviews of department websites and staff directories at each institution were conducted over a four-month period. A total of 2243 individuals were invited to participate in the study, but 639 individuals completed the survey. A total of 559 participants were eligible to be in the original study based on the following criteria: (1) age 18 or older; (2) current affiliation with 1 of 23 campuses as staff, faculty, or a student whose primary role on campus is providing services in one of the indicated service areas; and (3) answered at least one of the three open-ended questions. For this study, participants who also identified as Black were eligible to participate, yielding a total of 35 participants.

2.5. Data Collection

The participants completed questions accessed via an anonymous Qualtrics survey online. Before the study was conducted, institutional approval was provided by the IRB (HSR-19-20-96). Participants were given informed consent documents and had the opportunity to opt out of the study.

2.6. Instruments

The following open-ended questions were utilized to assess the participants' role challenges, efforts to cope, and desired institutional resources: (1) What is the hardest thing about your role? (2) What helps you most in coping with your role? (3) What is the most beneficial thing your campus could do to help you cope with the negative aspects of your role? In prior studies, these questions have been used to explore STS and burnout in law enforcement members and forensic interviewers [28,29].

2.7. Demographics

To assess the sample demographics, the participants were asked to report the following characteristics: gender identity, sexual orientation, highest level of education, race/ethnicity, campus location, campus size, campus role, primary student service area, number of service areas, role level for primary student service area, and time in current role.

2.8. Data Analysis

An analysis was conducted using Sort and Sift, Think and Shift (SSTS), an established qualitative method developed by Maietta [30]. SSTS is distinguished from other qualitative methods in that it immerses researchers in several rounds of reviewing the lived experiences of participants as captured in the data, integrating these data with individual and collective reflection on researcher knowledge as they work to achieve a consensus. This research process began with each researcher writing independent positionality statements to engage in self-reflection and minimize researcher bias.

In the first stage, known as "Diving In", each researcher identified 15 impactful quotes that stood out in their review of the participant data. Then, they developed episode profiles in which they elaborated on how these quotes helped to answer the research questions and created a diagram highlighting themes based on these quotes.

During phase two, "Stepping Back", the findings were discussed as a group, resulting in a joint construction of participant narratives and a final diagram capturing key themes [31]. First, the researchers worked together to establish a list of common categories and themes that highlighted the participants' overall message. As an illustration of this, the researchers reviewed quotes within the category "Role Challenges", which conveyed participant reports of inherent challenges in their role, including politics, student trauma, and experiences of their own trauma. These themes were selected based on their repre-

sentation of distinct difficulties experienced by Black staff. This process was repeated for each category and theme. After the initial discussion, the researchers returned to the data to refine their quote selections to ensure all major themes were represented. They then met several more times for discussion until they reached a final consensus on the themes and subthemes. At this point, a final diagram was created to illustrate the relationships between themes, and a table was created to highlight key quotes informing each theme.

3. Results

3.1. Demographics

The majority of the participants were female (77%), heterosexual (80%), and had obtained a Master's degree or higher (60%). Nearly two in three respondents reported their primary campus affiliation as staff (60%) and provided direct programming or other services to students (63%). Roughly half represented campuses with 20,000 or more students (48%) and worked in three service areas (51%): housing and residential life (8), student services or affairs (5), and disabilities (5). The majority of Black respondents had been in their roles for three years or less (74%), compared to 46% in the full sample. Additional demographics may be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Select demographic and professional characteristics.

Variable	Black Sample		Full Study Sample	
	%	**N**	**%**	**N**
Gender Identity		35		463
Female	77.1	27	20.5	95
Male	22.9	8	76.2	353
Sexual Orientation		35		463
Heterosexual	80	28	79.9	370
Other [1]	20	7	20.1	93
Highest Level of Education		35		463
Associate degree or HS [2]	8.6	3	7.3	34
Bachelor's degree	17.1	6	24.2	112
Master's degree	60	21	55.3	256
Doctoral degree	14.3	5	13.2	61
Campus Size (# people)		35		559
5000–10,000	14.3	5	22.7	127
10,000–20,000	37.1	13	31.0	173
20,000–30,000	14.3	5	15.7	88
Over 30,000	34.3	12	30.6	171
Campus Role		35		528
Administrator	28.6	10	18.6	98
Faculty	5.7	2	8.0	42
Staff	60.0	21	72.9	385
Student	5.7	2	4.9	26
Primary Student Service Areas [3]		35		546
Disabilities	14.3	5	8.8	48
Housing and residential Life	22.9	8	11.9	65
Student services/affairs	14.3	5	8.1	44
Number of Service Areas		35		543
1	48.6	17	54.3	295
2	20.0	7	19.0	103
3 or more	31.4	11	26.7	145

Table 1. *Cont.*

Variable	Black Sample		Full Study Sample	
	%	**N**	**%**	**N**
Role Level for Primary Student Service Area		35		528
Administrator	34.3	12	25.4	134
Programmatic/service staff	62.9	22	63.4	335
Administrative support staff	2.9	1	10.6	56
Time in Current Role		35		529
Less than 1 year	28.6	10	19.8	105
1–3 years	45.7	16	36.9	195
4–5 years	14.3	5	14.2	75
More than 5 years	11.4	4	29.1	154

[1] Identified as one of the following: lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or prefer not to say. [2] Includes Associate degree, trade/technical/vocational training, some college, high school diploma. [3] Includes top primary student service areas for this study's sample.

3.2. Qualitative Data

The themes that emerged from the data were organized into categories, as depicted in Table 2. The categories are based upon the three open-ended questions: role challenges, individual-level coping mechanisms, and desired institutional-level actions. Figure 1 displays the relationships between the categories. The complete arrows show a relationship between role challenges and individual-level coping mechanisms, while the dotted arrows indicate how desired institutional-level actions could decrease the amount of role challenges and reliance on individual-level coping mechanisms.

Table 2. Categories and emergent themes.

Role Challenges	Individual-Level Coping Mechanisms	Desired Institutional-Level Actions
Navigating role politics	Supportive relationships	Improve infrastructure
Factors contributing to secondary traumatic stress	Self-compassion and purpose (compassion satisfaction)	Promote wellness at work
Factors contributing to burnout Balancing internal and external demand "I am never enough"	Physical care	"Humanize those of us doing the work"
	Supportive structure	"Environment sensitive to my cultural needs"
		"Welcoming environment for students"

3.2.1. Role Challenges

Each category had a minimum of three emergent themes. For role challenges, navigating role politics, factors consistent with STS, and factors consistent with burnout were identified as prevalent themes. For the latter two themes, while it is not possible to assess the occurrence of STS or burnout based on qualitative exploration, the data shared by the participants were consistent with research identifying factors contributing to burnout or STS.
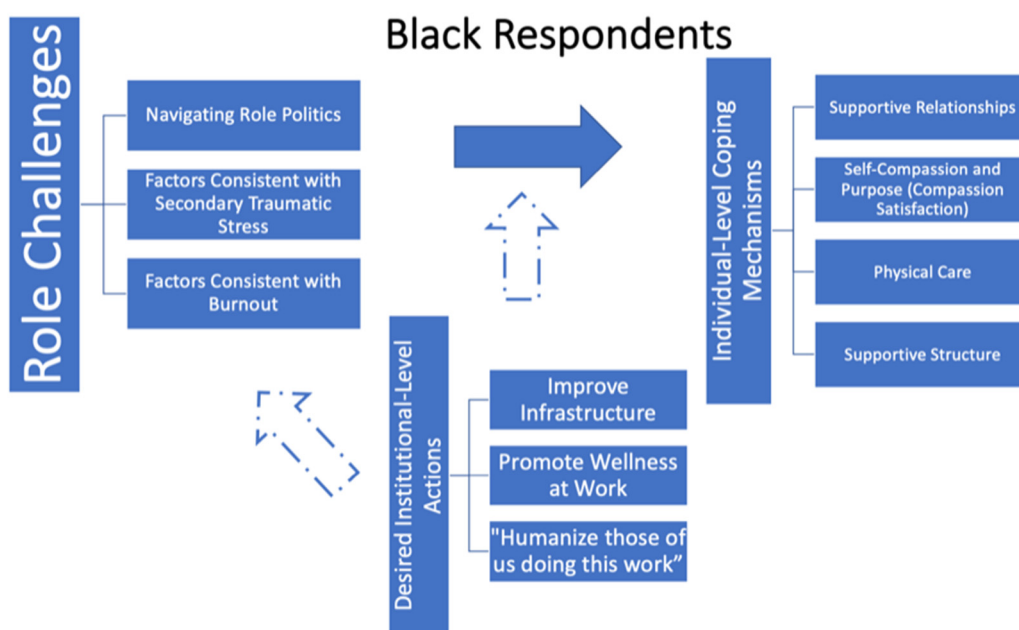
Figure 1. Diagram of categories and themes.

Navigating Role Politics

Several participants cited navigating role politics as a significant stressor, including a lack of autonomy, authority, and decision-making power within one's department and/or institution. One participant described their major stressor as:

"Lack of structural power for advisors. For example, I do general education advising but I cannot sign off on the postpone graduation form for students because only their major advisor can approve that request *even* if the student needs to postpone for non-major reasons. My office also becomes the unofficial "one stop office" for reasons that have nothing to do with our office and we get a lot of complaints as a result."

[Staff, Academic Advising]

This lack of power in their role not only impacted their ability to make decisions that could help to enhance and streamline services for students but also created operational challenges.

Factors Consistent with Secondary Traumatic Stress

The toll of personally identifying with trauma experienced by marginalized and under-represented student populations was a common theme among the participants, hinting at shared trauma as a major role stressor. One participant described this as "helping people with the stress of 'isms' which I also face in my own life; wondering if I am making a difference" (Administrator, Cultural Center). For several participants, the stressors faced by their students contributed to their personal stress. One participant stated, "the hardest thing about my role is knowing that students have to endure so much, in their personal lives/society, on top of managing academic and financial situations" (Staff, EOP and TRIO). This was further exacerbated by their limited ability to meet students' needs.

Factors consistent with Burnout

Balancing Internal and External Demands. Several participants mentioned the endless challenges to find balance, describing this process as "learning to balance multiple hats I wear . . . . trust[ing] [that all] will work itself out" (Food and Housing Security, Programmatic/Service Staff), navigating the "duality of their role" (Athletics, Programmatic/Service Staff), or having to figure out the art of "being in two places at once" (International Stu-

dents, Programmatic/Service Staff). Many highlighted that they were constantly facing incoming demands from multiple directions, often with decision makers lacking awareness of the true nature of their role. Failing to find this seemingly impossible balance, one participant spoke of "the demanding duties that often carry into weekdays nights and weekends" (EOP and TRIO, Programmatic/Service Staff), while another stated that they work "nights and weekends" because "people keep adding projects to my plate . . . Not things I "want" to do, but things that I have to do to keep the departmental processes moving forward" (Housing and Residential Life, Administrator). Another participant discussed the toll of "trying to balance self and others" and an enduring "cultural taxation" (Counseling, Programmatic/Service Staff). The latter phenomenon occurs out of a sense of obligation to address the needs of under-represented and marginalized students beyond the scope of one's role based on shared identity. Another participant discussed the burden of being "the only professional on-campus students have a connection with" (Cultural groups, Programmatic/Service Staff).

"I am never enough". Some participants responded to a sense of being overwhelmed due to questioning of their ability to fulfill role expectations. One participant discussed "not being able to be yourself . . . [and] still [feeling] unsuccessful in helping others" (Disabilities, Programmatic/Service Staff). Another mentioned "feeling replaceable and isolated . . . I am never enough" (Women and Gender Equity, Programmatic/Service Staff). One participant expressed wanting to do more than their role allowed and having to reconcile "my expectations of myself vs. the limitations of the role" (Academic Advising, Programmatic/Service Staff). Other participants found a way to make peace with their reality by being "accept[ing] of what is under one's control" (Counseling, Programmatic/Service Staff).

3.2.2. Individual-Level Coping Mechanisms

Several participants reported efforts to cope that were congruent with dimensions of the mindful self-care scale, particularly supportive relationships, physical care, self-compassion and purpose (compassion satisfaction), and supportive structures.

Supportive Relationships

Participants cited quality supportive relationships both on and off campus, such as friends, colleagues, and therapists, as helpful in providing support and perspectives to help them make sense of their experiences. On-campus support was seen as critical, with participants highlighting how important it was to have a "supportive team" (Student Services/Affairs, Administrator) or to " . . . have good people around... they are very helpful in allowing me to be better" (Disabilities, Programmatic/Service Staff). Others found it essential to "[talk] to off-campus friends who are in the same field" (Cultural groups, Administrator). One respondent acknowledged the important role of mentorship, stating, "I talk with my mentors who have been in the field longer and can take a bird's eye view of where I am" (Academic Advising, Programmatic/Service Staff). Others took proactive therapeutic steps by "seeing a therapist" (Housing and Residential Life, Programmatic/Service Staff) to further support their ability to cope.

Self-Compassion and Purpose (Compassion Satisfaction)

Numerous participants cited the value of fulfilling work experiences and maintaining a purpose-driven and/or self-compassionate outlook to cope with their role challenges. Participants reported finding meaning through "what I do and the impact my work and my words have on others" (Student Services/Affairs, Administrator). One participant specifically highlighted "seeing change in my clients . . . and feeling their energy levels change in my room after leaving a session" (Counseling, Programmatic/Service Staff). Other participants drew upon factors outside of work to affirm themselves and find meaning. One participant mentioned that "[I] remind myself I am my own #1 fan" (Housing and Residential Life, Programmatic/Service Staff). Several respondents cited faith as playing

a meaningful role, with one mentioning that it helped in "shaping [their] experience" (Housing and Residential Life, Administrator).

Physical Care

Participants discussed engaging in positive lifestyle behaviors to promote their physical health. One highlighted their primary coping mechanisms as "Self-care. Exercising and eating healthy has helped me significantly in this role" (Foster Care, Programmatic/Service Staff). Another participant highlighted the importance of sleep (Housing and Residential Life, Administrator).

Supportive Structure

Several participants mentioned the importance of creating boundaries to establish balance between their professional and personal lives. One participant noted the importance of having "alone time" (Housing and Residential Life, Administrator).

3.2.3. Desired Institutional-Level Actions

Improve Infrastructure

Participants expressed a desire for improvement in organization structures, mechanisms, and practices, including the removal of institutional barriers. One participant expressed the need to "create processes that are clear and easily accessible" (Student Services/Affairs, Administrator). Another acknowledged a need for greater income equity and parity via "rightful compensation" (Food and Housing Security, Programmatic/Service Staff). One participant called for institutions to "hire more black staff and faculty" (EOP and TRIO, programmatic/service staff). Several respondents requested more staff training and a more sincere focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion. One participant called for institutions to "review policies for efficiency in process and inclusiveness . . . consider how this rule can impact marginalized populations" (Student Services/Affairs, Administrator).

Promote Wellness at Work

Participants had several ideas for how changes to daily schedules could promote wellbeing among staff. One participant stated they "...would like if we could build self-care into our staff meetings or be allowed to rotate having Friday afternoons off" (Academic Advising, Programmatic/Service Staff). Another respondent called for "fewer meetings; more desk time; opportunity to work from/at home for quiet and uninterrupted time" (Cultural Groups, Administrator).

"Humanize Those of Us Doing This Work"

Participants highlighted a need to shift the organizational culture to be more considerate of their wellbeing. One participant called for a "non-toxic work environment . . . [with] open communication" (Disabilities, Programmatic/Service Staff). Participants proposed ways to help to mitigate aspects of this work that can be draining, with one stating:

> "really listen to those who have to have energy on both sides. It is sometimes like being in a divorced family where the parents do not like each other. You can try and please both but in some cases, people will be negative towards the other and I feel placed in the middle of an adversarial situation".
>
> (Athletics, Programmatic/Service Staff)

One called for more respect, asking institutional leadership to "humanize those of us doing this work" (Food and Housing Security, Programmatic/Service Staff). Several participants asked that leaders "appreciate the role we play" (Women and Gender Equity, Programmatic/Service Staff), and another called for them to "be supportive and open to honest dialogue" (Disabilities, Administrator). Other respondents called for an explicit show of appreciation, to "talk to staff and be intentional with the f/u [sic] actions

taken after the conversations are held... Care about our needs/requests" (Foster Care, Programmatic/Service Staff).

"Environment sensitive to my cultural needs". One participant reported tension due to their cultural identity not being accepted or valued in the work environment. They asked institutions to develop an "environment sensitive to my cultural needs" (Food and Housing Security, Programmatic/Service Staff).

"Welcoming environment for students". One participant discussed a desire for fostering a hospitable environment for students that would better enhance their receptivity to available services. They urged institutions to "provide a welcoming environment for students to be open about their challenges" (Student Services/Affairs, Programmatic/Service Staff).

4. Discussion

This study explores the role challenges faced by Black student services professionals, the individual-level coping mechanisms used by these professionals, and desired institutional resources for support. Findings related to role challenges are explored as factors consistent with STS and burnout, while coping mechanisms and institutional resources are viewed as protective factors.

4.1. Role Challenges

Emergent themes in the category of role challenges include the navigation of role politics, factors contributing to STS, and factors contributing to burnout. A lack of autonomy and decision-making power limits the extent to which the participants can support students and can add stress and feelings of personal inefficacy as they experience student complaints. Meanwhile, having to work beyond standard hours to meet deadlines or tackle an overwhelming workload decreases one's ability to engage in self-care practices or take advantage of wellbeing resources provided by the institution and can lead to engagement in maladaptive coping mechanisms. This has important implications for the health of staff, as research has shown a correlation between conflicting job demands, ambiguous work roles, and burnout, which can lead to fatigue and many chronic and life-threatening diseases [10,13]. When staff are exposed to the trauma of students or personally identify with and share in trauma experienced by the student populations they serve, such as racism, this can contribute to the risk of STS. One participant discussed being the only professional on campus who students have a connection with. This is representative of cultural taxation, where the professional is disproportionately tapped to show up for students to provide formal and informal support that often exceeds the standard scope of their role on the basis of shared identity characteristics that lend them to being perceived as more relatable or safe by students [11]. Lastly, we observed the frustration some respondents felt because of their inability to fully resolve the problems experienced by students and questioning about whether they are making a difference. Such phenomena align with a dimension of burnout characterized by a sense of personal inefficacy [10].

4.2. Individual Coping Mechanisms

Several of the practices reported by the participants were consistent with mindfulness and self-care practices cited by Burke et al. as effective for student affairs professionals experiencing stress in their roles [32]. This is important, given that mindful self-care had an inverse relationship with STS and burnout in research conducted among hospice care professionals [33]. Furthermore, the strategies employed by our participants were consistent with those reported in previous research on Black student affairs professionals, including boundaries, physical care, community, and therapy [18].

The participants cited supportive relationships with friends, colleagues, supervisors, and professional therapists as helpful in providing support and perspective in their efforts to cope with job stress. The benefits that participants received from talking with co-workers and having a supportive supervisor and/or team speak to the importance of supportive relationships in the workplace. This is consistent with a study of medical

residents, which found that supportive relationships with team leads were positively associated with resident wellness, above and beyond the impacts of self-care behaviors [34].

Self-compassion was mentioned by several participants, referring to a person's ability to view their own struggles through a lens of self-kindness and awareness rather than self-criticism, and a recognition that one's own experience is part of the common human experience [34]. Participants cited finding purpose in their work, which represents compassion satisfaction, receiving positive feedback on the impacts they are having on the students they serve, and seeing positive changes in clients as factors that helped them to cope with the role challenges they experienced. These findings are potentially insightful with respect to pathways to promote wellbeing, given that a study of U.S. health professionals found inverse correlations between self-compassion and both sleep disturbance and stress [35]. This is consistent with the findings from a quantitative analysis of our original sample, which found that mindful self-care mediated the positive relationship between compassion satisfaction and health-related quality of life [36].

4.3. Desired Institutional-Level Actions

Effective strategies for relieving stress and preventing burnout in the workplace require actions at the institutional level in addition to individual-level efforts [37,38]. The study participants called for modification to institutional policies to ensure inclusivity, better representation in hiring efforts, adequate compensation, the mitigation of unsustainable workloads, and increased attention to training for diversity, equity, and inclusion among personnel. Such efforts should emphasize that it is not enough to rely on opportunities for students to connect with Black professionals on campus who have the will (if not the capacity) to serve in this role, as doing so perpetuates cultural taxation. Rather, a sincere, comprehensive, strategic approach to connect students with well-trained professionals across backgrounds can help to address cultural taxation. Additional recommended institutional changes cited by the respondents to help to foster a work/life balance included fewer meetings, providing wellness resources, and increased opportunities to work from home. They also called attention to the need for establishing a more welcoming work environment for staff that focuses on open communication, positive dialogue, appreciation of efforts, and sensitivity to the cultural needs of employees. Not only does this benefit staff, but it may also enhance the level of trust and comfort among students to help them be more transparent about their needs, thus ensuring that they receive appropriate services. Consistent with these findings, in a study of mid-level student affairs leaders, the participants highlighted the need for increased recognition of hard work and opportunities for professional development [9]. A recent literature review suggests that contemplative training and leadership at work can successfully cultivate self-compassion and build the resiliency of employees [39].

4.4. Implications for Practice

Our work expands upon previous research conducted among Black staff, broadening perspectives on role challenges, coping strategies, and desired institutional support among Black student services professionals. It is responsive to the call of DeCuir-Gunby et al. to study the health implications of race-related stress to inform the development of interventions [24]. While most of the reported phenomena may be experienced in the workplace regardless of one's racial or ethnic identity, several indicate stressors that may be heightened as a result of experiences unique to Black staff. Such phenomena included sharing racial trauma with students, experiencing cultural taxation, working in an environment insensitive to one's cultural needs, a lack of adequate Black staff and faculty, and a lack of inclusive policies. This invites an important conversation about how racial battle fatigue may contribute to experiences of STS or burnout in this population. The literature on racial battle fatigue shows that the lived experience of Black students, staff, and faculty on campus is distinct, underscoring the importance of culturally sensitive resources and support mechanisms [18,20]. Without such efforts, Black students may struggle with feeling

welcome and having the comfort to access and use existing services, and Black staff may act beyond the scope of their role to fill this gap. Enhancing these efforts would help to alleviate the burden of cultural taxation and other factors that contribute to stress and burnout.

The coping mechanisms reported by our sample were consistent with those cited in previous studies, such as leaning on support networks, the use of boundaries and personal care strategies, and calls for increased transparency. The fact that about three in four respondents had only been in their roles for three years or less, compared to about one in two responses for non-Black respondents, indicates a pattern of high turnover among Black staff [3,24,40]. Thus, our findings inform an urgent recommendation to enhance strategies to (1) promote workplace wellbeing resources that are accessible to all staff; (2) expand hiring with livable compensation to address unsustainable workloads and under-representation while enhancing retention; and (3) commit to an in-depth, sustained focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion through courses and other training mechanisms that are required by all personnel. Previous research has highlighted important topics such as culturally responsive mindfulness for African American populations [41]. Han and Onchwari described a culturally responsive mentoring program used by the University of Minnesota Duluth to foster a community of support and interdependence among faculty and staff of color [42]. The program was described by members as a "self-help program run by and for employees of color" that is focused on wellbeing.

4.5. Limitations

One of the major limitations of this study is that it was conducted in the month leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is safe to infer that many of the experiences captured by this sample were exacerbated by the shifts that Black student services professionals underwent to adjust service delivery while navigating the implications of the pandemic in their personal lives. Given our small sample size, it is not advisable to extrapolate the experiences cited here as representative of all Black student services professionals in higher education. The experiences of staff with gender identities other than female, as well as sexual minorities, were not adequately captured in our sample. Given the opt-in nature of this study, the critical perspectives of those who chose not to participate in this study were not presented. Since the survey relied on self-report, there may be bias to the extent that participants reported socially desirable responses. Furthermore, the findings were interpreted through the lens of the research team, several of whom identify as Black, work closely with or identify as Black student services professionals, and engage in ongoing efforts to promote sustainable labor and address secondary traumatic stress and burnout in higher education. A major strength of this study is that amplifies the voices of Black student services professionals in a broad range of roles, expanding beyond the traditional scope of student affairs, to inform institutions of an expansive range of role challenges and desired support at the institutional level.

4.6. Future Directions

Our study found that Black student services professionals are experiencing role challenges that may be indicative of STS and burnout. Since this research was conducted in Spring 2020, many of the phenomena mentioned by our participants have only worsened. This time was followed by social upheavals and destabilization, such as the trauma of witnessing George Floyd's murder, the COVID-19 global pandemic, school closures, and economic fallout that disproportionately impacted Black and Indigenous people of color. In an era of increasing social fragmentation and the politicization of ideas and institutions, it is important that support for higher education professionals and diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives do not become part of partisan power disputes.

In a research study highlighting the impact of the pandemic on wellness among staff of color in higher education, Cho and Brassfield cited several phenomena resulting from higher education shifts during this period, including: (1) increased workload as staff navi-

gated gaps in institutional policy and resources to first transition service delivery in virtual and hybrid environments and then return to in-person services amidst uncertainty; (2) increased intensity of racial battle fatigue due to microaggressions and anti-blackness on and off campus; (3) fiscal constraints; (4) decreased access to wellness resources; (5) inadequate institutional and leadership responses as many campuses dealt with a racial reckoning and shift in collective consciousness of the impact of racism on people of color; and (6) harm caused by a lack of recognition and responsiveness among leadership and the institution as a whole to the ongoing toll of shifting global and institutional forces on staff [43]. One of the respondents in their study, responding to the difficulty that staff have in accessing wellness resources provided on campus, hit on a core theme of our work, stating "You're not thinking about my humanity at all." The respondents highlighted the pivotal role that direct supervisors can play in mitigating the blow of institutional policy that does not consider their needs while also calling for direct change related to transparency and communication. The participants in this study pointed to the pain of watching campuses celebrate surviving the pandemic, whilst feeling as if they have had to absorb the hidden toll. Since our data were collected just prior to the pandemic, we can only infer how the experiences of our own population have evolved since this time.

Future research should attempt to survey a broad segment of Black student services professionals from a diverse range of academic institutions across geographic regions. This would give more insight into their experiences of role challenges, individual-level coping mechanisms, and desired institutional-level actions. Additional measures of burnout, secondary traumatic stress, and discrimination would allow for the exploration of associations between these variables. Institutional assessments of secondary-traumatic-stress-informed policies, DEI efforts targeting staff, and an audit of the wellness resources most utilized by staff could provide a glimpse into how campuses are responding to the need to promote staff wellbeing, particularly among under-represented populations.

In light of Black womanists who have posited that the liberation of all is dependent on the liberation of Black people, such as Tricia Hersey of The Nap Ministry and the Cohambee River Collective, we assert that the deconstruction of systems that oppress the wellbeing of Black staff is in the interest of collective wellbeing in higher education" [44]. The intentional creation of an institutional environment that promotes the wellbeing of all campus personnel, inclusive of staff, is in line with the Okanagan Charter, which provides a vision to advance wellbeing at post-secondary institutions by promoting health in every component of campus culture [45].

5. Conclusions

This manuscript highlights the voices of Black student services professionals, whose role challenges were indicative of factors contributing to STS, a PTSD-like trauma response, and burnout. Participants reported coping strategies that were aligned with mindful self-care, such as having supportive relationships, finding meaning in their work, taking care of their physical health, and setting boundaries. However, participants emphasized that individual-level support is not sufficient to mitigate role challenges and called upon institutions to support and value them in their roles. Institutions should reflect on pathways to promote wellness in the workplace, leading to a higher retention rate, and expanding the capacity of staff to provide higher-quality support for students.

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