"Are you going to get in line?":

Black Administrators Navigating and Negotiating White Cultural Norms

Joan M. Blakey[1], Stephanie Payne[2], Brittany Hammonds[3]

1 University of Minnesota – Twin Cities

2 South Carolina State University

3 Tulane University

Abstract

In this paper, two African American administrators share their experiences navigating and negotiating the White patriarchal dominance at two large, Southern, predominately White institutions (PWIs). Analyzing and trying to make sense of their shared experiences led us to discover that their challenges navigating the patriarchal society stemmed from failing to adhere to White cultural norms that permeate the fabric of these institutions. Our understanding has also led to the development of strategies for existing Black administrators and women of color who aspire to advance within and become successful in the Academy.

Introduction

In the United States, less than 10% of all professionals working in predominantly White institutions of higher education are Black people (Fuesting et al. 2021; Whitford 2020). This disparity is even worse at the administrative and executive levels as Black administrators make up less than 8% of all administrators while more than 80% are White (Fuesting et al. 2021; Whitford 2020).

Low numbers of Black doctoral students, faculty, and staff in the pipeline is often used to explain why there are so few Black administrators (Whitford 2020). Other studies have identified other reasons for the low numbers of Black administrators (Flaherty 2016). Hostility stemming from racism and microaggressions is a reason there are not many Black administrators. Hostile racial climates, coupled with structural racism, often limit Black people's ability to become administrators. Other explanations for the low number of Black administrators are amorphous tenure and promotion processes, lack of institutional fit, and a lack of available mentorship and other supports that can help Black administrators navigate the higher education landscape (Whitford 2020). Finally, another reason for the low numbers of Black administrators are the ways that racism is "baked into institutions, traditions and practices," namely through White cultural norms (Whitford 2020).

According to Okun (2021b), White cultural norms are shaped by White people and benefit White people. In professional environments, everyone is expected to behave like White male middle-class Americans. Regardless of race or gender, everyone is measured against these often-unspoken norms and standards (Okun, 2021b). According to Gray (2019), White cultural norms are the "explicit and implicit privileging and centering of Whiteness" in

organizations that "dictate that White ways of behaving, dressing, talking, working, and being are normal and superior to all other ethnic, racial, and regional identities and customs."

Failing to adhere to White cultural norms often leads to reprimanding, isolation, demotion, minimization, or termination of anyone operating outside these norms. In this paper, two Black administrators share their experiences in higher education. Our third colleague is Native American and comes from the Lumbee Tribe. While our colleagues' experiences as an administrator are similar, we chose not to include her experiences in the narrative as her experience was not in higher education and, as a Native American, their history and experiences present slightly different dynamics. The three of us examine the ways in which we as Women of Color have struggled and sometimes failed to completely adhere to White cultural norms, which limited our ability to be successful as administrators and significantly contributed to our struggles as women of color in predominantly White institutions.

Pivotal Experiences as Black Administrators

As Black administrators in predominantly White institutions, there are pivotal moments that can change the course of your job. These interactions can impact how you feel about your role as an administrator. These moments and interactions will cause you to question your ability and the value you bring to the job as a Black person.

Joan[1]

Joan: "Can I speak to some of the points you made as some of them were incorrect?"

Boss: "No, I don't want to hear anything you have to say!"

Joan: "What do you mean I cannot speak, and that you don't want to hear what I have to say?"

Boss: "The only thing I want to hear from you is whether you are going to get in line with my expectations."

Joan: "Get in line? Get in line? These aren't slavery days."

Boss: "Like I said, the only thing I want to hear from you is whether you are going to get in line with my expectations. I am your boss, and you report to me. When you get back from vacation, I expect your answer. In the meantime, I am going to talk to your team about how things are going to go while you are on vacation."

Joan: "Why are you going to talk to my team? What makes you think that I would go on vacation for two weeks and not make sure that my direct reports know what to do in my absence?"

Boss: "Like I said, I am going to let them know how to handle things in your absence."

---

[1] *The incidents described in this article are from our vantage point. We have paraphrased many of these conversations based on our recollection of what happened.*

Joan: "I can't do this anymore. I quit."

The above exchange was the gist of my last conversation with my boss (this terminology is used throughout this paper as a placeholder for a person with executive privilege and since they are overwhelmingly male in academia, the pronouns he/him will be used) before I stepped down from my administrative position. This exchange was not the first where I felt dismissed and belittled, although this one did not leave me in tears—that is until the anger subsided.

A couple of things led to this exchange. The week preceding this event was contentious. My boss wanted to use my Blackness to convey to the school that I sanctioned and was a part of the efforts to respond to the murder of George Floyd. While my deciding to take a stand was not a conscious decision, in that moment, I felt like, how is a letter going to make a difference? I was tired of reading letters about standing with Black people while Black people are being harmed. I felt like I would be complicit in the harm if I simply signed my name to this letter. I decided to put conditions for using my Blackness to further an agenda.

I refused to sign my name to a "We Stand with Black Lives" letter unless certain conditions were met. The first condition was the school-planned initiatives could not be initiated on Juneteenth as previously scheduled. I do not celebrate Juneteenth. I do not understand why we celebrate the fact that Texas enslaved Black people 3 years longer than required by law (National Museum of African American History & Culture, n.d.). For me, it is a day of mourning and reflection, not one of celebration. So I did not want initiatives intended to help Black people to be unveiled on a day with such negative connotations for some. The second and most important condition was the letter had to speak to what we were

going to do differently in the school to stop causing harm to the Black lives our university and school interacted with daily. The atrocities Black people have had to endure are unconscionable, yet I did not understand how another letter talking about how bad it is in the world or that "we" are standing with Black Lives would make a difference. Black people did not need another baseless letter. Black faculty, students, and staff within the school felt like they had a proverbial knee on their neck. The school could not do anything about the racism in the world. We could, however, make the school better for the Black lives we interacted with daily. I put conditions on Whiteness that asked for more than pandering and lip service, which led to my leaving my administrative position under what felt like duress.

Many colleagues who are administrators at other universities have described similar experiences. Stephanie is an administrator at another university. Below, she describes a pivotal moment that changed how she showed up at work.

Stephanie

As a young Black training and development director at a large predominantly White institution (PWI) located in the South, how I spoke, dressed, and styled my hair often was criminalized because it represented Blackness. I remember leaders commenting that I and others on my training team, all African American, dressed too "churchy." A few Black female administrators advised me to manage the inflection in my voice and watch my tone when I spoke. I was instructed not to use my hands when I talked. Finally, I was advised to pick and choose what I advocated for and the battles I decided to fight. They added that my White colleagues would interpret those actions as aggression versus passion. I was told my White colleagues would only see "an angry Black woman" instead

of seeing a woman who speaks with clarity and conviction and who can back up the commentary with supporting evidence. After conducting a training session, a Black colleague, a master trainer, indicated that I was a great trainer but not excellent. She stated that what separated me from excellence was how I spoke, including my cadence and diction. She noted when I became excited, my southern drawl was noticeable. This person stated that old White men would not receive me if I did not learn how to manage the way I spoke. Then, she gave me a grammar lesson in front of another colleague I was mentoring. I was disappointed the only feedback provided was how I could be "more White." This exchange was the last straw. The only way I knew how to survive was to withdraw from investing in the organization.

These experiences are not unique to a particular institution or to us. Throughout our career, countless Black women and men administrators have experienced similar dynamics at different predominantly White institutions. What Stephanie and I experienced were racist interactions in which we felt disrespected, diminished, and dehumanized as Black women.

Reflecting on Being Black Administrators at Three Predominantly White Institutions

Joan

I knew the only reason I was instructed to sign the letter was because I am Black. There was no other initiative where all of the executive teams' names appeared, even if we had been part of the planning. Why was this one different? Clearly the one Black administrator's stamp of approval was needed. Well, my stamp of approval came at a price. This conversation happened on the

Tuesday before Juneteenth. By Friday, June 19, I was stepping down. It was funny that my freedom came on the same day it came for some slaves 100s of years ago. I was emancipated. Although I was hurt and still am, I knew it was the right decision for me.

Stepping down from my administrative duties provided me with the opportunity to reflect on my experiences as an administrator at two predominantly White institutions. There were a series of incidents that led to my decision to leave my administrative position. I thought of stepping down almost every week. Probably a month prior to this exchange, I went into the office I had coveted since I arrived. I sat behind the desk and thought to myself, when I step down, I want to move into this office. I guess it was my way of coping with the job. I wanted to leave because it was getting increasingly harder to stay. My boss and my values could not be bridged, so I knew it was inevitable, but I was not ready to leave because I had not accomplished all of my goals. I also was worried about what might happen to students and faculty if I was no longer in this role.

It seemed like my boss wanted my Black face but did not want my "Black" ideas, particularly when they were different from his, which was most of the time. Too often diversity is about someone's skin color. People of color are the only ones who can teach social justice or serve as the Chief Diversity Officer. Often, people of color are hired as a "diversity hires" because it looks good for institutions or companies, but the employers hope it will be business as usual. According to Bunn (2021), "many organizations are not interested in real change. . . . They are looking at diversity as a numbers game...So, what they essentially want to do is bring in people who look different from them, but not necessarily think different from them." Without diversity of thought and a deep understanding of White supremacy, nothing is going to change.

When I look back at our ongoing struggles, the micromanaging, allowing the White people who reported to me more autonomy than provided to me, and the constant questioning of my overall competence, I know that it stemmed from the fact that I approached administration differently than him. I believed it was important to hear from my direct reports and give them the opportunity to weigh in on decisions. They interacted with students daily and, in some cases, were more informed regarding their needs and desires. I tried to build a consensus and believed that everyone had great ideas that deserved to be considered. My boss believed my way was weak and that I let my direct reports have too much say. He thought I was indecisive and, consequently, ineffective. Despite two years of trying to make me in his image, I had failed to learn how to be an effective administrator from his vantage point. He constantly assured me that doing things his way would make me better. When I failed to adopt his ways is when I started to feel undermined and micromanaged, which also contributed to my stepping down.

Stephanie

The younger me, the social worker, did not understand why these Black administrators advised me to conform to a system that oppresses people of color. Now, as I reflect, those Black administrators thought they were helping me navigate the White world in higher education. Those Black female administrators were 20–30 years my senior, which means they were most likely raised professionally by White men. Therefore, they saw professionalism and excellence through the lens of a White man.

Different Types of White Cultural Norms

Our "Blackness" interfered with our ability to succeed and excel as administrators. Our bosses were operating out of White cultural norms. We did not realize it until we began to be reprimanded for our Black ways of being. Okun (2021a) has identified over 20 White cultural norms. They also describe ways of being in direct opposition to White cultural norms.

Based on Stephanie's and Joan's experiences, the most prevalent White cultural norms were:

Table 1. Paternalism Versus Partnership

'NORM' of White Culture	ANOTHER WAY
Paternalism: There is not any consultation or transparency in decision making. Those in leadership positions feel they know what is best and take over the process, often failing to listen to those impacted by proposed changes.	**Partnership:** "Decision making is clear, affected parties are consulted. Evaluations include staff at all levels. Leadership of frontline communities is respected and nurtured" (Okun 2021a, 4).

Joan

As an administrator at two institutions, my workdays were a minimum of 12 hours. In addition to my administrative duties, I also was the Master of Social Work (MSW) director and in charge of accreditation. For years, I worked nearly every day, making sure I was staying on top of my administrative duties and continuing to publish 2–3 manuscripts per year. After doing this for a number of years, I went to my boss and asked to restructure my unit. I had some ideas about more efficient ways to restructure it, so I was able to operate at the 30,000-foot level as I did with the other programs within the school. He assured me that once our self-study was

submitted, we could talk about restructuring. After doing the job for a number of years, I had clear ideas on how to make it better. However, I also wanted to solicit feedback from my team as they would be most affected by the restructuring. In one of our weekly staff meetings, I mentioned the restructuring to my staff. I talked about some of the parameters. For example, I wanted people to be cross-trained so we could still get our work done when someone was out. I shared that I had come up with three possible ways we could restructure the unit, but I also wanted to hear their thoughts.

We were scheduled to meet on Friday to discuss the three options I created. Unbeknownst to me, my unit got together and came up with a beautiful plan that met all of my parameters. They all were on board and supported the plan. It was a great plan and one I had not thought of. My boss and I met to discuss restructuring. He presented his plan for how he wanted my unit restructured. Based on the plan, it was clear that my boss had no clue of all that I did. I explained why I did not think his plan would work and excitedly shared that my unit had come up with a fantastic plan that fit all of my parameters, and, most importantly, it had come from them. He told me I was the boss and employees should not be able to structure their own jobs. Using a paternalistic view, I was supposed to tell them how things were going to go, not the other way around. Using a partnership view, I believed that affected parties should be consulted. My unit knew I had the last say and the power to veto their idea. However, it was a great plan and they bought into the idea because they had a hand in creating it.

Table 2. Official Title Outweighs Experience Versus Holistic View of People

'NORM' of White Culture	ANOTHER WAY
Official title outweighs experience: Regardless of someone's broad skills and experience base, they are treated as though they only know how to do what is in their job description, and their ideas are valued based on organizational rank. When offering to do more or different, they are told to stay in their lane.	**A holistic view of people:** "People's experience and skills are understood to likely expand beyond what they have been hired to do, and opportunities to contribute more of who they are, are offered" (PCC, n.d., 5).

Stephanie

When a new senior manager of training and development was hired, she met with my training team to introduce herself and her vision for the team, contract year, etc. Introductions and her vision were merely agenda items out of formality. The true purpose of the meeting was to let us know she had unquestionable authority. The tension was thick in the meeting. Several of us shared our academic and professional backgrounds to demonstrate our legitimacy and prove we could contribute to decision-making. The senior manager dismissed me and the team's academic and professional credentials. Despite the fact that my unit was composed of 9-10 women at any given time who collectively obtained over 20 postsecondary degrees in the social sciences field, several professional licenses, and had over 130 years of professional child welfare experience, my boss downgraded us from "child welfare subject matter experts" to simply "trainers." She asserted that anyone could pick up a training manual and train. My boss did not care that we were the most credentialed training unit she had, nor did she solicit our ideas and feedback for enhancing training, increasing productivity, or working more efficiently. She ran our team like a benevolent dictator.

Instead of seeing that our collective knowledge, experience, and skills expanded beyond training and providing opportunities for us to continue to grow, my boss diminished our skills by saying anyone could do our jobs. Her need to reduce what we did to a title versus taking a holistic view of our contributions created a hostile climate, damaged relationships, and limited my team's desire to continue improving and finding ways to make the organization better. My team went from mission-driven to checking off boxes, only doing what was required.

Table 3. Power Hoarding Versus Power Sharing

'NORM' of White Culture	ANOTHER WAY
Power Hoarding: Ideas from less-senior people are treated as a threat, information and decision making is confidential. Holding on to resources based on a scarcity mindset.	**Power Sharing:** "Ideas at all levels are valued for the positional expertise they represent. Ideas from others are requested and space is made for them to be heard. Budgets are made available for viewing, providing input in, and resources are shared equitably and appropriately" (Okun 2021a, 5).

Joan

As an administrator, all academic-related issues (which were the majority of issues in a school of social work) fell under my purview. I was one of three people who made up the executive team. However, when it came to budget issues, I was rarely allowed to participate in those decisions even though these decisions affected academics. I did not even know the salaries of the people who reported to me. My colleague was allowed to weigh in on academic decisions often related to academics, but I was never allowed to weigh in on decisions regarding the budget. I believe the main reason I was not privy to this information or included in budget

decisions was to avoid questions, particularly related to the equitable distribution of resources. I thought differently than them and believed in equity. Consequently, I was left out of most budget decisions. Power sharing values and respects positional expertise. Ideas and feedback from others are highly sought after, and space is made for them to be heard. The budget was shared with faculty after it was completed. Power sharing would have meant faculty and I were asked and allowed to provide input as the budget was being created. In power sharing environments, resources (i.e., office space, offices with windows) are shared equitably and appropriately.

Table 4. Progress is bigger, more versus Progress is sustainability and quality

'NORM' of White Culture	ANOTHER WAY
Progress is bigger, more Focus on quantity; less focus is put on the cost of growth on people, communities, and relationships.	**Progress is sustainability and quality** "Cost/ benefit analysis includes all costs. Focus is on sustainability" (Okun 2021a, 6).

Stephanie

My department's primary obligation is to write curricula and facilitate all certification and advance training for the state's child protection, foster care, and adoptions frontline case managers and leadership as they are our primary funder. My state's child welfare agency outsourced all certification and advanced training to my university around 13 years ago. The state child welfare organization, which White directors have historically run, pushed my unit, a predominately Black unit, to get child welfare professionals certified and working despite our push back. The state's child welfare agency placed emphasis on getting boots on the ground despite the quality of training or the wellbeing of trainers. This "get 'er done" mentality was designed to

increase the number of child welfare professionals in the state by increasing the number of training sessions conducted annually and the number of registrants per session, reducing the length of time between training sessions, removing the pass/fail standard to prevent persons from being terminated due to not passing certification training, and moving from the two-trainer model to a one-trainer model. Training was reduced without removing any content from the curriculum, which impedes the transfer of learning. The rigorous curriculum offered limited opportunities to sit with complex content to allow for processing, application, and debriefing. We had no choice but to comply. The number of training sessions conducted increased. The max capacity for registrants increased. There are more trained professionals. However, learners frequently complained about their inability to process and apply content due to the rigorous curriculum and training design. Instead of focusing on the number of child welfare professionals trained, emphasis should have been placed on the quality of training. We should have been examining ways to generate and transfer learning and analyze what was thwarting case managers' ability to retain, transfer, and apply knowledge post child welfare training which impacts the state's ability to ensure children's safety, permanency, and wellbeing. The indirect message conveyed to my department was to get in line or they will find someone else to do the job. The state has found another organization that will do what they are told without asking any questions. As of December, our contract with the state will end.

Table 5. Defensiveness Versus Vulnerability

'NORM' of White Culture	ANOTHER WAY
Defensiveness Nowhere to air grievances. Focus placed on protecting power instead of addressing harms, naming intention instead of acknowledging impact.	**Vulnerability** "Give and receive feedback non-defensively, have a clear structure to hear and address grievances. Skills are supported in being both self-critical and self-loving" (PCC, n.d., 4).

Joan

Several students approached me in my administrative role about concerns they had regarding the MSW program. They asked to meet with me to talk about their concerns. I worked with the students to schedule a townhall-type meeting. I invited faculty and staff to attend. I felt it was a great way to hear students' concerns, explain how curriculum decisions were made, discuss what parts of the curriculum were negotiable and which were not negotiable based on accreditation, practice wisdom, etc. It was suggested that I cancel the meeting in the event that there were questions I could not answer. I said, "I am a social worker. I am confident that I can handle any situation that comes up. If I do not have an answer, I will tell them I don't have an answer, and I will get back to them." My boss rarely sought feedback except from people he was sure would give him the answers he sought. His style was consistent with authoritative management style or top-down leaders. I tried to make decisions in concert with consultation from all impacted parties. Students are important stakeholders, and although administrators cannot meet every demand or desire students have, they deserve to be heard. They deserve the opportunity to ask questions, and they deserve to receive answers. The townhall meeting went well. We listened to their concerns. The students felt heard. Out of the townhall, a student advisory council was formed. Any time major changes were being made to the program, students were consulted and got to weigh in on decisions as they were being made, not after the fact.

Table 6. Transactional Goals Versus Transformational Goals

'NORM' of White Culture	ANOTHER WAY
Transactional Goals "Transactional deliverables/quantifiables are ranked above meaningful engagement or qualitative goals. Rushing to achieve numbers. Transactional goals are focused more on quantity than quality. The metrics used to evaluate effectiveness are more considered with growth" (PCC, n.d., 4).	**Transformational Goals** "Working towards meaningful engagement with depth, quality; using qualitative goals in addition to whatever deliverables a foundation is asking for. The timeline for the deliverables includes enough time for quality" (PCC, n.d., 4).

Joan

As an administrator, my primary concern was the educational product students received and the quality of their experience while in school. Consistently, students complained about the quality of the program. The primary complaints centered around issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion; the need for a more rigorous curriculum; the quality of instruction; and the parity between our various programs. At different time points, only 33–45% of students indicated they would recommend the program to others. Routinely, these numbers were disregarded. I was asked, "How many students did these numbers represent?"

Many of my efforts to improve the program were consistently questioned and, at times, undermined. I was less concerned about the number of students and more concerned about the actual quality and that a large number of students would not recommend our program. It was suggested that I was over-identifying with students, and I needed to remember where my allegiance should lie. From his vantage point, these problems did not affect our numbers and ability to recruit students. Every semester we had full cohorts, so, in his mind, I was creating the problem. I was more interested in quality and sustainability. Students pay a lot of money for education, and they deserve the best the school has to offer. Transformational goals focus

on meaningful engagement with stakeholders—in this case, students—who are critical parts of the creation of transformational goals.

The examples provided come from a combination of my administrative roles. The white cultural norms that have been highlighted are examples of how differing or traditionally non-white and non-male leadership styles are questioned and often not respected. While there were other White cultural norms operating, the norms identified were the primary ones that affected our experience as Black administrators. People of Color have lived experiences of race but do not necessarily have an in-depth understanding of White supremacy and internalized racial oppression. Black administrators are not immune to the effects of White supremacy. We are taught that entry into or acceptance by the dominant culture is a success. Additionally, we are taught to despise everything that makes us us. White supremacy often shows up in our attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, particularly as we strive to succeed and excel in predominantly White spaces (Okun 2021). White supremacy culture tells us who and what has value. We must actively fight the ways we have been conditioned to participate in our own degradation.

Strategies for Success as a Black Administrator

In our literature search, there was a dearth of information regarding what it takes for Black administrators to succeed (Perryman-Clark & Craig 2019). The suggestions we share with you are based on our literature findings and our personal experience. Though one of us is no longer an administrator, we do not consider this a failure as we learned valuable lessons that we will take into our next administrative role.

1. Talk to people who came before you.

Ascher (1943) suggested successful administrators always remember that we are standing on the shoulder of giants that came before us. Talk to people, seek advice. Sir Isaac Newton said, "Standing on the shoulders of giants is a necessary part of creativity, innovation, and development. It doesn't make what you do less valuable" (FS Blog, n.d.)

2. Seek support from other Black administrators.

Generett and Cozart (2011) shared that support and validation of experiences allowed them to see and understand the impact of their work. They took the information they gathered from their own experiences and utilized it to see meaning in their work in the academy. It also helped them know they were not alone in the feelings they were experiencing.

3. Know the difference between responsibility and accountability.

Covey (2014) said, "accountability breeds response-ability." Canfield (n.d.) discussed the differences between accountability and responsibility. Responsibility focuses on tasks. We take responsibility to complete tasks that hopefully lead to the accomplishment of goals. Accountability focuses on the results. When we are accountable to others, we are much more concerned about the outcome of our actions versus checking a box that we accomplished some tasks.

4. Leadership Style: Know your audience.

Know your leadership style. Know your boss's leadership style. Know your direct reports' styles. There are four leadership styles: (a) structural, (b) human resources, (c) political, and (d) symbolic (Bolman

& Deal 2017). The goal is to incorporate elements of all four styles, but we have a primary style that informs how we make decisions. For example, my primary style is human resources. The dean's primary style was political. When I went to him with ideas on how to solve problems or approach things, I always led with how these changes affect people (human resources). My boss was much more concerned with the political ramifications of those decisions. When I led with human resources, I had a 50% chance of getting him to say "yes." When I led with the political ramifications, I was always able to convince him. I was more effective and able to get more things done when I used his frame, which is why it is important to know your audience.

5. You must decide what is important to you and the price you are willing to pay.

As administrators, we have to decide what is most important to us and what we will not compromise. I believe in fairness and equity to my core. I will not compromise these core beliefs for anything. We also must decide the price we are willing to pay and where we draw the line. In the award-winning journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones' statement on her decision to decline tenure at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, she wrote:

> "At some point when you have proven yourself and fought your way into institutions that were not built for you, when you've proven you can compete and excel at the highest level, you have to decide that you are done forcing yourself in" (LDF Media, 2021).

In the end, these decisions are yours and yours alone because you will suffer the consequences or reap the benefits.

6. What do you stand for?

Dr. Martin Luther King, Malcom X, and Alexander Hamilton are all credited with the quote, "If you don't stand for something, you will fall for anything" (Penn State University 2017). People in your organization should know your values and what you stand for, not so much by what you say but what you do and how you interact with them.

7. Realize you are never going to please everyone.

Though it is true we will never please everyone, it is important to be transparent and help people understand the reasons why we approached something in a particular way. There may be some things that cannot be shared with the wider public, but what we *can* share *should* be shared.

8. Possess the right skills to succeed in the role.

According to Katz (1974), administrators need three important skills to be successful (i.e., technical, human, and conceptual skills). Technical skills focus on the specialized knowledge needed to be successful. Human skills focus on relationships, how administrators treat people, and ensuring environments are safe and collaborative. Finally, conceptual skills are the most important key to success. Conceptual skills involve viewing the organization as a whole, how each department works with each other, and how changing one department will affect the organization as a whole. Having this skill allows administrators to know how each system is working together and what is not working as a unit.

9. Being an administrator can be lonely.

The academy can be a cold place for women of color. Isolation could stem from upper management, direct reports, or other women of color

within the organization. Often these environments are not welcoming. Black administrators may not be extended professional opportunities to advance or get specialized training. Black administrators may constantly have their legitimacy questioned. Also, isolation could stem from racialized labor, making for extremely long days and limiting the ability to build collaborative relationships amongst colleagues. If we aren't strong enough to stand alone, we may have to create spaces to be heard to increase productivity.

10. Be courageous!

Social movements and social change come from people who may be afraid but are willing to act anyway because they know it is the right thing to do. It is easy to conform and do what is expected (i.e., maintaining status quo). Ruth Gordon said, "Courage is very important. Like a muscle, it is strengthened by use" (Spark People 2021). Countless people say they "will be courageous once I get tenure." The problem with this statement is there will always be something. Pre-tenure, it is tenure. Then it is full professorship, a deanship, and then provost. Courage is a muscle that is built overtime. Acting courageously may be awkward or may turn out badly, but I would argue it was not courage but the approach. We learn from our mistakes and get better at being courageous.

Conclusion

White supremacy culture is a powerful force that affects our relationships, interactions, and even defines important concepts such as success and power. As Black administrators, faculty, and/or staff in higher education, the experience is challenging and rewarding. We have the privilege of walking alongside students as they begin to establish their professional identities. We can help other Black administrators, faculty, and staff navigate the White

patriarchal environments in the Academy. Being an administrator provides the opportunity to inspire and give hope to students of color, women of color. Our presence shows them the possibilities. It shows them that the glass ceiling can crack for us, too. However, current administrators of color or those aspiring to be in the academy must ask themselves what price they are willing to pay be in this world. The price we pay and the subsequent penalty for not conforming is assessed at a higher rate than for the dominant culture.

If you find yourself in similar spaces in the academy and trying to make sense of your experiences, frustrations, feelings of inadequacy, or anger, consider which White cultural norm may be present. White cultural norms are deeply embedded into the fabric of PWI's and society.

While the emergence of diversity and inclusion trainings at universities has popularized, the lack of equity that persists demonstrates that PWI's still have a long way to go. This paper aimed to provide a space for Black administrators to make sense of our shared experiences and illuminate the unspoken rules for engagement and structural inequity that challenges Black administrators and provide strategies for obtaining success in the academy. You don't have to do it our way, but it is important that we do not remain in our respective silos.

References

Ascher, Charles S. 1943. "The Art of Succeeding." In *Public Administration Review* 3(1): 67–70.

Bolman, Lee G., & Deal, Terrence E. 2017. *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Bunn, Curtis. 2 "A Black Chief Diversity Officer Lost a Job After Flagging Racial Bias." *NBC News*, October 29, 2021.https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/black-chief-diversity-officer-lost-job-offer-flagging-racial-bias-rcna4038

Canfield, Jack. *Accountability vs. Responsibility.* Last updated 2023. https://www.jackcanfield.com/blog/accountability-vs-responsibility/

Covey, Stephen R. 2014. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.

Flaherty, Colleen. . "Thinking Outside the Pipeline." *Inside Higher Ed*, November 18, 2016. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/11/18/study-suggests-phd-supply-isnt-problem-when-it-comes-diversifying-professoriate

FS Blog. (n.d.). "Standing on the Shoulder of Giants." https://fs.blog/shoulders-of-giants/.

Fuesting, Melissa et al. 2021. *Professionals in Higher Education Annual Report: Key Findings, Trends, and Comprehensive Tables for the 2020-21 Academic Year.* CUPA-HR. https://www.cupahr.org/wp-content/uploads/surveys/Results/2021-Professionals-Report-Overview.pdf

Generett, Gretchen Givens & Sheryl Cozart. 2011. "The Spirit Bears Witness: Reflections of Two Black Women's Journey in the

Academy." In *The Negro Educational Review* 62-63(1–4): 141–165.

Gray, Aysa. "The Bias of 'Professionalism' Standards." In *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, June 4, 2019. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_bias_of_professionalism_standards#

Katz, Robert. 1974. "Skills of an Effective Administrator." In *Harvard Business Review*.

LDF Media. "Nikole Hannah-Jones Issues Statement on Decision to Decline Tenure Offer at University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and to Accept Knight Chair Appointment at Howard University." *Legal Defense Fund*. NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, July 6, 2021. https://www.naacpldf.org/press-release/nikole-hannah-jones-issues-statement-on-decision-to-decline-tenure-offer-at-university-of-north-carolina-chapel-hill-and-to-accept-knight-chair-appointment-at-howard-university/

National Museum of African American History & Culture. "The Historical Legacy of Juneteenth." The Smithsonian Institute. https://nmaahc.si.edu/blog-post/historical-legacy-juneteenth

Okun, Tema. 2021a. "White Supremacy Culture." *Dismantling Racism*. https://www.whitesupremacyculture.info/uploads/4/3/5/7/43579015/okun_-_white_sup_culture_2020.pdf

Okun, Tema. 2021b. "White Supremacy Culture – Still Here." *Dismantling Racism* https://www.dismantlingracism.org/uploads/4/3/5/7/43579015/white_supremacy_culture_-_still_here.pdf

Partners for Collaborative Change. "*White* Dominant Culture and Something Different: A Worksheet." *Cuyahoga Arts & Culture*. https://www.cacgrants.org/assets/ce/Documents/2019/WhiteDominantCulture.pdf

Penn State University. "Speak Up." *Sites at Penn State*. Wordpress, Posted February 12, 2017. https://sites.psu.edu/mnshermanci/

Perryman-Clark, Staci M. & Collin Lamont Craig. 2019. "Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration: From Margins to the Center." In *Studies in Writing and Rhetoric: Conference on College Composition and Communication of the National Council of Teachers of English.*

Whitford, Emma. "There Are So Few That Have Made Their Way." *Inside Higher Ed*, posted October 28, 2020. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/10/28/black-administrators-are-too-rare-top-ranks-higher-education-it's-not-just-pipeline

About the Authors

Dr. Brittany Hammonds, DSW, LCSW, LCAS, CCS is a licensed clinical social worker, licensed clinical addiction specialist, and a certified clinical supervisor. Dr. Hammonds received her MSW from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte in 2015 and her doctorate in Social Work from Tulane University in 2021. Dr. Hammonds specializes in working in addiction, anxiety, depression, mood disorders, and life adjustments. Dr. Hammonds refers to herself as the guide and her clients are the experts of their own lives. Dr. Hammonds thrives with working with a diverse clientele. Dr. Brittany also serves as adjunct faculty at Winthrop University and The University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Dr. Brittany also provides clinical supervision to provisionally licensed clinicians that are obtaining their LCSW, LCMHC, LCAS, and/or CCS. Dr. Brittany's research interest includes: substance abuse/addiction, race and culture, and Native American people.

Dr. Stephanie Payne, a Child Welfare Subject Matter Expert, Certified Adoption Investigator, Licensed Master Social Worker, and Assistant Social Work Professor, has an extraordinary record of serving children and families, training and developing child welfare professionals and educating future social workers in South Carolina. Dr. Payne worked at The Center for Child and Family Studies at the University of South Carolina charged with facilitating and developing curricula for traditional instructor-led, virtual instrctor led, and web-based training for Child Protective Services, Foster Care, and Adoption staff and management. Additionally, Ms. Payne has traveled the state facilitating debriefings for the differing SCDSS' County offices regarding their Child and Family Services Quality Assurance Review results. She assisted those county offices in developing an internal program improvement. Currently, Dr.

Payne is an Assistant Professor at South Carolina State University. Ms. Payne is also a member of the South Carolina Black Pages Top 20 Under 40 2020 Class.

Dr. Joan M. Blakey is the School of Social Work Director, Gamble Skogmo Endowed Chair, and a tenured Associate Professor at the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities. She received her doctorate from the University of Chicago's School of Social Administration (currently known as the Crown Family of Social Work, Policy, and Practice) in August 2010. She also attended the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, receiving her Bachelor of Science degree in African American Studies, Sociology, and Youth Studies and a Master of Social Work degree. Previously, Dr. Blakey was the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs at Tulane University and Department Chair at the Helen Bader School of Social Welfare at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Dr. Blakey's research agenda primarily focuses on diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racist and anti-oppressive practice. Her work consistently has been about transforming systems to recognize and embrace peoples' full humanity to create and foster a sense of belonging where Black and other marginalized people can excel and thrive. As an equity consultant, Dr. Blakey works with universities/colleges, public school systems, and for-profit and non-profit organizations to assess the organization and provide expert guidance, direction, and advice on existing policies, procedures, practices, and strategies. She also develops work plans, organizes training, and identifies strategies to improve racial climates.