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From Kindergarten Classrooms to PhD Pursuits: Academic Narratives that Influence Career
Decisions in Black Women Counselor Education and Supervision Doctoral Students

by

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Acknowledgments

Whew! For most of this experience, it felt like I would never make it to this point. I used to read other people's acknowledgement sections to keep me motivated on my worst days. God is so good. I thank God for the support He placed in my life to help make this a reality. I hadn't dreamed this big for myself, and I'd like to thank God for continually blessing me with things greater than I could ever imagine. Just a warning - these thank-yous won't do anyone justice. For me, though, I know putting things on paper makes all the difference.

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To the Black women and girls reading this: I wrote this for us. We matter, and you matter to me. We are not invisible, incompetent, or incapable. We are brilliant, bold bosses. It's never too late to start taking up space, or creating safe spaces of our own. Show up, speak up, and shake things up. Your survival - our collective survival - depends on it. And remember, "When you exist in spaces that weren't built for you, remember sometimes that just being you is the revolution." - Elaine Welteroth

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Abstract

FROM KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOMS TO PHD PURSUITS: ACADEMIC NARRATIVES THAT INFLUENCE CAREER DECISIONS IN BLACK WOMEN COUNSELOR EDUCATION AND SUPERVISION DOCTORAL STUDENTS

By Erin Hanley, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Counselor Education and Supervision at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2021.

Major Director: Director: Abigail Conley, Associate Professor Counseling and Special Education

Though Black women continue to receive advanced degrees at increased rates, this attainment is not reflected in the number of Black women serving as faculty members in academia. The field of counselor education encourages the recruitment and retention of diverse students and educators, though the literature outlining the reality of the experiences of Black women in counselor education has been limited. This qualitative interpretive phenomenological analysis uncovered the academic experiences of Black women doctoral students from kindergarten to their current doctoral programs, and how these experiences have influenced their career decision making. Guided by Black feminist thought and career human agency theory, two rounds of qualitative interviews addressed K–12 and postsecondary academic experiences, respectively. Themes that emerged as influencing career decision making for the participants included Being the “Only,” Playing the Game, Family Matters, Proving People Wrong, and Support.

Chapter One

Introduction

Black women are receiving graduate degrees at advanced rates, leading women of other races in doctoral degree completion (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019). Though more Black women have the credentials necessary to be professors, as of 2018, Black women comprised only 3% of full-time faculty members at postsecondary schools (NCES, 2020). The student to faculty pipeline, especially for Black women, deserves further investigation. Of particular interest is Black women in counselor education and supervision (CES) because CES trains its graduates specifically to be professors; however, in 2017 Black women represented only 10% of all faculty in counseling programs accredited by Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP, 2018). Though CES doctoral students are trained and prepared to become counselor education professors, of interest is why Black women are choosing alternative career paths following program completion. This chapter introduces background information on underresearched realities of Black women scholars and their professional pursuits, as well as the purpose and significance of the proposed study. Briefly introduced is the research question, theoretical frameworks, and methodology guiding the research.

Problem Statement

Though the program experiences of Black women doctoral students often include feelings of tokenism (Shavers & Moore, 2019), isolation (Walkington, 2017), and difficulty navigating academic climates and expectations (Pope & Edwards, 2016), there has been a lack of knowledge concerning the impact of these experiences on career decision making of Black

women once CES doctoral programs are completed. The field of counselor education and supervision is of special interest. CACREP (2015) holds counselor educators to the professional standard of attracting, hiring, and sustaining, “a diverse faculty to create and support an inclusive learning community” (p. 6). However, many counseling programs fall short in meeting the diversity professional standard. Therefore, there has continued to be calls for more diverse faculty and counseling professionals (Baggerly et al., 2017; Cartwright et al., 2018); highlighting that there is acknowledgement of the growth needed to ensure students see themselves reflected in both faculty. Nevertheless, research has highlighted that racially homogenous classroom spaces, even in CACREP programs, can include adverse experiences that make people foreclose on academic career paths (Hudson, 2020; Mingo, 2015). This foreclosure continues the cycle of limited diversity among professors, limited opportunity for Black women to see themselves reflected in academic spaces, traumatic experiences in classroom spaces, and foreclosure of academic careers.

Interestingly enough, counselors themselves are often expected to assist others with vocational choice, but their academic histories, and how these experiences influence career decision making, are under examined. Specifically for CES, there is research exploring the experiences of Black women during CES doctoral programs (Hudson, 2020; Zeligman et al., 2015) and as CES faculty members (Cartwright et al., 2018; Fitch, 2015; Jones-Boyd, 2016; Robinson, 2018); however, the research is disjointed and often describes experiences at one time point during their career trajectory. The current study seeks to connect the experiences of Black women throughout their academic histories to career decisions made during and after their doctoral programs in CES.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine what historical academic experiences encourage or discourage Black women counselor education doctoral students from pursuing professorship. Though there were themes found in the literature regarding what Black girls experience in K–12 academic environments (Apugo et al., 2020; Butler-Barnes & Inniss-Thompson, 2020; Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Gambles, 2020; Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020; McArthur & Lane, 2019; Neal-Jackson, 2020; Young, 2020; Zimmermann, 2018) and what Black women are exposed to from undergraduate programs (Commodore et al., 2018; Davis, 2017; Ota-Malloy, 2019; Winkle-Wagner et al., 2019) to doctoral pursuits (Haynes et al., 2016; Jordan, 2017; Pope & Edwards, 2016; Shavers & Moore, 2019), considering these experiences collectively was of interest and importance. By providing a holistic picture of academic histories from kindergarten through doctoral coursework, themes presented will be acknowledged and assessed in relation to career decisions. The use of Black feminist thought (BFT) and career human agency theory (CHAT), both discussed later in the chapter, helped ensure the voices of Black women were not lost, their educational experiences and career trajectories were critically explored, and that approaches to improving the educational experiences of Black women were addressed by the impacted population.

Study Significance

Assessing the stories and histories of Black women counselor education doctoral students was important not only for the participants themselves, but for the betterment of the other Black women who will eventually enter these spaces. The analysis of doctoral experiences may improve the institutional support or policies provided or practiced by postsecondary schools.

Understanding how both the intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) of race and gender, and the matrix of domination regarding how oppressive identities are connected (Collins, 1990), impact the academic experiences and career decisions of Black women counselor education doctoral students may serve to improve the doctoral experiences of these students, and possibly the numbers of Black women in faculty positions. These findings may have positive effects for both educators and learners, and may ultimately increase the number of Black women pursuing professorship if their academic experiences as students are better understood and appropriately addressed. Those potentially benefiting from the study include Black women doctoral students in counselor education and otherwise, institutions hoping to best support this group via programming and policies, and faculty who strive to truly address social justice and cultural competence within pedagogy. Findings may inform the treatment of and policies and programming related to Black girls and women at every level of schooling, which may improve their academic and professional pathways. Additionally, study participants hopefully developed a better understanding of how their histories may be influencing their career decision making.

Theoretical Framework

BFT

BFT is a critical social theory that both empowers Black women and actively responds to and combats oppressive actions and beliefs (Collins, 1989). Collins (2000) defined BFT as, “the dialectic of oppression and activism, the tension between the suppression of African American women’s ideas and our intellectual activism in the face of that suppression” (p. 3). BFT also addresses the experiences of Black women (Awad et al., 2015). BFT emphasizes that Black women are powerful creators of knowledge, and that knowledge is both a source of freedom for

the oppressed and incites movement toward change (Collins, 1990). This theory was used as both a foundational aspect of research and a source of resilience or strength for the participants. In the words of Collins (1986), “Black feminist thought consists of ideas produced by Black women that clarify a standpoint of and for Black women” (p. S19). For Black women, self-definitions of Black femininity can be forms of resistance against the othering that stereotypes reinforce (Collins, 1986). It is important not only to value Black women and validate these voices, but to move from validation to “action, resistance, and/or activism” (Patterson et al., 2016, p. 69). BFT is also relevant for Black women, as it “informs and empowers Black girls about structures for the purpose of social change” (Nyachae, 2016, p. 791). As such, this theory adequately addresses the experiences of participants across academic levels from childhood to present womanhood. Black women deserved the space and opportunity to reflect upon the educational experiences as they likely shaped their career decision making, which may not have been processed prior to study completion.

CHAT

CHAT assists in distilling and fulfilling intentions, reestablishing significance, and reevaluating desires (Chen & Hong, 2020b). CHAT emphasizes assisting people with gaining entry to a broader selection of possibilities in conceptualizing a life path that is autonomous and purposeful (Chen & Hong, 2020b). Career decisions coincide with the creation of identities centered around career selves and future adult selves (Bowles & Brindle, 2017). Though Black women faculty and their career realities and satisfaction are often considered, the decision making in becoming a Black woman professor is not often explained in the literature. Career decisions may be influenced by these experiences and how students process and conceptualize

the impact of these events. A goal of incorporating CHAT is realizing the relationship between jobs and life events and professional aspirations (Chen & Hong, 2020b). Additionally, CHAT considers power differentials in how oppressive and discriminatory instances are perceived (Chen & Hong, 2020b).

Combined BFT and CHAT

In an effort to both empower Black women voices and illuminate their experiences, BFT allows for experiences to be shared, achievements to be acknowledged, and voices to be amplified (Patterson et al., 2016). Vital to Black feminist ideology is moving from awareness to resistance, which may be applicable to choosing not to enter academia in a faculty role (Patterson et al., 2016). Resistance might include acting against “dominant, mainstream interpretations” (Patterson et al., 2016, p. 58) or narratives that impose idealized identities or roles for us to fill. Even with the increase in doctoral degree completion (NCES, 2019), Black women may not be thought of as traditional students in higher education. Traditional methods of assessing the academic realities and career decisions of Black women may be ineffective (Storlie et al., 2018), as higher learning was often originally reserved for white men. CHAT diverges from normative theories, highlighting a collaborative understanding of societal interactions (Chen & Hong, 2020a). The combination of these frameworks helped to answer the research questions.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were:

RQ1: What are the academic experiences of Black women counselor education doctoral students from kindergarten to present (doctoral program)?

RQ2: How do Black women counselor education doctoral students' academic experiences, from kindergarten to present, influence career decision making?

The goal of this research was to explore what experiences during an academic history have positively or negatively impacted the professorial pursuits of Black women counselor education doctoral students. This was best accomplished via an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach, which is detailed in Chapter 3.

Definitions of Terms

Defining the following terms used throughout this paper and study provide context to readers.

Academic histories. Educational experiences spanning kindergarten schooling to doctoral studies.

Black. The racial description for those who descend from Africa; sometimes also known as African American (American Psychological Association, 2019).

Career decisions. Decisions concerning the career students intend to pursue or actualize (Jung, 2012), specifically following doctoral program completion.

Counselor education (CES). Doctoral programs in counselor education and supervision that include training students in ethics, competence, and professional identity, and prepare students for the teaching profession within a counseling specialty (CACREP, 2016).

Faculty. Those teaching students at postsecondary institutions in professorial positions, whether working toward tenure or not.

Female. The gender identity determined personally by students and participants (VCU Safe Zone, 2020) to include those who identify as transgender women.

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). A qualitative research approach used to uncover and understand the realities of those who have experienced a specific phenomenon for better understanding (Alase, 2017).

K–12. Academic experiences spanning kindergarten to 12th grade.

Postsecondary. Academic learning for learners who meet the prerequisites for high school graduation (Pérusse et al., 2017).

Summary

Though Black women receive advanced degrees at increased levels, only a limited number of Black women enter faculty positions. As a result, the educational experiences of Black women and girls at K–12, secondary, and postsecondary levels were of interest. These academic experiences, and how they are understood or perceived, has been impacting career decisions for Black women in counselor education and supervision. Counselor education and supervision is a professional field that emphasizes professional identity development (CACREP, 2021), which made Black women CES doctoral students a desirable population to research. BFT and CHAT were used to assess the academic experiences and career decisions of Black women CES students.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The year 2014 marked the 60th anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ruling, which sought to desegregate schools and make education more equitable (Young et al., 2015). The father of Linda Brown, a young Black girl in the third grade at the time, sued a Kansas school board to enroll his daughter into a white-only school (Mahnken, 2018). In a unanimous decision, the court voted to desegregate schools, allowing Black and white students to, in theory, receive the same education (Mahnken, 2018). The old adage of The American Dream includes economic advancement (Armstrong et al., 2019). Ideally, educational advancement provides pathways away from being poor or oppressed (Merolla & Jackson, 2019). However, this may only be true for some Americans. Presently, schools are actually resegregating (Young et al., 2015), as public school racial diversity peaked in the 1980s and 1990s (Mahnken, 2018). Early academic trends following the decision showed promise (Morris & Perry, 2016), and had the trends remained consistent, racial achievement gaps should have been eradicated by 2010 (Kozlowski, 2015). Instead, the achievement gaps the court ruling hoped to work against still exist, evidenced by discipline rates and curriculum placements (Mahnken, 2018). For Black girls and women, the intersection of being Black and a woman creates educational experiences completely unique from other students (Young, 2020).

The experiences of young Black girls in K–12 settings likely frame their academic futures (McArthur & Lane, 2019; Neal-Jackson, 2020; Zimmermann, 2018). With higher rates of disparities in discipline from peers of other groups (Annamma et al., 2019; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Epstein & Blake, 2017; Gambles, 2020; Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020;

Zimmermann, 2018), teachers expecting less of students of color (Glock & Klapproth, 2017) and implicit biases present in school settings (Chin et al. 2020; Marcucci, 2020; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Starck et al., 2020; Warikoo et al., 2016; Whitford & Emerson, 2019), young Black girls have a nuanced academic experience. These academic experiences, as found in the literature, do impact postsecondary pursuits (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Zimmermann, 2018) and possible career trajectories (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Gambles, 2020).

A breadth of literature exists regarding the realities Black women face during educational pursuits. Consideration of career possibilities may be influenced by relationships with educators and what confidences academic environments encourage or discourage. For young Black teens, race-based identity development is related to mental, educational, and social health (Mims & Williams, 2020). During adolescence, Black girls receive “socialization” messages from Black girls have been found to have high rates of self-worth (Butler-Barnes et al., 2019). Receiving negative messages impacts how Black girls navigate their racial identity (Butler-Barnes et al., 2019). Being grounded in one’s racial identity is more prevalent when Black girls are in less diverse schools, and has also been related to increased instances of racial discrimination in school settings (Butler-Barnes et al., 2019). These preliminary experiences may set the stage for what these students believe about themselves, which impacts their career decisions and trajectory.

As postsecondary students, Black women experience biased interactions with educators (Baker & Moore, 2015; Shavers & Moore, 2019), a lack of mentorship relationships (Mingo, 2015; Robinson, 2018), feelings of tokenism and isolation (Hudson, 2020; Ota-Malloy, 2019), and microaggressions (Haynes et al., 2016; Lewis et al., 2016; Neal-Jackson, 2020). For those

who do choose to become professors, many of the same issues of feeling isolated and marginalized are still prevalent (Edwards & Ross, 2018; Phelps-Ward et al., 2018). Although research has outlined these experiences and alludes to possible ways to mitigate them, these realities may discourage Black women students from becoming professors themselves (Jaeger et al., 2017). Although the numbers of minority students in higher education are increasing, those of minority faculty are static or declining (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017), falling victim to underrepresentation (Abdul-Raheem, 2016; Louis et al., 2016; Wilder et al., 2015).

As Black women are increasingly pursuing advanced degrees, the number of Black women professors is not reflective of this academic progress/degree attainment. For counselor education doctoral students specifically, diversity and multicultural competence are of importance in the broader field (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014). However, this diversity is not represented within institutions and doctoral programs themselves. Thus, exploring the experiences of Black women counselor education doctoral students, and what impacts their choice to pursue professorship was critically important. This study aimed to uncover the academic experiences of Black women counselor education doctoral students and what contributed to their career decisions.

Theoretical Lens

Black women may not be thought of as traditional students in higher education. As higher learning was originally reserved for white men, traditional methods of assessing the academic realities and career decisions of Black women may be ineffective. As career decisions were of interest, assessing what contributes to career decisions was essential. Imperative to this study was considering how Black feminine identity impacts how academic experiences were perceived

and how career decisions were impacted as a result. Using both career human agency theory (CHAT) and Black feminist thought (BFT) served to uncover the nuances of identity influencing experiences and the conceptualization of career decisions.

BFT

BFT served to consider both the individual nuances in stories shared by participants and the collective themes drawn from these recollections (Collins, 1989). Black feminist ideals enable the criticism of society while considering the stances of Black young girls and women (Collins, 1989; Evans-Winters, 2017). The concepts that differentiate BFT from other ideologies include individual wisdom impacting person-specific responses to themes present for the collective group, links between what Black women collectively encounter, the offerings and diversities of Black women intellectuals, and advancing toward social justice (Collins, 1989). Patterson et al. (2016) contested that BFT emphasizes racial and gender identities are not separate from one another for Black women, and the combination of these perspectives impact how reality is constructed and how that informs interactions with society.

Collins (1989) believed recentering the perspectives of Black women means uncovering, understanding, and processing of the ideas of subsets of this marginalized collective group (Collins, 1989). When using Black feminist methodology, Black women realities are key in conceptualizing the way Black women fight against oppressive forces every day (Patterson et al., 2016). BFT does not assume that the life events of every Black woman are exactly the same, or that they are interpreted with the same perspective (Collins, 1989). In an effort to both empower Black women voices and illuminate their experiences, BFT allows for experiences to be shared, achievements to be acknowledged, and voices to be amplified (Patterson et al., 2016).

Self-definition for Black women allows for the rejection of the belief that people holding more power can define and determine their realities (Collins, 1986). As such, BFT helped reveal the perspectives and academic experiences of Black women as they navigated educational settings.

BFT offers Black women the opportunities to be seen as human, feel emboldened in their feminine identities, and love themselves without apology (Patterson et al., 2016). As a methodology, BFT acknowledges the “living, surviving, and thriving within multiple forms of oppression” (Patterson et al., 2016, p. 58). BFT methodology works against conventional beliefs of the existence of a “single, discoverable, absolute truth” (Patterson et al., 2016, p. 59), a distance between researchers and those being studied, and sharing research findings in the interest of personal gain instead of with populations the findings can help. Black feminist methodology allows Black women to give voice to and validate their experiences, with narratives both becoming data and instilling a sense of community (Patterson et al., 2016).

Researchers employing Black feminist methods are intentional about highlighting various “truths” (Patterson et al., 2016, p. 60), making space for defining one self, encouraging one self, and realizing the significance of realities. In a research synthesis of the literature centering Black women in postsecondary education, Haynes et al. (2020) analyzed how BFT was used. BFT was used most often and addressed the topics of Black women as faculty and how they maneuver in academia, gendered and racial stereotypes, and how intersectionality encourages perseverance in unsafe academic settings (Haynes et al., 2020). An additional theory, CHAT (Chen & Hong, 2020b) was used to encourage being agentic when facing difficulties (Chen & Hong, 2020a) and to better understand the career decisions of Black women counselor education doctoral students.

CHAT

As a sweeping concept, human agency has been considered by many schools of thought (Chen & Hong, 2020a). Bandura (2006) believed human beings are “self-organizing, proactive, self-regulating, and self-reflecting” (p. 164). As such, people are not passive participants, but active agents who contribute to their outcomes (Bandura, 2006). For Bandura, CHAT (Chen & Hong, 2020b) may offer insight into what influences career decisions. For Bandura, the four constructs of agency include being intentional (i.e., approaching goals strategically), being future focused (i.e., visualizing and anticipating outcomes), being reactive (i.e., considering actionable steps and how to actualize them), and being reflective (i.e., being aware of beliefs and steps taken toward goal achievement). An understanding of how agency impacted career decisions in Black women counselor education doctoral students was especially of interest. For the purposes of this study, the implementation of CHAT components were based on the interpretation of the researcher. Considering the intersectional identities of participants, and their potential experiences and career decision making practices as a result, the components of CHAT specific to this study were developed to best serve and sustain the study population.

The four components of agency as defined by Chen and Hong (2020b) that were assessed in relation to Black women in counselor education programs are career intentionality, career forethought, career reactivity, and career self-reflectiveness. Career intentionality acknowledges career interests can change over time, and career forethought involves shifting from career planning to purposeful actions (Chen & Hong, 2020b). Career reactivity refers to maintaining control of the emotions that weigh one’s experiences, in the hopes of regaining confidence in oneself or recognizing new paths or assets at their disposal, and career self-reflectiveness is

considering execution and capabilities, as well as environmental factors, that might detract from achievement (Chen & Hong, 2020a).

According to Chen and Hong (2020a), CHAT assists with offering a broader variety of possibilities in creating a self-determined, satisfying life. Personal agency is cultivated by aiding the development of capabilities and skills, and encouraging how people perceive their own levels of efficacy (Chen & Hong, 2020b). Assisting students with cultivating their capabilities and ability to self-regulate may improve efficacy (Chen & Hong, 2020a). This can be established via a therapeutic alliance, scaffolding as people recall events and consider broader avenues, and incorporating creative ways to express agency (Chen & Hong, 2020a). CHAT can be used to create actionable future plans, and pinpoint and fight against systems of oppression (Chen & Hong, 2020a). For the purposes of this study, participants described their career decisions and analyzed which academic experiences impacted their career decisions and in what ways. CHAT is both postmodern and constructivist (Chen & Hong, 2020b). Although the goal of postmodern research is to highlight numerous perspectives and notions of what is true, constructivism creates knowledge via conversation, engagement, and application (Tracy, 2013). As such, CHAT aided in both recounting past experiences and considering future career possibilities.

As a meta-theory, CHAT incorporates elements of prior theoretical basis (Chen & Hong, 2020a). Proposed advantages of a meta-theory include advancing theory, heightening availability of theory for practitioners and the general public, to discover new ideas and beliefs, and to extend theory integration with the career and psychological fields (Chen, 2015). As a relatively new theory, CHAT extends human agency by Bandura (2006) and career theory (Chen & Hong, 2020a, 2020b).

Combining BFT and CHAT

Although BFT can serve to determine both elements specific to individuals and themes present within groups that are specific to being a Black woman (Collins, 1989), CHAT could hone in on individual agentic actions and reflections that impact career decisions.

Postmodernism allows for the analysis of difficulties Black women encounter in educational contexts, allowing for dominant narratives, and dominant and oppressive forces, to be challenged (Collins, 2000). As the comprehensive goal of BFT is fighting against oppressive thoughts and actions, BFT will always be an appropriate rebuttal to how Black women are oppressed via the intersections of their identities (Collins, 1989). Though certain themes may be found true for Black women as a whole, individually, responses to these themes will vary (Collins, 1989). Instead of group themes, CHAT highlights a collaborative comprehension of the ways one sees and engages with society, and encourages people to make meaning of their realities (Chen & Hong, 2020a). Goals of CHAT include increasing self-understanding, adjustability, and agentic capabilities in relation to personhood and professional pursuits (Chen & Hong, 2020a). Further, BFT seeks not only to understand the realities of Black women, but also to improve them (Collins, 1989). The merging of BFT and CHAT is conceptualized in five guiding tenets for this current investigation into the experiences of Black women counselor education and supervision (CES) doctoral students and their career decisions. The five guiding tenets include:

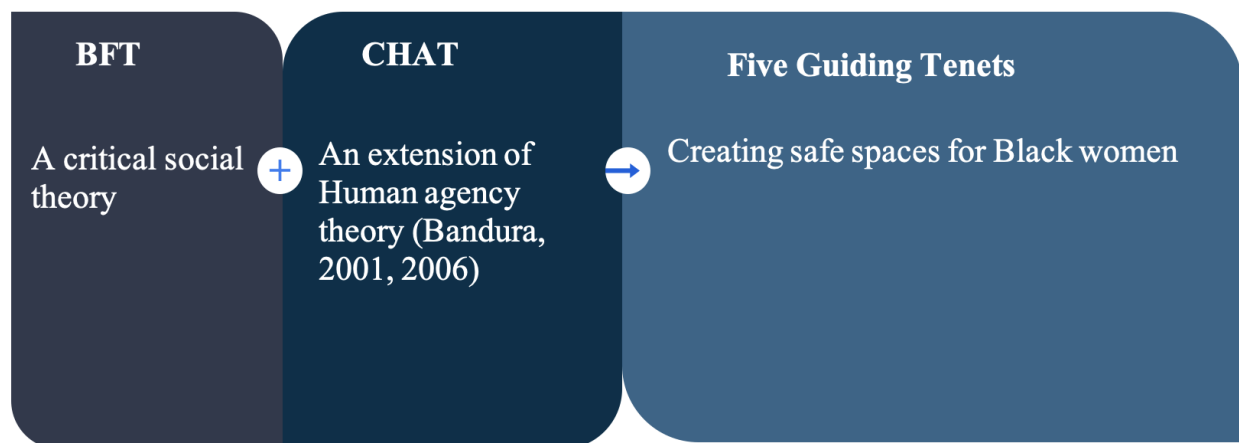
1. Creating safe spaces for Black women to challenge dominant and oppressive career decision narratives.
2. Exploring the role of intersectionality in career decision making.

3. Engaging with history, intersectionality, and self-understanding as it relates to career decision making.
4. Centering individual and collective realities and voices of Black Women in the United States and in systems of education.
5. Challenging dominant oppressive narratives about career decisions (e.g., choosing careers alternative to academia meaning a career choice is less than).

The merging of these concepts helped identify how academic experiences impact the professorial pursuits of Black woman counselor education doctoral students and pinpointed which experiences have impacted career decision making, as outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Combining BFT and CHAT



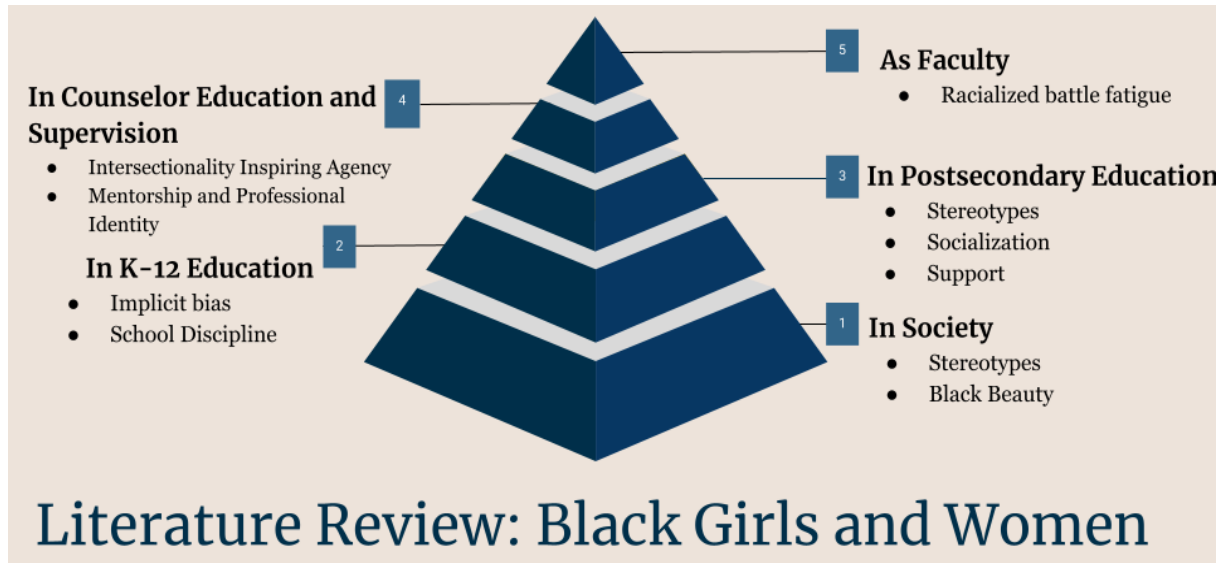
Note. The merging of BFT and CHAT as a theoretical framework.

Black Women in Society

Before reviewing the experiences of Black women and girls in education, it is important to acknowledge the beliefs about them that may be present in classrooms before they even arrive. Understanding how Black women are perceived in society is important when considering how Black girls and women are also perceived in schools. In a continuation of experiences endured in educational environments, Black women are compared to white women in terms of appearance, actions taken, and interactions with others. Although the breadth of the many topics related to Black women in society are not discussed in this dissertation, stereotypical beliefs, concepts of Black beauty, and colorism are discussed. These societal factors impact educational experiences in turn, with K–12 experiences including implicit bias and overrepresentation in discipline data, and postsecondary pursuits including intersectionality, stereotypes, mentorship, and other sources of support. It is important to highlight these experiences as the culmination of them contributes to career decisions. The intersectionality of being Black and woman impacts how Black women are seen in society and in school. These experiences are outlined in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Literature Review: Blacks Girls and Women



Note. The common experiences of Black girls and women in society and school settings.

Intersectionality

For the purposes of this study, intersectionality is the consideration of how both race and sex define the Black feminine experience (Crenshaw, 1991). Crenshaw (1991) believed both the racial and gender identities were often not considered when acknowledging the realities of women of color. Without considering where identities intersect, the lived experiences of Black women cannot be fully conceptualized or understood (Crenshaw, 1991). Crenshaw also believed intersectionality applies to the ways inequalities influence and aggravate one another (Steinmetz, 2020). It is important to consider how inequality is perpetuated via societal systems, and who is harmed or helped in the process (Steinmetz, 2020). Grounded in Black feminist ideals,

intersectionality acknowledges that the realities of Black women and girls highlight a specific conceptualization of their relationship to sexist, classist, and racist oppression (Haynes et al., 2020).

As both race (McGee et al., 2016) and gender are social constructs (Eigenberg & Park, 2016), it is important to define these concepts for the purposes of this study. The term Black refers to those who are descendants of Africa, and often identify as Black and/or African American (American Psychological Association, 2019). Black will be capitalized throughout this paper, as the terms “Black” or “African Americans” refer to a particular group of people, and the term “white” will not be capitalized (Crenshaw, 1991). Gender identity references how a person perceives themselves as man, a woman, neither of those identities, or these identities in tandem (Palmer & Clegg, 2020). As such, women will be defined as those who identify as women, including those “whose gender identity may differ from the sex recorded at birth (gender nonconforming, transgender, transsexual, trans, gender nonbinary, gender incongruent, and genderqueer)” (Palmer & Clegg, 2020, p. 2236). Self-identifying as both Black and woman is important, as the realities of these intersections are often left out of the literature. Using quantitative content analysis to analyze literature centered on Black girls and women, and published between 2000 and 2015 in reputable education journals, Young (2020) found, outside of multicultural or urban education journals, Black women and girls comprised only 1% of the literature. According to Patton et al. (2016), between the years of 1991 and 2012, just 48 publications concerning the realities of Black women in higher education were published in respected higher education and psychological science journals. The realities of learners or

educators that identify as both Black and woman need to be examined and shared with the greater public.

As education systems contain various levels of systemic barriers, it is important to understand oppression as it relates to multiple identities students hold within these settings (Chan et al., 2018). In counselor education, intersectionality can be used to acknowledge and address the inequities students face (Chan et al., 2018). Intersectionality and feminist ideologies can be used to create counternarratives that fight against oppression and master narratives (Chan et al., 2018). Walkington (2017) called researchers to study the intersections of salient identities, including race and gender, for Black women in educational institutions. Intersectionality present in educational experiences might offer insights into the experiences of Black women graduate scholars, and their career decisions as a result (Walkington, 2017). Intersectionality, and how Black women are perceived by others, should also be considered in how Black women and girls engage with the world, and how educational systems engage with them as a result. Impacting Black girls and women during their academic pursuits are social issues such as stereotypes, Black beauty, hair, and colorism.

Stereotypes

How Black women are perceived by society, in terms of personality traits and outward appearance, impacts how educational and professional environments are experienced. Stereotypical beliefs related to attitudes, ability to endure trauma, and independence are especially of interest. Incorrect beliefs about Black women as a collective are impacting Black women individually, including their academic experiences and career choices.

Stereotypes are defined as incorrect perceptions about populations of people (Jussim et al., 2015). They impact quick decision making (Harrits, 2019) and apply to racial, gendered, populations, and circumstances (Bordalo et al., 2016). Many ideals and stereotypes can be traced back to slavery, and the actions of and beliefs held by slave owners (Essien & Wood, 2021). A stereotype used, and present in academic settings, is that of Black learners being intellectually inferior (Craemer & Orey, 2017). This type of detrimental stereotype could potentially cause a stereotype threat, which is defined as being aware of a negative stereotype related to one's salient identities (Gates & Steele, 2009). The possibility, or threat, of being associated with an unwanted stereotype, can impact how Black women perform academically (Steele, 1997). Awareness of negative stereotypes present in a particular profession may impact career decision making (Schuster & Martiny, 2017).

Another facet of the stereotype spectrum is the strong Black woman (SBW) stereotype, which was provided as a reasoning for Black enslavement and mistreatment (Jerald et al., 2017). The SBW stereotype has been extremely detrimental to Black women, as shown in a research study by Watson and Hunter (2016) that examined if 13 Black women between ages 18 and 65 could perceive the SBW stereotype holistically instead of as a strictly negative stereotype. A critical-realist paradigm and qualitative interviews revealed the three following tensions of SBW themes: (a) being psychologically durable yet not engaging in behaviors that preserve psychological durability (i.e., not sharing emotions or practicing self-care), (b) being equal yet remaining oppressed (i.e., wanting to be viewed as well-functioning members of society while battling difficulties and feeling inferior), and (c) being feminine yet rejecting traditional feminine norms (i.e., supporting others while not receiving help themselves; Watson & Hunter, 2016).

This stereotype is detrimental to Black women because they are grappling with dealing with stressors and may not be seeking help, are bombarded with destructive messages related to their racial identities, and being effeminate while enduring stressors (Watson & Hunter, 2016). This relates to education because Black girls and women are either not receiving or not taking advantage of resources to support their academic endeavors (Watson & Hunter, 2015; Watson-Singleton, 2017), feeling unwelcome in the learning environment (Hudson, 2020; Mingo, 2015), and not offered support as often as students of other identities (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2017; McCoy, 2018).

Stereotypes held about Black women reinforce oversimplifications of Black women as a collective (Jerald et al., 2017) and seat the white majority as the pinnacle to aim for while demoralizing the realities of others (Neal-Jackson, 2020). For Black women, definitions of femininity are dependent upon both popular U.S. culture and Black culture (Jerald et al., 2017). Black feminine narratives are particular to how Black women are regarded in mainstream culture (Jerald et al., 2017). Normative gender ideals provide a framework for the responsibilities, personal dispositions, and actions that are presumed standards for gendered identities (Jerald et al., 2017). Black girls not meeting standards of white femininity in schools is related to both implicit bias (Halberstadt et al., 2020; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015) and disproportionate discipline rates (Gambles, 2020; Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020), which is discussed further later in the chapter. Also of importance is Black feminine appearance and its impact on experiences.

Black Beauty

According to Awad et al. (2015), for Black women, conceptions of beauty “can only truly be understood within a framework of interlocking systems of ‘isms’” (p. 541), including the concepts of race, sex, class, and sexual orientation. In a study by Awad et al., 31 Black women, both undergraduate and graduate students, assessed their beliefs and concepts about beauty standards. Participant perceptions of beauty seemed to be greatly influenced by family members, who emphasized a relationship between outward presentation and opportunities for success (Awad et al., 2015). Fulfilling or fighting against these beauty ideals is an unfortunate reality for Black women, with people deeming them more “political” (Awad et al., 2015, p. 549) or more personable based on the tone of their skin and style of their hair. The widely accepted beauty standards of whiteness, “white skin, blue eyes, and straight, long, blonde hair” (Awad et al., 2015, p. 541), do impact how people who do not have these characteristics maneuver through society and the educational system. Accepted standards of beauty may impact how Black women are perceived, possibly in professional (Dawson et al., 2019; Dickens & Chavez, 2018) and educational settings (Essien & Wood, 2021; O’Brien-Richardson, 2019). These standards might influence the professional settings a Black woman chooses to enter herself, or is welcomed into by others (Dawson et al., 2019; Garrin & Marcketti, 2018). Of particular interest is how stereotypes surrounding hair and colorism impact the academic experiences and career decisions of Black women.

Hair

Following slavery, a straighter hair texture was connected to higher social status (Dawson et al., 2019). In the 1960s, Black people made less efforts to satisfy white standards of beauty

with many choosing to wear their hair in its natural state, whether as an afro or braids, which many identified as being fulfilling and freeing (Dawson et al., 2019; Essien & Wood, 2021). Though caring for and styling Black hair can serve as a source of pride, stereotypes of how Black hair is worn can be detrimental to Black women socially and professionally. For example, a research study of 31 Black women found that “ignorance/racial microaggressions” were a common thread for participants with regard to questions and comments about their hair (Awad et al., 2015; Mbilishaka & Apugo, 2020). Fulfilling or fighting against these beauty ideals is an unfortunate reality for Black women, with people deeming them more “political” (Awad et al., 2015, p. 549) or more personable based on the tone of their skin and style of their hair.

In a study of perceptions of natural hair in professional settings, Dawson et al. (2019) collected online data of perceptions of natural hair via Google searches that yielded five websites with a minimum of 20 comments regarding natural hair. Using grounded theory, and open and axial coding, three themes were revealed: (a) hair bias (i.e., natural hairstyles deviating from norms, viewed as unprofessional; wearers of natural hair were surprised by responses to their chosen styles, including being stereotyped as angry), (b) identity (i.e., personal and social identity, and identity transition: feeling confident in oneself and self-expression through hairstyles, moving toward loving oneself exactly as they are), and (c) conformity (i.e., frustrations about needing to fit white beauty standards; trading self-confidence for the possibilities of increased success found in conforming; Dawson et al., 2019). Ultimately, for Black women, hairstyle choice can impact professional experiences (Dawson et al., 2019).

In the popular media, CNN Business reported that, for Black women, different hairstyles like “curly afros, twists, or braids” (Guy, 2020, p. 1) decreased the likelihood of landing a job

interview. White “beauty standards” (Guy, 2020, p. 2) align with professional standards as well, leaving Black women who enter spaces as themselves to receive discrimination because of their appearance. Researchers have emphasized the need for laws protecting Black women who wear natural hairstyles (Mbilishaka et al., 2020). This type of discrimination driven by Black hair stereotypes is detrimental to Black women, and in general to the culture and climate of a workplace (Chancellor, 2019); because of this and the advocacy of many groups, there is a movement to ban discriminatory practices based on hair (Donahoo & Smith, 2019; Guzman & Hamedy, 2020). Thus far, four U.S. states have “banned” discriminatory practices on the basis of hair via the Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair Act (CROWN Act, 2019; Donahoo & Smith, 2019).

Colorism

The complexities of complexion, and hierarchies related to skin color, are an unfortunate remnant of white supremacist ideals (Keith & Monroe, 2016) and can be traced back to slavery (McGee et al., 2016). Colorism is the notion that regard lighter skin complexions as more advantageous in receiving certain privileges (McGee et al., 2016). These privileges can perpetuate white supremacy (Keith & Monroe, 2016) and systemic oppression (McGee et al., 2016). Classifying people by race included classifying white people as those in control of society (McGee et al., 2016). Being white and privileged meant white people and families were viewed as superior (McGee et al., 2016). As such, so were lighter skinned slaves, who were products of Black women slaves being raped by white men (McGee et al., 2016). As owners of slaves offered different opportunities to the slaves of lighter complexions, including working inside the homes of slave masters instead of completing fieldwork, class rankings based on skin tone were

introduced (McGee et al., 2016). Being lighter was viewed as being better, causing discord among those of the same race (Keith & Monroe, 2016). In some instances, light and dark Black people were even encouraged to be enemies (McGee et al., 2016).

Those of darker complexions may be victims of stigmatization solely for the color of their skin (McGee et al., 2016). The consequences of colorism can be seen in various realms, including placement for academic courses, holding leadership roles, and being recommended for advancement opportunities by educators (Keith & Monroe, 2016). Awad et al. (2015) found participants believed colorist ideals were present in “both Black and White contexts” (p. 550); their skin color, and how people perceived or reacted to them because of this, determined their engagement with others. Participants acknowledged navigating a society that is more accepting of and welcoming to people of a light complexion, and that this physical feature may allow easier “access to certain social resources” and “acceptance” (Awad et al., 2015, p. 556) in both Black and white groups. Colorism can affect academic realities as well, though its impact has not been thoroughly researched (Keith & Monroe, 2016; McGee et al., 2016). Understanding colorism may help educators champion the importance of encouraging minority students to work against harmful messaging, and create safe spaces for the cultivation and discovery of constructive racial and scholarly identity formation (McGee et al., 2016).

Using data from the first and second waves of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Harris et al., 2009), Blake et al. (2016) analyzed how colorism factors into the disciplining of Black girls in relation to their white counterparts. Blake et al. found being suspended the previous school year and having contentious relationships with teachers to be indicators of being suspended from school in young girls. Additionally, skin

complexion was also a factor in being suspended, with Black girls of the darkest skin tones being the most likely to be suspended in relation to their White female peers (Blake et al., 2016). Black girls are also criminalized for acts that are not deemed illegal by school policy, including sleeping, self-advocacy, and donning natural hair styles (Mbilishaka & Apugo, 2020; Morris & Perry, 2016). When Black girls behave in ways that oppose biased standards of femininity, they are likely to be mistreated or misunderstood. Though youth may be unaware of the role history plays in how society receives them, they are able to pinpoint disparities between light and dark skin tones and societal treatment (McGee et al., 2016). These differences in treatment may include those of lighter skin tones being favored over their darker-skinned peers, including in academic contexts (McGee et al., 2016). Although darker complected adolescents gain awareness of their image in relation to society, academic encounters may be sullied by systematically biased encounters (McGee et al., 2016). Creating a constructive scholarly identity can occur in tandem with fighting against narratives of dark skin being devalued (McGee et al., 2016).

In summary, how teachers conceptualize Black girls and women may be influenced by stereotypical beliefs (Craemer & Orey, 2017), hair styles (Dawson et al., 2019), skin color (McGee et al., 2016), and are reflected in the interactions of Black learners. The academic experiences of young Black girls, their engagement with their teachers, and how their behaviors are interpreted, are impacted by stereotypes and societal standards that their racial and gender identities do not match or meet. It is important to consider the realities of Black women in society, as these interactions may also shape school experiences.

School Experiences: K–12

When Black girls behave in ways that oppose biased standards of femininity, they are likely to be mistreated or misunderstood (Evans-Winters, 2017; Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020). The intersectionalities of race and gender can negatively influence how teachers perceive Black girl students during K–12. The engagement Black students have with teachers in their introduction to formal schooling may be indicative of their relationships with educational institutions throughout their educational histories (St. Amour, 2020). As the factors that impact educational experiences are endless, the themes of educator relationships, implicit biases and their impact, and the discipline practices were chosen to explore as they were present across educational levels for Black girls and women.

Black Girls' Experiences of K–12

Dominant narratives, as perpetuated by educators and school administration, may be a part of the everyday experiences of young Black girls (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). What teachers expect of students may be related to what students believe about themselves, as how teachers perceive students negatively or positively impacts their instructional conditions (Williams et al., 2018). Black students may be more aware of the implicit biases at play than the teachers who serve them, as students can become aware of racial tension in an academic environment as early as primary schooling (St. Mary et al., 2018). Students as young as fourth through eighth grade can be conscious of power hierarchies present based on racial and ethnic backgrounds, and aware of how this treatment impacts their educational experiences (St. Mary et al., 2018), with this awareness also present in later schooling. In a mixed-method study of over 2,000 middle and high school-aged young women and their parents, and over 600 middle and

high school teachers, more than 33% confirmed minority students receiving bias and unfair treatment (Jacobs, 2020). As educator beliefs may mark the beginnings of students' academic histories, implicit bias from those educators (Glock & Kapproth, 2017; Morris & Perry, 2016; Zimmermann, 2018), and being overrepresented in discipline data (Annamma et al., 2019; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Gibson & Decker, 2019; Hassan & Carter, 2021) may also be impacting the academic and career trajectories of young Black girls.

Implicit Bias

Though Black students often find better success with teachers of the same race (Redding, 2019), almost 80% of public school educators are white (Quinn & Stewart, 2019) women (NCES, 2020). Implicit bias is the presence of cognitive relationships based on racial, gendered, and additional identities that might result in unconscious differential treatment (Payne et al., 2017). Teacher biases toward students, and student awareness of these biases, have both been studied throughout the K–12 level. Zimmermann (2018) used two waves of data from Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 2010–2011: 2011, a sample of nearly 15,000 K–12 students across the United States, to examine students who identified as minority and as white student–teacher relationships. Results found that biases grounded in race might impact how teachers interact with Black students, and there may be differences between genders (Zimmermann, 2018). Though teachers can perceive girls as having less discipline issues, this may not apply to young Black girls (Zimmermann, 2018). Considering both race and gender is important in breaking down the numerous disparities present in teaching and learning (Young, 2020; Zimmermann, 2018); this intersectionality is a potential factor in the racial and gendered disparities in discipline rates (Zimmermann, 2018). The findings from the Zimmermann (2018)

study are similar to a study examining elementary ($n = 82$) and secondary school ($n = 82$) teachers implicit and explicit biases (Glock & Kapproth, 2017). Using the Implicit Association Test (Greenwald et al., 1998) and Hachfeld et al. (2012) questionnaires revealed elementary and secondary educators showed increased implicit bias toward young minority girls, and secondary school teachers had more multicultural competence but even lower positive associations with young girls of color (Glock & Klapproth, 2017). Similar to the Zimmermann (2018) study limitation, researchers believed viewing behaviors present in the classroom might have been helpful (Glock & Kapproth, 2017).

Teachers' adverse perceptions of students, although they are likely not objective, may result in increased rates of student retention, special education placements, and disciplinary infractions (Mattison et al., 2017). Okonofua and Eberhardt (2015) used two controlled experiments to explore how student race influences how teachers respond to misbehaving in class. In Experiment 1, 57 women educators of grades kindergarten through 12 were recruited from school district websites across the United States and viewed both photos and student records listing two incidents of misbehaving (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). Participants were asked to assess the infractions listed on student records containing either stereotypically Black or stereotypically white names, and the likelihood that they would rate the student as a troublemaker (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). Even though all infractions were minor, teachers believed discipline should be more extreme after the second infraction committed by a Black student, were likely to perceive infractions as patterns of behavior for Black students, and more likely to view Black students as troublemakers (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). In Experiment 2, there were 191 participant teachers, and researchers assessed perceptions of student infractions

further, asking whether participants anticipated having to eventually suspend the student (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). Results found that teachers were more likely to view behaviors of Black students as a pattern of bad behavior likely leading to suspension. The results of this study highlighted that disparities in disciplinary action can occur in instances when Black and white students behave similarly (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). Though the sample of teachers was racially diverse, limited variation across racial groups did not allow for significant comparisons between racial groups (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015).

Similarly biased beliefs were found by Halberstadt et al. (2020), specifically in regard to young Black girls. In an effort to uncover biases of 178 future teachers, Halberstadt et al. (2020) assessed the emotional intelligence of both Black and white children, specifically in relation to anger. Over 70 facial expressions and six varied emotions were assessed, with expressions varying in levels of intensity (Halberstadt et al., 2020). Participants were mostly white (70%) women (80%; Halberstadt et al., 2020). Implicit bias was assessed using a survey based in Project Implicit, and explicit biases were assessed via emotional recognition and implicit association activities, and a survey addressing explicit racism (Halberstadt et al., 2020). Though participants did not exhibit high levels of implicit or explicit bias, Black girls were more incorrectly perceived to be angry than their white peers (Halberstadt et al., 2020). Teachers may be misjudging students as angry based on biases teachers hold, and researchers predict increased levels of bias when teachers have to quickly discern the emotions of their students, meaning Black girls may be more likely to be inaccurately labeled as angry (Halberstadt et al., 2020).

Using both nationally representative data of nearly 40,000 respondents in third through eighth grade from 2008 to 2016, and the Implicit Association Test to uncover implicit biases held

by educators, Chin et al. (2020) found Black learners are more than 2 times as probable to be suspended than their white peers. However, racial implicit biases do influence racial polarities in academics and school discipline (Chin et al., 2020). Teacher perceptions are important to consider when analyzing how students are disciplined, and which students are the most impacted. These preconceived perceptions of Black students may be related to the relationships with educators, and the disciplinaton and criminalization of young Black girls in educational spaces.

School Discipline and Pushout

School discipline functions to lessen the degree of student disturbances in the academic setting (Roch & Edwards, 2017). Policies addressing school discipline can also serve to decrease the possibility of violent occurrences, while increasing the sense of structure and welfare of those in the school building (Irby, 2018). Black students are more likely than other groups to endure negative repercussions due to being disciplined at school (Mahnken, 2018). Though researchers believe the disciplinaton of Black boys is often more of a focus than that of Black girls (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Neal-Jackson, 2020; Young, 2020), Black girls are doubly victim to both racism and sexism in their discipline disparities (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020); yet, overlooked in relation to their peers (Annamma et al., 2019; Gibson & Decker, 2019; Hassan & Carter, 2021). In K–12 settings, there are often stricter behavior standards for Black girls than other students, which may factor into disproportionate discipline rates (Gambles, 2020). When it comes to discipline infractions, Black students may not be given the benefit of the doubt in the same ways as their peers of other races. This may be especially true for young Black girls. School discipline practices impact the racial and gendered identities of Black girls, and

perpetuates standards of white femininity (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020). Epstein and Blake (2017) found adults believe Black girls need to be encouraged, consoled, and made to feel safe less than their white peers, likely as a result of not being perceived as guiltless, or believing the decisions of Black youth are pernicious instead of precocious. Though increased attention is being paid to how minority students navigate tense academic environments, and how young women act against sexism within their schools, additional attention is necessary to understand the resistance and coping of young minority women (Evans-Winters, 2017). Differences in how race and gender factor into punitive measures and are exemplified in how young Black girls are disproportionately disciplined in K–12 settings.

In an effort to add to the scant literature on the topic, Annamma et al. (2019) conducted mixed-methods research to assess the discipline practices of a Colorado school district that worked to reform their discipline practices after students, parents, and stakeholders complained of the racial disparities of the discipline practices (Annamma et al., 2019). Critical race theory and critical race feminism were used to analyze the data quantitatively and highlight the racial discipline disparities, and descriptive data analyzed discipline and critical discourse analysis to uncover the subjectivity or objectivity present in discipline and how infractions compare to stereotypical narratives about Black girls (Annamma et al., 2019). When young Black girls were disciplined for the same behaviors as their peers of other races, the punishment was more severe (Annamma et al., 2019). Black girls had an increased likelihood of being disciplined for subjective occurrences, like being disobedient or defiant, dependent upon the perspective of the school staff (Annamma et al., 2019). As the Annamma et al. (2019) study was correlational, the causes of these disciplinary relationships between students and staff were unclear. Study

limitations included needing greater insight into how students perceive the disciplinary practices active in school settings (Annamma et al., 2019). Researchers encourage future qualitative studies that further explore the Black girl educational experience, counternarratives, and positionalities of these students (Annamma et al., 2019).

Another detrimental facet of school discipline is zero tolerance policies, which allow students to be punished for small or significant acts that take place in school settings (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020), but not the opportunity to exhibit course correction following the act (Hassan & Carter, 2021). These policies stem from a theory of policing that infers minor delinquent acts are evidence of future, more serious criminal occurrences (Morris & Perry, 2016). In the school system, minority students are often at the brunt of the disciplinary reaction to zero tolerance policies with punishment such as out-of-school suspensions or expulsions (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020). This response to minor infractions is detrimental with many educational scholars noting that missing class as a result of discipline is “one of the worst things to happen to a student” (Mahnken, 2018, p. 18), as the disciplinary measures of suspension, expulsion, and arrest can both interrupt students as they learn, and tarnish their student records for the remainder of their academic histories. These exclusionary discipline factors perpetuate the school-to-prison pipeline (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020)—those that remove students from an educational setting (Marcucci, 2020)—are likely contributing to pushout.

Pushout can be defined as the collective rules and perspectives keeping these students unseen, ignored, and oppressed (Morris & Perry, 2016); ultimately, these school rules and regulations inhibit or avert Black girls from successfully finishing school (Hines-Datiri & Carter

Andrews, 2020). Aiming to share the impact discipline has on young Black girls, Crenshaw et al. (2015) reported how discipline and pushout impact minority girls in public schools in Boston and New York. Bostonian Black girls were 11 times as likely to be disciplined than their white counterparts, Black girls in New York were 10 times as likely (Crenshaw et al., 2015). For the 2011–2012 school year, Black girls in New York comprised 90% of suspensions when disaggregated by gender, while white girls were not expelled at all during the same time frame (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Additionally, 63% of girls expelled in Boston were Black, and again, no white girls received the same punishment (Crenshaw et al., 2015). For Black girls in New York, suspensions were 10 times as much as those of white girls and 12 times as much in Boston (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Participants believed zero tolerance policies discourage safe spaces needed for scholarship and from being active learners (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Although school rules must be revisited, spaces for girls to reflect must be provided, and future research should include a framework that focuses not only on the implications of race, but also of gender (Crenshaw et al., 2015). It is possible that actions that result in exclusionary practices stem from unaddressed traumatic experiences endured by Black girls (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris & Perry, 2016). It is these traumas and incidents this study explored.

A major critique of the current literature is that it often does not include qualitative accounts of how discipline impacts Black girls (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020) and should include qualitative accounts of Black girls' primary educational encounters (Zimmermann, 2018). The current research addressing discipline also does not connect with the outcome of these experiences later in life for the students subjected to this type of treatment (Young, 2020). These instances can accumulate in their lifetime, and the impacts of these

disparities may have implications far beyond the K–12 setting (Zimmermann, 2018). The current study took a retroactive look at the experiences of Black women, their discipline experiences in K–12 schooling, and how that has influenced their academic and career trajectories.

School Experiences: Postsecondary

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2019), postsecondary education refers to academic learning for learners who meet the prerequisites for high school graduation. This section covers the experiences of Black students in undergraduate and graduate school programs. From 2000 to 2016, there was a 75% increase in bachelor’s degrees earned by Black students, and a 5% increase in college enrollment for this group (NCES, 2019). Between 2015 and 2016, 64% of women awarded bachelor’s degrees were Black women (NCES, 2019). Graduate degree percentages followed similar trends between 2000 and 2016, with the amount of Black students receiving masters degrees doubling, and doctoral degree rates increasing by 90% (NCES, 2019). Again, between 2015 and 2016 Black women earned 70% of master’s degrees awarded to Black students, and women earned 66% of the doctoral degrees awarded to Black students, respectively. Although the increased educational advancement of Black women is encouraging, literature about experiences endured in programs of study reveal issues that must be addressed (Crumb et al., 2020). Although seminal research concerning minority counselor education experiences does exist (Bradley-Holcomb & McCoy, 2003; Henfield et al., 2017), current research detailing the experiences of Black women in CES programs should be added to the literature.

Black Women’s Counselor Education Doctoral Program Experiences

Counselor education doctoral programs are defined as doctoral programs in counselor education and supervision that include training students in ethics, competence, and professional identity, and prepare students for the teaching profession within a counseling specialty (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2021). Many, not all, of these doctoral programs are guided by the CACREP, which upholds standards for the preparation provided by counseling programs, and the ethical standards outlined by the ACA. There are currently 85 approved CACREP doctoral programs, with approximately 3,000 students matriculating through those programs (CACREP, 2018). According to CACREP and ACA ethical standards, counselor educators within these CES doctoral programs have an ethical responsibility to recruit and retain diverse students and faculty members (ACA, 2014). Though attention to diversity has become more or a priority in counselor education within the past half century (Baggerly et al., 2017), current literature outlines where these programs fall short in supporting Black students (McCoy, 2018). The experiences of Black women enrolled in counselor education doctoral programs may be nuanced based on their gendered and racial identities, and the intersections of these identities.

Intersectional Identities Inspiring Agency

For some Black women CES doctoral students, honoring racial and gendered identities, even in the midst of stereotypes and microaggressions, helps with honing a professional identity. Aimed at adding to the limited literature regarding racial and gender intersectionalities in counselor education and supervision coursework, Hudson (2020) conducted a qualitative phenomenological study to examine the experiences of 13 Black women between 28 and 48

years of age attending predominantly white institutions (PWIs) for counselor education doctoral programs. Results found that participants expressed experiences including realizing the nuances of their doctoral journey in comparison to others', not assimilating to the sometimes racist program culture, increased feelings of isolation, and struggling to navigate the hidden culture of the program (Hudson, 2020). Other participants recounted feeling invisible (Hudson, 2020). Microaggressions experienced included differential treatment based on racial and gendered identities, professors attempting to silence students instead of considering their realities, and having to search for opportunities easily accessible for their white peers (Hudson, 2020). Students were expected to speak for all Black people, an idea that had to be balanced with using one's voice backfiring and fulfilling the angry Black woman stereotype, with one participant feeling faculty incorrectly viewed her as aggressive instead of passionate (Hudson, 2020).

These findings were also present in a study by Mingo (2015), who employed phenomenology, intersectionality, and womansim to uncover how intersectionality influenced program interactions for Black women CES doctoral students. The 10 participants, determined via purposive and snowball sampling, were current students, with most attending traditional, in-person learning formats (Mingo, 2015). Mingo (2015) found participants felt discouraged by white classmates or cohort members when trying to share their thoughts or realities, and diminished by professors who were threatened by their advancement in the program or profession (Mingo, 2015). The Mingo study, along with the research conducted by Hudson (2020), highlighted how intersectional identities impact program experiences. For Black students, awareness of how salient identities differ from other students impact interactions with both peers and professors (Hudson, 2020; Mingo, 2015; Pulliam et al., 2019).

For minority counseling doctoral students attending PWIs, cultural competence is often not addressed in curriculum or implemented by students or professors (Pulliam et al., 2019). Counseling studies at PWIs are often troubling for minority students, as students of color may need different needs addressed than their white counterparts (Pulliam et al., 2019). Graduate students of color have been found to feel discouraged by the absence of diversity in program peers, professors, and pedagogy (Seward, 2019). Pulliam et al. (2019) believed multicultural confidence at PWIs can be improved, including a curriculum that reflects the demands of a diverse student body, and ways to confront bias from White classmates and professors.

Acknowledging being the sole or “one of few” Black students, once again (Hudson, 2020), Black women in CES doctoral felt responsible to represent the Black race (Mingo, 2015). Participants were not only underrepresented in their programs and course curriculum, but noted a lack of Black women faculty as well, with feelings of being an outsider-within referred to feelings not only about programs, but on the campuses of their PWIs (Mingo, 2015). Feeling tokenized, or being underrepresented made participants battle against stereotypes and feel pressured to be seen positively (Mingo, 2015). One participant shared the restlessness of interpreting how students and professors view her, and wondering if her intersectionalities influence her experiences (Mingo, 2015). Of the four themes found, two themes represented participant experiences with microaggressions, one acknowledged the importance or support, and the final highlighted hope in helping future Black women students in CES doctoral programs (Mingo, 2015).

Study limitations included the primary researcher sharing racial, gendered, and educational identities with the participants, being in the same doctoral program as three

participants, and being unable to define whether or how researcher biases may have impacted research or findings, even with bracketing (Mingo, 2015).

In an effort to uncover the experiences of minority students in counselor education doctoral programs, Baker and Moore (2015), used qualitative, narrative methodology, and critical race theory to interview 19 full-time minority doctoral students (15 women, 12 Black/African American). Results showed that participants felt their white counterparts received more information, resources, and courtesy during challenging times (Baker & Moore, 2015). Though faculty support was viewed as pivotal in both choosing to pursue a doctoral degree and during the program, negative engagement with faculty may discourage students from higher education positions (Baker & Moore, 2015).

To better understand the paths women of color take that lead to doctoral studies, researchers aimed to qualitatively “break the silence” (Zeligman et al., 2015, p. 67) by giving voice to five minority women, ages 25 to 36, in higher education. Similar to the findings by Shavers and Moore (2019), participants felt both minority identities of being Black and woman greatly impacted their experiences (Zeligman et al., 2015). Black women in counselor education wanted to normalize the notion of women of color receiving advanced degrees (Zeligman et al., 2015). Even with such negative experiences, Black women doctoral students in CES showed interest in reinforcing Black women doctoral students, with each participant eager to make doctoral navigation better for future Black women scholars. Participants aimed to do this through advocacy, motivating Black women to pursue the doctorate, bringing attention to the issues of underrepresented students and faculty, and conducting research highlighting the impact of mentorship for minority students attending PWIs (Mingo, 2015).

As doctoral programs impact professional identity formation, a sea of unfriendly white faces in institutional spaces may lessen the likelihood of Black women becoming professors (Mingo, 2015). Even though other experiences included feeling the need to prove oneself, feeling invisible, and questioning whether a doctorate was truly necessary, students were able to define oneself for oneself, ultimately inspiring activism, advocacy, and boundary setting (Hudson, 2020). Though participants identified instances when they could have practiced self-advocacy, they were ultimately able to develop their voices, allowing a stronger sense of professional and personal identity (Hudson, 2020). Robinson (2018) found Black women in counselor education fought against stereotypes as a means to educate others and define their own identity within higher education. Using snowball and purposive sampling, Robinson (2018) studied 18 Black, cisgendered women who were working in the field of counselor education for at least 3 continued years (as either full time or adjunct or in faculty roles) and working in desired roles in higher education (Robinson, 2018). Being resilient in higher education was related to negotiating identities (i.e., maintaining professionalism with well-being, self-care, and important relationships), internal drive (i.e., negative experiences minimally impacting goal attainment), and valued identities (i.e., being Black and woman serving as a motivator that participants “self-authored” themselves; Robinson, 2018). Even as Black women CES doctoral students have been found to persevere (Flowers, 2018; Jordan, 2017), access to effective mentorship may greatly impact the career outcomes of these students and other doctoral pursuing Black women (Guess, 2020; Varnado-Johnson, 2018).

Mentorship Molding Professional Identity

Mentoring by faculty can be seen as a supportive factor in program completion (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2017). As their realities are different (McCoy, 2018), counseling students of color may have different program needs than their White classmates (Pulliam et al., 2019). Minority students have been found to want faculty to approach students more often in offering help (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2017). Faculty can show support for students of color by practicing advocacy, objectivity, instilling confidence, and offering counsel (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2017). The literature on cross-racial mentorships in counselor education is scarce (Guess, 2020), even though this type of mentorship is likely considering the amount of Black CES faculty (Harris et al., 2019).

Using transcendental phenomenology, Brown and Grothaus (2019) explored perceptions held by Black students about cross-racial mentorship, or mentorship with White counseling professionals. Most participants were 2nd year ($n = 6$), first generation (70%), working class (70%) women (60%) in their 20s ($n = 7$) attending PWIs in the suburban/Midwest (20%), urban Midwest (20%), and suburban/Southeast (205) regions of the United States (E. M. Brown & Grothaus, 2019). The research team, a Black male primary researcher, two (man and woman) white CES doctoral students, and a white male CES external reviewer found four themes (E. M. Brown & Grothaus, 2019). Most participants noted having both white professors and clinically-based supervisors, three noted a minimum of one white professor, and two noted a minimum of one supervisor (E. M. Brown & Grothaus, 2019). Researchers found that though each participant expressed openness to cross-racial mentorship, overarching themes including trusting and not trusting white mentors, and how cross-racial mentoring could be beneficial (E.

M. Brown & Grothaus, 2019). Each participant confirmed instances of racism in their life and CES program experiences, with half of all participants noting overt racism, both as children and contemporarily (E. M. Brown & Grothaus, 2019). One Black woman participant noted not feeling accepted by Black women counseling professionals (E. M. Brown & Grothaus, 2019), which might be especially discouraging when considering how few Black women faculty there are for same race-gender mentorship (McCoy, 2018).

Both same race-gender, or homophilic, mentor relationships and cross-identity mentorship relationships have been found to influence women doctoral students of color (Squire & McCann, 2018). Mentors of the same race and gender can be sources of inspiration, support, and motivation to persevere (Squire & McCann, 2018). Black professors have been found to positively engage students, with approachability, openness, and compassion helping students feeling seen, validated, and at ease (Neville & Parker, 2017). In a study by Neville and Parker (2017) of student interactions with Black faculty, exposure to Black professors had positive impacts on classroom interactions, as students found them easy to approach and engage. Homophilic mentors also reinforced professional development by encouraging research interests, cultivating safety in research implementation, offering innovative outlooks concerning research, and exemplifying being a professor of color (Squire & McCann, 2018). Squire and McCann (2018) found openness to validating the intersectionalities of women doctoral students of color, and encourage critical theory and research topics, to impact in cross-identity mentorship. Doctoral women of color are not always able to interact with professors in ways authentic to their critical perspectives and research topics, leading them to supports separate from their programs (Squire & McCann, 2018). Being mentored by professors of color can encourage not

only perseverance, but professorial pursuits, as students are able to imagine themselves in the same professional positions (Squire & McCann, 2018).

In summary, in counselor education doctoral programs specifically, themes of microaggressions (Hudson, 2020) and impacts of faculty–student relationships (Baker & Moore, 2015; Hudson, 2020; Robinson, 2018) continue from earlier educational experiences. Though identifying as a minority might have detracted from graduate experiences, this identification may have simultaneously piqued the interest of minority students wanting to make a change in the counseling profession. As microaggressions may permeate their program experience (Baker & Moore, 2015; Haynes et al., 2016; Hudson, 2020; Mingo, 2015; St. Amour, 2020), and considering Black women doctoral students can feel alienated from family, faculty, and peers (Shavers & Moore, 2019; Hudson, 2020), institutions should do more to assess the realities of these students to improve their experiences (Mingo, 2015). Mentorship is important to doctoral program completion for Black women (Mingo, 2015). Other sources of resilience (Robinson, 2018) and support (Baker & Moore, 2015; Hudson, 2020) used by Black women should be prioritized when assessing how academic experiences impact career decisions. Many of these themes are common aspects of the postsecondary experiences of Black women.

Black Women’s Postsecondary Experiences Broadly

To understand Black women’s postsecondary experiences, the following review is broadly covering Black women in different fields outside of counselor education. This review is important as it provides insight into nuances perhaps not identified in the counselor education literature and may also situate common issues found in the counseling education literature within the bigger challenges of academia as a whole and not necessarily program specific issues. Many

of the themes present for Black women during their postsecondary experiences are present at various educational levels. Although college experiences include resilience (Moody & Lewis, 2019), educational “experiences” prior to postsecondary pursuits likely impact how Black women perceive and engage within their campus communities (Commodore et al., 2018; Hannon et al., 2016). Understanding their postsecondary experiences may offer greater insight into career decision making that follows program completion.

Black girls and women are continuously tasked with traversing inequity and oppression not only in their everyday lives, but on their educational campuses (Commodore et al., 2018). The realities of Black women college students can be less prioritized than those of their peers (Commodore et al., 2018). Even with the advancements seen in educational attainment of Black women in college, barriers to their academic success are still evident (Commodore et al., 2018). Many of the campus experiences of Black women at PWIs are impacted by feeling isolated from others (Commodore et al., 2018; Dawn, 2017; Hannon et al., 2016). Although microaggressions might be a common reality in academia, specifically at PWIs, certain microaggressions are specifically related to racial stereotypes (Lewis et al., 2016).

Stereotypes

Black women in college are, at times, adversely impacted by stereotypes. Common stereotypes related to Black women and college attainment include feeling isolated on campus, mentorship deficits, psychological stressors, stereotypes (Commodore et al., 2018). Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2009) defined the SBW schema as emotional and physical resilience, motherly instinct, and supernatural strength against victimization and harsh conditions. There

have been mixed findings on how the SBW stereotype of schema impacts the college experiences of Black women emphasizing the complexities within this schema.

M. K. Jones et al. (2021) examined how Black women college students conceptualized the SBW schema. The majority of participants, 220 Black women college students ages 18 to 48, identified as Christian (78.2%), single (96.4%), and 67.6% were undergraduates (M. K. Jones et al., 2021). Researchers made The SBW survey that featured both open-ended and closed-ended questions (M. K. Jones et al., 2021). Using consensual qualitative research (CQR) methodology, seven themes emerged. The seven themes included: (a) resilient (i.e., able to battle difficulties), (b) independent (i.e., able to achieve without help), (c) hardworking (i.e., goal oriented and dependable), (d) nurturing (i.e., considering others before oneself), (e) gendered-racial pride (i.e., assurance in one's self and race), (f) new wave (i.e., reframing the traditionally negative SBW schema and acknowledging both benefits and drawbacks), and (g) emotionally contained (i.e., not showing emotion or needing emotional encouragement; M. K. Jones et al., 2021). Resilient and hardworking were the most prevalent, with the theme of gendered-racial pride also related to the SBW schema (M. K. Jones et al., 2021). A theme named new wave corresponded to Black women and their agency in changing perspectives of the SBW schema (M. K. Jones et al., 2021). Those who traditionally viewed the schema (i.e., being independent, not expressing emotions, and taking care of others) possibly endure increased stress in comparison to Black women who have revised the schema or reinterpreted strength to include self-care (M. K. Jones et al., 2021). For instance, Shahid et al. (2018) found the Strong Black Woman Cultural Construct (Hamin, 2008) did not mitigate or heighten beliefs about race-based strain or stress levels for Black women college students (Shahid et al., 2018). Though the findings failed to corroborate the SBW

schema and the impact it can have on college experiences for Black women, Shahid et al. (2018) believed the realities of Black women at PWIs deserve more attention. Though Black women being stereotyped as independent and capable of facing hardships may lessen their likelihood of obtaining help (Donovan & West, 2015; Watson & Hunter, 2015; Watson-Singleton, 2017), Black women have found ways to remain persistent in their postsecondary programs (Winkle-Wagner, 2015; Winkle-Wagner et al., 2019).

Socialization. Classroom experiences in postsecondary environments continue to function as unsafe spaces for the intellectual expression of Black women (Commodore et al., 2018; Lewis et al., 2016). Awareness and fear of activating stereotypes often impacts the sense of community within a classroom, and whether or not Black women students contribute to in-class discussions (Commodore et al., 2018). Classroom experiences may impact overall socialization, possibly decreasing coping behaviors such as joining student groups and leading campus social groups (Commodore et al., 2018). Using BFT and a constructivist framework, Lewis et al. (2016) implemented focus groups to uncover how the intersectionalities of being both Black and woman at PWIs impact microaggressions experienced in their everyday lives Black women again shared feeling invisible in educational settings, whether as the result of being belittled or disregarded by their peers (Lewis et al., 2016). Other microaggressions were related to the projection of intersectional stereotypes, including the Jezebel and angry Black women, communication (i.e., being believed to be loud or overly expressive through body movements, like eye- and neck-rolling) and outward appearance (i.e., having curvier bodies or hair not fit for professional settings; Lewis et al., 2016). Participants, both undergraduate and graduate students,

shared that they felt censored and demeaned in their educational, professional, and community settings (Lewis et al., 2016).

Similar findings were present in a study by Neal-Jackson (2020), who found most Black women endured microaggressions during conversations in class and collaborative peer assignments. The Neal-Jackson (2020) study included 30 Black women attending a PWI and sought to understand how stereotype threat impacted campus experiences. Using intersectionality and semistructured interviews, results highlighted that inhibited their inclusion in the learning community and possibilities for achievement. Themes found revealed Black women mainly battled stereotype threat via (a) implicit peer education, (b) explicit peer education, and (c) faculty and administrative leadership engagement. In learning settings, stereotype threat was most often experienced during classroom conversations and group projects (Neal-Jackson, 2020). In response, Black women educated their peers and communicated their concerns to professors and/or administration (Neal-Jackson, 2020). Participants felt classmates were overly critical of their contributions to classroom conversations, and essentially sabotaged them by dismissing their “comments” or passing off the ideas of Black women students as their own (Neal-Jackson, 2020). Professors also participated in making Black women feel invisible, ignoring or belittling their “presence” and perspectives (Neal-Jackson, 2020). Participants believed this treatment was due to stereotypical beliefs that Black women had nothing or merit to add to the conversation (Neal-Jackson, 2020). A lack of support from faculty and the campus caused students to take matters into their own hands, educating peers and professors of their problematic beliefs (Neal-Jackson, 2020). Black women students can take feelings of isolation as fuel for inciting activism (Ota-Malloy, 2019). Though the emotional labor was heavy, participants felt

encouraged in improving circumstances for Black women in and outside of the classroom (Neal-Jackson, 2020). Participants also attacked stereotypes by consciously acting in ways to “disprove” them, or directly addressing the behavior through conversation (Neal-Jackson, 2020). Students interacted with faculty least often to address these microaggressions, possibly as a reaction to feeling professors failed to be sources of support (Neal-Jackson, 2020).

Support

Graduate school can be a source of stress for all students but Black women students especially because of the instances of stereotype threats, microaggressions, and adverse classroom experiences as described in previous sections; which makes support extremely important. Support can vary and include peer support and mentorship.

Peer Support. Peer support is defined as “mutual respect, trust, and teamwork” (Shapiro & Galowitz, 2016, p. 1200). Peer support is found to be beneficial for Black women doctoral students because peer support can be a buffer against biased interactions (Apugo, 2017). In a phenomenological study, Apugo (2017) uncovered the function of peer support for 15 women of Black or African ancestry at PWIs. Students were diverse in both masters programs being studied and U.S. geographic location (Apugo, 2017). Microaggressions were still present in graduate studies (Apugo, 2017). When classroom interactions did not include their thoughts and recommendations being dismissed by both classmates and professors was negative, but peer support allowed Black women to both validate their viewpoints and remain encouraged (Apugo, 2017). These peers may also function as mentors, with support offered ranging from establishing programmatic insights to strengthening professional networks (Apugo, 2017). Of the 15 participants, 13 (86%) credited their program perseverance to peer support (Apugo, 2017).

Mentorship Relationships. Mentorship can be defined as offering feedback, support, and sensible insight into skill development for future professional success (Curtin et al., 2016). In academia, mentorship can help with increased professional satisfaction, dedication, confidence in future success, finding employment, and, eventually, successfully gaining tenure (Dutton et al., 2017). A mentorship relationship involves providing both professional and psychological support (Dutton et al., 2017). Although graduate students can have both encouraging and discouraging mentor relationships with professors (Alexander & Bodenhorn, 2015), mentorship may help Black women persist in their postsecondary pursuits (Apugo, 2017). For universities who truly want to improve the number of Black students in graduate programs, and of Black professors, mentorship should be part of the Black graduate student experience (Moore et al., 2020). As the institutional and systemic structures in place are not offering the appropriate levels of support, Black women are left to fend for themselves, hoping to meet the vague finish line of academic success (Phelps-Ward et al., 2018). Researchers have believed in the importance of assessing how mentorship shapes the career decisions of minority doctoral students (Curtin et al., 2016). Curtin et al. (2016) analyzed how and if three forms of mentoring impact the career decision making of doctoral students at a public, research-focused institution in the Midwest. Of the 848 responses, 37% ($n = 315$) were from women, the majority ($n = 63$ participants) of participants were in the dissertation phases of their programs, 37% ($n = 316$) were not in STEM, and 8% ($n = 105$) identified as minorities (Curtin et al., 2016). Curtin et al. (2016) also specified helpful kinds of mentoring, finding instrumental (i.e., specific insight into resources in their midst and how do practically master competencies related to careers), psychosocial (i.e., offering encouragement through difficulties), and sponsorship (i.e., validating

ways a mentee advances their field, often via indirect advocacy) to be related to graduate student self-efficacy and intention to pursue careers in the academy.

Women in doctoral programs were “less likely” to attest to receiving instrumental support (i.e., helpful advice concerning research practices) and sponsorship (i.e., being advocated for and nominated to others for opportunities; Curtin et al., 2016). In fact, women in doctoral programs were “less likely” to attest to receiving instrumental support (i.e., helpful advice concerning research practices) and sponsorship (i.e., being advocated for and nominated to others for opportunities; Curtin et al., 2016). Minority women participants did report lower interest in faculty pursuits than all other participants, which may be a result of the lower levels of sponsorship and instrumental mentoring they reported receiving (Curtin et al., 2016). Even as beneficial as it is found to be, researchers emphasize mentorship is not a cure all for minority doctoral students (Grant & Ghee, 2015) and should be a feature of various supportive initiatives universities offer this student group (Curtin et al., 2016).

As there is an increased likelihood for mentors to choose mentees of similar identities, fewer Black women faculty often means Black women doctoral students have fewer possibilities to seek same race-gender mentors (Grant & Ghee, 2015). To address a deficiency in the literature, Grant and Ghee (2015) used BFT and autoethnography to explore how doctoral programs prime students for professorship and how experiences prior to tenure-track jobs impact the student–professor trajectory. After analyzing independent and collective experiences, discussions, and comments regarding conference presentations, traditional mentoring (i.e., role modeling, psychosocial support, and professional advice), same race-gender mentoring, and cross race-gender mentoring were all found helpful in doctoral attainment and career

development (Grant & Ghee, 2015). Though researchers do recommend same race-gender mentorship with peers and professors (Donovan & West, 2015), findings by Williams et al. (2018) opposed the idea that same-race mentorship offers an inherent connection between mentor and mentee, as student perceptions and levels of disappointment may be more damaging in these mentor relationships.

To better comprehend how gender and race impact the socialization of Black doctoral students, Williams et al. (2018) used critical race theory to interview students from 13 research-intensive universities representative of the United States. Data analysis included open coding that led to a primary set of codes, reviewing interview transcripts twice, choosing distinct codes, and organizing them into themes (Williams et al., 2018). Same race mentorship can have its own challenges, with students anticipating increased awareness of and sensitivity sometimes leading to disappointments in Black mentors (Williams et al., 2018). Noted mentorship patterns included faculty–student mentorship and additional supports (Williams et al., 2018). Additional sources of support included faculty outside one’s program of study and other students (Williams et al., 2018). Postsecondary schools have a responsibility to address the demands of diverse students and discover how to ignite and sustain “interest” in professorship (Williams et al., 2018). Many participants shared difficulties in establishing genuine relationships with their mentors, even those with commonalities in identity (Williams et al., 2018). This speaks to Black women experiences not being monolithic (Haynes et al., 2020), and the importance of analyzing various individual experiences of what impacts career decision making of Black women doctoral students.

Though a Black woman can graduate from college and gain a job, she may not reach achievements that are comparable to peers of other races or genders (Commodore et al., 2018). As these double-minority identities can essentially not be separated, interactions impact student scholarship (Donovan & West, 2015), the ways Black women are engaged with in academia, and the ways they engage with academic environments in return (Donovan & West, 2015; Phelps-Ward et al., 2018). Black women college students, believed to be independent and capable of facing hardships (Abrams et al., 2019; Nelson et al., 2016), are frequently left to determine their advancement as they navigate unwelcoming and degrading educational environments (Winkle-Wagner, 2015), making navigating higher education more challenging (Commodore et al., 2018; Phelps-Ward et al., 2018). Much of the literature addressing the college experiences of Black women reveals feeling isolated from others as a detractor from their success (Everett & Croom, 2017; Johnson, 2017; Patton et al., 2016; Winkle-Wagner et al., 2019), includes their personal characteristics instead of campus supports, does not address the varied intersectional experiences of Black women (Lewis et al., 2018) and emphasizes perseverance over self-wellness or meaning-making (Winkle-Wagner, 2015). As difficulties faced have long-term effects (Commodore et al., 2018), they may also impact student career decision making. However, Black women may instead use these negative interactions as inspiration to seek out or create their own communities (Luedke, 2017) and educate students and professors of their possible biases against Blackness (Neal-Jackson, 2020). These factors may also contribute to interest in remaining in academia professionally or pursuing alternate career paths. Addressing the whole-student experiences of Black women students is not limited to professional development and should include affirming their self-concepts (Commodore et al.,

2018). Though perseverance in doctoral completion counters negative narratives about Black women (Crumb et al., 2020), as they defy spaces that discourage their visibility (Haynes et al., 2016), it does not indicate the likelihood of becoming a faculty member.

Black Women as Faculty

For decades, the number of Black women in higher education faculty have left much to be desired; according to Pope and Edwards (2016), the U.S. Department of Education (2014) saw no positive change in these numbers, with Black women still accounting for approximately 3% of higher education faculty 5 years later. Between the years of 1991 and 2012, just 48 publications concerning the realities of Black women in higher education made it to “juried higher education related, psychology and behavioral science publications” (Patton et al., 2016, p. 194). Even the hiring of Black women as faculty can be a double-edged sword, as Black women are often viewed as diversity hires instead of distinct individuals extending their intellectual and emotional efforts to their institutions, possibly experiencing “racialised fatigue” (Phelps-Ward et al., 2018, p. 772) when navigating academia with these intersecting double-minority identities. Black faculty members speak of institutions hiring Black professors to address issues with diversity, only to disregard institutional problems with campus climate and professors feeling isolated once they are employed (Flahery, 2020). Addressing these experiences and supporting Black women seem to be where schools fall short. Though this study met Black women in their counselor education doctoral journeys, it sought to determine what narratives have been present throughout their entire educational journeys. Though Black women faculty and their career realities and satisfaction are often considered, the decision making in becoming a Black woman

faculty member is not often explained in the literature. Findings can hopefully offer suggestions for how to improve academic experiences for Black women and girls at every academic level.

In summary, early academic experiences may impact what careers students choose to pursue or believe they can achieve. K–12 experiences can impact how students perceive schooling and learning for the remainder of their academic careers (St. Amour, 2020). Additionally, early academic experiences may impact what careers students choose to pursue or believe they can achieve. Young Black girls receive messages about themselves in their engagement with educators. These messages from and experiences of school settings may be following Black girls and women from one level of education to the next (Davis, 2017), impacting self-confidence, academic successes, and, ultimately, career decisions. Although current literature discusses certain realities of Black girl and women learners, the missing pieces would provide a fuller picture of the experiences impacting career decisions. Historically, against all odds Black women have acquired the tools necessary for freedom and thriving (Phelps-Ward et al., 2018). As master narratives and their perpetuation within academic spaces serve to “devalue Black womanhood” (Haynes et al., 2016, p. 381), Black women should be given the space to share their experiences, and make meaning of how they may be impacting their present, and possibly their future. As previous studies have focused on either Black women doctoral students and their academic experiences across educational levels (Barney-Inniss, 2020; Haynes et al., 2016) or only on their doctoral experiences impacting career decisions (Culver, 2018; T. B. Jones et al., 2015), this study offered a comprehensive understanding of how an entire academic history has impacted career decisions.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Chapter 3 presents the qualitative methods used to assess how the career decisions of Black women have been impacted by their academic histories. The chapter provides a review of qualitative research methodology and the methods used to employ to best answer the research question. Methods of data collection, the sample population, and data analysis are also discussed.

Overview of Research

Black women have had a complicated history existing both within society and the education system. As double minorities when considering both race and sex, the intersectional experiences of Black women in counselor education and supervision (CES) were of particular interest. These individual histories influenced their career decisions and choosing to enter academia as an educator themselves.

Restatement of Research Questions

This study sought to answer two research questions:

RQ1: What are the academic experiences of Black women counselor education doctoral students from kindergarten to present (doctoral program)?

RQ2: How do Black women counselor education doctoral students' academic experiences, from kindergarten to present, influence career decision making?

Methodology

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) is defined as a qualitative research approach used to uncover and understand the realities of those who have experienced a specific phenomenon for better understanding (Alase, 2017). Phenomenology is a trusted and vetted

research methodology that allows deeply descriptive and interpretive understandings of what is being researched and its influence on the lived experiences of research participants (Alase, 2017). IPA was the best fit for the current research study, as it served not only to gain understanding, but also helped to build upon understanding (Alase, 2017). In addition, IPA was useful for the current investigation because it is believed to extend data analysis, as this methodology incorporates many components that encourage richness of data (Alase, 2017). Although simple inductive analysis involves pinpointing themes within the data as they relate to the goals of the researchers, IPA emphasizes how participants have experienced the occurrences of interest, and its influence on those being studied (Alase, 2017). IPA also centers deep understanding of phenomenon using multiple data collection techniques (McGovern, 2017).

Using IPA allows various people with comparable “events/stories” to be able to share their narratives absent of misrepresentation (Alase, 2017). Additionally, IPA involves analyzing and assessing both how the studied phenomenon influenced the realities of those being researched while championing the narratives and voices of research participants (Alase, 2017). This was especially useful in uncovering what Black women have experienced as students at various educational levels, and how these experiences have influenced their career decision making. Although narrative research allows individuals to share their experiences, phenomenology allows for the analysis of experiences people have in common (Creswell, 2007). A goal of this study included honoring the intersectionalities and nuances among participants while also exploring the commonalities of their realities.

Researcher Positionality

It is important to acknowledge my positionality in relation to the study. It is important to acknowledge that my own identities of being both Black and woman influenced my research of those with the same identities (Patterson et al., 2016). Being a Black woman is a salient identity for me. I am Black and I am a woman; I am always both of these identities, and they cannot be separated from one another. This self-awareness informed my doctoral journey in ways different from that of my classmates. I am a Black woman who interviewed other Black women, have experienced each level of education being studied, and am a current counselor education doctoral student. I have my own nuanced academic history, and bring with me my own experiences that have impacted my career narrative and perceptions of how these experiences have shaped my professional interests. As a professional school counselor prior to my doctoral studies, my goals included knowing students holistically, establishing safe spaces for underserved students, and encouraging development both during schooling and following graduation. This study aligned with these missions, aiming to do the same at the postsecondary level for the chosen population.

Numerous intersectional identities and interactions inform the career decisions I will make following program completion. Although being a doctoral student involves very specific, nuanced idiosyncrasies that can be hard to understand if not personally experienced, this has been doubly true for me as a Black woman doctoral student. Sentiments of “all our experiences are the same now” have been uttered by both professors and classmates alike, implying that understanding and empathy can be expected as we experience these things together. Although likely spoken in the hopes of helping us all feel a bit more connected, this only heightened my feelings of erasure and isolation. Though well intentioned, my cohort members have never been

mistaken for the only other Black woman in the office or had their natural hair called “poofy” by a supervisor. They have not felt the absence of never receiving program instruction from professors of their shared identities or being told their racial identity would negatively impact their teaching evaluations. Whether stepping into a classroom, speaking up during classroom discussions, or seeking opportunities for advancement, being Black and female impacts every interaction, impression, and instructional experience. As the only student of color in my doctoral cohort, my experiences both during my program and after its completion, will never be the same as my classmates’. It is these realities, and their impact on career decision making, that this research served to explore.

As a Black woman uncovering the experiences of fellow Black women in the same field, this study served multiple purposes in informing and understanding the career decisions of myself and others. As IPA analyzes and champions the narratives and voices of research participants, interpreting participant realities was dependent upon an empathic, extensive conceptualization of those being researched (Alase, 2017). Study findings can help educators at all levels better understand how intersectionality influences educational experiences, how these educational experiences can be improved, and how the culmination of these experiences impact who seeks professional positions within education. Methods to maintain trustworthiness and ethical standards are discussed later in the chapter.

Study Participants

Participants were recruited via purposeful and snowball sampling. Purposeful sampling allows for the intentional choosing of participants with certain traits or factors (McMillan, 2016). Snowball sampling is contacting already-established networks who may refer or recommend

people that fit the criteria for the research study (Palinkas et al., 2015). Qualifying participants met the following delimiters: (a) doctoral counselor education students who (b) identified as Black/African American and (c) as female. This population was chosen to assess the career decisions of Black women counseling doctoral students after gaining doctoral degrees. Students in all levels of the doctoral process were able to participate, as academic histories for each stage of doctoral studies are of interest, and career decisions may be dependent upon early or later experiences within the doctoral program. To keep findings current, participants entered their doctoral programs within the past 6 years. CES doctoral coursework beginning after 2014 correlates with the updated 2014 American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics, which outlines the obligation of CES programs and faculty to not only recruiting and sustaining diverse students, but supply these students with “appropriate accommodations that enhance and support diverse student well-being and academic performance” (p. 15). As the research analyzed an academic history, the only delimiter surrounding age was participants being age 18 or older. Participants were full-time or part-time students from any region of the United States and attendants of postsecondary public, predominantly white institutions (PWIs). Participants had academic experiences that occurred in school settings (i.e., participants cannot have received homeschooling) and could have experiences of exiting school in their academic histories, either by choice (i.e., leave of absence, gap year) or by force (i.e., pushout, suspension or expulsion). The inclusion of these experiences allowed for the analysis of whether or not themes present in the literature review are also present in the lives of participants. In light of the COVID-19 global pandemic, currently attending class either virtually or in-person is applicable. Additionally, participants needed to have access to reliable technology (for audio recording) for the duration of

the study. The desired number of participants ranged from four to eight Black women CES doctoral students, which allowed the number of participants to be within the recommended range of two to 25 participants (Alase, 2017). Participants in IPA research are taken from a homogenous pool, offering in-depth understanding of the studied phenomenon (Alase, 2017). Recruitment also included emailing the CESNET-L list-serv (see Appendix A). After clicking on the link to learn more about the study provided via online methods, prospective participants were taken to a landing page that details the study delimitations and allowed them to answer demographic and screening questions (see Appendix B). After completing the demographic and screening questions, participants were sent an email that either confirmed they met the requirements for the study (see Appendix C), were disqualified after not meeting study requirements (see Appendix D), or that the study had reached the maximum number of desired participants (see Appendix E). Snowball sampling was also used, to include asking doctoral student colleagues, faculty, and campus affinity groups of those potentially interested in study participation.

Data Collection

Two weeks prior to participant interviews, interview questions were piloted to assess question effectiveness in garnering responses and answering the research question (Davis, 2017). The semistructured interviews were completed individually and featured open-ended questions (Alase, 2017). Although open-ended questions encourage reflection, a semistructured interview format creates the opportunity for the researcher to inquire about specific details (Creswell, 2007). Participants also completed demographic information surveys regarding age, year of doctoral CES program, and institutional location.

Interviews were conducted using technology, either through Zoom online video services, or over the phone, audio recorded, and transcribed. Additionally, field notes were taken during all interviews, with identifying information removed from all data in consideration of confidentiality, safety, and security for all participants involved. It was important to balance participant anonymity, if desired, with the authenticity of their narratives (McAlpine, 2016). Students were still enrolled in CES programs, and as such, both their identities and university affiliations have been protected. Dedoose transcription software was used to analyze participant interviews, which allowed for the tracking of codes present in qualitative data and for inductive and deductive reasoning concerning themes, connections, and diverging experiences between participants. The principal researcher conducted all interviews, and the researcher and research team coded the findings. Several rounds of coding completed by the research team determined overarching themes present for participants. When using Black feminist thought (BFT), both analyzing and sharing data included effortfully highlighting realizations, validating the needs of those being studied, and cultivating chances to define oneself for oneself (Patterson et al., 2016). As a CES student, skills including engaging participants in conversation, critically considering narratives shared, and empathy were used by the researcher (McGovern, 2017). A constructivist approach allowed the researcher to be enthusiastically involved in guiding the perspectives of multiple participants as knowledge is created (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Procedures

Each participant completed at minimum an initial (see Appendix F) and final interview (see Appendix G), with two participants requiring one additional interview to answer all the interview questions. Interviews were completed following piloting and IRB approval. Interviews

lasted approximately 2 hours. Participants were emailed prior to the initial interview (see Appendix H), outlining interview procedures. Prior to the final interview, participants were emailed (see Appendix I) interview transcripts and audio recordings for member checking, optional resources to aid in considering self-care while discussing sensitive topics (see Appendix J), and the final interview prompt (see Appendix K). Following the final interview, participants were emailed (see Appendix L), interview transcripts and audio recordings, and thanked for their participation. After participants were interviewed, sessions were transcribed and provided to participants for accuracy and member checking (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Narratives shared verbally became data (Patterson et al., 2016), and all semistructured interviews were transcribed verbatim and checked by participants for clarity. Various participant perspectives may serve to improve the richness and credibility of the study (McAlpine, 2016).

After transcribing, data were coded using qualitative data analysis software via Dedoose. Codes helped with interpreting the subject being studied and the perceptions of participants, and coding allowed the researcher to make sense of the collected data (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Preexisting themes stemmed from themes found in the literature review, and new themes were based on nuanced findings from participant narratives. Coding included reading interview transcripts to uncover themes (Alase, 2017). The data were assessed for meaningful quotes to uncover the “essence” of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007, p. 105). After coding, themes were inductively confirmed and/or deductively created based on participant responses. In inductive coding, codes, or quotes and sayings from participants, came from participant interviews (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Deductive coding uses themes present in contemporary research

(Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). In efforts to further ensure participant protection (Alase, 2017) and anonymity, data were stored in a secure, password protected location.

In addition to the two interviews, participants were asked to provide an optional academic history artifact and a future career autobiography (FCAs; Rehfuss, 2009). Academic history artifacts were examples of teaching and learning experiences from K–12 (e.g., report cards comments or discipline referrals) or postsecondary (e.g., assignment comments from instructors or postsecondary professors) experiences that may have impacted career choice. FCAs have been used both prior to and following career development coursework to recognize and assess shifts or continuity in career narratives (Rehfuss, 2009). Developed by Rehfuss (2009), FCAs seek to help students consider present and potential career aspirations. Rehfuss originally used FCAs with undergraduate students both before and after delivering career interventions to capture changes or consistencies in career goals. In this study, interview questions, academic history artifacts, and FCAs captured the holistic journey of participants' career decision making. The FCA was completed in the final interview only, serving to capture a final picture of participant career decision making. In this study, FCAs helped outline the career goals of participants following discussion of their K–12 through postsecondary experiences, as changes in career decision making was sometimes present.

Trustworthiness

As the interviewing researcher was a current Black woman CES doctoral student, who interviewed others of the same identities, validity is important to consider. Triangulation aided the validity of a study (Farquhar, 2020; Myrick, 2016). In efforts to both establish rapport and allow adequate time for two rounds of interviews (Alase, 2017) prolonged engagement was a

feature of the study. An IPA researcher must be mindful of completing research interviews inside an appropriate window of time that allows for an initial interview, and other interviews if needed (Alase, 2017). Bracketing, or acknowledging my own biases and experiences, kept my feelings and beliefs from impacting stories shared by participants (Alase, 2017). Bias from the researcher was also lessened through member checking, or including participants in affirming research findings (Birt et al., 2016). Researcher memos are continued considerations of the coding and research topic, allowing for connections to be made among the codes, data analysis, and findings (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Interview transcripts were sent to participants following the first interview. A member check interview was completed as part of the second interview; transcripts were checked for accuracy, or edited if needed, before beginning the second interview (Birt et al., 2016). Member checking reinforced the idea of knowledge being collaboratively created (Birt et al., 2016). The combination of these efforts is referred to as triangulation, or using multiple means to confirm findings (Noble & Heale, 2019). Although interviews were audio recorded to aid in transcription, the primary researcher also took notes during the interview processes (Alase, 2017), known as researcher memos (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Considering dual relationships with participants was important, as three of five participants were colleagues of the researcher. Remaining reflexive, or aware of how past occurrences may be impacting the research being conducted (Berger, 2015), also decreased subjectivity.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were especially of importance. The ACA (2014) Code of Ethics outlines the philosophy of ethical counseling practices. Although overarching ethical practices include doing no harm, being equity minded, and encouraging independence, participant

awareness of and agreement to research procedures and maintaining confidentiality of participants are also of importance (ACA, 2014). As participants were current students, they may have been subject to institutional or professional repercussions when sharing their academic histories. To create the safest space possible for participants and their participation, participant consent to participate in the study was captured via a consent form (see Appendix M) that detailed the nature and breadth of the study. This consent form recognized that participation is completely voluntary, information shared need only include what participants felt comfortable disclosing, interview questions could be skipped, and removing oneself from the study could occur at any time. Ethical considerations also included protecting data with password encryption, and removing factors that ease identifying participants from the data (Tracy, 2013).

Summary

The qualitative methodology of IPA with a constructivist approach was employed to answer the research questions addressing the academic experiences and career decisions of Black women CES doctoral students. BFT (Crenshaw, 1991) and career human agency theory (CHAT; Chen & Hong, 2020b) were used to assess the experiences and decisions of this population. Chapter 3 offered insight into the chosen research methodology and design, sample, and data collection and analysis procedures. The research questions, ethical considerations, and study limitations were also addressed.

Chapter Four

Findings

This qualitative interpretative phenomenological study sought to explore what experiences within an academic history positively or negatively impact the professorial pursuits of Black women counselor education and supervision (CES) doctoral students. In addition, the research aimed to determine what the academic histories of Black women CES doctoral students include, and how to improve policy and practice across K–12 and postsecondary programs. The data analysis was completed using inductive and deductive coding, leading to theme development.

In this chapter, findings from the semistructured interviews, career autobiographies, and academic history artifacts are outlined. Chapter 4 offers demographic narratives of all five participants to offer the reader a more holistic conceptualization of their individual experiences. Themes found in data analysis are described, using excerpts from participant interviews, and discussions of career autobiographies and academic history artifacts. The chapter concludes with a summary of the overarching findings.

The Participants

Study participants were a sample of five Black women CES doctoral students. The participant narratives that follow offer the demographic information of each participant, offering the reader a greater breadth of information regarding their backgrounds and experiences. Pseudonyms are used throughout the remainder of the study to increase participant confidentiality.

Participant 1: Emory

Emory is a Black/African American woman who was attending a doctoral program at an R2 in the Midwest. Emory was over the age of 18 (28 years old). At the time of interviewing, Emory was a full-time student who had just finished the 3rd year of her doctoral program, and would soon be starting her 4th year. Emory completed three interviews total, all via Zoom Online Video Conferencing.

Participant 2: Logan

Logan is a Black/African American woman who was attending a doctoral program at an R1 university in the Mid-Atlantic. Logan was over the age of 18 (30 years old). At the time of interviewing, Logan was a part-time student who had just finished the 4th year of her doctoral program, and would be finished with coursework after successfully completing the fall semester. Logan completed two interviews total, all via Zoom Online Video Conferencing.

Participant 3: Haven

Haven is a Black/African American woman who was attending a doctoral program at an R1 university in the Mid-Atlantic. Haven was over the age of 18 (31 years old). At the time of interviewing, Haven was a part-time student who had just finished the 1st year of her doctoral program. Haven completed two interviews total, all via Zoom Online Video Conferencing.

Participant 4: Harper

Harper is a Black/African American woman who was attending a doctoral program at an R1 university in the Mid-Atlantic. Harper was over the age of 18 (31 years old). At the time of interviewing, Harper was a full-time student who had just finished the 1st year of her doctoral program. Harper completed two interviews total, all via Zoom Online Video Conferencing.

Participant 5: Aloni

Aloni is a Black/African American woman who was attending a doctoral program at a teaching university in the Mid-Atlantic. Aloni was 31 years old. At the time of interviewing, Aloni was a full-time student in the 3rd year of her doctoral program. Although Aloni also attended an HBCU for a postsecondary program, the included data are specific to their academic experiences at PWI higher education institutions. Aloni completed three interviews total, all via phone.

Results

This research was guided by two research questions, which aimed to determine what historical academic experiences encourage or discourage Black women CES doctoral students from pursuing careers as faculty members in higher education. All 12 interviews were conducted and transcribed by the principal researcher. Only two participants requested clarification and modification of interview transcripts following member checking. Codes were applied to each transcript and academic history artifact using Dedoose transcription software. Eight of the 12 interviews were coded by the principal researcher; the remaining four transcripts were coded by the research team. All codes from each transcript were reviewed by the principal researcher and the research team. Optional academic history artifacts (submitted by two of the five participants) and required future career autobiographies were also coded using Dedoose transcription software. Noting the prevalence of codes across participant interviews, the principal researcher created categories, then themes from the coded data. Codes were determined based on inductive and deductive coding. Inductive coding was based on the literature review; deductive codes were determined based upon commonalities across participant responses to the interview questions

(see Appendix H for the presentation of codes). Based upon the codes determined via data analysis, five themes emerged as the most definitive and prevalent across all three sources of participant data.

Themes

Data analysis resulted in five themes that addressed the posed research questions. Each theme is based upon the analysis of multiple sources of data, including participant interviews, academic history artifacts where provided, and future career autobiographies. Participant responses to support and showcase these themes are also featured. Data analysis resulted in the following five themes: (a) Being The “Only,” (b) Playing the Game, (c) Familial Matters, (d) Proving People Wrong, and (e) Support and related subthemes as shown in Table 1. Although overarching themes were present for all participants, subthemes showcase the variances among participant experiences. These themes and subthemes are described in the chapter, based on participant interviews, academic history artifacts, and future career autobiographies, which present a detailed description of the thematic findings. Direct quotes are used to indicate the participants’ perspectives, and to share each theme found.

Table 1

Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Being the “Only”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Foundational memories● Learning experiences
Playing the Game	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Skills● Safety● Racial battle fatigue● Being perceived as professional● Pros and cons of professorship● Carving out one’s own lane
Family Matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Help at home● Not an option● Exceed and excel● Career exposure
Proving People Wrong	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Going above and beyond● Redefining Black femininity● Benefits of Being a Black Woman
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Peer support● Campus community support● Notable Educators● Filling the gaps

Being the “Only”

The theme Being the “Only” conceptualizes participant experiences of not being in diverse academic settings. Stories included being the only Black student or Black woman or girl in classroom settings. In her first interview, Logan shared, “In kindergarten I was with (name redacted) but first grade through fourth grade, I was the only Black girl, or sometimes Black student.” Logan later shared, “I have positive memories about it, like the fact that I was the only

Black kid in some of my classes, I remember, but it was nothing, like . . . It impacted me but it wasn't like, negatively, I don't think." However, later in the same interview, Logan shared, "I, I wish there were more Black kids." Being the only student with Black and/or Black and feminine identities seemed to be such a normal circumstance for participants that they often did not seem to initially internalize its impact. Haven shared realizing a noticeable difference when leaving a predominantly white school, and its impact on her elementary identity. Haven recalled:

I grew up in a rural community in [redacted] where I was like one out of three Black girls in our whole grade and, just dealing with that and that—that wasn't always fun and then moving up here to [redacted], in the sixth grade being a predominantly Black school which was a culture shock for me and then going to a PWI for undergrad so it's just really, I guess, you know, just codeswitching, not only in language but in lifestyle. And you know, this—is it to adapt or is it to survive in these environments that I were in.

Foundational Memories

Participant recollections included early memories of participants in which they realized how their Black and/or feminine identities might impact their interactions with others, or how others might perceive them. This subtheme highlights instances, with both adults and peers, of explicit or implicit interactions influenced by the participants' intersectional identities. These instances were both explicit (i.e., overt) or implicit (i.e., covert). Haven initially recalled not experiencing racist incidents in her K–12 school. She recounted:

I will say I am very fortunate to have, to not have experienced openly or not directly to my face just blatant . . . racism, while, but you know a lot of microaggressions, especially

after getting labeled gifted. Um you know where, “You’re speaking too much, let someone else talk,” or, “You think you know it all,” you know? Like, “What? I’m just answering your question.”

Though Haven initially stated never having experienced overt racism, after further reflection, she did recall a white student calling her the n-word. She shared:

It just took me off guard like. How do you even know that word? Because somebody taught it to him at home, you know? Now that, you know, older, looking back on this, but yeah just in elementary school, you had—I had like these. Random moments of racism [laughed]. Is it random?

Haven also recalled being asked about the whereabouts of a classmate’s missing purse as a second grader. She may have been asked about the incident as a result of implicit biases held by her teacher. Haven recalled:

In, in second grade um one of the white students misplaced her purse and I was asked about it and it, found it like somewhere under, hidden under something in her cubby and I was like . . . I just remember I was like, I don’t know where her purse is. I don’t even talk to her like that and, second grade, what are you like, seven, eight? Just to be aware of it.

Logan remembered visiting her father at Take Your Daughter to Work Day. A coworker of her father seemed surprised at how Logan and her sister spoke, though Logan did not determine the basis of the microaggression. She shared:

One of his coworkers, who was a woman, she was like, “Oh my gosh they speak so well!” and I was like, are you—like in that moment, I was just like okay, whatever—but looking back on I was like, are you saying this because of this—she said to me and my

sister—just saying this because we’re little Black kids, or because of our age, or because you’ve been around the Black people that you have been exposed to really articulate their words and speak how you would assume like another person would speak? And so that was something that stuck with me early on as a young, younger kid.

With peers, foundational memories often included participants’ Blackness being either questioned, attacked, or ostracized. Similarly, Aloni remembered a conversation with a friend in high school, saying:

And she was, she was very kind, very sweet and got along well and I don’t know what transpired. We’re having casual conversation—I don’t know or can’t remember all the parameters, but I certainly remember the words . . . She said, “You’re, you’re like an Oreo you’re Black on the outside and white on the inside,” and she was, like “You, are the whitest Black person that I have ever met.” So you know, in the moment you’re probably not like getting all the nuances at once, but you know there’s something behind what has been said.

Aloni decided to both educate her friend, and be more true to herself during their interactions. By modeling the nuances of Blackness, Aloni was able to use covert or overt biases to covertly or overtly increase the cultural competence of her companion. She said:

I do remember with this individual in our conversations, I became much more mindful of how I was presenting myself and being who I knew as a Black individual, right? So maybe less careful about my word choices or my vernacular to be more comfortable in my own cultural space, I remember nudging the person, to better understand . . . To have the chance to learn a little bit more about what makes Black, not this unilateral

perspective . . . I remember being more intentional to promote these authentic parts of myself or to use them as teaching moments, whether subtly or overtly.

Though Aloni shared friends judging or rating her Blackness, Harper shared a memory of a peer simply refusing to get to know her because she was Black. Harper shared the interaction with a peer and a teacher, receiving more support from her friend than the teacher she told. She recalled:

One of my like, first what I consider like my first racist memory was when I was in first grade first or second grade. Really young. And I have always been super friendly; I love, making the friends very sociable and I told, I turned to the—in the auditorium—and I turned to this little white, white kid like, “Let’s be friends,” and he said that his parents wouldn’t let him be friends with Black people, and I remember being completely like, like my little heart broke, and that, at the learning that, “Oh wait people won’t like me because I’m Black. And even when I told, I told my friend and then my friend was, who was white, and she was like, “No this isn’t okay, you need to tell the teachers about this.” So I told one of my teachers and the teacher didn’t really do anything, she was just like, “I’m sorry,” like, That’s just the way kids are or you have to go through that.” But it was more so, like. “What a bummer,” you know what I mean? Like, “Oh, that sucks, sorry about it.” So that was a really foundational memory for me.

Harper remembered other students grappling with her racial identity. For Harper, experiences like these continued throughout her foundational academic experiences. Harper was able to share how she felt about these experiences later as a high school student. She was able to address both teachers and students concerning her experience of being Black in predominantly white school, recalling this pivotal moment:

And that was just a really pivotal moment in me talking about being Black of like a lot of people would say, “Oh, you’re our token Black friend, you’re a white girl stuck in a Black girl’s body,” and I was able to vocalize like how damaging that was and even the teachers afterwards they’re like, “Thank you so much for sharing your experience,” like, “I want to be more mindful of if, like students say that and calling them out, but thank you so much for speaking out.” . . . It like really caused a change for me and my friends of them not saying that as much, and also teachers just being more aware of what teach—students are saying.

Having the opportunity to share her experiences with both teachers and students seemed very affirming for Harper. More opportunities to convey shortcoming in addressing diversity may improve the learning experiences of Black girls and women.

Learning Experiences

Being the only Black and/or woman student in their classes was a normal, almost expected, occurrence for participants. Participants also noted a lack of student diversity in more than one level of schooling. K–12 experiences seemed to be more impactful than those later on, with conditions or interpretations of conditions usually improving or becoming less impactful by the time participants were in their doctoral programs. Nevertheless, these experiences within educational environments seemed to influence the educational experiences that followed, with participants aware of what types of environments Harper considered the importance of diversity when choosing which graduate programs to enter. She shared:

I definitely knew that I wanted to be at an institution, where at least be [more] students who looked like me, um. And that was kind of the deciding factor for me to go to [name

of school redacted] both for my Grad and for my doctoral program. But I'd say, I got it more in the Doc program of there's like—my cohort, four out of five of us are all like Black and brown people um. And I really needed, that in grad school like in the master's program I didn't have that as much as only me and one other individual who are like, "Well let's three of us all together work."

Logan reflected on the realization of taking advanced classes meaning not being surrounded by students who looked like her. She seemed to grapple with certain course choices inherently impact the community she found in those courses, saying:

In some of the classes that I took, like if I would have stayed at like the C-level classes, there would be more Black students, but once I took like the college level classes, AP or honors, the numbers always decreased, so I do vividly remember being like, "If I want to stay in honors, I would know more umm, of the, the Black students" versus—like it very much reminded me of like my elementary days—when I was taking honors and AP classes, like. It was like that battle between like, not that I wasn't accepted but, being with people that look like you versus like your education and things like that.

When reminiscing about the interview process for her doctoral program, the lack of diversity seemed like less of a choice, and more of a condition of this level of education. Logan shared:

I didn't necessarily feel out of place, I think, because I had, had the experience of being the only Black kid in my younger grades. That didn't really like faze me as much like I'm definitely aware, of walking in the room and being like when is somebody else Black gonna come in the room, but it wasn't like life or death or anything um. You know it was a pretty good experience, I think.

Logan's cohort experience was also a more diverse group of students than her earlier experiences, finding the "50/50 split" to be "super surprising." Haven shared the same satisfaction in the diversity of her doctoral cohort, saying, "My cohort, three of us are Black women, one is from Africa, the other two of us Black American um so our, our small cohort is pretty, kind of diverse and so definitely; I'm comfortable with all of us together." Awareness of what participants were looking for—a diverse learning environment—was a factor both in program choice and perceived program satisfaction. Being in learning environments with other Black and/or minority students seemed to offer the sense of community participants were seeking.

Playing the Game

Playing the Game highlights the skills participants felt they needed to thrive in a career in academia. Skills to navigate academia—including making connections with peers and professors and completing tasks to feature on a curriculum vitae—required an awareness that was often referred to as "playing the game." Haven shared, "It took me a while to really learn how to play that game, but once I learned how to play that game I got better at it." Many participants suggested ways to attain these skills were not explicitly addressed in their doctoral program, even though skill attainment would likely lead to future success. Emory shared, "It's more so, like the unspoken stuff back, though, has been a little bit of a challenge or difficulty, not because, because I know it's, for some people it's because they don't even know exists, like those unspoken things." Knowing how to play the game also means knowing what is necessary to complete outside of coursework to be successful. Haven mentioned getting more familiar with playing the game since her undergraduate schooling, realizing opportunities she would have

taken advantage of had she had more knowledge of available resources. She also shared a mindset shift regarding academic scholarship, and its impact in her current doctoral program.

Haven recalled:

Yeah I just didn't know everything that was available to me like, I didn't utilize like the Career Center as much as I would have liked to looking back on—I, I just didn't know all that I could or should have been doing in my undergrad program, um, to better prepare me for like, like I didn't—I had no research experience, so that's why I was working really hard this summer to join research labs, because that's something I didn't do in undergrad or in my masters, so . . . I had, umm Dr. [redacted], she told me a couple months ago, like, "We accepted you into this program cause we know you're gonna pass the classes. It's what else you're going to do while you're in the program." And that really kind of, shook me in a good way . . . Having to get out of the mindset that school is more than just passing classes, and doing well in the actual courses, in the classroom.

Adjusting to the responsibilities outside of the classroom seemed to be a big shift for participants. Higher education, especially at the doctoral level, demands both more knowledge and skill development than earlier levels of schooling.

Skills

Participants shared certain skills they felt professors expected them to gain during or already have a grasp of during their doctoral journeys. Even though these skills would ultimately help them be successful as both students and professionals in academia, skill attainment was often not explained, defined, or scaffolded for participants. The skills mentioned most often in playing the game were research skills, networking, and academic writing. Aloni spoke of her

experience with gaining research opportunities. She stated:

Just in conversations and I know again I've, I've had with like-cultural and like-gender identification colleagues um. Some of the things that ma be we've discussed are like, for example, research opportunity. It seems like it's easier, sometimes for certain demographics, to move ahead and find those connections and those research opportunities. And unless someone is really opening the door kind of pulling you into a research project or someone has the minus to pull you in. Sometimes those opportunities can be a little harder to come by. I've been very blessed in my own experiences to find colleagues who, you know, we share like-topic experience and we're able to do work together related to equity and other topics.

Although Aloni had more positive experiences with feeling connected to research opportunities, Haven faced challenges with research writing. In preparation for a faculty position, doctoral coursework often emphasizes research (i.e., conducting research projects), scholarships (e.g., producing academic writing in the form of journal articles, book chapters, books). Academic writing, a scholarly style of writing used in research, academic papers, and publications, was often mentioned as a concern participants had about current and future academic performance. Haven recalled not being concerned about coursework, but about the things she needed to do in addition to course expectations. She shared:

It's the other part, like understanding research. Writing, doing proposals, actually writing manuscript is—that has been the challenging part to me, and learning about journals, and which journal, will be a best fit for different things and, how to build up your CV with valuable tasks and things, and things that are not just fluff, so I think that has been

challenging because I'm a first gen doc student.

Emory noted not feeling other professional development skills are addressed in coursework, while knowing how to network is not. Though networking was understood by Emory to be an important factor in academic and professional success, not receiving guidance on how to best approach and engage with others was notable. Emory recalled:

Um so like obviously there are things like build up your CV, you know, have publications that, those type of things, but then there are those unspoken, unspoken things like networking. Like networking is actually important and, or at least maybe, I guess they do say networking is important but it's not like, "Here's how to network," basically. Like I've had, I've had sessions or classes, where they're like, "Here's how to do a CV. Here's how to make a poster presentation," but not really anything like, "Here's how to network," like, "Here's what you should do if you're a awkward introvert and don't know how to network." So, like those type of spoken and unspoken things where you're just expected to know how to do it.

After sharing she was not sure if she found difficulties with networking because of her personality or Black and feminine identities, Emory shared, "I don't know it's, I guess, like a personal, professional development thing that I'm still working out that obviously there's not really a book of how to do it right. Um so yeah that's my academic struggle." Having success with coursework seemed to be less of a concern for participants than the skills expected of them outside of class. The culmination and acquisition of these skills, and self confidence in them, could be the difference between those choosing careers in academia, and those choosing alternative career paths.

Safety

Participants spoke of intending to be very selective about future work environments, hoping to work in spaces that were safe to exist in as Black women. For some this meant not wanting to be tokenized in the workplace; for others, this meant not wanting to bear the emotional weight of clients or colleagues of color. Mostly, this referred to honoring their own mental health. Although those participants did speak to wanting to serve and support other Black people in their work, there were concerns about how this would impact their personal and professional functioning. Logan shared about choosing a professional role in part due to the diversity of the staff, saying:

I would say, like in choosing jobs I choose, I've chosen like job sites, more so, that, I feel that I will feel like I'm more valued and safe and so like going back to like my principal when I had my interview. Um it was actually a position for a full time position at the school that I'm at now a part time or like split between my school and another school. And the principal that interviewed me was Black, the assistant principal—and they were all Black women—a Black woman, and then there was the principal from the other school was, a Black woman, the head of the, head of the reading team that did my interview was a Black woman and then there was another woman, but she was an older white lady. But when I—because I had like two offers, and so, when I picked there, I was like I feel like I would be more valued and heard just because, like the people that were the leaders of the school are Black.

For Harper, safety was mostly related to how she might be supported in the workplace. When asked if past or present thoughts about career possibilities included or reflected identifying as a Black woman, Harper shared:

I would say when I'm thinking of places that I want to apply to, it does. That's one thing that I've been thinking about. Plus and it's this—for me it's this odd divide of I want to feel some—I want to be somewhere where I feel safe and my voice is heard, and I want to be this form of security and support for Black students at PWIs— at real PWI that like when there's a lot of tokenism going on . . . What comes along with being the supportive force at a PWI for Black students is increased isolation for myself, and having to do a lot of my own work, and a lot of finding my own community of people who support me while I'm supporting these students.

As Harper spoke of supporting Black students in academia, Emory also shared concerns about the personal impacts of supporting Black clients. Although Harper was concerned about isolation and having a supportive community, Emory seemed concerned about the possibility of burnout.

Emory said:

And I think also just in terms of like the population I'm working with like, I want to work with Black clients, but I also don't want that to be the majority of my clients, just because, especially in the last few years there's always been like something that's been happening with Black people in this country and, it's draining. And to have something that's not only in the session room but also like, outside of the session room as well, is exhausting . . . And then clients are asking what should I do or how should I process and I'm like, I don't even know, cause I don't know how to process . . . If I actually had to

like counsel just like especially just Black people. And that's, that's gonna sound like really horrible but like if, If I wasn't allowed to work in a workspace with actual diversity in terms of clients and in terms of like coworkers, I think I would be like really burnt out really quickly. So I think that plays a role into like, where I want to work and stuff like that.

For Emory, safety also included job location. She shared her ideas about considering safe places to live as a career consideration. Location included considering access to loved ones, coworkers, and the climate in the surrounding area. She said:

Like right now in terms of like, where I want to work or whatever it's like, "Okay does this feel safe? Do I at least have like, friends or family in the area who like, if anything, were to happen, I would like reach out to? You know, is this a faculty of all white people? Like, do I feel safe with that?"

Specifics around safety also included states and regions Emory planned to avoid. Although this may be less of a factor for others, the consideration of potential racial tension in determining where and where not to live is an understandable concern for those of marginalized identities.

Emory shared specifically avoiding applying to universities in certain location:

I don't know if I said this explicitly but like I'm really trying to avoid applying to universities in the south. And even, in some of like, the more Western, midwestern areas, uh. Um . . . So yeah I feel like that kind of limits me to like California, which I mean like, racism is everywhere, but, like . . . I feel . . . I don't know. I don't know if safe is the right word, but I don't know I guess I've like but I don't know I guess I've like . . . tricked

myself into feeling like it won't be as bad or at least I won't have to worry about nooses.

So less—or hoods, more particular.

For participants, safety concerns included feeling isolated as faculty members, finding and having support while supporting Black students, experiencing exhaustion as a result of supporting Black clients, closeness to family and loved ones, and regions and states that felt like safe places to live. Many of these considerations are specific to the intersectional identities of being Black and/or woman, and may be less of a reality for those of other identities.

Racial Battle Fatigue

Racial battle fatigue includes responding to stress or stressors “(e.g., frustration; anger; exhaustion; physical avoidance; psychological or emotional withdrawal; escapism; acceptance of racist attributions; resistance; verbally, nonverbally, or physically fighting back; and coping strategies)” (Smith et al., 2007, p. 552) related to having a minority identity and navigating an institution of higher education. This often includes how faculty members of color are treated by students and staff in their higher education settings. When considering a career as a professor, Emory thought about the perspective students might have of her, based on her intersectional identities. She shared:

I mean, the first thing comes to mind is that, like Black professors have—are more likely to have negative evaluations, for their classes . . . Thankfully, I haven't had this experience, I mean when I taught so far, but like just students who are looking at me either because I'm a Black woman or because I may look younger than some of the other professors, and assuming that I don't know things, or like I don't know enough things to teach them, especially masters students.

Emory also wanted to be mindful of roles and responsibilities she might be asked to take on as a Black woman professor, and maintaining her own wellness. Though she wanted to uphold her professional responsibilities, she also wanted to honor she personal well-being. She shared:

I feel like I'm trying to practice saying no to things that are not beneficial to me in the hopes that, like when I do get a faculty position, I'm not just taking on like diversity and inclusion stuff just, you know to be a team player. Like obviously I want to be a team player, but not at the, at the risk to, like my own, mental health and well-being and to my own like professional goals as well. So I think it's a balancing job of being authentic to myself but also for lack of a better term like still having to play the game, right now, because of where things are at, so.

Also considering the faculty team she might be a part of, or have to prove herself to, Haven shared concerns about needing to prove the merit of her research interests. Haven considered the attitudes of other professionals in the field, and barriers to professional achievement as a Black woman professor. She said:

The more— maybe I need to get off Twitter—but the more I just see and you know I think people who are currently in academia, I think they're doing a good job of just forewarning us of how—what it's really like, but at the same time, especially for someone like me who's like nonconfrontational, pretty easy going, just overall. I mean, of course I know how to stand up for myself, but do I want to be in a field where I feel like I constantly have to stand up for myself? . . . I'm like, can I be an adjunct professor and a part-time school counselor and, make this work? So yeah I'm just kind of, I don't know,

my mentor's like, "Please don't get revved up, you're gonna be fine," but, I ain't got time for nobody tell me, oh, "My, my scholarship don't matter."

Later in that same interview, Haven reflected on Nicole Hannah Jones, a Pulitzer prize winner and renowned scholar in the ways Black Americans have contributed to U.S. history (Jaschik, 2021) struggling to gain tenure. Hannah Jones seemed to serve as a cautionary tale of what can happen to Black women in academia and the likelihood of gaining tenure. Haven said:

It was a database, where you can look up to see how many full professors were Black women at different institutions—and I'm looking at my school . . . I don't think that it hit 10. I'm like, ughhh. Like why am I doing all this hard work? And I, one day, I won't, probably can't be a full professor because racism? How, too much—that's too much.

Racial battle fatigue includes racist incidents that occur in majority-white settings (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). Participants seemed aware of the battles they might face as Black women faculty members. Negative teaching evaluations, balancing professional responsibilities and personal health, and facing obstacles in gaining tenure were perceived challenges in pursuing professorship.

Being Perceived as Professional

Professionalism was a factor mentioned by each participant. All had concerns, or sometimes frustrations, with how their Black and feminine identities might impact them being seen as competent professionals, often related to appearance. Ways to style one's hair, and how this would be perceived in the workplace, was a common topic. Logan, who has locs, a natural hairstyle often worn by Black women, shared:

I was really just cognizant about like hairstyles because I didn't want to be like have this

stereotypical like big braids . . . And that was also something that I thought about when take—starting my job at the school, but my principal and assistant principal were both Black women and so. I felt more comfortable and so it took a while for me to even be comfortable enough, I was like I really want to loc my hair, and so I did that, a year ago, . . . But it took me a while, because I was like I don't want to be seen, like people that don't understand, like hairstyles and things like that at the academic level.

Emory, who mostly wears her relaxed hair in a straight style, shared reservations about wearing her hair in its natural state when being considered for faculty appointments. She mentioned not necessarily wanting to gamble with how she could potentially be perceived based on her hairstyle, saying:

Yeah there's like the reality, where like yeah I wish it didn't matter but also like, especially now, like I said, trying to—preparing to find faculty positions it's like, will that be helpful for me to like have my hair straightened? Will that not? you know? In some way, I want to say in the counseling field like even on like a surface level, I want to say, like no it shouldn't. But . . . There's a level of like, not wanting to take that risk.

Harper, who has natural hair that she often wears in a straight style, shared her experiences with wearing her hair both straightened and in its natural state. Although Emory was hesitant about potentially being perceived differently if she wore her hair naturally, Harper shared noticing different reactions based on hair that was straightened or not. She said:

Yeah it's just, it's just complicated, and I wish I didn't present differently when I wore my hair different like I wish that I was just always treated the same. But I'm not and that's that's just the reality that I've accepted like I'm gonna get more looks today I get more

like, weird mannerisms as people—there'll be more like, microaggressions and I just have to accept it so acceptance of oppression almost is something that I've kind of taught myself like, "Oh yeah you need to just accept this because it's going to happen, but how are you going to deal with it when it happens?" is what I've been trying to frame it to and understand more deeply.

Aloni considered ways Black women doctoral students might be thinking about their hair as professionals and doctoral students. Messages about professionalism may be internalized, determining how Black women choose to present themselves in professional spaces. Aloni was intentional about her workplace decisions and the ability to express herself authentically through her hairstyle choices. She shared:

I would say, for myself personally there aren't too many places in terms of the places where I've been especially if in my employment decisions I happen to be picking or choosing or seeking to align myself with an agency or a place in higher education or even a counseling agency that is mindful and embracing of diversity and ethnic diversity, that I've gotten too much pushback about hair right? But I think again there's these internalized narratives of professionalism, right, like will I be received if I wear braids to work, right? Or is there a certain hairstyle that I should wear for my dissertation defense because that might look more professional versus the hairstyle that I might choose on a day to day basis, right?

Participants did speak of instances where they eventually became more comfortable with how their hair is viewed in relation to professionalism. With time, Emory grew more comfortable with wearing her hair in its loc-d state; she said:

You can be professional with like, an afro, you can be professional with like sister locs or the traditional locs but it took me a minute to get there, and be like, “Well, this is the person that I’m going to be. You can either take it or leave it.”

Haven realized her colleagues and/or leadership at her job were not going to challenge her about how she chose to wear her hair, and that being in a school with other Black professionals might be a factor in self-expression. She stated:

At least working in a predominantly Black student population school I like, I feel more myself too, like if I want to wrap my hair, wear a head wrap, I have—I don’t have to worry about people questioning it or or not, and even for the 2 and a half months I worked at a white school—that was interesting—I felt comfortable wrapping my hair up then because they weren’t gon say nothin to me!

Aloni believed increased confidence about one’s hair and appearance may be a result of increased professional attainment. Achieving certain professional goals may serve as a catalyst for feeling more confident to change self-definitions of professionals. She said:

Even watching you know professionals other Black women on LinkedIn, who now have entered into PhD world. Right and they have been bold with their lip choices, their hair choices, their beauty choices. And we’ve heard of the phrase, or the fad like, “This is what a doctor looks like,” or whatever the case, or, “This is what a Black doctor looks like,” or whatever the case. And it’s almost like a liberating sector, but I wonder how many people feel that freedom until they either arrive at a certain point in their career or have a certain overt credentialing that kind of justifies the means of being who they are authentically or their creativity. Because of all that we’ve been taught beforehand about

professionalism . . . It's almost like sometimes you're reaching for attainment to have freedom to be more authentic or the proof of, "I've made it now, I can be me and do me."

Participants also spoke to other aspects of their appearance that might give others pause in perceiving them professionally, including clothing and professional dress. Harper shared thoughts about feedback she had received about her work attire, saying:

The way that I dress making sure once again I'm not dressing too provocatively the way I wear my makeup making sure I'm not wearing like too, like vibrant colors . . . The way I wear my earrings, I usually like bigger earrings. One time I was told by two other Black counselors who it be—I know it's ageism—but they told me like I had to take off my earrings . . . They were like, "You're not their friend, you're their counselor." I was like, I know I'm their counselor and I would hope that the earrings that I wear wouldn't make them feel any different. But they were like, "You need to understand that you're going to be perceived differently," so even the, like down to the earrings that I wear, very intentional about whenever I am getting dressed just because I don't want to be perceived as like ghetto, because if I'm perceived as ghetto, then the really privileged white students that I work with me look at me less than.

In addition to physical appearance and expression, aspects of verbal expression were also addressed. Aloni spoke of codeswitching, which is not limited to changing the vocal tones, word choice to be more socially acceptable when communicating (Singletary, 2020), and how it might impact Black women in higher education. Aloni alluded to the helpfulness of codeswitching in navigating different environments, and the ways being multifaceted can be misunderstood by others. She said:

I would say . . . the feeling like there's something to prove like where you get in certain spaces and certain conversations. Code switching right? Code switching simply because you know that a certain language, vernacular, dress, hair, things like that, that, if we were around each other, be like, "Girl you look really cute, you look good," but your professional environments may not understand the nuances of being multifaceted and still being professional.

Participants did become less concerned with how they were perceived by others over time. When asked if she thinks about what people might say when thinking about future jobs she might apply to, Haven shared, "I don't. I don't care anymore, yeah that's it. Like, I even, I remember doing a presentation last summer like, I'm not gonna codeswitch anymore. I'm tired. I'm too old. I ain't got time." For participants, mindset shifts in how others perceive them professionally seemed to be a result of wanting to express themselves authentically, being intentional about professional spaces participants chose to enter, increased self-confidence, and growing tired of trying to meet professional standards rooted in whiteness.

Pros and Cons of Professorship

This section showcases participant realizations about both possibly enjoying professorship, and potential difficulties they might have to face as Black women. For some, potential positives of being a professor outweighed the potential negatives. For others, possible obstacles detracted from the desire to become a faculty member. Aloni shared her realization of professorship being a positive possibility. Her focus included working with and preparing students, and sharing knowledge with others. She said:

I would say the moment that it was really solidified for me was serving as a TA within this current program I noticed that there was this contagious excitement that I had about teaching, but also about learning alongside my students, so not attempting to elevate myself above them but us entering in the space of knowledge and curiosity together . . . So when I saw real time, in real time as a TA that students were really taking grasp of that, that they would get excited to ask me questions or present questions, and I could kind of figure out with them like the best course of action or direction or resources that could be available to them. But the opportunity to really pour into their dream and their future, like so many had poured into mine was really exciting for me . . . So I would say, serving as a teaching assistant really solidified that first, “Maybe I can do this. I can be a professor” in there and then from there, the fact that it seemed like I did have something to offer students in experience, because I believe knowledge is best when it is shared. And what other place, right? What better place to share knowledge than in the halls of academia?

Harper acknowledged drawbacks to a career in academia, though they are not deterrents to wanting to be a professor. Tenured professorship did not seem to offer as much career variability as Harper is looking for, especially in terms of staying in one location as a tenured professor, saying:

I feel like tenured is what everyone wants and, for me, the idea of being in one location for an extended amount of time is just not something that I like . . . So I think that’s the one thing that I don’t like the stability almost of it or the ability to not have changed in my life because there’s a lot of professors that you see who started and never saw like

they've been doing this for years and years and years and I don't really like the thought of that and, I think that's the one number one thing that really makes me question like is this something that I want to do? . . . Yes, there's just a lot that I've, I question with being a professor, even though I know I want to do it.

Similar to the passion Aloni shares for working with students, Harper also shared a student-focused interest in being a professor. However, considering both pros and cons to a faculty position, Harper shared this:

Helping students find their voice helping them understand transferable skills, those are all things that make me really excited about the field, plus I really love counselor education and helping them become impassioned and, just having this sense of self and knowing that this is what they want to do is something that I want to instill in others. But there's just a lot of politics within academia.

Politics were also a factor for Haven in career decision making. When comparing the politics found in academia to those in her current position as a K–12 professional school counselor, issues present in higher education seemed more pressing. This seemed especially specific to potential obstacles in gaining tenure. She said:

I don't like politics, I don't like this whole, this is all you need to have for tenure and then you're this great candidate and then so and so don't like you and so they're not gonna offer you to— uhh, sounds like a lot of—like we ain't even got that much issue in K–12.

Emory also considered the differences between the K–12 and postsecondary settings. Instead of the differences in politics, Emory considered the differences in pay between the two levels of

schooling. Also of importance to Emory was the length of time spent in her current professional role, and the length of time required to gain tenure once becoming a professor. She said:

The biggest thing is because, like to me, I would make more money, and not to say it's all about the money, but if I'm getting a doctorate like I do want to make more money, so I would make more money staying in K-12 education, rather than like doing, going—like working my way up in higher ed trying to get tenure. Like, I'm already tenured at my job, like in [location redacted]. So if I go up like. Why would I leave my tenured job I already have and try to get [tenure] somewhere else?

When assessing potential futures as faculty members, participants considered teaching and supporting students, sharing and instilling knowledge, navigating politics related to tenure, differences in compensation between being a tenured professor and other possible careers, and length of time spent in current career roles.

Carving Out One's Own Lane

This subtheme refers to the sentiment most (i.e., four) participants held of not wanting to limit themselves to just one professional role, or ways to professionally advance within their current roles. Harper shared the sentiment of trying to figure out what professional decisions would also be personally fulfilling, saying:

My dream, would be to do a lot of part time stuff so being able to do part time counseling maybe having like a private practice, or having that similar schedule of a private practice and then also being able to be a professor and teaching courses that I really enjoyed teaching within a counselor education program and also doing research with someone and also being a supervisor for master students . . . I really love that idea of having all my

favorite things and still be able to do it without letting one slip to the wayside. And, especially as, for me, I put my counseling identity at the forefront of my professional identities and that's the one that I want to make sure I'm all always growing in.

Harper expanded upon these ideas in her future career autobiography, answering the open-ended question by providing a 5-year postgraduation plan. Defining her professional identity as “fostering parts of my professional identity including being a clinical supervisor, counselor, researcher, and educator,” Harper shared her desire to become a licensed professional counselor. She expanded, “My ‘dream goal is to be able to continue to work part time as a counselor as well as work as a professor within a research institution. I am still honing my skills and cultivating my identity as a researcher.” Her foreseen career goals included “some form of outpatient work preferably at a college counseling center,” becoming an adjunct professor, conducting research, “and supervising master’s level professionals.” Her 5-year plan also included skills development in being a clinician, supervisor, and educator, and gaining clarity on future career decisions. Related to career expectations 4 to 5 years after PhD program completion, Harper shared, “Due to my own insecurity around my research, it is difficult for me to imagine doing research extensively during this time.” An additional interest of hers was conference presentations.

Similar career interests were held by Emory. In her future career autobiography, Emory shared wanting to be an active professor and researcher, and eventually a private clinician and/consultant. Highlighted interests include serving as a mentor for BIPOC and/or first generation students, conference presentations and article publications, and social media endeavors. She stated:

After graduating from [redacted] with a PhD in Counselor Education, I hope to quickly find a full-time faculty position at a CACREP accredited Counseling program. In this position, I would like some sort of combo of teaching, researching, and possibly being able to still see clients. I want to continue to do research on bisexual+ women of color, mentorship in cross-cultural dyads, and academics'/researchers' use of social media, respectively. I would present findings at conferences and in academic journals. I would also like to mentor students, specifically BIPOC students who may be the first in their family going to grad school. Within the next 5 years, I hope to have further grown my professional social media presence through my YouTube and Instagram pages [names redacted]. I also hope that by that time I will have already or be in the process of opening up a private practice and/or mental health and media consulting firm.

Aloni also outlined wanting to work with those of her racial background, sharing aspirations in “demystifying and destigmatizing conversations surrounding Black/African American mental health in university and Christian church settings.” Aloni foresaw this occurring “through the operational roles as a licensed professional counselor and mental health consultant, invited lectures, workshops, and community-based psychoeducation programming.” A 5-year career plan also included “a ‘global mental health’ paradigm,” addressed via “international nonprofit development work and mental health missions” both nationally and internationally. With aims “to globally increase mental health education, equitable services access, and resource affordability,” Aloni mentioned interest in becoming self-employed within nonprofit work, and conducting “research inquiries and empirical explorations” based on her work. Additional interests were “program management and program evaluation assignments”

and “serving as a mental health consultant for varied-scaled organizations, companies, and corporations.” Interestingly, being a professor was listed last in her future career goals. She stated:

Lastly, teaching aspirations gel within each of the aforementioned career goals as a posture of ongoing action (i.e., action word) beyond an academic position. As a counselor educator, I see teaching as carrying two profound dimensions: (1) to equip and undergird the callings of future mental health professionals and (2) to bring mental health education (e.g., psychological first aid and communication skills) outside of the classroom walls into communities as nonclinical, first-step, and prevention-based mental health resources.

Interestingly, the future career autobiographies (FCAs) of the current school counselors made little mention of careers in academia. Though Logan was initially interested in being an adjunct professor, her FCA revealed her growing less confidence of her career decisions over time. She stated:

At the start of the counselor Ed and supervision program, I knew exactly the path and next steps that I wanted to take after graduating. I saw myself as an adjunct professor and a school counseling specialist (supervisor of all levels of school counselors within a school district). I was pretty set on this until I started growing through the program. I am truly conflicted on next steps and take it one day at a time. I know that I have options but considering salary of taking the path in higher ed or staying in the K–12 setting . . . I’m not sure if it’s [worth] it. I have also considered counseling abroad at the end of the doc program. I feel like it will give me a new perspective and fresh approach to counseling.

Unlike Logan, Haven seemed more sure of both sustaining and advancing in her current role as a school counselor. When considering her future trajectory, Haven reflected, “The academy is weird and It just seems very cutthroat, very shady, very not loving to Black women and Black women professors and so I’m really trying to figure out how I’m gonna carve my path.” Her FCA expanded upon this individual path, highlighting supervision, publishing, and being a pillar of the school counseling profession, stating:

I hope to be a dope school counselor educator and supervisor who will train the next generation of antiracist and student-centered school counselors . . . I hope to be regarded as a community scholar. I believe that research serves no purpose if it doesn’t involve the community surrounding the institution. I hope to be a resource to local school counselors and school counseling departments. I hope to author books and articles (fiction and nonfiction) on Black girlhood and school counseling. I hope to help develop a nationwide Sister Circle program for middle school and high school girls. I hope to be happy with a life that provides a flexible life to travel and rest whenever I need to. I hope to be surrounded by people who I love and who love me authentically. I hope to be in a better world.

For the three participants with clinical backgrounds, individual career paths included, but were not limited to, being a full-time or adjunct faculty member. Additional career interests included private practice, consultant work, nonprofit development, and conducting and presenting research. The two participants serving as school counselors at the time of interviews made minimal mention of future careers in academia if mentioned at all. One school counselor participant was still considering all career options, seemingly not swayed by either school

counseling or academia. The other current school counselor participant was interested in remaining a school counselor, publications, and helping others in the field. Two participants mentioned hoping to gain better clarity of their desired careers in their FCAs.

Family Matters

The theme *Family Matters* showcases the impact family had or has on academic achievement and career decision making. Each participant spoke of family members being influential in their conceptualizations of academic achievement and career choice. Impactful family members included both immediate and extended family. Subthemes include *Help at Home*, *Not an Option*, *Exceed and Excel*, and *Career Exposure*.

When asked both who, if anyone encouraged/encourages her academically and/or professionally, who supported her in K–12 and postsecondary educational endeavors, and who encouraged her to continue advancing her education, Logan offered the same reply: her parents. In reflecting on who encouraged her to attend a master’s program, she shared, “Same people; my parents. Most of it is just my parents. Not really any teachers or anything.” Haven shared a similar sentiment of feeling and receiving a lot of support from parents at home. Her parents made the difference between her becoming disenchanted with school, helping her process negative experiences. She said:

Even though I love school, there were just there were a few incidents, that’ll always stand out, um, that could have really just tainted my whole experience, but I think just having parents to help me process things at home um really kept me from not falling out of love with school.

When asked about support, Aloni replied, “I think so, so sources of support, first and foremost family. Very family oriented so family first.” This impact took on many forms and functions. Family members were remembered as being helpful resources outside of school, having expectations regarding participant educational attainment, encouraging participants to exceed the academic and career achievements of said family members, and exposing participants to career options.

Help at Home

Participants received help from family members other than their parents. This included academic support, personal encouragement, and offering childcare. Harper got homework help from her older sisters, sharing, “They were able to help me with any of the coursework that I had so they were my free tutors that were there when I got home.” Sharing more about her sisters, Harper also remembered, “My sisters, would be the ones to help me out and helped me whenever I would get discouraged or call myself stupid, they would be the ones to help me see past that and kind of reframe my thoughts about myself.” Haven shared about the help her grandmothers provided. As a child, she visited her grandmothers after school instead of going to daycare. She recalled, “My grandmother’s were my babysitter’s” and shared, “ Even to this day, I still consider them some of my most important role models.” Participants seemed to gain confidence and assurance in themselves and their aspirations. Familial support anchored participants in security, encouragement, and examples to model themselves after. These outcomes likely aided participants as they continued their academic journeys.

Not an Option

In addition to the support they offered, family members also had high expectations of participants. These included expecting participants to achieve both academic and professional success. For each participant, higher education was not an option, but instead an expectation.

Emory explained:

It was just always expected. Like you go to college and then, especially because my mom was the teacher, she was just like okay you're gonna like, even if you take a gap year or so after college and like still do something like still do work like at some point you're still gonna want to go and get like a masters. At least, so it was just kind of like I thought everyone do this and then obviously as I got older I realized like not everyone even gets to the college part and that it's not necessarily bad it's just their decision.

The expectation of going to college was present when Aloni was a K–12 student. Aloni also shared both the familial expectation of attending higher education, and the encouragement offered by her family, saying:

A lot of what shaped my belief in my academic abilities was coming from a household where academics, academia, learning and knowledge was amplified was encouraged, I mean, even when I was going through K through 12 studies, I remember, we kind of had this joke in our household, but it was quite serious right that it wasn't if you're going to college, it was when . . . I would say my family and my parents did well to affirm us in our academic abilities, I was told that I was smart, brilliant, intelligent, capable, that I had all due capacities to be able to excel at anything and anything I put my mind to or wanted to.

When asked if there was a story she could share that made her interested in pursuing a postsecondary degree, Haven shared not knowing attending college was an option. Though she was excited to attend a postsecondary school, it did not occur to her that attending college was a choice:

For undergrad . . . I did not, I did not know that going to college was an option, like, I was always told I was going, like, I just—that was my next step. I didn't know I could say, "No, mom, I don't want to go to college." No. It was just already ingrained that I was going to go to college. And I wanted to go, I wanted to go, so I wasn't forced and didn't [not] enjoy it or anything.

Families held participants to high academic expectations, specifically that they attend college. Though attending college was not viewed as an option by their family members, or by participants as a result, participants did not seem to harbor negative feelings about these expectations. Participants did not seem to believe the expectations to attend college were unfair or unaligned with their interests. As these messages seemed to have been ingrained within families from an early (i.e., K–12) age, participants accepted this expectation as a standard set that must be met.

Exceed and Excel

For participants, familial expectations did not only include attending a postsecondary program. Expectations often included being better than, or reaching greater academic and professional achievements, than family members. This applied to both degree attainment and career choice. In the words of Logan, "My mother told me I had to be better than her." Logan explained the examples set by her parents, and their expectations for her as a result, saying:

That's really like—it wasn't ever an option. Like growing up a lot of the narrative was like like my mom has two master's my dad has a master's degree. And so my dad was actually the first person his family to get, to get a college education, he has, of his siblings or he has 12 brothers and sisters and he's smack dab in the middle . . . Growing up the narrative was always like you're going to college it's just a matter of which college are going to. And then you need to like, take it a level higher than we did so like, you have to do better, and so, when I graduate I'll actually be the first grandchild, with the doc.

Emory remembered the career path of her grandmother. The expectation for Emory included choosing a different professional path to follow. She said:

And then my grandma worked as a custodial worker at a community college . . . But it was like very apparent, I was like this is not going to be you you're you're smart you're going to do better so like this is not going to be like your career path.

Family members met achievements that they expected participants to surpass. Awareness of what family members had achieved, and the expectations to excel what had been done prior, set the stage for participants to seek advanced degrees and elevated career paths.

Career Exposure

Participants spoke of being directly or indirectly exposed to career possibilities by family members. Through bearing witness to the academic journeys of family members, or discussing career options with family members, participants gained a grasp of possible career decisions. Haven shared how seeking guidance from her mother helped with career decision making. After

a tough year as a teacher, Haven and her mother discussed other potential career options. When asked if anyone encouraged her to attend a master's, Haven replied:

I would say my mom . . . But she was the one to kind of start initiating the conversation, especially after the whole SOL fiasco. And was like well you know you are, you are well with kids, you are good with kids; what else would you want to do in education? And so we started exploring . . . And then that's when I kind of got to work with, like I said shadow our school counselor at my teaching job . . . But yeah it was her. Mama, Mama started the first early conversations about getting a master's.

Aloni witnessed her mother being a spouse, mother, and student. Aloni viewed her mother as an example of all she could potentially achieve and become herself, saying:

Watching firsthand my mom complete her master's within a allied health field, watching her do that and having three children right and being married and all of this showed me the possibility of being a dynamic woman, really a dynamic Black woman, that is scholarly and thriving personally and professionally.

Emory remembered learning about counseling from her mother. Similar to Aloni, Emory also remembered her mother as a student in a graduate program. Emory was exposed to her future professional yield at just 8 years old. She said:

And then I can't remember if I said this last time, but like when I was 8 my mom was, at the time she was working towards a master's in counseling and I found one of her books and I was like, "This is cool. What is this about?" and she was like, "Oh it's about like, helping people heal but helping them with their emotions and not their bodies," so I was

like, that sounds cool and doesn't require blood, so I was like cool. Like basically since I was 8 I wanted to be some sort of mental health professional.

The involvement and impact of family in the lives and outcomes of participants cannot be undervalued. Both immediate and extended family members offered support ranging from academic, emotional, and professional guidance. Family members expected participants to reach certain academic heights, specifically that of attending college. Participants built upon the academic and professional examples set by their families, elevating and advancing themselves by exceeding familial expectations. Family members also exposed participants to possible career options, whether through indirect exposure to academic journeys or direct conversations regarding career decision making.

Proving People Wrong

A theme of Proving People Wrong was present for every participant, with each noting a pressure to actively work to disprove negative beliefs or stereotypes, or remembering discouraging conversations while on their academic or professional journeys. Subthemes included *Going Above and Beyond*, *Redefining Black Femininity*, and *Benefits of Being a Black Woman*.

Wanting to disprove others seemed to be a motivator for academic and career achievement. Emory talked about pushing past hearing the word, “No,” in ways those of other identities may not be as familiar with, saying:

I can only know my own experience—but at least my own perception of things is, I can see in the ways that me being a Black woman and me, umm, having to deal with “No’s” or dealing with people like underestimating or whatever, has made me been like, “Okay,

you know, let me show you,” versus, um, some other friends who are not Black women . . . My perception is it because there they haven’t had to go through some of those things, umm, some places where they would have been told, “No,” they would have been like defeated or umm . . . anxious or whatever, umm, when I would’ve just been like, “Okay let’s keep it moving,” you know, like no point in—at least for some things I do try to let myself feel things—but at least like in some things like, “No point in like crying over spilled milk,” basically.

Being underestimated or discouraged may come from professors. Logan revealed a professor in her master’s program did not recommend she pursue a doctorate degree. Instead of internalizing the message from her professor, Logan used their words as motivation to enter a doctoral program, noting:

[Redacted] actually like discouraged me from trying to go to the doctorate, he was like, “It’s a lot of data and you say you don’t like that. I just don’t know if that’s something, like research and data, and I don’t know if that’s something that like, you would be good at.” Well, and that’s, so that was kind of part of the reason why I did it too because, like when somebody tells me I can’t do it, I have to do it to like, prove them wrong.

Proving people wrong was also a factor in career decision making. Though Harper had a positive relationship with her high school counselor, Harper recalled a conversation in which her counseling did not foresee a counseling career as part of Harper’s future. She recalled:

Ironically enough, even though my school counselor’s like amazing [name redacted] in high school she was, “I don’t know I just don’t see you as a counselor for some reason,”

and I was like, “I’ll show you.” And I told her that. Thankfully, we have, we have a very like loving and like we go back and forth and yeah. I am about to be a professional counselor.

Professors and high school counselors were included among those participants sought to prove wrong. Authority figures seemed to have beliefs about who participants could and could not become, and what they could and could not achieve. Connected to Black women in CES doctoral programs working to prove others wrong is the idea of having to overperform to do so.

Going Above and Beyond

This theme is defined by overperforming to dispel stereotypes, or just to be on an equal playing field as others of other identities. Emory shared, “You have to do like, twice as much work to get like, just like an inch of recognition.” Harper reflected on whether or not the motivation to go above and beyond was driven by internal or external motivators. She said:

For me, and I think I struggle with if this is a expectation that society has put on me, or is this an expectation that I’ve put on myself of having to really go above and beyond. With everything that I do . . . I want to be better than others, and I want to not have my race define me in a way or a sense of, “Oh, it’s okay that Harper’s slacking you know she’s like—Black people go through so much like it’s okay if she’s falling behind.” . . . I don’t want that, and I really hate that. So, having to go above and beyond, is definitely an expectation that I have. Once again I don’t know if that’s me or that society but it’s definitely one that I am still holding on to and I’m not sure if I’m ready to let it go or if I even want to let it go.

When asked the role narratives about Black women played in her academic experiences, Harper discussed being intentional about not falling victim to stereotypes. This intention often included ideas surrounding overachieving and perfectionism. She shared, “It goes back to something I said earlier, of me feeling the need to overachieve and be perfect. Due to not wanting to fall into a stereotype.” However, Aloni reflected on attempting to dispel certain stereotypes potentially perpetuating others. Being mindful of the stereotype connecting laziness to those who identify as Black can sometimes mean overworking and falling victim to the Superwoman stereotype held of Black women. Caught between stereotypes of working too little or too much, Black women may be struggling to find relief from preconceived beliefs in their academic and professional lives. This struggle may be impacting their mental health as a result. She recalled:

I would say other stereotypes that are often impacted, umm, is like you know, historically, people have thought Black people were lazy in the workplace . . . Umm, so I think combating that stereotype in the workplace is one that is often there and it’s like “No, we are not lazy.” Now, it can work to the detriment on the flip side because sometimes perfectionism kicks in and type-A personalities and other things that may be a driver to overwork to disprove that point. So sometimes I—I’ve noticed, sometimes for myself, I’ve heard this from other colleagues—we get caught up in superwoman syndrome as Black women because we don’t know how to take breaks. We don’t know how to take a vacation like our counterparts, right? Because we’re feeling like if we take time off or we say, “We need a breather,” it shows a sign of weakness or incompetence or whatever the case may be, and that’s just not true. . . . I would say, those are also the ones that can

simultaneously impact mental health, even for Black women in mental health. Because we forget that sometimes the things that we're teaching other people also apply to us in the ways that we set boundaries in the workplace.

Participants were unsure if the notion of going above and beyond was motivated by personal (i.e., internal) or societal (i.e., external) factors. Carrying the weight of wanting to disprove stereotypes is sometimes coupled with unhealthy beliefs surrounding work performance and boundary setting. Overall, proving people wrong included working against discouragement, and feeling the need to work twice as hard or overperform in comparison to peers of other identities in the hopes of disproving stereotypes held about Black women. Defining Black womanhood for themselves was also prevalent for participants.

Redefining Black Femininity

Participants worked hard to redefine what it means to be a Black woman, both for society and themselves. Participants were able to identify stereotypes that exist about Black womanhood, and how they impacted their self-concepts. When asked, "What comes to mind when you hear the words Black woman?," a reply from Emory was, "I'm really trying to like avoid saying the word resilient because I hate that word." By acknowledging what their Black feminine identities did not include, participants were also able to identify the struggles of creating new definitions of their Black womanhood. As Black women, stereotypes about feelings and emotions were considerations in how participants communicated in academic, professional, and personal settings. Participants were aware of how they wanted to express themselves emotionally, and how that can sometimes be perceived or misperceived by others. Emory shared an awareness of taking an extra step when expressing her emotions as others might question the source or

authenticity of her feelings. Having proof that validates feelings of anger was thought to be helpful in dispelling “angry Black woman” stereotypes. Emory stated:

I think, always you know, making sure that it—not coming off as like the angry Black woman or like if I do get angry I get angry with facts. So it’s not just like seeming like it’s coming in from an emotional place . . . Basically, like always feeling like I have to have actual receipts and be like, “No, I have a reason to be angry. Here’s your proof because apparently you don’t believe that I’m saying like, this is shitty,” or whatever.

Harper considered stereotypical expectations of emotional expression, and its impact. Harper mentioned implicit stereotypes being “pretty much pretty ingrained in our society, really entrenched in people’s thinking.” When asked to expand, she shared the difficulties of trying to balance disproving expectations about her emotions with wanting to put herself and mental health first, Harper said:

Honestly, I think of like the vulnerability aspect and equally not showing vulnerability or a lot of emotional expression and still the expectation that I need to be the nurturer and I need to be caring for people . . . That’s hard, because I don’t want to care for people all the time, like sometimes I need to just take care of myself and then being called selfish for doing that.

Stereotypes about Black women and their emotional expression, or lack thereof, impacted how participants engaged with others in academic and professional settings. The angry Black woman stereotype (Lewis et al., 2016), strong Black woman (SBW; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009), mammy/nurturer stereotype (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008) were either mentioned or alluded to

by participants. Awareness of these stereotypes, and how they influence both self-concepts and situational interactions, is a key factor in working to unlearn them.

Participants did share instances of moving away from the harmful practices of proving others wrong, and operating from places that felt more authentic to them. Participants spoke of working toward or working at shifting from unhealthy beliefs about who Black women are and should be. This often included harmful stereotypes. Harper shared noticing shifts in how Black women express themselves emotionally, saying:

I didn't really see it as much when I was younger but definitely as I've gotten older and I think that comes along with maturity and vulnerability um but yeah just a lot more Black women are able to express vulnerability without there being any repercussions for it so it's more normalized. And I think that's one thing that I've really loved seeing and I've loved seeing that within myself and as well as in the community at large, absolutely.

Haven discussed letting go of a pressure to present herself a certain way. The pressure to speak and present in a certain way stemmed from wanting to represent Black people positively. When asked what role narratives about Black women play in her academic experiences, she shared:

I did think that I had to be like better and prim and proper and umm speak intelligently all the time and, just have my stuff together so maybe it caused me to over perform, or add unnecessary pressure to myself, because I, I wanted to represent my people in the best light possible. . . So I will say I do think that's how it kind of played just trying to be the, the model minority when—girl, now that's too much work [laughed].

Harper spoke of being “more deliberate and intentional” in speech and actions within her master’s program because, “I knew that whatever I said and did would influence their views on Black women.” She shared recently being able to move away from harmful messaging in her current postsecondary program, viewing these mindsets as “not sustainable,” saying:

Now within my doctoral program I think that I’ve let go of a lot of messages that I don’t want to hold on to any more about like who I need to be or what I am just because they’re not conducive to my development.

Unlearning healthy beliefs seemed to be a culmination of maturity and reflection. After years of exposure to negative stereotypes about Black women, participants seemed to be relieved to own their own individual versions of Black femininity. Unlearning unhealthy beliefs seemed especially beneficial in their interactions and engagement in academic settings. By releasing themselves from who they were believed to be, they were able to become who they wanted to be. This translated to considering the full breadth and depth of their Black femininity, including other intersectional identities.

Participants were also aware of how identities other than those of being Black and feminine impacted or impact their academic experiences, and career decisions as a result. Intersectional identities, how participants chose to account for them in their work, and how they impacted their interactions and aspirations were influential for each participant. For Emory, her LGBTQ identity impacts the roles she plans to enter, and the diversity she plans to bring to a professional setting. She said:

That’s one of the reasons why I did a doc program . . . because I think there needs to be more faculty of color in these programs, and hopefully encouraging students on the

master's level. To also do doctoral programs as well and diversify not only racially and ethnically but also like in terms of LGBTQ and other marginalized identities.

When asked how she defines herself outside of the identities of being a Black woman, Harper shared her queer identity. She shared the impact of her intersectional identities, both professionally and personally, saying:

Of course, being good counselor is a really important role and something that I think about this consistently within my work and just within my life as a whole, and I would say, also being queer—happy pride, by the way—but. Yeah that's been what I've been . . . What's the term? Almost grasping with I guess? Just because of the stigma with being queer and what that means, especially with being a Black woman. So that extra intersectional identity that provides more . . . bias. And can have a lot of negative connotations that go along with it.

When asked if there was a story she could share that made her interested in pursuing a post secondary degree, Harper shared wanting her parents to feel pride in her academic achievements was a motivating factor for her. Harper also shared her parents were immigrants from Jamaica. This in turn impacted her approach to education. She expressed, “Especially like being immigrants, not having a formal education. Them still not understanding the intensity of a doctoral program; they just know it's like, a big thing.” Aloni shared how faith impacts her perspective. Her foundation in faith influences her as a scholar, counselor, and human being. She said, “As a Black female and then admittedly as one who identifies as a Christian Black female that I bring to the mindset of what I do as a student, as a person, as a clinician and so on.” Haven considered the impact being a first generation doctoral student has on her experiences. She

recalled not immediately receiving formal guidance on program navigation or resources available to aid her in her academic journey. Though she was unsure why she was not receiving this guidance initially, the advice of a mentor was very helpful in revealing the resources at her disposal. She remarked:

And that's why it was important for me to have mentors because I don't, I really wouldn't have anyone else . . . Like I said I love my program, I love my people. But I don't know if it's because of COVID or everybody's just tired but, I really haven't had too much of, "Hey, let's sit down, let me explain all this to you," so one of my mentors had to tell me to go—"Hey, make an appointment with the School of Ed librarian." And I was like, "we have a librarian just assigned for the School of Ed? What?" And we met last week and that man showed me so many databases and I was like, "I ain't never seen this stuff before in my life." . . . And so that type of stuff has been like a, the biggest learning curve, for me, is not the classes and not the materials is the just understanding this . . . higher education world.

Emory was also a first generation doctoral student. She discussed the weight of being the first grandchild in her family with a doctoral degree. She acknowledged her family encouraging her to take advantage of the ability to gain an education, as this was not always an option for those who identify as Black, saying:

I'mma be the first grandkid so it's like so much pressure. Like I can't stop, I have to continue, and so it was just never an option . . . It was like embedded to us that like, you have to do something great and the way to like have a extra leg up, yeah extra leg up or

like, access to resources is through education, because it hasn't been something that Black people have always had, had, had the ability to gain and have.

As each participant identified as a Black and/or African American woman, there was much discussion related to being a Black woman in academic and career settings. Participants were aware of how they are perceived by society, how they present themselves to society, and who they truly are as Black women. Participants were aware of the stereotypes that exist about being a Black woman, the ways these stereotypes impacted them, and the ways these beliefs influenced their interactions with others. Fighting against oppressive stereotypes proved challenging, especially in regard to who Black women are believed to be by society, and who participants believed themselves to be. This was also true of how Black women in society are believed to feel and express emotion, and how participants did this themselves. Awareness of how Black women are expected to feel (or not feel) and express (or not express) emotions helped participants move away from unhealthy mindsets about how they show up in society, and academic and career settings as a result. In addition to being Black women, other intersectional identities for participants included being members of the LGBTQ community, having a foundation in faith and religion, being children of immigrant families, and first generation doctoral students. As participants were able to define their Black womanhood for themselves, they were also able to pinpoint positive aspects of their Black feminine identities.

Benefits of Being a Black Woman

Participants did speak of the joy they have in being Black women. Factors benefited included their approaches to both professional and academic pursuits. This is important to highlight, as experiences may not have always resulted in participants holding positive feelings

about these identities. Harper spoke of several instances of microaggressions and feeling othered as a K–12 student, saying, “Once again going back to this idea of like being Black. I first learned in elementary school and that’s when I first got told like, ‘Oh you’re a white girl stuck in a Black girl’s body.’” When asked about if K–12 was challenging for her, Harper spoke about how early experiences impacted her racial identity development. She shared:

I would say it’s just been, recently—honestly, within the past 4 to 5 years—that I’ve really, not seen me being a black woman as a bad thing, of like, “Oh yeah racism is the bad thing; me being black is not the bad thing.” Umm, and that’s only been recently so, 27, 26, yeah. Birth until 21 thinking of it as a negative.

Aloni considered how being a Black woman may help her connect with those she serves in a professional role. As a Black woman, working with those of the same identity may offer an interconnectedness that aids Aloni in being a conduit for change. She said:

What I have grown more aware of with age and time and even in the space of our own interview is me being born into the world as a Black woman, is a unique conduit and a unique key to open doors of healing for others and to provide a relatable place that I might not have had access to certain people, or communities or a sense of relate ability, with certain people had it not been that God designed me to be Black and woman, right? And I think that is the most enriching and insightful part of it. It’s not just how do these things, then motivate me to serve in these capacities, but it’s becoming more aware of like, Lord you designed and made me this way, therefore, how are you using this to be a tool to accomplish a greater purpose, right? How does it give me a leveraging place in different communities and conversations that it really becomes the key for change and

puts me before certain people, certain individuals, certain families, certain agencies that will actually hear my voice differently, and being Black and woman that they may have been like, “How do you, like, you can’t identify with us on these issues,” right? Or, “You don’t know our story,” and it’s like, “Actually I do. Because I’ve lived it.”

For Emory, a benefit of being a Black woman included using stereotypes to her advantage.

Emory spoke of her approach to a diversity statement for a postsecondary application. She expected the people reviewing her application to make assumptions about her background and lived experiences based on her race and neighborhood. In turn, Emory flipped the concept of white guilt, using it to make her a favorable applicant. She said:

You know in that diversity statement that they always like make you do? I was just like, “I’m just a little ole girl from the south side of [redacted], with a dream to be more, with my ancestors standing behind me.” [laughed] Okay, didn’t say it like that, but you know that, like vibe . . . I didn’t even grew up in like the typical southside, or at least like what people think of when they you know, think of southside [location redacted] where they think of like, violence and like you know, I grew up in [redacted] which is like really like a white middle class so but, like, I am aware that people don’t look at that they’re just like, “She’s Black,” so I was like, might as well use that to the best of my ability.

For Haven, belonging to a sisterhood of other Black women was an unmatched component of her Black and feminine identities. Black womanhood involves a connection to other Black women that includes support, correction, and love. When asked what her favorite thing about being a Black woman is, Haven shared:

Oh, I just think we have this universal sisterhood that is. Just unparalleled to any other group. The way we just support each other and look out for each other and correct each other in love when needed and I just really admire that um but yeah that's why I really love being a part of this, this dope sisterhood. All the time.

Each participant was able to name some benefits related to their Black and/or feminine identities.

Though interactions may discourage Black women from pinpointing privileges related to Black womanhood, participants seemed resolved in the impact of these intersectional identities.

Overall, participants seemed to find strength and reassurance in redefining Black femininity for themselves. Expressing their emotions, unlearning unhealthy beliefs, and acknowledging other intersectionalities seemed to bolster participants in their academic and professional pursuits.

Awareness of how Black womanhood works to their benefit is helpful in considering how being Black women impacts the supports available to participants.

Support

The theme of Support defines feelings held by participants about support provided during their academic journeys, or a lack thereof. Subthemes include *Peer Support*, *Campus Community Support*, and *Notable Educators*. Participants identified peers, campus constituents, and educators as resources used for academic and career support across various levels of schooling. Notable educators include the examples set by Black educators, guidance in career decision making, and instances of bullying participants experienced at the hands of educators. In lieu of adequate support, participants were also able to recall using agency to get their needs met.

Peer Support

Peer support was received from classmates or those in a similar age group, often from older students. These themes were present in K–12 and postsecondary academic settings. Haven remembered support received in middle school through her specialty program membership. Though her impression of present peer support is positive, she also acknowledged experiences of students outside of this specialty program may be different from her own. She said:

Middle school, I will say the school climate for me was very positive, especially when I got into this specialty program seventh grade and eighth grade. And with us just being a close knit type of kids we kind of had our own little subculture within the school and it was just really fun. We were all taking the same types of classes, we all had like similar interests. And it was you know it was, it was just a really fun time to be around other like-minded individuals um. And I think that kind of spilled into how I perceived my over—like the whole school and I could, it might not have been that experience for everyone else in the school especially those weren't in our program . . . I think we were so isolated in our own little bubble that that's all that I really remember of my time in middle school was like, Oh, it was so great, being in, in this program. But if I talked to someone else who went to the school, but wasn't in our program who probably would have the opposite. And that's possible.

Harper shared a story about her high school friend group. The close knit bond that began in high school is believed to have increased both her confidence and participation in class. This group continued to serve as a source of support for her. She said:

We were all Black girls at the time of us being there for each other and having that community and support system where we could literally talk about everything from something that happened in math class that we still don't understand how to go about this problem too . . . And I think that also played a role in how active I was in classes and like us working together as a team to do their different things . . . My friends have been like, "We really love, what do you do that," like "you've helped us umm, you, you help us you're a role model," almost even being that role model for one another without that judgment has been great, and that was something that started in high school for sure.

Support from peers also included peer mentorship. Aloni spoke of using peer mentorship as a K–12 student. Seeking out others who had already experienced a certain happening or who could assist with an issue was helpful to Aloni in her academic journey. Having peer mentors also encouraged Aloni to become a mentor herself after gaining her own knowledge and expertise. She said:

Just because I also wanted to continue to do well, like, I was doing in my other classes and when I see a challenge it's like, "Let's recruit help early, so it doesn't become an issue on the back end" . . . Mentorship was always in play one way or another; mentorship either by students in a grade ahead of me who had already gone that, two grades ahead. Then it empowered me to want to be a mentor to others when it was my turn being in that seat so mentorship. Mentorship for – from anyone who's been in there.

Emory shared similar feelings about the help of peers. Peer mentorship offered both assistance in applying for opportunities, and the confidence to showcase skills to others. For Emory, a peer

mentor was someone who had already experienced opportunities she was aiming for, and who was invested in her success. She said:

Peer mentorships as well, so like I said there's my friend who's also, she's a little bit further than me in the process . . . She was the one who helped me with my NBCC application, because she did it last year. And I think that was like super helpful because she went through my essay and was just like, "Okay, why didn't you put this? I know you do this, do that," so like having someone who like, knows me or like, is not afraid to force me to like shine, I guess.

Harper mentioned sometimes being more comfortable seeking support from peers than professors. There can be intimidation involved with approaching professors for help, especially when wanting to portray oneself as capable and competent. Harper shared her help-seeking decision making in her doctoral program, specifically sharing how it feels to approach a Black woman professor, saying:

I say I have really strong relationships with my professors, overall I also – for me it's just easier to go to, a peer as opposed to a professor, because I am very – I don't want to be seen in a negative light. Even – and I see that a lot with Dr [redacted]. I'm very, very mindful of what I would go to her for just because I want her, and I think it's because I see her as like such a powerful and dynamic Black woman, that she is intimidating. And I'm like no, I want to be on my like A-game, if I say any words to her.

It can be daunting to approach professors or educators for help. Even seeking help from professors of the same racial and gender identities can be less preferred in comparison to getting help from peers. Black women CES doctoral students may be relying greatly on support from

friends and classmates. Having perceptions about the peer support available may also influence postsecondary program choice. When asked what kinds of things related to her identity as a Black woman helped her decide which postsecondary programs to attend, Harper spoke about having peer support within the classroom. Desiring a sense of community was a deciding factor in the master's program she chose to enter. She recalled:

Having people who look like me. And I honestly, that was the main thing, yes, because I hadn't had that in a while um within academics, of having a community that I could rely on. That was really, that was something that I needed and, especially, because I was working beforehand, and I was working at an agency that was all white. And they didn't talk about anything related to race, I was like I need to be somewhere where people look like me, and they are having these conversations because it's important to have and I shouldn't be the only one wanting to bring this stuff up all of the time of like and even, in a sense, I've had to censor myself. In predominantly white settings of me not wanting to be like, "Oh Harper the black person is bringing up race again," like, "Isn't there anything else for us to talk about?" Like I don't want to be—I didn't want to be perceived that way. I don't care as much now. So I'd say having an institution that really embodies that and where I knew I would have community of some sort, was what led me to [school name redacted].

Having support from peers can be a factor in increased student confidence, increased classroom participation, the motivation to apply for opportunities, and even to apply to postsecondary programs. In turn, a lack of perceived peer support may negatively impact academic experiences, and inclinations toward career decision making in academic roles. Peer support and mentorship

included both peers in the same grade level or period of program entry (e.g., cohort members), or students further along in their academic journeys. Members of the campus community also served as sources of support for participants.

Campus Community Support

Many participants spoke of support provided by members of the college campus community who were not educators. This included those working in dining services and the admissions office. Logan talked about on-campus verbal and provisional support provided by Black women outside of the classroom. She said:

At [undergrad] the cafeteria ladies were like so encouraging. They, they were always like asking about class and, so when we ran out of food and money, and all of them were Black women, they would make sure we have food, give us free Chik-fil-A, things like that, so that was another source of support at the undergrad level.

Logan shared receiving help from university staff. At her undergraduate university, Logan met someone who connected her to funding opportunities. She was able to save money on her educational expenses because of the financial resources this person offered, saying:

She worked admissions at [undergrad] she always, I don't know how, I think we got connected through ambassadors, when I was an ambassador and she would always find like she saved me so much money undergrad finding like scholarships and things that I could apply for just to have more money and decrease the amount of student loans and things that I had so she was definitely a major component and did very much so behind the scenes, but she was also a Black woman.

These acts of kindness made postsecondary progress a bit easier for participants. Access to food and adequate finances are common concerns for students on college campuses. Alleviating these stressors, even if only temporarily, offered some form of relief for participants in their academic journeys. These examples of added support were provided by fellow Black women. Participants also recalled experiences with educators that impacted their academic experiences and career decision making.

Notable Educators

Participants remembered the teachers or professors who encouraged them academically or professionally. These encouragements included seeing strengths in their academic skills, and seemed to have long-range effects on academic trajectories, career decisions, and increased self-confidence. Haven recalled a teacher recommending she be tested to see if she was a gifted student. She said:

You know in looking—memories unlocked just like last time—thinking I don't know if i would've tested in the first place for gifted. I mean I can assume now, but. But yeah cause typically you see a lot of your gifting testing in in third grade um but I remember it was fourth grade and that's when I started to do like the gifted students stuff.

Without the help of this teacher, Haven may not have been placed on the same academic path that led to becoming a doctoral student. Haven also talked about her history teacher, and the support this teacher offered as Haven moved into a professional role. This notable educator both attempted to help Haven get a job, and gave her supplies to help her be successful. She recalled:

My first teaching job she gave me like this big box of like teacher goodies and she tried to get me hired at her school, but they didn't have a history teacher position and I became

a history teacher and she was my history teacher. So I always [redacted] I love her, but you know always consider her one of my earliest and first, first mentors.

Aloni spoke about her academic history artifact, a letter of recommendation used in her college application. Aloni appreciated the letter focused on her as an individual instead of her intersectional identities. She truly felt seen and understood by the writer of her letter as more than just a Black girl or woman, but as a person, too. She said:

I really appreciate how the person was able to articulate me as the person knowing me as the individual. And was able to speak to my characteristics and qualities as an individual and not, again, have a cultural slant or lens to it. If they would have spoke to that it would have been okay, but I think too many times let's say when people are writing letters or recommendations for us as Black individuals, they seem like they always have to tell the story of our culture and it's not to erase that from there, but do you know me as an individual and see how me as an individual actually enhances what makes me beautiful, wonderful, competent . . . as a Black woman? And that letter does well.

Much of the notable educators in participants' lives are those they maintained contact with, even after advancing in their academic journeys. Educators seemed to make a lasting positive impression with participants when they both highlighted their strengths, and continued to help or encourage participants long after their time together as teacher and student. Harper shared a teacher realizing strengths in her as K-12 student, and still receiving encouraging words from this teacher today. She recalled:

My second grade teacher [name redacted], she was one that really was like, “You’re such an excellent writer, you need to stick at this. You have such a great imagination.” So she really motivated me, really inspired me, really helped me see my strengths with writing. And even now she’s like, “Do you still write, even for fun?” Oh so yeah it’s like she remembered that part of me, she saw it as a strength, she helped me understand that it was a strength.

Notable educators were often those who made participants feel seen. These teachers saw skills and potential in participants that both encouraged them, and elevated their academic progress, skill development, and career confidence. Other notable memories of education included examples set by Black educators, the impact of mentors of other racial identities, and career guidance.

Participants shared their experiences of, or exposure to, Black educators throughout their academic careers. Experiences were both positive and negative. Harper discussed the validation her high school counselor provided, and its influence on her racial identity development. When asked if she had Black and/or African American women teachers at her schools, Harper reflected on the supports in her life. She shared:

I have had a lot, I would say that’s a good handful of really strong Black women in my life, who even now still encouraged me and are like, I still have a relationship with everyone now just looking out for me and being there for me and supporting me.

Counted among these supportive Black women was her high school. Though she did not have Black teachers at the time, Harper shared, “my school counselor was the Black woman that I looked up to the most during that time.” Harper recalled her school counselor telling her, “Who

cares about all of the rest? There's no such thing as being the ideal Black woman, because at the end of the day, you'll never be ideal and you'll never be perfect." When reflecting upon the impact of this relationship, Harper shared, "That was something that I really needed at that time in my life." Although some participants shared consistent experiences with Black educators, sometimes this included limited direct exposure to being taught by Black teachers or professors. Haven shared the joy of seeing more Black teachers in her new school building after moving from a majority-white school. As being in the international baccalaureate program meant she was often not taught by Black teachers, just the increased presence of Black teachers was encouraging. She recalled:

When I went to the zone school that's in my neighborhood, that was a predominantly Black school and even the teaching staff reflected that and even still it's still like a lot actually more so Black male. But, it was just kind of, it was really cool. It was really cool to have a teaching staff that look like you, especially coming from rural [location redacted] where the teachers didn't look like me, and it was, I thought it was a culture shock for me.

Emory shared the impression a Black woman teacher left on her in high school, sharing, "I remember, she was just like one day she pulled me aside she's like, 'You're smart. Don't take that bullshit.' I don't remember exactly like what even happened I just remember her saying that. I was like, 'Yes!'" Participants also spoke of Black educators with a tough-love approach when teaching Black students. Likely as a result of having to work twice as hard to be just as good, Black educators held their Black students to high standards, challenging them on their academic

journeys. Logan spoke of a Black woman who expected and demanded a lot of her Black students, saying:

I felt like she was always harder on the Black kids which was probably very intentional. And until we got to 12th grade she kind of like relaxed with us and was more chill on just her approach . . . She was mean, she was mean to us until we got to 12th grade, and then I guess she was like we all got it now so, but she like always . . . as an adult I don't think it's mean but, like in high school, I was like she's a mean lady. But she really just wanted the best for us because I'm friends with her on Facebook now.

Logan also shared her experience being taught by a Black male professor in her doctoral program. She discussed both reactions to the course content the professor chose, and the bravery it likely took to broach such sensitive topics, saying:

I really appreciated taking his class because he incorporated Black Americans into his curriculum, and a lot of the conversations in classes that were not multiculturalism or multicultural, were around—that class was really just around like race, perceptions of race, just not Black people, but like Asian American and Native Americans—And things like that, so I really appreciated that. His curriculum and book choice . . . He was very intentional and, as a new person coming into college or university that does take, I think, a lot. It was interesting because a lot of the white students complained, they were like, “We're just tired of talking about like the impact that America has had on Black people and we wanna talk about something else” . . . But they vocalized it in the class and everything and I'm like, “This is how we feel when we're talking about like white history all the time,” so I definitely appreciated that class and him incorporating it into it.

Logan also shared her perception of her doctoral program prior to the hiring of a Black woman professor. Not having a Black woman faculty member implied that Black women are not only undervalued, but unlikely to reach tenured status. As Logan and her classmates shared their concerns about a lack of faculty diversity prior to this hiring, it was hard for Logan to determine whether the hiring of a Black woman professor was only because students shared their concerns. She said:

Just the fact that there wasn't any Black women in the counselor ed department spoke volumes, whether they meant for it to or not, but it's like you don't value and put up you know Black women to the department and really until Dr [redacted] got there. But then I also know that they were really trying to become and look more diverse, as we have voiced that too, so I don't know that if we hadn't have voiced it if that would have happened, you know. um. So I don't think that they were necessarily said, but it was a, more so like, actions speak louder than words and the fact that you don't have one speaks volumes.

Black professors sometimes served as mentors for participants, connecting them to resources or assisting with their skill development. Haven spoke of a program professor and a professor outside of her CES doctoral program. When asked who she considers a mentor or important figure in her future professional role, she shared:

Definitely, Dr. [redacted] who's a professor here at [school name redacted]. She's our only Black professor in the counselor education program . . . But once letting her know more about my interests and what I want to do like she's just been like sending me stuff left and right. I'm like, "Okay. I can't do all of this, but thank you for all of these

great opportunities and connecting me to the right people.” And there’s another Professor, Dr. [redacted] she’s not in—she, she graduated from [school name redacted] but she’s been like going over like the *real* stuff that you know you think should be included in the program. So maybe because it’s a virtual year, maybe because I’m a part time student, maybe I’m missing, but like, stuff like how to get on an editorial review board, how to create a research agenda like stuff that people will be asking me for in 3 years.

Although participants desired more interactions with Black educators, engagement with Black educators were not always pleasant experiences. Though participants were sometimes able to remember these moments fondly, some left lasting negative impressions. In addition to experiences of support and validation, participants revealed being disappointed by Black educators. Harper spoke of her middle school counselor discouraging how she chose to present herself, saying:

I had a Black school, a Black school counselor in actually all three grades three levels . . . I’m closest with was my one in high school, who really helped me and was just a really great person . . . My middle school and elementary school were not that great.

There was one time in middle school that I was wearing black nail polish and my school counselor was like, “Do you know what people will think of you, if you’re

Black and wear black nail polish?” And I was like, “Uhh, that I like the color black?”

And she was like, “Do you know how they used to treat us?” And she she never told me anymore, she was just like, “Do you know how they used to treat us for this?”

Even Black educators can discourage Black students from genuine self-expression. It is not only peers who can make students question how they express their Blackness, but professional

educators as well. In a misguided attempt to protect Harper from bullying or being othered, this counselor became the very bully from which Harper needed protection. Related to expression, performance, and representing Black people or Black women collectively, Emory remembered a Black woman professor from her time as an undergraduate student. Emory shared feeling disappointed by the teaching the class received. As a Black woman professor, Emory both wished the professor had done a better job of representing other Black women educators well, was conscious of the different standards Black women in education are held to in comparison to those of other identities. She said:

It was obvious that she kind of didn't want to be there and then. It felt like she didn't really explain anything and they like her directions were not clear . . . Those moments are just like, "Oh my gosh you're ruining this like come on that, but for the culture." And I felt bad for like even then, I feel bad for thinking about it because I'm just like I don't know what she's going through, but then like it's just like one of those things where like sometimes I feel defensive for Black teachers or especially Black female teachers. Especially when other or when white or non-Black students like critique down because I'm just like you wouldn't be critiquing them if they were, white or they were a man or whatever, but I mean she she was kind of like not really teaching us so it was like that weird thing of like being disappointed that we weren't really learning but also be disappointed that she just wasn't doing a good job.

The meta-awareness required to both be dissatisfied with Black educators and extend them grace in their shortcomings may be easier for students who share their identities. Though Emory wanted better professional performance from her Black woman professor, she also

acknowledged not being aware of what this professor might have been experiencing, personally or professionally. Relationships with Black educators included racial identity development, self-advocacy, and seeing oneself in classroom curriculum. Relationships also included suppressing expression and being disappointed in professional performance. For some, exposure to Black educators was consistent across each level of schooling. As access to Black educators was often limited or unavailable, participants recalled experiences with educators of other identities.

Participants were able to share experiences, also positive and negative, of educators of different racial identities. Harper recalled her ninth grade English teacher, who acknowledged their differences with compassion and empathy. By addressing her racial identity and the nuanced experiences that accompany her Blackness, Harper was able to feel seen and supported. She said:

She was always there to listen, once again, and she was able to also listen to race things that would happen. And always open to saying like, “I don’t know what you’re experiencing because I’m white and, of course, you know that, but I want you to know that I’m still here for you,” which I really appreciated.

Addressing differences in identities was more helpful to participants than educators who chose to ignore them. As acknowledging identities and interests can be helpful in supporting students of color. Haven discussed a mentor who graduated from the counseling program she was attending. There was an awareness of what is important to Haven, which allowed her mentor to connect her to relevant and interesting opportunities. She said:

I don't use the term "ally" a lot . . . But she, she's a coconspirator. Like she's, you know, anything she—she only tried to throw my way paid opportunities, because that's what's up. And like connecting me with like people who are paying me to do stuff and talk about things I'd like to talk about.

Mentorship includes supportive actions and considerations. Haven was able to identify her mentor as a coconspirator, or ally in fighting anti-Blackness (Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021).

Although participants did share exceptions, also of importance were instances where participants felt othered or unsupported by their educators. Participants shared experiences of not feeling heard or considered in the classroom, with educators being dismissive of the feelings or realities of Black students. Harper remembered sharing instances of bullying with K–12 teachers, and having them dismissed. Actions were often not taken to support or defend Black students. The attitude held by educators seemed to be that of accepting race-based bullying incidents as the norm. After sharing there being a lack of conversations around race in her K–12 schooling, Harper shared this example of teacher responses to race-based incidents:

Even when it came to verbal bullying, it was especially from the white teachers, it was just like, "Oh, you need to—I'm sorry this is happening, but you need to like grow up. It's just a phase. They'll get over it," as opposed to, "No it's not okay that someone's bullying you." It's, it was more so like, "You'll be fine, You'll be—this will be done within 2 years you just have to get through it." So, especially with that, like our concerns as Black girls—I won't even use the term women because we were 12, 13—Black girls. Not being taken seriously, of having really like racist things said to us from others and being discriminated against by us telling us, learning like, "Oh, the discrimination that

you feel you just need to get used to it,” was the message that it was. Being told, even implicitly like the explicit was, “Oh, it’s just a phase, you can get through this.” Implicit was, “Oh yeah this is going to be forever, you have to get used to this in order to not break down.”

Feeling unsupported in class was often related to there not being conversations about race held in the classroom, or classroom discussions that participants felt missed the mark. Emory shared instances of microaggressions and racism at each level of her postsecondary schooling (i.e., undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral). For Emory, “all these experiences, just like seems to blend and they all seem to just be the same thing over and over again just in different spaces.” In her doctoral program, she addressed what she believed was a lack of discussing issues around race, specifically in relation to antiracist promises the doctoral program promotes. Emory spoke about her academic history artifact, a letter she wrote to her program faculty, acknowledging where they have fallen short. She stated:

Last summer, when I wrote the faculty members in my program a letter as like the committee chair of the doctoral student counseling committee saying like, “Hey, online on all of our like information flyers we say that we’re a social justice focused program. And yet y’all have not said anything about George Floyd, Breonna Taylor,” and, you know it wasn’t even like—I mean according to one faculty it came off as demanding but you know. We don’t listen to him. But . . . it was . . . It was just like, “Hey this is who you all say you’re not if we’re going to keep calling ourselves a social justice program because I know that’s why I came to the program, then what are ways that you’re actually doing that or ways that you’re actually promoting, umm, antidiscrimination and

antiracism?” And that was something that of course I shared with like the rest of my cohort, the rest of the doctoral students and was something that like whether or not other people agreed with me, I was still going to send.

Similar to experiences with Black educators, participants were both encouraged and discouraged by educators of other racial identities. Connections to and engagement with white educators included mentorship, compassion, being disregarded, and demanding accountability. Experience and engagement with educators of all identities influenced and continues to influence the career decision making of participants.

Participants referred to moments or memories of important figures in their lives that encouraged them to consider a profession or career. This guidance often came from educators with whom participants had positive relationships. As noted earlier, genuinely knowing participants and acknowledging their interest and strengths encouraged genuine connections. These relationships allowed trusted adults to offer guidance regarding career decision making. Even though Emory knew she wanted to be in the mental health field at a young age, an advisor helped steer her toward steps she could take to actually become one. She recalled:

So my family and then I guess also my advisor because I think I said before, that I knew I wanted to do mental health stuff I knew I wanted to do counseling but I was, even when I looked online it wasn't clear like in terms of the pathway, so I think I guess in terms of like this is actually what you need to do my undergrad advisor was like, “Yeah you're gonna, you're gonna need to go to grad school at least getting like a master's.” I'm like, “Oh okay cool.”

Logan shared she changed her undergraduate major after the death of a high school teacher. The relationship with her teacher included conversations concerning career decision making. The loss of her music teacher was a catalyst for Logan to change her undergraduate major, marking the beginning of her career trajectory as a counselor. When asked who, if anyone, encouraged her academically or professionally, she named her music teacher. She shared:

My music teacher a lot, because that 12th grade year . . . There was nowhere for me to go like there was no other classes for me to take and so my music teacher was like well I don't have a class during that block it's my first period. So, if you want to be my aide, you can be my aide, and so we created a block itself had so many conversations just about what I wanted to do in the future, and like what life would be like and those really did shape like—just, like I was always going to college like that wasn't a doubt, but, just like the opportunities and really doing what I wanted to do. Like when she—cause I started off as a math major—when she died I ended up switching and going to human services because that was something that we talked about doing.

When figuring out next steps, Harper considered guidance from professors and colleagues. Though some professors were discouraging, others encouraged Harper to pursue a doctorate degree. Respected colleagues also offered the same advice, ultimately, resulting in Harper pursuing this advanced degree. She recalled:

It was me understanding and being told, like, “Oh yeah, if you want to make it in this field like you need to get your PhD.” And especially because I was, I am getting my LPC and they're like, “You're not an LCSW. If you want, you can maybe find a job, like that. But if you're having your LPC as a Black woman you need to have your PhD along with

it, so that people can take you more seriously.” Um so let’s say that was, like the final straw for me because I always felt as—I wanted to get it. I had a few professors who would be like, “It’s really hard I don’t know if you want to do it,” so that kind of told me to go a different route. But really, between, honestly between Dr [redacted] who’s my advisor as well as the two Black counselors at [redacted] at [redacted] where I work there they’ve all been like, “Oh no, you need to get your PhD.” Um that was honestly, all I need for people to, that I look up to, to, to tell me that so that’s what led me here.

Guidance and support in career decision making came from advisors, teachers, professors, and colleagues/peers. Discussing career decisions with those they trusted and respected seemed to motivate participants toward meeting their career goals. Career navigation nudges included providing clear professional pathways, choosing academic and career paths that felt authentic to participants, and pursuing advanced degrees. Though participants pinpointed multiple sources of support, they also outlined ways they supported or sought support themselves in their academic and professional journeys.

Filling the Gaps

Filling the Gaps refers to the agency and advocacy used by participants in their academic and professional environments. Participants took the initiative to supplement the support, information, or skill development they were not receiving from their schooling. This included finding ways to support oneself when support was either not available or not explicitly known. Filling the Gaps, or supplementing the resources available, was key to their success. As Emory shared, “I think if I just like settled with the support in my program I would be really dissatisfied.” Emory talked about finding outside support when her advisor was

unresponsive. Technology allowed strangers to function as resources via social media. She said:

This has been great, but then also even like virtual spaces like academic Twitter has been really great or the AMCD graduate student group has been super supportive in terms of just like overall support and enthusiasm, but also in terms of like “Oh, if I have a question about something,” and there’s usually at least like one person who can hopefully help. So like last year I was supposed to do my first poster presentation at APA. Super excited, emailed my advisor and she didn’t get back to me. I was just like, “Okay, how to do a poster presentation like what do I even like, how do I even make it?” . . . So it was a combination of going to Twitter and be like, “Yo academic Twitter, I’m doing a poster presentation, for the first time, help!” and having like, kind complete strangers email me like, their draft or their version, so I can look at, and then also having my friend who’s a year above me who’s done a few poster presentations email me her draft. That was like, super helpful.

Aloni shared her approach and perspective around support provided. Although Aloni acknowledged the obstacles and nuances Black women and students can face in receiving support, she also attested much of success to her attitude and spiritual identity. She said:

I do not operate in the mindset of lack. And I do not allow myself to think that a system, a structure, a person or an environment can be a hindrance to anything that I know God has called me to. Because, ultimately, He has the final say and provision rests in His hands and that’s my faith conviction so with that if I see that there’s a limitation, that is the place where, then I become all the more adamant to either (a) seek out what I need, that resource or whatever the case may be, or (b) I become a part of the solution, and then I

begin to operate as that, that conduit between whatever that need is whether that student needs specific to us as Black females or Black or African American students. I become a part of the answer, and the solution and I don't mind doing the digging to make sure that we are afforded those resources and opportunities to move forward . . . I believe I have it, I believe it's there for me, I believe I can find it. If it's not, I'll go seeking it and if I can't find it will be a part of the change . . . No there, there are far and few and in between things that I don't think I have access to if operating in those steps, but being mindful obviously that sometimes access to resources and varying degrees can be limited, or can be a, a place of discussion. For those who identify as Black and African Americans.

When support was unsatisfactory or unavailable, Black women CES doctoral students found support or supported themselves. Agency was a key factor creatively finding resources to aid in their success. Outside assistance was offered through social media connections and faith identities. Additional support was given by participants who received therapy. Only two participants shared receiving therapy at some point during their academic journeys. Emory shared experiencing a lot of gaslighting in her master's program related to discussions (or missed conversations) about race. Afterward, she decided to enter therapy. She described the support she received from her therapist in terms of validating her feelings and experiences:

I, so I think the best way that I explain it is because, like I said it in my master's program that's why I was like, "Okay, fuck this; I need therapy." I got therapy and like ironically I got, I had my therapist was like a white woman . . . I think, at that time I needed, I don't, like I guess validation is the sense that, like. Not necessarily validation for myself the validation that there was someone who could be a white woman.

I can be like, “Do you not see how crazy this is?” Yeah and like she like really validated that she was like, “Yeah.” Like, “You know it sounds like you have like a healthy amount of like cultural suspicious—suspicion and they’re like proving you right.” I’m like, “Thank you!”

Although Emory sought therapy as a postsecondary student, Harper spoke about receiving therapy as a middle schooler. The exposure to a counseling professional influenced her career interests at the time. Having an example of a Black woman counselor inspired her to envision becoming one herself. She recalled:

I would say, definitely my own personal experiences in middle school with mental health concerns was what—I was honestly looking at it, I was, I’d probably always go down the road, road of counseling like in some way . . . I don’t want to state that my mental health concerns was a catalyst, but like it was kind of a catalyst for me to be more grounded that um . . . Really having really great therapist as a middle schooler was nice it was really awesome . . . So I would say for certain careers, it was hard for me to see that because I had black school counselors it was easier for me to think about being a counselor. And with that being said, the therapist that I had when I was younger, I actually just got my first Black therapist—I’ve had a quite a few therapists throughout my life—um. So I think it was even difficult for me to like, I knew I could be a counselor but I thought I would just be like the only one and I’d have to get used to being the token Black counselor in a field, in my field.

Mental health providers were able to validate academic experiences, and serve as examples of who participants could professionally become. Sought after when participants were both K–12

and postsecondary students, therapists offered additional assistance. Both same race-gender and cross-racial therapy were found to be beneficial.

Summary

This chapter offered descriptions of the five study participants to aid in understanding the Black women counselor educator doctoral students who were interviewed, and their academic experiences and career decision making. This chapter also outlined the themes found based on the data collected and analyzed, as detailed in Chapter 3. Participant interviews, academic history artifacts, and career autobiographies revealed five themes: Being the “Only,” Playing the Game, Family Matters, Proving People Wrong, and Support. Examples of all five themes were included by incorporating data provided by participants. Chapter 5 offers a discussion of the research findings when considering the research questions posed, theoretical frameworks implemented, and existing literature. Chapter 5 also includes recommendations and implications concerning the academic experiences and career decisions of Black women counselor education doctoral students.

Chapter Five

Discussion

This section provides an overview of the themes found in relation to the two research questions and themes presented in Chapter 4. In this chapter, I revisit the posed research questions, discuss the themes present in the context of previous literature, and link findings to the theories that guided the research. Also included are limitations to the current study, implications for educational practices and policies, and recommendations for future research. The academic histories of Black women counselor education and supervision (CES) doctoral students needed to be addressed. Though academic histories included racism, microaggressions, and tokenism, Black women were still able to reach the academic heights of doctoral scholarship. Participants shared how they have navigated higher education, pinpointed sources of support and motivations for academic pursuits and career decision making, and offered examples of struggling to dispel stereotypes. Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), Black feminist thought (BFT), and career human agency theory (CHAT) were used to understand the academic histories of these Black women CES doctoral students, and what impacted their career decision making.

Restatement of the Research Questions

RQ1: What are the academic experiences of Black women counselor education doctoral students from kindergarten to present (doctoral program)?

RQ2: How do Black women counselor education doctoral students' academic experiences, from kindergarten to present, influence career decision making?

Discussion of Findings

Being the “Only”

For most participants, doctoral programs were not the beginning of experiencing a lack of representation. In fact, participants in this study addressed being the only student, or part of a limited number of students, with Black and/or feminine identities in multiple levels of schooling. Foundational memories included interactions with both peers and teachers. Subthemes included *Foundational Memories* and *Learning Experiences*.

Participants often spoke of these occurrences as happenings they had previously forgotten about or, alternatively, would never forget. These shared memories reveal early realizations of how racism, microaggressions, and bias have impacted how others perceive them as Black girls and women. Additionally, many participants recounted instances of being othered, judged, or ostracized for their racial identities, often based in stereotypical beliefs. As realizations about tense academic settings due to race can occur in elementary school (St. Mary et al., 2018), these early experiences may have impacted academic experiences thereafter in terms of engaging with students and teachers. Early negative experiences with classmates and teachers may also unconsciously impact engagement in later educational settings, possibly discouraging Black women students from seeking help from teachers or professors, or seeking community with classmates or colleagues of other identities.

Foundational Memories

Similar to findings by Neal-Jackson (2020), participants sometimes used these negative racial instances to teach others about their incorrect beliefs. Even so, these interactions seemed to hold lasting impressions. One participant was found to be accused of something she had not

done, possibly related to implicit bias held by her teacher. Implicit biases held by educators remains an important topic of educational research (Glock & Kapproth, 2017; Morris & Perry, 2016; Zimmermann, 2018). As educator beliefs may influence the academic trajectories of students, implicit bias from those educators can lead to student of minority identities being overrepresented in school discipline data (Annamma et al., 2019; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Gibson & Decker, 2019; Hassan & Carter, 2021). Though luckily Haven was found innocent, being found guilty—whether she truly was or not—could have led her to being assumed to be a “troublemaker” with the behavior believed to indicate a pattern likely to later be repeated and addressed by suspending her from school (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). Ultimately, had this instance instead involved Haven being perceived as guilty, she may have been yet another Black girl victim to school pushout (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020).

Learning Experiences

Learning experiences often included participants reflecting upon the perceived lack of diversity in their educational environments. Though participants seemed much more familiar with this phenomenon by the time of their doctoral programs, their experiences in doctoral programs also often featured either a positive turnaround in student diversity, or a change in mindset of how to approach a lack of diversity. *Being the “Only”* at the doctoral level seemed to be less jarring and impactful than experiencing similar circumstances in earlier levels of schooling. For Black women, tokenism has been found to be a feature of doctoral programs (Shavers & Moore, 2019) as are feelings of isolation (Walkington, 2017). Although feeling less effects of being isolated in an academic setting can be perceived positively, experiencing a lack of diversity so often in educational experiences is a cause for concern.

Participants shared limited personal experiences with being overrepresented in discipline. Related events were often related to perceived violations of the dress code by school staff. This may be reflective of participants' academic trajectories not being interrupted by serious discipline issues (i.e., suspensions, expulsions, retentions) or pushout, which likely served as encouragement in reaching and pursuing the doctoral level of academic scholarship. Colorism was also not a strong feature of participants' experiences, though there were acknowledgements of how colorism impacts society.

For young Black teens, race-based identity development is related to mental, educational, and social health (Mims & Williams, 2020). When Black girls receive negative messages, their racial identity is impacted as a result (Butler-Barnes et al., 2019). Connection to and awareness of their racial identities is more prevalent for Black girls in less diverse school settings (Butler-Barnes et al., 2019). As racial discrimination in school settings is related to racial identity development (Butler-Barnes et al., 2019), participants' awareness of adverse academic encounters with peers and adults may have resulted in negative self-concepts. These preliminary experiences may set the stage for what these students believe about themselves, which impacts their career decisions and trajectory.

Playing the Game

This theme refers to figuring out how to navigate higher education, often including expectations around skill acquisition. *Playing the Game* would likely be much easier for students if they were properly socialized into what is expected in academia, how to survive the ivory tower, and how to secure a job after program completion. According to Caruth (2015), this enculturation into a doctoral program, often called socialization within the literature, includes the

journey from admission to being named a doctor. Successful “socialization” impacts the likelihood of quitting a program or acquiring a degree (Caruth, 2015). Although participants were aware of the struggles that accompany being a Black woman in academia, they did not always feel privy to the information helpful in circumventing these struggles. This may be due to not being properly socialized into the culture of academia. As found by Hudson (2020), navigating a hidden program culture was often challenging for participants. Similar to previous findings, students of other identities seemed to have easier access to this helpful information (Baker & Moore, 2015) with participants feeling much was not shared aloud by their professors. Having expectations without explicit instructions on how to meet them often proved challenging for participants, likely impacting not only their current academic experiences, but career decision making as well. Subthemes included *Skills*, *Safety*, *Racial Battle Fatigue*, *Being Perceived as Professional*, *Pros and Cons of Professorship*, and *Carving Out One’s Own Lane*.

Skills

Networking and academic writing were often mentioned by participants as skills helpful to their success that they often had to learn on their own. Although expectations for publications and meeting other peers and professionals were made known to students, steps in acquiring these skills successfully were often not communicated. Heflinger and Doykos (2016) built upon a study by Nathanson et al. (2012) employing their own inquiries and written participant answers concerning doctoral study and career preparation. Participants in the current study had similar findings related to variances in perceived levels of professional preparedness. Doctoral students may have more confidence in concrete skills than those participants referred to as the “unspoken” skills they are expected to acquire. Mentorship, to include feedback, support,

guidance in skill development (Curtin et al., 2016), may improve skill attainment and confidence in skill acquisition.

Safety

A component of *Playing the Game* included considerations concerning the safety of existing as a Black woman within academia. This included professional concerns of being tokenized as a faculty member, to include support one might receive from colleagues, and personal concerns of existing as a Black woman in living communities outside of the workplace. Similar to the findings of Lewis et al. (2016), participants seemed to be considering whether or not they would have to censor themselves in faculty positions and what that censorship might look or feel like. These concerns are valid. Kinouani (2020), a professor and counselor, shared this of her experiences in white-majority spaces: “I have found myself in various settings where, as the only person of colour, speaking of my experience of the world has led to hostility, occasionally to violence, and more frequently to disorientating silencing attempts” (p. 146). Additionally, in a study assessing the occurrence of workplace bullying in higher education, Hollis (2018) found 68% of Black women reported being affected by bullying. Even when choosing the opposite of censoring oneself—self-advocacy and self-expression—Black women faculty members may still end up being silenced by the oppressive structure of academia.

Racial Battle Fatigue

Jaeger et al. (2017) suggested, although choosing a career in academia may be challenging for any doctoral learner, minority students may have more considerations than others. Concerns might include having their knowledge acumen “challenged” (Jaeger et al., 2017, p. 232), or being the sole member of their racial background within their institutional

department. Participants also feared being tasked with additional duties related to diversity due to their intersectional identities. Similar to findings by Phelps-Ward et al. (2018), concerns about these additional tasks, and the emotional labor they would require, gave participants pause when discussing pursuing professorship. As Black faculty members can be hired to address diversity issues on campuses (Flahery, 2020), these concerns are warranted. Other concerns include not reaching professional goals, including tenure, mainly due to being a Black woman. This concern may also be legitimate, as the number of Black women faculty in higher education has not significantly increased in recent years (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). As the recognition of negative stereotypes within a career may impact career decision making (Schuster & Martiny, 2017), certain beliefs of Black women may directly discourage Black women in CES from becoming professors. All of these considerations are evidence of participants engaging with CHAT, as career self-reflectiveness includes pondering how to execute tasks and capability to do so, as well as environmental factors that may potentially derail achievement (Chen & Hong, 2020a).

Being Perceived as Professional

Identifying as both Black and woman contributed greatly to how participants felt they might be perceived. Participants were conscious of how they presented to others, especially in professional settings. Considerations for being perceived professionally were a result of both internal and external messaging, with participants both wanting to present as their best selves, and some instances of being expressly told what to do to appear more professional. Similar to findings in earlier literature, participants shared receiving microaggressions as result of their hairstyles (Awad et al., 2015; Mbilishaka & Apugo, 2020) or being afraid to wear their hair a

certain based on how they might be perceived (Dawson et al., 2019). Lewis et al. (2016) found Black women at PWIs to be impacted by microaggressions surrounding communication and appearance.

Participants in the present study took professional presentation precautions during job interviews and while at work. Both decisions about how to style hair, including hair usually worn in its natural state, and style of dress were mentioned as concerns. Some participants eventually became more comfortable with balancing a personal style that felt authentic to them with appearing professionally. Additionally, styles of speech and physical gestures, and how they could be misinterpreted, were also mentioned. Awareness of negative stereotypes present in a particular profession may impact career decision making (Schuster & Martiny, 2017). With heightened awareness of how they might be perceived, participants eventually revealed an increased comfortability, or approaching an increased comfortability, in expressing themselves through their physical appearance.

Pros and Cons of Professorship

Participants were very aware of what they were both hopeful for and hesitant about when considering pursuing professorship. Participant reflections about career decisions and the possibility of becoming a professor included whether or not professorship might be a good professional fit, gaining tenure, and comparing careers in the postsecondary and K–12 settings. Participants interested in careers in academia shared being inspired to contribute to student development, both personally and professionally. Jaeger et al. (2017) focused on minority students in STEM programs specifically; yet, there were many commonalities with participants of the current study. Jaeger et al. (2017) found participants having a “goal of impacting the

recruitment of diverse students to the STEM field; the desire to serve in a mentorship role to other students of color; and a desire to prove others wrong” (p. 242) factored in career decision making. Both sets of participants also showed interest in wanting to mentor minority students in future careers (Jaegar et al., 2017). Almost all (i.e., four) participants addressed commitments to serve Black students, clients, or communities in future career roles. Although participants were inspired by the changes they could make in students’ lives was encouraging, dealing with politics of being a professor was a definite drawback in career decision making. Being an educator in the K–12 setting was seen as a more lucrative career option with less professional tensions than that of a faculty member. Being a professor was also believed to potentially limit one’s freedoms in terms of length of time at a job and being resigned to a location for a long period of time.

Only about half of all doctoral scholars complete their programs (Caruth, 2015). Even Black women who complete doctorate degrees may choose to leave academia based on experiences during their schooling (Caruth, 2015). Two future career autobiographies (FCAs) specifically mentioned wanting to gain career decision making clarity in the future. These thoughts and decisions are evidence of career intentionality, which accounts for possible shifts in career interests (Chen & Hong, 2020b). Although those pursuing graduate degrees have been found to lose interest in pursuing faculty positions, this may be more likely for minority students (Jaegar et al., 2017).

Carving Out One’s Own Lane

Minority doctoral students have been found to question what professional positions might be more diverse than their doctoral programs, and match their “community interests and approach” (Jaeger et al., 2017, p. 242). When addressing their career goals, both in verbal

interviews and in the provided FCAs, participants noted both traditional and nontraditional career paths in academia. Although professorship was a definite career possibility for some, goals of being a professor included increasing representation and diversity, not only for other Black women but others of LGBTQIA identities as well, to support future mental health professionals in their endeavors and provide the skills necessary to improve mental health education. Other interests included working in the nonprofit sector, working in private practice, providing proactive mental health services, and discussing mental health in academic and faith-based environments, especially for those of Black/African American and Christian identities. Other interests in academia included program management, providing mental health consulting and programming, and being a community college counselor. Teaching part time, an alternative to being a full-time professor, was also mentioned. Similar to the findings of Storlie et al. (2015) who studied the career decision making of Black women college students, participants sometimes sounded optimistic but uncertain about their prospective career decisions.

Half ($n = 3$) of all participants mentioned either an interest in attaining or having already attained their Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) credential. Participants with experiences as K–12 professional school counselors were less likely to be completely invested in the idea of pursuing a faculty position. They were also more likely to be part-time doctoral students and full-time professional school counselors. Participants with clinical experience were more likely to be more interested in pursuing professorship, and either have or will be working toward a LPC credential. Participants had perceptions about what careers might be best suited for them based on what they foresaw for themselves in the future, who they believe themselves to be, and who

they believed they want to become. Career decision considerations included components cited by Bandura (2006), including approaching goals strategically, visualizing and anticipating outcomes, considering actionable steps and how to actualize them, and being aware of beliefs and steps taken toward goal achievement. CHAT can be used to oppose oppressive systems (Chen & Hong, 2020a). By reflecting on careers that may offer more personal and professional agency, participants were better able to determine spaces they might like to enter or avoid in prospective careers. Considering which spaces might be less oppressive regarding their intersectional identities allowed participants to consider environments where they did and did not feel they would be able to self-actualize as successful Black women professionals.

Family Matters

Family members were impactful in the academic experiences and career decision making of participants. When asked about supports available to them, family members were mentioned by each participant. Families are often counted as supports for Black women in postsecondary settings (Hannon et al., 2016; Storlie et al., 2018; Winkle-Wagner, 2015). Black women in CES doctoral programs have specifically been found to count family among resources and supports they use (Zeligman et al., 2015). The impact of family on academics and career decisions included receiving help, expectations regarding academic achievement, expectations regarding career decisions, and exposing participants to different career possibilities. Participants felt supported by their family members in various realms, including prayer, being positively affirmed, and advocating for participants when necessary. It is not unusual for family members of Black women students to be supportive of postsecondary pursuits, though not fully grasping what the undertaking entails (Alexander & Bodenhorn, 2015) or being able to relate themselves

(Shavers & Moore, 2019). Even when participants shared family members did not understand the gravity of their academic undertakings, participants still felt supported in their endeavors.

First-hand postsecondary experiences is not a prerequisite for providing support to students in higher education (Storlie et al., 2018).

Help at Home

Parents and families being involved in a student's education can encourage academic success not only in K–12 settings, but in postsecondary schooling as well (Benner et al., 2016). Mothers, sisters, and grandmothers have been found to be large motivators in the career paths of Black women college students (Storlie et al., 2018). Grandparents, parents, and siblings were all mentioned as helpful sources in the lives of participants. Support included offering childcare, encouraging words, and homework help. These familial resources likely made other areas of participants' lives easier to navigate. Family members often served as role models for participants. Family members providing both emotional (e.g., encouraging participants) and monetary support (e.g., offering childcare) may have added to the academic success seen by students in terms of grades received, credits earned, and overall perseverance (Roksa & Kinsley, 2019). Both immediate and external family can help Black girls and women develop healthy and affirming self-concepts, with this positive acculturation potentially acting a buffer against oppressive experiences.

Not an Option

Similar to the findings of Zeligman et al. (2015), participants were encouraged by their families to attain advanced degrees. Each participant shared receiving a postsecondary education was an expectation of their families. Included in family culture was the pursuit of a

postsecondary degree, and that participants would attend college. Attending college was ingrained in participants' academic identities, and this indoctrination was a likely factor in participants' postsecondary pursuits. Increased involvement from parents and families has been found to be a factor in increased educational accomplishments (Benner et al., 2016). In fact, parents and families being involved in a child's education has long-range impacts and has been found to be influential in the lives of students even 10 years later (Benner et al., 2016). These influences can potentially be seen in both degree attainment and career choice.

Exceed and Excel

Witnessing family members gaining advanced degrees has been found to motivate Black women in CES doctoral programs to do the same (Zeligman et al., 2015). Participants admired the examples set by immediate and extended family members. Family members expected participants to take their familial achievements one step further, and often ultimately expected greater academic attainment and/or career success than the family members who came before them. Sometimes participants revealed feeling a pressure to achieve. In other instances, participants seemed to fondly reflect on the standards set by their families. One participant specifically mentioned being the first in her immediate family to receive a doctorate degree, even though both of her parents had advanced degrees themselves. It is possible that feeling the need to build upon what family members had already achieved encouraged participants to seek advanced degrees, as explicitly stated by Logan. Adolescents with educational goals that coincide with their career goals may be more likely to achieve elevated academic trajectories (Schmitt-Wilson & Faas, 2016). Many participants specifically spoke of examples set by their mothers. If participants are hoping to surpass the educational achievements of their mothers, the

degree attainment rates of Black women are to be considered. A rise in degrees attained by mothers can positively influence the self-confidence their children have in attending college (Augustine, 2017). As Black women continue to lead the ranks in populations of women receiving doctoral degrees (NCES, 2019), more Black girls and women may be inspired to pursue the doctorate as well.

Career Exposure

Exposure to careers seemed to be more present in the home than in academic settings. Career exposure in the home included examples set by parents of attending postsecondary programs. As families were setting examples, participants seemed to be identifying possible paths they could take themselves in determining possible academic trajectories and career decision making. Family members have been influential in the career decisions of students, particularly when a relative is working in a respective field (Maor & Cojocar, 2018). For some participants, exposure to their current or future careers occurred in their formative years. Though participants did share other career possibilities that they eventually shifted from, it is possible that being in close proximity to someone they admired in these prospective careers influenced their career interests in turn.

Proving People Wrong

Though some participants struggled with whether the inclination to do so was spurred by internal or external forces, the idea of disproving beliefs held by others was held by each participant. Beliefs participants worked to disprove included their academic potential, sometimes specifically for doctoral-level scholarship, and stereotypes of Black women, sometimes related to laziness and emotional expression.

Going Above and Beyond

Feeling the need to properly represent the Black race is not a new phenomenon for Black women in CES doctoral programs (Mingo, 2015). Participants noted sometimes feeling a need to overperform (i.e., to work harder than others) to receive acknowledgement for their work, and to disprove negative stereotypes. However, it was acknowledged that disproving these negative beliefs sometimes came at the expense of participants' work-life balance, and maintaining their own mental (D. L. Brown et al., 2017) and physical health needs. The strong Black woman (SBW) stereotype specifically has been found to be correlated with unhealthy mental and physical health symptoms (Abrams et al., 2019; Donovan & West, 2015; Watson & Hunter, 2015). While Black girls are attempting to cope and adapt when facing adverse experiences, their health and well-being may be taking a toll (Goodkind et al., 2020). Ideals around not taking breaks and working twice as hard to be just as good could be detrimental to Black women CES doctoral students themselves, they may also be perpetuating stereotypes of this population not needing help or support. Beliefs about being invincible may be influencing Black women and those around them, as stereotyping may fuel beliefs that Black women can endure more than those of other identities (M. K. Jones & Pritchett-Johnson, 2018). Stereotype threats (Gates & Steele, 2009) may have been present for participants. If present, these stereotype threats may have spurred their performance as a result (Steele, 1997). Working against being seen as weak or incompetent meant participants sometimes overextended themselves and worked harder than their non-Black peers, potentially at cost to their mental health and self-concepts.

Redefining Black Femininity

Showing and sharing emotion and having love for and pride in oneself are directly aligned with Black feminist principles (Patterson et al., 2016). By rebuking their oppressive thoughts and the oppressive actions and beliefs of others, both in academia and in society, participants engaged directly with BFT (Collins, 1989). Redefining Black femininity for oneself can serve as a form of resistance against the distance stereotypes instill between Black women and those of other identities (Collins, 1986).

Participants recognized opportunities to display an array of emotions, and the best ways to do so to be heard. Participants were aware that they were more likely to be viewed as angry (Halberstadt et al., 2020), especially when advocating against oppression or ignorance. As a result, participants often considered how to best validate their emotions to others, especially to white peers and professors, in ways that might make being heard and understood more likely. Participants shared becoming more comfortable with showcasing their vulnerability, and realizing how important sharing the gamut of their emotions can be in dispelling negative stereotypes.

Black femininity was not solely about resilience. In fact, it often included unlearning beliefs related to stereotypes and a desire to dispel them by overachieving. Participants were also proud of additional intersectional identities, including those related to sexuality, spirituality, parental immigration, and being the first in their families to receive a doctoral degree. Participants also recognized that certain privileges come with being a Black woman. Professionally, this can include being able to relate to other Black clients or students.

Academically, this can mean acknowledging the stereotypes those in leadership positions may hold about Black women, and reinforcing them in ways that can be beneficial.

Support

Black women counselor education doctoral students were able to name several sources of support. Support impacted both academic experiences and career decision making. Support was offered in many forms, including from fellow students, members of the campus community, and educators across various levels of schooling. Participants also implemented agency to find additional sources of support when necessary. Subthemes included *Peer Support*, *Campus Community Support*, *Notable Educators*, and *Filling the Gaps*.

Peer Support

Participants were able to count on peers (sometimes further along in their academic journeys) or classmates (often cohort members). Peer support was found to be a factor in both K–12 and postsecondary environments. Sources of peer support were academic specialty programs, friend groups, and peer mentorship. Peer support included an enhanced sense of belonging, participation in classes, and confidence in applying for opportunities. As found by Apugo (2017), having the support of peers served as a buffer when facing bias. For participants in the current study, peer support allowed the space to share their thoughts and remain invested in their programs. For many participants, the same peers served as friends and resources across multiple levels of schooling, remaining in contact from one academic setting to another. Similar to earlier findings (Apugo, 2017), peers also functioned as mentors for participants, encouraging personal growth and professional advancement.

Campus Community Support

On-campus supports included being given both additional food and financial aid on campus. Campus workers in various realms supported students either verbally or through virtuous acts, including offering affirmation or information. This support often came from fellow Black women. Though resources existed, Haven also acknowledged not being aware of all the resources available to her as a college student. Previous researchers have shown that Black girls and women are either not receiving or not using resources to aid them during their academic journeys (Watson & Hunter, 2015; Watson-Singleton, 2017). However, this may not always be a choice Black girls and women are making, and may instead be a result of how—or whether—they are socialized or mentored on campus.

Notable Educators

Relationships with educators had a lasting effect on academic trajectory and confidence. Participants remembered teachers who impacted their sense of self. Participants also noted their perceptions of Black teachers and professors, both as students of Black educators and as professionals working alongside Black educators. Relationships with educators also impacted career decision making, with participants seeking career counsel from K–12 teachers and school counselors and postsecondary advisors and professors. In a study by Girls Leadership (Jacobs, 2020), Black girls were more likely to rate higher on a leadership scale when they could name leaders of their same racial/ethnic background. Positive relationships with and exposure to Black educators may improve what Black girls believe they can achieve, both academically and professionally.

Participants shared the impact of having or not having direct access to Black educators. Though some Black educators did offer emotional and personal support to students, these instances seemed to happen mostly in K–12 settings. After entering postsecondary programs, participants rarely spoke of receiving this kind of support from Black professors. This could be due to low numbers of faculty of color, as participants sometimes spoke of one or zero present in their programs. It is quite possible that Black professors may not have awareness of how to be an effective mentor to Black students, especially if they did not receive mentorship from a Black professor during their own schooling. This could also be due to the nature of academia, with more tangible professional outcomes (e.g., tenure) residing with duties outside of mentorship (e.g., teaching and publications). When they were taught by Black professors, participants noted both things they could appreciate and things they wanted to avoid. Having Black professors infuse Black culture into curriculum proved to have a positive impact on Logan. Graduate students of color can be discouraged by a lack of diverse coursework (Seward, 2019).

When speaking of their educational experiences, participants often spoke of interactions or experiences with white women educators. This was expected considering the number of teaching professionals who are both white (Quinn & Stewart, 2019) and woman (NCES, 2020). For Black women doctoral students, fewer Black women faculty can translate into fewer Black women same race-gender mentor relationships (Grant & Ghee, 2015). Participants spoke of White educators (mostly women) showing up for them via compassion and allyship. Negative experiences included failing to take accountability for a lack of anti-Black pedagogy, and failing to support Black students during classroom conversations regarding race.

Although negative interactions with faculty members may decrease the chances of a student choosing a career in higher education (Baker & Moore, 2015), positive relationships with educators influenced the career decision making of participants. It is important to consider the ways mentorship impacts the career decisions of doctoral students of color (Curtin et al., 2016). Although some career navigation nudges occurred in postsecondary settings, it is also possible for relationships with K–12 educators to influence career decisions. Having mentors and role models at each level of education is a key factor in determining possible career paths. The validation that mentors provide can offer students more confidence in their career decisions. Personal agency is fostered by helping with skill development and motivating individuals to consider personal levels of efficacy (Chen & Hong, 2020b). The impact of positive, supportive relationships with educators, especially in reflecting upon strengths and interests, is important to acknowledge in career decision making. Because faculty support was viewed as pivotal in both choosing to pursue a doctoral degree and during the program (Baker & Moore, 2015), it may also be influential in career decision making regarding professorship. Although graduate students can experience both heartening or disheartening mentorships with faculty members (Alexander & Bodenhorn, 2015), for Black women, mentorship can help with postsecondary persistence (Apugo, 2017). Opposing earlier findings (Redding, 2019), experiences of and engagement with Black teachers professors was not necessarily any better than those shared of non-Black educators, Both Black and non-Black educators, across levels schooling, offered both affirming, helpful engagement and discouraging, unhelpful engagement. Having mixed feelings about educational experiences may lead to being confused about remaining in academia professionally.

As effective mentorship may influence the career trajectories of Black women in doctoral programs (Guess, 2020; Varnado-Johnson, 2018), it is possible that consistent, positive interactions with faculty members might encourage career decision making of Black women in CES to include careers within the professoriate.

Filling the Gaps

Finally, when participants encountered obstacles and felt they were lacking support, they were agentic in seeking out resources to help them succeed. This included using social media as a source of support while navigating academia, seeking change or seeing changes through, and receiving mental health counseling. A lack of institutional and systemic supports means Black women have to figure a lot out on their own (Phelps-Ward et al., 2018).

As supported by previous research (Squire & McCann, 2018), minority women doctoral students can seek support not directly provided by their programs. Being both Black and woman may mean working doubly hard as doctoral students to ensure they are receiving support to aid in program and professional success. Though participants often found resources on their own, as supported by Hipolito-Delgado et al. (2017), some also mentioned a desire for professors to approach them and offer help. Effective mentorship relationships would offer both being championed both professionally and psychologically (Dutton et al., 2017). It is possible that mental health professionals can function as mentors for Black women in CES doctoral programs, especially in terms of processing experiences and figuring out future steps as CHAT suggests. However, teachers, professors, and administrators, across all levels of education, cannot rely on the resilience of Black girls and women in lieu of offering this group proper resources.

Relationship to Theoretical Framework

Participants created knowledge concerning their career decisions based on Black, feminine, and other intersectional identities. BFT created the space and safety for participants to acknowledge oppressive systems and experiences and figure out how to best fight against them. Participants engaged with Black feminist ideals by both becoming aware of their experiences and resisting stereotypical narratives of Black femininity (Patterson et al., 2016). In redefining Black femininity for themselves, participants also defined what careers might match their self-concepts, either of who they currently are or hope to become. By reflecting on oppressions fought every day (Patterson et al., 2016), or in some cases in every level of schooling, these Black women CES doctoral students constructed a knowledge base for career decision making. This base knowledge was also dependent upon their intersectionalities and forethought (Chen & Hong, 2020b) concerning how these multiple, multifaceted identities might factor into professional settings. As BFT encourages Black women to love themselves unapologetically, participants were able to be authentic, vulnerable, disappointed, and proud, a testament to the multifacetedness of the Black feminine existence

Participants showed agency and forethought (Chen & Hong, 2020b) in determining what supports would be available to them in the careers proposed in their FCAs, and how their Black and/or feminine identities might impact their experiences. Reflecting upon past academic experiences via academic history artifacts allowed participants to remember positive and negative experiences with educators, noticing threads that have been consistent or inconsistent in their academic histories. Participants demonstrated intentionality (Chen & Hong, 2020b) in choosing careers they might most enjoy and forethought (Chen & Hong, 2020b) for how to reach

career goals. Career reactivity (Chen & Hong, 2020b) was demonstrated as participants considered how to reach future career goals, or gaining clarity regarding future career decisions (Chen & Hong, 2020a). Career self-reflectiveness included considering how the intersectionalities of being Black and woman would contribute to, or detract from, professional success, advancement, safety, and satisfaction in prospective careers (Chen & Hong, 2020a). After years of academic experiences including oppression and microaggressions, participants also showed agency and career reactivity (Chen & Hong, 2020a) when carving out their own career lanes. Acknowledging how their Black and feminine identities have, do, or could impact them professionally meant considering the emotional, mental, and physical possibilities awaiting them in their careers.

Implications for Practice

Recommendations for Black Women Counselor Education and Supervision Doctoral

Students

Black women CES doctoral students specifically are tasked with addressing the mental health and emotional needs of the students and clients they serve, and expected to maintain their own mental and emotional functioning. The balancing act of being a Black woman, student, and mental health professional inherently seats Black women CES doctoral students in spaces Black women are often expected to be in—taking care of everyone but themselves. However, Black women CES doctoral students are also uniquely seated to be both deliverers and appreciative of mental health services. As such, they should be offered the care they often provide, and receive their own mental health counseling. At some point in their academic journeys, Black women CES doctoral students should find a mental health provider and receive counseling services.

Counseling can address the various obstacles they may potentially face, including struggling with stereotypical beliefs, career decisions, and processing their academic and professional experiences. Though seeking help directly opposes the SBW stereotype (Abrams et al., 2019), for minority women in the academy, developing and/or assessing positive coping skills assists with processing their experiences (Zeligman et al., 2015). Narrative therapy interventions specifically can help with reauthoring (White, 2007) not only experiences endured but perceptions of oneself, potentially mitigating feelings of imposter syndrome, having to prove oneself, or needing to be a model minority. These interventions may specifically help Black women CES students re-author certain experiences or interactions that impacted the academic self-concepts and career decision making.

Additionally, Black women must honor their agency. This can be done by creating safe spaces to simply exist. By “constructing homeplaces,” Black women in CES doctoral programs can cultivate “spaces of joy and healing within a school that seemed to deny their rights to either” (Kelly, 2020, p. 460). If there are no spaces that honor the full embodiment of Blackness on campus, create them. If there are no students in a program or cohort that support, find them. Capitalize off of the “universal sisterhood” of being both Black and woman by creating safe spaces. This can be accomplished by creating Sistah Circles, or spaces for Black women where resources are shared, collaboration takes place, social capital is increased, and safety is created (McLane-Davison et al., 2018). Sista Circles can exist among different campuses and cohorts and even virtually (McLande-Davison et al., 2018), connecting Black women all over academia. Black women in higher education can create counternarratives to their realities and redirect race-based instances to professional pursuits (McLane-Davison et al., 2018). They can also

expand professional networks and productivity, offering a bank of resources for presentations, proposal requests, and career opportunities (McLane-Davison et al., 2018).

Last, but certainly not least, Black women in CES doctoral programs, and Black women in general, must allow themselves the permission to quit. Having agency also means acknowledging every option available. Though it may be frowned upon externally (e.g., by family members, friends, colleagues, or classmates) or even internally (e.g., negative self-talk or guilt), leaving things behind is always an option. This includes programs, professors, peers, people, places, and things that are not propelling one toward their purpose. Everything is not meant to be endured, and everything does not have to be. For Black women CES doctoral students who choose to see it through, the same recommendations Tevis et al. (2020) offered for Black women higher education faculty and administration apply: believe in you; find support outside of the academy that encourages surviving and thriving; get familiar with resolving conflict, and get help when necessary; be aware of your rights and the proper channels for reporting concerns or complaints; and set long-term goals, including knowing when to exit if necessary.

Recommendations for K–12 Educators, School Counselors, and Administrators

Being the “Only” was a common finding among participants. By the time these women had reached their doctoral studies, being the only or one of few Black students was a normal academic occurrence. Educators have a responsibility to ensure students of color are receiving opportunities to challenge themselves academically. This can be achieved through program and data analysis of advanced placement courses, shifts in school culture, and parental involvement in academic planning.

Logan shared the moment she realized that an advanced academic trajectory meant not being in classrooms with other students of color. Indeed, Kelly (2020) found that Black students may be opting out of honors or advanced level classes to avoid being tokenized in more challenging courses. Teachers and school counselors should examine data regarding students recommended for advanced level classes and specialty programs, and increase the representation of diverse students in these courses. Efforts to increase diversity in advanced-level work should be a feature of annual evaluations for both teachers and schools. Pivotal factors in students being enrolled in Advanced Placement courses include the influence of families, advocating, and how involved families are believed to be in the educational lives of students (Naff & Ferguson, 2021). Though current efforts to increase diverse enrollment in gifted programs can be thwarted by bias and race- and class-based privilege (Naff & Siegel-hawley, 2020), educators should strive for more inclusivity in gifted programs and advanced classes. Student “tracking” for courses begins in K–12, and may contribute to the types of courses—“remedial, standard, or advanced” (Naff & Siegel-hawley, 2020, p. 26)—students complete up until high school graduation. Suggested efforts for combating disparities in diverse students enrolling in gifted education include educators being trained in how to recognize signs of giftedness in marginalized student populations, recruiting diverse educators and administrators, offering different assessments to both test for giftedness and reduce the likelihood of bias, and observing students in a classroom setting (Naff & Siegel-hawley, 2020).

Participants shared instances of both covert and overt racism when engaging with both students and teachers. Though Black girls and women can find safety through homeplacing (Kelly, 2020; Pope & Edwards, 2016) and Sistah Circles (McLane-Davison et al., 2018) at

various levels of schooling, not having support from students, educators, and administration can quell their efforts (Kelly, 2020). It is not the responsibility of students to create inclusive, equitable learning environments. As Kelly (2020) stated, “the onus of supporting and protecting marginalized students should be placed on school leaders and teachers, rather than on those most disempowered by racism and misogyny” (p. 451). To mitigate race-based traumas endured by students, schools must develop a culture of valuing diverse identities and integrating families into school decisions (Henderson et al., 2019).

School counselors should revisit cultural competence in classroom and group counseling lessons. Making students aware of how these interactions might look and sound may decrease Black students feeling othered. As a component of an inclusive and accountable school culture, training students on what it means to be a bystander versus an upstander may increase the belonging Black students feel in K–12 settings. Instead of avoiding or dismissing conversations about race, school leaders should create cultures that include addressing racial inequities (Henderson et al., 2019). The use of race-based trauma informed care may aid in students receiving an equitable, inclusive education. Although trauma informed care interventions address students who have endured adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), the addition of a racial identity lens rebukes a “color-blind” (Joseph et al., 2020, p. 163) approach to education. Originally, experiences classified as ACEs only including incidence of being abused, neglected, or being raised in a home with exposure to specific difficulties (including but not limited to an incarcerated family member, drug use, and mental health issues; ACE Resource Network, n.d.). Additional experiences faced in childhood now also being considered as adverse include race- and gender-based discrimination, and battling racism that is systemic and/or institutional (ACE

Resource Network, n.d.). This can be implemented via restorative practice groups or individual sessions that highlight students' skills, show compassion for the injustices they face, and cocreating resolutions (Joseph et al., 2020). This may increase feelings of trust students have for their teachers and better student–teacher relationships overall (Joseph et al., 2020). This will hopefully decrease the implicit bias of educators while increasing the cultural competence of the students, teachers, and administrators as a whole.

Finally, as familial support was an impactful theme for each participant, K–12 educators and administrators should consider ways to incorporate family members in career education and consideration. For students like Harper, whose parents are less familiar with formal schooling, or even students like Logan, who have educators as parental figures, family involvement is key in mapping out academic trajectories and career possibilities. Participants were scarcely able to recall career development events provided in their K–12 schools. When they were able to remember, participants attested to the more standard and stereotypical careers being included. However, family members played a monumental role in the academic and career trajectories of each participant. School counselors should consider ways to create long-lasting impressions of career possibilities, and to include families in these discussions. As families often exposed participants to potential careers, having students and families complete career genograms could be helpful in career path development. These can help students understand differences present between generations, understand the support families can offer and the morals they uphold, being indecisive regarding career decisions, envisioning undiscovered options, and conceptualizing being a professional (Storlie et al., 2019). Additionally, school counselors may have more

holistic understanding of the students themselves, and where students' interests lie, by involving family members in academic discussions (Harris et al., 2019).

Recommendations for Counselor Education and Supervision Doctoral Program Faculty and Administration

Navigating academia is not an easy feat, especially as a Black woman. For these Black women in counselor education and supervision doctoral programs, the learning curve for navigating academia, and feeling a greater connection to their programs, seemed fairly steep. Currently, at the institutions participants attend, there is not a course that exists to outline how to successfully navigate academia and transition from a student to realized career professional. As noted by both Emory and Haven, a course addressing both the spoken and unspoken aspects of academia should be designed and offered to CES doctoral students. Course topics including teaching, research (e.g., writing and submitting proposals, manuscripts, articles, and book chapters), and service (e.g., volunteer efforts) should be included. As noted by Haven, professional dress should also be addressed. Assignments should also serve as preparation for transitioning into multiple kinds of professional positions, including the creation of a curricula vitae and cover letter. This course should also include information about career possibilities after graduation, including those outside of higher education. A study by Moore et al. (2020) found both doctoral students and novice faculty members were more knowledgeable regarding making decisions that would lead to their achievement after attending seminars addressing finding jobs, obtaining tenure, choosing a research focus, career planning, and submitting documentation for tenure review. For Black women in CES doctoral programs, this may result in increased confidence in skills and capabilities, possibly increasing the likelihood of a career in academia.

Additionally, effective mentorship would decrease or mitigate many of the issues faced by Black women CES students. Mentorship was said to connect participants to paid opportunities for advancement and campus resources for academic success. Though participants were able to supplement the support they were not receiving from professors or educators, programs should supply students with formal mentorships. Multitiered mentorship participation (i.e., professors paired with doctoral students, doctoral students paired with masters students, and masters students paired with undergraduate students) may instill confidence to continue with education, increase personal and professional networks, and ease academic and professional transitions. Black students and faculty at PWIs have many commonalities in their higher education experiences, including being familiar with feeling isolated from others (Cooke & Odejimi, 2021). It is recommended that Black students be mentored by Black faculty members of color (Zeligman et al., 2015). As mentorship programming for women of color could impact student retention (Zeligman et al., 2015), it is possible that mentorship programs can bolster both Black students and faculty, increasing the retention and success of both groups. As mentorship has been found to impact how confident students feel to achieve program success, matching students with mentors for the duration of a postsecondary program may increase persistence (Zeligman et al., 2015).

Finally, as many schools have added diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), DEI statements as a component of their professional applications. DEI-efforts should be a component of higher education contracts, specifically tenure review. Including this as a facet of the service commitments required of professors considered for tenure may even offer more chances for Black professors to receive tenure. Though Black professors in CES are often committed to

serving and helping their communities, this is not considered as important as research and teaching in tenure reviews (Henfield et al., 2017). A DEI component should also be added to course evaluations, with set protocols in place for improving efforts of those with low effectiveness, as addressing and improving effectiveness in the classroom may increase the retention of Black students in postsecondary programs.

Higher education institutions need to provide identity-group specific resources for Black women students and professors. Postsecondary campus should increase the retention efforts of not only Black students and faculty members, but mental health professionals. Instead of assuming Black women will seek their own support to address their mental health, it may be more beneficial to “bring care to Black women” (Abrams et al., 2019, p. 523). Infusing mental health care into environments Black women have familiarity with—in this case, institutions of higher education for CES doctoral students—may result in more Black women CES doctoral students having and using this accessible resource (Abrams et al., 2019).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Half ($n = 3$) of participants were and are students in the same CES doctoral program the principal researcher attends, though not members of the same cohort. This may have influenced how these participants spoke of their doctoral program experiences. This could potentially mean being more politically correct regarding doctoral program experiences, or alternatively, reflecting more honestly about negative program experiences. Additionally, four of five participants were doctoral students in the same state. Though regional differences can be expected, experiences with racism and microaggressions based on doctoral program location may be similar. Two participants also attended the same institution for masters and doctoral programs. This continuity

may have lessened the variance in program experiences related to degrees of negative experience, or accounted for positive relationships with professors due to prolonged interactions and exposure. The research team created to assist with coding was not developed until after the principal researcher began coding the transcripts. Though the codebook was edited and codes from all transcripts were reviewed prior to theme development, having the coding team code all 12 participant interviews may have been helpful. The research team (composed of a white woman and white man) did not include any additional researchers of color. This may have subconsciously impacted the portions of the transcripts codes were ascribed to, and the potential over- or under-identification of important concepts.

Though CHAT draws from historically vetted concepts, CHAT is a relatively new theory (Chen & Hong, 2020a). The COVID-19 global pandemic removed the possibility of in-person interviews, which may impact interview responses and researcher–participant engagement. Additionally, there may have been a limited number of participants that met the research criteria. Finally, not hearing the stories of Black women who do not have PhDs, for whatever reasons (e.g., doctoral program departure, careers after masters) could impact research findings. Additionally, impactful life events (e.g., marriage, divorce, motherhood) not directly related to academic experiences could also be impacting career choices. As the number of intersectional identities of Black women is immeasurable, it is impossible to fully encompass all the possible ways academic experiences impact the career choices of Black women in CES programs. There were likely few participants both available and eligible for a sample, as the delimiters previously mentioned likely decreased the already limited number of Black women in CES doctoral programs able to participate.

The various intersectional identities of Black women CES students are endless. As such, there are infinite possibilities for extending this research. Noting the experiences of first generation doctoral students may be especially interesting, as unspoken information and mentorship availability may impact their educational experiences. Sexual orientation and the obstacles related to that intersectional identity also offer an interesting lens into differences in oppression and representation. Faith and spirituality also offer an interesting intersectional identity, as faith may serve as a buffer against obstacles and oppression. Those without salient faith or spiritual identities may have different perceptions of program experiences, and considerations about what helps them persevere. Finally, the experiences of Black women CES doctoral students who are mentored by Black or Black women professors are especially of interest, considering the battles both groups face in academia. Assessing whether or not being mentored by a fellow Black woman mitigates program experiences or influences career decisions would be an interesting and important extension of the current research. The experiences of Black women CES students attending HBCUs is also of interest, to see if or how differences in microaggressions or program support can be accounted for.

Conclusion

Black women CES doctoral students have nuanced academic experiences, and consider various professional options in their career decision making. Academic experiences include being subject to and working to dispel stereotypes, often being the only or one of few Black women or Black people in an academic environment, receiving various supports, and being expected to attend postsecondary institutions. Career decision making was impacted by

relationships with educators, the encouragement of family members, and perceptions of program and professional experiences.

This study sought to capture the phenomenon of being a Black woman in a CES doctoral program. As a result of this study, the voices of Black women in CES are added to existing literature, and both K–12 and postsecondary policies and procedures can be improved. Using BFT, CHAT, and IPA, these Black women were given the space to process their experiences and career decision making in a safe space. Participants were able to recount impactful experiences and conversations, consider their impact, and consider how career decision making was impacted as well. Their voices were amplified and their experiences were validated, and they contributed to research that will improve the lives of the Black women and girls who follow in their footsteps.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Email

My name is Erin Hanley, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education and Supervision program at Virginia Commonwealth University under the supervision of Dr. Kaprea Johnson (xxxxx@vcu.edu).

I wanted you to be aware of a qualitative dissertation study I am completing to explore the academic experiences of Black women in counselor education and supervision doctoral programs, and how these experiences impact career decision making.

To participate you must:

1. Be a counselor education and supervision doctoral student who
 - a. identifies as Black/African American
 - b. identifies as female, and
 - c. has attended Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs)

Participation will include:

1. Two interviews, lasting no longer than 120 minutes, conducted via zoom. Tentative dates for the initial interview would begin the week of May 24th, and the week of June 7th for the final interview. Participants will have up to two weeks between interviews.
 - a. Prior to the second interview, you will be asked to complete a 500-word future career Autobiography.
 - b. Optional: You can provide an optional academic history artifact (K–12 report card comments or discipline documents, assignment feedback from postsecondary instructors/professors, etc.) prior to the initial interview.

Your participation would add to the understanding of how academic histories may be influencing career decision-making. This research will inform the treatment of, and policies and programming related to Black girls and women at every level of schooling, which may improve academic and professional pathways.

If you know of others who may fit the participant criteria, please share this information with them as well.

If eligible and interested, please complete these [Demographic and Screening Questions](#).

Thank you!

Appendix B: Demographic and Screening Questions

My name is Erin Hanley, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education and Supervision program at Virginia Commonwealth University under the supervision of Dr. Kaprea Johnson (xxxxx@vcu.edu). I am completing a qualitative dissertation study to explore the academic experiences of Black women in counselor education and supervision doctoral programs, and how these experiences impact career decision making.

I am interested in your educational history and experiences related to identifying as a Black woman. As academic experiences may encourage or discourage Black women from pursuing higher education professionally, findings of this study can help determine what educational policies, procedures, and practices may increase positive educational and professional outcomes for Black women students. The following demographic and screening questions should take about ten minutes to complete. Following your completion of these questions, you will receive an email regarding your eligibility for the study, and next steps in scheduling an interview, if applicable.

Email address:

Are you a counselor education and supervision doctoral student?

Yes

No

Do you identify as Black and/or African American?

Yes

No

Do you identify as female?

Yes

No

Are you over the age of 18?

Yes

No

Have you attended predominantly white institutions (PWIs) for all of your postsecondary schooling (undergraduate, masters, and doctoral programs)?

Yes

No

Did you begin your doctoral program in 2014 or after?

Yes

No

When might you be available for our first interview? The interview duration is approximately two hours. Please provide at least three dates and times (i.e., Mondays from 12-1:30) of your availability.

How would you prefer to meet for our interviews?

Via Zoom Online Video Conference

Over the Phone

No Preference

Appendix C: Confirmation Email

Hello,

You are receiving this email as a follow-up to the demographic and screening questions you provided concerning your educational history and experiences related to identifying as a Black woman doctoral student in counselor education and supervision. You have met the requirements for participating in the study! If still interested in participating, please review the attached consent form, and let me know if you have any questions. Verbal consent will be obtained from you during a consent discussion prior to our first interview, where you will be able to receive answers to any questions you might have regarding the study.

Sincerely,
Erin Hanley, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate
Counselor Education and Supervision
Virginia Commonwealth University
xxxxx@vcu.edu

Appendix D: Disqualification Email

Hello,

You are receiving this email as a follow-up to the demographic and screening questions you provided concerning your educational history and experiences related to identifying as a Black woman. Unfortunately, you do not meet the requirements for participating in the study. Thank you so much for your time and consideration in adding to the discussion of Black women's educational experiences. Our voices matter, and I encourage you to continue finding ways to ensure your voice is heard.

Sincerely,
Erin Hanley, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate
Counselor Education and Supervision
Virginia Commonwealth University
xxxxx@vcu.edu

Appendix E: Maximum Participants Reached Email

Hello,

You are receiving this email as a follow-up to the demographic and screening questions you provided concerning your educational history and experiences related to identifying as a Black woman. Unfortunately, I have reached the maximum number of participants for the study. Thank you so much for your time and consideration in adding to the discussion of Black women's educational experiences. Our voices matter, and I encourage you to continue finding ways to ensure your voice is heard.

Sincerely,
Erin Hanley, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate
Counselor Education and Supervision
Virginia Commonwealth University
xxxxx@vcu.edu

Appendix F: Initial Interview Questions

Phase I Interview Protocol

Intro/Background Questions

What comes to mind when you hear the words, “Black woman?”

What is your favorite thing about being a Black woman?

Outside of your identities of being a Black woman, how do you define yourself?

Were/are there ways that being a Black girl/woman impacted/impacts your academic experiences?

In relation to:

- a. Stereotypes
 - b. Black Beauty (colorism and hair)
4. Was there a time that your Black and/or feminine identities were brought to your attention in an academic setting?
 5. How old were you, or what level of education did this happen for you?
 6. If you can remember, please share a story about a time you felt truly safe or seen as a Black girl/woman student.
 7. How old were you, or what level of education did this happen for you?
 8. Moving to more recent experiences:
 - a. How far along are you in your program?
 - b. Do you attend an R1 university?
 - c. How would you describe the geographic region of the United States where your current institution is located?
 9. What would you like to share about the academic history artifact you’ve chosen today?

[BREAK: 5 MINUTES]

K–12 Experiences

- 1.) What do you remember about being a Black girl in your K–12 schools (describe a typical day for you)?
- 2.) Were there Black and/or African American women teachers at your schools?
 - Who did you consider a mentor/important figure?
 - What were your relationships with your teachers like?
- 3.) How would you describe your K–12 experiences?
 - Interactions with instructors, staff, and students: School climate
 - Interactions with instructors, staff, and students: Classroom experiences
 - Who, if anyone, showed or shows up for you?
- 4.) Was K–12 challenging for you?
- 5.) What sources of support do you remember using as K–12 student?
 - Are there sources of support you felt were unavailable to you?
- 6.) Were there narratives about Black girls present during your K–12 experiences?
 - a. If so, what role did they play in your academic experiences?
- 7.) What did you believe about your academic capabilities during your K–12 schooling?
 - a.) Who, if anyone, encouraged you academically? Professionally?

- 8.) What careers were you exposed to as a K–12 student?
- 9.) What did you want to be when you grew up?
 - a.) What influenced these interests?
 - b.) What did you believe you could professionally pursue?
 - c.) Do you remember if your thoughts about career possibilities in K–12 included/reflected identifying as a Black young woman?
- 10.) Is there a story you can share that made you interested in pursuing a postsecondary degree?
- 11.) What kinds of things related to your identity as a Black woman helped you decide what postsecondary programs to attend?

[BREAK: 5 MINUTES]

Postsecondary Experiences

- 1.) What do you remember about/what is it like being a Black girl in your postsecondary programs (describe a typical day for you)?
- 2.) Were/are there Black and/or African American women professors during/in your postsecondary programs?
 - Who did/do you consider a mentor/important figure in your postsecondary programs?
 - What were/are your relationships with your professors like?
- 3.) How would you describe your experiences in your postsecondary programs?
 - Interactions with instructors, staff, and students: Campus climate
 - Interactions with instructors, staff, and students: Classroom experiences
 - Who, if anyone, showed or shows up for you?
- 4.) Were/are there narratives about Black women present during your postsecondary experiences?
 - a. If so, what role did they play in your academic experiences?
- 5.) Were/is your postsecondary program(s) challenging for you?
- 6.) What sources of support do you remember using/currently use for your postsecondary programs?
 - Are there sources of support you felt/feel were/are unavailable to you?
- 7.) What did/do you believe about your academic capabilities in your postsecondary programs?
 - a.) Who, if anyone, encouraged/encourages you academically? Professionally?
 - b.) Did anyone encourage you to attend a masters program?
 - c.) A doctoral program?

Debrief: We have reached the end of the interview questions for today. Thank you so much for sharing your experiences. You will be sent an audio recording and transcript of our interview, as you will have the opportunity to clarify, further explain, or redact anything you choose. Our next meeting will focus on your career decisions. We have covered a lot of information, and it is important to allow you time to process things before our next meeting. In scheduling our next interview, what date and time within the next two weeks would allow you the opportunity to process everything we've discussed, and be ready for our final interview?

Appendix G: Final Interview Questions

Phase II Interview Protocol:

From Interview One

Is there anything mentioned in our last interview that you would like to revisit, redact, or modify?

Intro Questions

- 1.) What careers were/are you exposed to in your postsecondary programs?
- 2.) What did/do you want to be when you grew up/graduate?
 - a.) What influenced/influences these interests?
 - b.) What did/do you believe you could professionally pursue?
 - c.) Have your professional aspirations shifted during your program?
 - d.) Did/do your thoughts about career possibilities include/reflect identifying as a Black woman?
- 3.) What careers have you previously held?
- 4.) How do you think identifying as a Black woman impacts/has impacted your career decision making?
 - In relation to:
 - a. Stereotypes
 - b. Black Beauty (colorism and hair)
- 5.) Are you interested in becoming a professor yourself? Why or why not?
 - When did you know being a professor was or was not of interest to you?
- 6.) Is there a story you can share that made you interested in pursuing the career(s) of interest to you?

Link to Written Exercise - Adapted from Rehfuss (2008):

Please type or write a brief paragraph (about 500 words) about where you hope to be in life, and what you hope to be doing occupationally, five years after graduating from your counselor education and supervision doctoral program.

Questions Following Written Exercise

- 7.) What sources of support do you deem will be available to you in this professional role/position?
- 8.) Who do you consider a potential mentor/important figure for you in your future professional role/position?
- 9.) Are there narratives about Black women in this field/profession that you are aware of?
 - a. If so, what role did/do they play in your career decision making?
- 10.) How might being a Black woman impact your future career?

Debrief: Thank you so much for sharing your experiences today. You will be sent an audio recording and transcript of our interview, as you will have the opportunity to clarify, further

explain, or redact anything you choose. As this is our final interview, thank you again for contributing to this research sharing Black women's experiences and career decisions.

Appendix H: Email Prior to Initial Interview

Hello,

You are receiving this email to schedule your first interview for the study concerning your educational history and experiences related to identifying as a Black woman doctoral student in counselor education and supervision. Based on the interview availability you provided, might you be available for the first interview on (Insert Date) from (Insert Time)? The interview will last approximately two hours. Before the interview, I will obtain your verbal consent to participate in the study prior to beginning the interview. As a reminder, consent is an ongoing process, and you may discontinue participating in this study at any time. Also prior to the meeting, you can send an optional academic history artifact that you would like to discuss in our interview. This artifact can be from your K–12 (i.e., report cards comments or discipline referrals, etc.) or postsecondary (assignment comments from instructors or postsecondary professors, etc.) that highlights your academic experiences. I am so excited to meet and work with you! Please let me know if you have any questions!

Sincerely,
Erin Hanley, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate
Counselor Education and Supervision
Virginia Commonwealth University
xxxxx@vcu.edu

Appendix I: Email Prior to Final Interview

Hello,

Thank you so much for sharing your experiences! I want to reiterate the importance of allowing yourself time to process the experiences you've shared. Attached to this email, you will find a copy of your interview audio and transcript. Prior to our second interview and when you are ready, please read over the transcript, as you will have the opportunity to clarify, further explain, or redact anything you choose in our second interview. Our second interview will hone in on your career decision-making. I've attached a few **optional** resources for you, to help with self-care and relaxation in the meantime. Prior to our meeting, you will be asked to write about 500 words, sharing your career goals and plans. I have attached an example for you to review. The prompt for this written exercise can be found [here](#). The interview will last approximately 120 minutes. Looking forward to it!

Sincerely,
Erin Hanley, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate
Counselor Education and Supervision
Virginia Commonwealth University
xxxxx@vcu.edu

Appendix J: Optional Self-Care Resources

These self-care and relaxation resources are completely optional! Enjoy!

Apple Music Playlist: <https://music.apple.com/us/playlist/pl.u-06oxvJNsMGqlk>

Meditation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WHCl6b9K25Y>

Podcasts:

Therapy for Black Girls

Soul Sistas Sleep Meditations

Okay, Now Listen

Black at Work

Apps:

Shine

Daylio Journal

Exhale

Liberate

SelfishBabe

Appendix K: Final Interview Prompt

A portion of our final interview includes discussing your Future Career Autobiography (FCA; adapted from Rehfuss, 2009). This FCA will be used to capture your career goals and interests, and will foster a discussion about your career decision making. Your response will be discussed during our final interview.

Email Address:

Please type or write a brief paragraph (about 500 words) about where you hope to be in life, and what you hope to be doing occupationally five years after graduating from your counselor education and supervision doctoral program.

Appendix L: Email Following Final Interview

Hello,

Thank you again, so much, for your participation in this study! I want to reiterate the importance of allowing yourself time to process the experiences you've shared. Attached to this email, you will find a copy of your second interview audio and transcript. Please read over the transcript, as you will have the opportunity to clarify, further explain, or redact anything you choose. Thank you so much for your time and consideration in adding to the discussion of Black women's educational experiences.

Sincerely,
Erin Hanley, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate
Counselor Education and Supervision
Virginia Commonwealth University
xxxxx@vcu.edu

Appendix M: Consent Form

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

STUDY TITLE: From Kindergarten Classrooms to PhD Pursuits: Academic Narratives that Influence Career Decisions in Black Women Counselor Education and Supervision Doctoral Students

NAME OF RESEARCHER: Erin Hanley, Virginia Commonwealth University

INTRODUCTION:

My name is Erin Hanley, Ph.D. candidate at Virginia Commonwealth University in the Counselor Education and Supervision program. I am conducting this research study to learn a.) what the academic experiences of Black women counselor education doctoral students are, from kindergarten to present, and b.) learn how Black women counselor education doctoral students' academic experiences, from kindergarten to present, influence career decision making. The purpose of this study is to determine what historical academic experiences encourage or discourage Black women counselor education doctoral students from pursuing faculty careers. The proposed study will establish a connection between academic experiences, and career decisions, specifically for Black women in Counselor Education and Supervision doctoral programs.

ABOUT THIS CONSENT FORM

This consent form serves to help you determine whether or not you want to participate in this research. Your participation is completely voluntary. You can decline this interview invitation at no penalty to you. Additionally, should you choose to participate, you are able to discontinue the interview and research process at any time. Your decision not to take part or to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND YOUR INVOLVEMENT

This consent form does not have to be signed and return until you feel you understand and agree to being a research participant. You have been invited to participate in the study because you are a doctoral counselor education and supervision student who a.) identifies as Black/African American, b.) identifies as female, and c.) attends and has attended Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) postsecondary programs.

Participation

You will participate in two individual interviews. Interviews will be scheduled based on your availability. The first interview will last approximately 120 minutes. This initial interview will review your academic experiences, from K–12 to your current postsecondary program, and your perceptions of these experiences. The second interview will last approximately 120 minutes, and review how these academic experiences may be impacting your career decision-making. Before the second interview, you will be asked to write a future career autobiography (500 words

describing your future career goals) in an effort to capture a holistic understanding of your academic experiences and career decisions. In addition to interviews, you will be asked to provide an optional academic history artifact (i.e., report card comments or discipline records from K–12 experiences, assignment comments from instructors or postsecondary professors). The interviews will be audio recorded. Recordings and transcripts of these recordings will be provided to all participants for review and accuracy confirmation. No identifying information will be included in the recordings or the transcripts.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Sometimes sharing personal experiences and thoughts can be difficult and upsetting, especially when done virtually. Ethical considerations will be especially important for this research, as participants may be subject to academic or professional repercussions when addressing such sensitive topics. Please know that you do not have to share any information that causes discomfort. You may skip questions or exit/end the interview at any time. Participation in research might involve some loss of privacy. There is a small risk that someone outside the research study could see and misuse information about you.

BENEFITS TO YOU AND OTHERS

There is no guarantee that you will receive any benefits from being in this study. However, assessing the stories and histories of Black women counselor education doctoral students may be important not only for you, but for the betterment of the other Black women who will eventually enter these spaces. The information you share during the interview may benefit you and other Black women in counselor education, and all levels of education, by allowing you an opportunity to give voice to and validate your experiences. Findings may inform the treatment of, and policies and programming related to Black girls and women at every level of schooling, which may improve their academic and professional pathways. Additionally, you may have a better understanding of how their histories may be influencing your career decision-making.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Potentially identifiable information about you will be excluded from interview notes and recordings - only your first and last initials will be included on these documents. Data is being collected only for research purposes. Signed consent forms will be kept in online password-encrypted storage. There will be no identifiable information about you in the interview notes, academic data, or demographic data collected for this study. If your name ends up on an audio recording, it will be removed from any transcripts to protect your identity. Quotes from your interviews may be included in the write-up of this study, but they will only be labeled with a pseudonym. Any contact information you provide or obtained will only be used to contact you for scheduling interviews or otherwise discussing the study with you and will not be connected with any of the data collected for this study.

I will also use a pseudonym to identify any organization names, colleagues, or any

identifiers. All interviews will be audio-recorded, but no names will be used. I will not use your name during the interview. All digital recordings will be uploaded to a secure, password-protected drive and then deleted from the recording device. After the information from the recordings are transcribed, the recordings will be destroyed. All hard copies of notes and study forms will be stored in a secure, locked area. Personal information about you might be shared with or copied by authorized representatives from VCU or Officials of the Department of Health and Human Services for the purposes of managing, monitoring, and overseeing this study. In general, we will not give you any individual results from the study. In the future, identifiers might be removed from the information you provide in this study, and after that removal, the information could be used for other research studies by this study team or another researcher without asking you for additional consent.

QUESTIONS?

The investigator and study staff named below are the best person(s) to contact if you have any questions, complaints, or concerns about your participation in this research:

Erin Hanley at xxxxx@vcu.edu

OR

Faculty Advisor: Kaprea Johnson, PhD at xxxxx@vcu.edu

If you have general questions about your rights as a participant in this or any other research, or if you wish to discuss problems, concerns or questions, to obtain information, or to offer input about research, you may contact:

Virginia Commonwealth University Office of Research
800 East Leigh Street, Suite 3000, Box 980568, Richmond, VA 23298
(804) 827-2157; <https://research.vcu.edu/human-research/>

CONSENT

I have been given the opportunity to read this consent form carefully. Questions about the study have been answered and resolved. My verbal consent indicates that I freely consent to participate in this study. I will receive a copy of the consent form once I agree to participate in the study.

Appendix N: Presentation of Codes

Codes	Categories	Themes	Research Question Answered
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Being the “Only”: ● Foundational Memories/Racial Identity Development ● Pre-existing: K-12 - Implicit bias ● Pre-existing: K-12 - School discipline 	<p>Marginalization and microaggressions impacting academic experiences participants from K-12 to current doctoral programs</p>	<p>Being the Only Subthemes: <i>Foundational Memories</i> and <i>Learning Experiences</i>.</p>	<p>RQ1</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Inductive: Racial Battle Fatigue ● Pre-existing: Postsecondary - Socialization ● Pre-existing: Faculty - Racial battle fatigue ● Deductive: Hidden Information/Seeking information Not Shared in School ● Deductive: Playing the Game 	<p>Hidden information impacting one’s confidence to successfully navigate academia</p>	<p>Playing the Game Subthemes: <i>Skills, Safety, Racial battle fatigue, Being perceived as professional, Pros and cons of professorship, and Carving out one’s own lane</i></p>	<p>RQ1 and RQ2</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Deductive: Drawbacks to Career(s) in Academia 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Deductive: Familial Influence/ Expectations ● Deductive: Parental Exposure ● Deductive: Self-Confidence 	<p>The impact family had or has on academic achievement and career decision making. Familial Impact</p>	<p>Family Matters Subthemes: <i>Help at Home, Not an Option, and Exceed and Excel.</i></p>	<p>RQ1 and RQ2</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Deductive: Self-Confidence ● Deductive: Body Image ● Deductive: Unspoken Sisterhood ● Pre-existing: Society - Black beauty ● Pre-existing: Society - Stereotypes ● Pre-existing: CLED - Intersectionality Inspiring Agency ● Pre-existing: Postsecondary - Stereotypes ● Deductive: Carving Out 	<p>Actively working against stereotypes or explicit discouragement to create a healthier definition of Black femininity for oneself, to include career decisions.</p>	<p>Proving People Wrong Subthemes: <i>Going above and beyond, Redefining Black femininity, and Benefits of being a Black Woman</i></p>	<p>RQ1 and RQ2</p>

<p>One's Own Lane</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deductive: Faith and Spirituality • Deductive: Representation in the Media 			
<p>Support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-existing: Postsecondary - Support • Deductive: School Counselor Influence • Deductive: Teachers/Mentors Influencing Career Decision-Making • Deductive: Tough-Love Teachers • Pre-existing: CLED - Intersectionality Inspiring Agency • Pre-existing: CLED - Mentorship and Professional Identity 	<p>Positive and negative experiences with peers, campus resources, and educators, and/or finding/creating support for oneself</p>	<p>Support Subthemes: <i>Peer support, Campus community support, Notable educators, and Filling the gaps</i></p>	<p>RQ1 and RQ2</p>