THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BLACK MASTER-LEVEL GRADUATE STUDENTS

ENROLLED IN PREDOMINATELY WHITE COUNSELING PROGRAMS IN TEXAS: A

TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

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by

Shandelyn Treshay Carper

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DEDICATION

With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible. -Matthew 19*:26*

When I decided to further my formal education, I had no idea of the journey on which I was embarking. Throughout this process, I have been challenged beyond my academics. This monumental milestone could not have been achieved without God.

To my Mommy: I am grateful for your determination and the standards you have set for me. Thank you for helping me with the obstacles that have been placed before me and providing me with a support system during challenging of times. Love you always! To my sister, Maikailyn: I want you to know I am proud of you and admire your ability to find your way. You are the peanut butter to my jelly. Love you little sister, and I will always be here for you. To my entire village, especially my grandparents who paved the way for my parents and me.

To my mejor amiga, Cristina: There are not enough words in the dictionary or storage space in the cloud to document all the memories we have. Your undoubted support, kind heart, and comedic nature are my lifelines. Te amo siempre! To my best friend and prom date, Missy: You are a wonderful person, friend, mother, daughter, wife, and sister. Your kindness is earth shattering and your patience and strength are unmatched. Thank you for always being a call or a drive away for me, and for opening your home to me. Keep saving the world.

This year, 2019, marks 400 years since the first ship carrying enslaved African people arrived in America. I could not think of any other way to celebrate this monumental anniversary than by graduating with my doctorate degree. I want to dedicate this dissertation to my strong African ancestors, the African-Americans that suffered unimaginable strife, and the Black Americans that paved the way for me. Those courageous individuals braved horrendous conditions set before them and prevailed despite of the barriers, I thank you and I will continue to excel and advance the community. Last but not least, I want to dedicate this dissertation to myself. Shay, may this serve as a reminder of your capabilities and encourage you in times of doubt.

ABSTRACT

Carper, Shandelyn Treshay, *The lived experiences of Black master-level graduate students enrolled in predominately White counseling programs in Texas: A transcendental phenomenological approach*. Doctor of Philosophy (Counselor Education), December, 2019, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas.

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of Black master-level graduate students enrolled in predominately White counseling programs in Texas. Historically, Black Americans have been denied access to a quality education. The impacts of these intergenerational traumas are present today, in society and in academia. College campuses are representative of the disenfranchised American society. The counseling field is ethically responsible for promoting and implementing diverse and inclusive environments. A transcendental, phenomenological method was utilized in the qualitative research approach examining the experiences of Black graduate students. An eight question, semi-structured interview was implemented with eight participants enrolled in predominately White counseling programs in Texas. Participants' responses were examined and analyzed utilizing Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kaam's (1959, 1966) method of data analysis. The seven themes that emerged were: (a) racism, (b) multiculturalism, (c) race-related classroom challenges, (d) the Black Unicorn syndrome, (e) belonging within the Black community, (f) coping, and (g) worrying about the future of the counseling profession. The findings of this research study may provide counselors and counselor educators relevant perspectives of the experiences of Black, master-level graduate students enrolled in predominantly White counseling programs.

KEY WORDS: Black, Counseling programs, Graduate students, Phenomenological, Qualitative, Transcendental

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Historically, Black Americans have been at a disadvantage in the United States. Exactly 400 years ago, in 1619, Africans were enslaved by Whites to satisfy the labor needs of the North American colonies (Bayor, 2003; Fehrenbacher, 1978). Enslaved Africans significantly contributed to the economy through the production of crops. Throughout this time, enslaved individuals were dehumanized and treated as property (Bayor, 2003). Educating slaves was illegal, and enslaved humans were severely punished and even beaten if they were caught reading or writing (Diouf, 2001; Wilson & Ferris, 1989). By the end of the 18th century, many Northern U.S. states abolished slavery, but slavery remained prominent because the institution was vital to the South's economy (Fehrenbacher, 1978).

Although the 13th amendment was passed in 1865, Black Americans were not politically recognized as U.S. citizens. Black Americans, by law, were not allowed to enjoy the full rights of being an American citizen. This disenfranchised group had been treated unequally and unfairly, being denied equal access to political and social environments, including education. From the end of slavery until the end of segregation, most Southern states enforced laws requiring Blacks to be separate from Whites in hotels, restaurants, and other public establishments, including schools (Bayor, 2003; Behnke, 2017).

Black students were required to attend separate schools from Whites, typically with less than adequate resources. Prior to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, Black educators were heavily involved in advocating for Black students (Walker, 2013).

Following the decision of the historical, influential court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, historically White institutions were required to enroll diverse students (Lee & Barnes, 2015). Black students faced hardships and isolation being away from Black educators. This integration shift affected all educational environments, including college. Transitioning to college can be difficult for students (Lee & Barnes, 2015). In addition, Black students attending TWIs may need strategies to deal with non-academic factors, due to their unique sociohistorical backgrounds (Lee & Barnes, 2015). Focusing on educational discrimination toward Black college students is critical.

Black students reported experiencing discrimination, psychological distress, and lower levels of belonging than their White peers; and are often regarded and responded to as an inferior group in higher education (Lee & Barnes, 2015; Lige, Peteet, & Brown, 2017). As Blacks pursue higher education, they face negative, racially charged situations, ultimately affecting their academics (Lee & Barnes, 2015). From 1954 to present day, supporting a diverse culture and climate at Traditionally White Institutions (TWIs) has not made significant changes (Lee & Barnes, 2015). Most of the literature attended to undergraduate students' experiences and limited literature addresses graduate students' experiences.

Statement of the Problem

The oppressive nature of society potentially influences the quality of Black students' school experience (Ewing, Richardson, James-Myers, & Russell, 1996). In addition, institutionalized oppression impacts the campus environment and Black students' collegiate experience (Lee & Barnes, 2015). Black students face negative stereotypes directly and indirectly, in and out of the classroom, ultimately negatively

affecting their academic and personal success (Ritchey, 2014). These students may not pursue postsecondary education due to negative feelings resulting from microaggressions, psychological distress, and cultural mistrust (Ross, Powell, & Henriksen, Jr., 2016). Specifically, Black students enrolled in TWIs may encounter racism, lowering academic achievement.

Black students often face more academic achievement barriers and adjustment difficulties that are not experienced by their White peers (Hurd, Sanchez, Zimmerman, & Caldwell, 2012; Ross et al., 2016). Only half of enrolled Black college students persist to graduation, and compared to their White counterparts, Black students' graduation rates are lower (Lige et al., 2017). Black college students also experience obstacles to academic performance, suggesting that the academic environment can be stressful for these students (Lige et al., 2017). Due to percentage underrepresentation, Black college students enrolled in TWIs might benefit from strategies to deal with discrimination (Lee & Barnes, 2015). Recently, there has been an overall decline in Blacks students enrolled in higher education institutions (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education [JBHE], 2018b). However, the number of Black students pursuing graduate education has remained steady at postsecondary institutions in recent years (JBHE, 2018a).

Although Black students' efforts and perseverance may contribute to overcoming circumstances, self-identity is an important contributing factor to academic and career success (Ross et al., 2016). Making college counselors aware of the lived experiences of Black graduate students can also assist counselors in how to address concerns of this specific population of students. One major difference between TWIs and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) is that, HBCUs use "academic involvement

strategies to promote academic success among students attending their institutions"
(Melius, 2011, p. 607). This supportive environment, including academic support, for
Black students enrolled in HBCUs is lacking for Black students enrolled in Traditionally
White Institutions. Racial group affiliation and connectedness might promote increased
academic motivation for Black students (Hurd et al., 2012).

Purpose of the Study

To support Black college students throughout their collegiate career, "it is critical
for student affairs professionals to be knowledgeable in Black identity development since
a positive racial identity is linked to academic and personal success" (Ritchey, 2014, p.
100). Black college students are subjected to the environment and culture at TWIs that
function under the melting pot theory (Ritchey, 2014). This theory holds that all students
are "expected to fit into the mainstream White middle class value structure" (Ritchey,
2014, p. 101). The melting pot theory maintains an environment that is not encouraging
or beneficial for minority students (Ritchey, 2014). Black students' discriminatory
interactions at TWIs can negatively impact performance and increase psychological
distress (Lee & Barnes, 2015). Ewing et al. (1996) stated that Black graduate students
experience difficulties that affect their psychological well-being. Furthermore, Haskins
et al. (2013) conducted research exploring the experiences of Black graduate counseling
students in predominately White institutions. The researchers utilized group interviews
to gather data from the participants. The findings of the current study may confirm the
findings of Haskins et al. and contribute a more in depth understanding of the
participants' experiences. The purpose of the study is to discover and give voice to the

lived experiences of Black master-level graduate students enrolled in predominately White counseling programs in Texas.

Significance of the Study

According to Hurd et al. (2012), "race is a central part of one's identity and may contribute positively to one's academic performance" (p. 1197). To improve educational outcomes, school achievement is necessary for future success (Hurd et al., 2012). The impact of variables, such as positive self-image, understanding of and ability to deal with racism, and success in leadership, remain unclear regarding the effect on Black graduate students enrolled in Traditionally White Institutions. The findings of the study may contribute to creating an inviting, encouraging environment for Black graduate students to attain personal and academic success (Ross et al., 2016). Historically Black Colleges and Universities have successfully supported Black college students, and HBCUs' student-centered methods should be explored and applied to Black college students enrolled in any university (Melius, 2011). Furthermore, administrators, faculty, and staff at TWIs should progressively implement inclusive learning environments beneficial for the entire student population (Lee & Barnes, 2015).

The findings of this study may be useful for counselors, administrators, professors, and staff of university settings and beyond. The aforementioned professionals could gain information to increase their knowledge about Black students' identity development and provide a safe, comfortable space for those students. Counseling staff can implement diversity awareness and sensitivity training across campus.

The university environment is an important setting to understand individuals' psychological experiences (Melius, 2011). Lee and Barnes (2015) stated that by

acknowledging Black students' collegiate experience, TWIs can create and maintain culturally sensitive programs and environment. Black college students enrolled in TWIs have a unique experience, specifically in their academic and social situations (Lee & Barnes, 2015). Additionally, there is a gap in the research exploring Black graduate students' experiences (Haskins et al., 2013). While Haskins et al. (2013) research findings have contributed to the gap in the literature through focus groups, individual interviews might be utilized to gain a deeper understanding of the students' experiences. The significance of this study is to understand the essence of the lived experiences of Black master-level graduate students enrolled in predominately White counseling programs in Texas.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined to inform the reader of how the terms were used in the present study.

Black-American/ Black

These terms are used synonymously. The term *Black American* is used to describe a racial group in America and is not an attempt to describe individuals genetically, biologically, or anthropologically (Gordon, 2017). The term Black Americans is used to denote race and entitlement to inalienable rights as American citizens. The construct *Black* historically encompasses phenotypical features—including skin color. The definition of *Black* is inseparable from the social and economic institution of slavery (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2002). "Throughout U.S. history, racial identity has been legally, and later culturally, determined by the one-drop rule, thereby giving individuals with any known [B]lack ancestry no choice other than to identify as

[B]lack." (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2002, p. 104). The *onedrop rule* was implemented to include individuals as Black with ratios of 1/32 of Black blood (Bayor, 2003; Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2002). For the purposes of this study, the term *Black* includes culture—a collection of values and norms that a group of individuals identify with. Individuals can self-select and self-identify as Black or Black-American.

Black identity

William Cross (1971) developed the Black Identity model. This model, also known as the *Nigrescence* model, is essential in affirming a Black identity (Cross, 1971; Wilson & Gavarappan, 2018). This model serves a framework for simultaneously decreasing Black self-hatred and increasing Black self-acceptance (Wilson & Gavarappan, 2018). Black identity is one that "develops in response to and as result of being in an oppressive environment" (Ewing et al., 1996, p. 55).

Double consciousness

Defined by W. E. B. Du Bois (1903/2003), double consciousness refers to "the ability of [B]lack Americans to see themselves only through the eyes of [W]hite Americans, to measure their intelligence, beauty, and sense of self-worth by standards set by others" (p. xvi). Black Americans possess a national identity of being an American, while living in a nation that rejects their Black experience (Du Bois, 2003; Klor de Alva, Shorris, & West, 1997).

Ethnic identity

Ethnicity socially defines a group of individuals based on culture, such as shared language, traditions, and history (Tatum, 1997). Individuals may identify as a member of an ethnic group, such as Nigerian, Italian, German, etc. (Tatum, 1997). Theories of

ethnic identity development theories been applied to understand college student development (Johnston-Guerrero, 2016).

Graduate students

For the purpose of the current study, graduate students include students enrolled in master-level counseling programs at a university or college. In addition, these students earned an undergraduate degree.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are "[B]lack academic institutions established prior to 1964 whose principal mission was, and still is, the education of [B]lack Americans" (Roebuck & Murty, 1993, p. 3). Blacks were denied access to education, and after the Civil War, HBCUs were established to serve the educational needs of Black Americans (US Department of Education [USDE], 1991). Historically Black Colleges and Universities are unique in their "close identity with the struggle of [B]lacks for survival, advancement, and equality in American society" and unparalleled impact to the advancement of Black people (Roebuck & Murty, 1993, p. 3). For the purpose of this study, HBCUs are defined as collegiate institutions that were originally created for Black students and continue to have a majority of the total students enrolled identify as Black.

Imposter Syndrome

Clance and Imes (1978) developed Imposter Syndrome to identify internal experiences of intellectual phoniness. Despite contrary evidence, *Impostorism* tends to contradict external evidence of success with opposing internal, negative beliefs (Clance & Imes, 1978; Lige et al., 2017). Imposter syndrome is associated with anxiety,

depression, excessive worry, poor mental health, and diminished self-esteem (Lige et al., 2017).

Predominately White Counseling Program

Predominately White Counseling Programs (PWCP) were identified via Traditionally White Institutions. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) vital statistics were consulted for each counseling program. Predominately White Counseling Programs include more than 50% of enrolled students that identify as White.

Traditionally White Institutions (TWIs)

Traditionally White Institutions include any non-HBCU and were originally established to serve White students (Smallwood, 2015). Traditionally White Institutions are also understood to be previously historically White Institutions and/ or Predominately White Institutions (PWIs), enforcing exclusion supported by the U.S. prior to 1954 (Brown & Dancy, 2010). Traditionally White Institutions include universities that were established prior to 1964 and historically excluded Black students (Brown & Dancy, 2010). The institutions were rooted in the education of White students and openly practiced discrimination and prejudice against diverse students (Brown & Dancy, 2010). Traditionally White Institutions tend to observe traditions of PWIs rooted in the ideas Western Europe and were heavily influenced by church officials (Brown & Dancy, 2010). The TWIs' current student body may not include more than 50% of White students, but the student body or the faculty and administration historically held oppressive mindsets. This includes White administrative leadership in power at a racially

diverse university, as a White president can chose to select a majority White cabinet, yielding to White institutional agents (Harper, Smith, & Davis, 2018).

Racial identity

Racial identity delineates the degree to which individuals are aware of and experience the world through their particular racial group (McClain, Beasley, Jones, Awosogba, Jackson, & Cokley, 2016). Examples of racial identity include, but are not limited to: Black, Asian, White, and Latinx (Johnston-Guerrero, 2016). Black American racial identity is defined as an individual's thoughts and beliefs about their race, and the level of importance and affect the individual places on this identity (Lige et al., 2017).

Racism

Racism is an oppressive system in America, operating to the advantage of White Americans and to the disadvantage of people of color (Tatum, 1997). This system involves "cultural messages and institutional policies and practices as well as the beliefs and actions of individuals" (Tatum, 1997, p. 7). Racism is designed to maintain a caste system solely based on skin color (Tatum, 1997).

Theoretical Frameworks

In this study, I will be using three theories: (a) College Student Retention, (b) Black Identity Development, and (c) Critical Race Theory. These theories will be used as a framework and are described below.

College student retention

Tinto (1975) created the college student retention model and later expanded the model in 2017. Tinto (1975) focused on college dropout and created a model to interpret the multiple factors of student retention. The primary focus of the model was split

between student's goal commitment and institutional commitment. The student's goal commitment was demonstrated to largely influence academic integration; the institution's commitment largely influenced social integration. Academic and social integration, as demonstrated by Tinto's (1975) model, largely influence student's dropout decision. Tinto (2017) explored methods in which institutions can increase student motivation to persist and complete their degree. Tinto's (2017) model focuses on experiences on campus that shape student motivation (which can be enhanced or diminished) that are within the institution's capacity to influence.

The student persistence model suggests that student's goals influenced their level of motivation, which in turn, influences their persistence. In the category of motivation, Tinto (2017) assessed: a) self-efficacy, b) sense of belonging, and c) perception of curriculum. The model focuses on "what experiences influence their self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and perceptions of the value or relevance of their studies and in turn their motivation to persist" (Tinto, 2017, p. 256). The factors of the student experiences (self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and perception of curriculum) can affect motivation. Although Tinto's (1975, 2017) models do not address culture, the factors remain relevant.

Black identity development

Cross (1971) developed the Black Identity Development model. The Black Identity Development model, also known as the Nigrescense model, encompasses five stages: Preencounter, Encounter, Immersion/Emersion, Internalization, and Internalization/Commitment. In this model, Cross (1971) characterized visual or verbal encounters that cause individuals to reinterpret and make a new meaning about race to stress the importance of race. Progressing through the five stages, the Black individual is

evolving and affirming their Blackness. As mentioned previously, identity and identity development are critical for college students.

Black identity can be complicated pertaining to being accepted in various social situations. In predominately White settings, Black students feel forced to separate themselves from their culture of origin and adopt mainstream culture resulting in their increased feelings of guilt, depression, and identity confusion (Ross et al., 2016). Blacks are historically viewed as inferior and may encounter racially-degrading situations—even in educational settings. In response, Black Americans learn to create and present a version of themselves that is more acceptable to mainstream society. Black students may struggle with downplaying their cultural norms and realize they must learn to speak, look, and behave White in order to be accepted (Ross et al., 2016).

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged during the Civil Rights era as a response to Blacks' hindered efforts for equality (Delgado & Stafancic, 2017; Dixson, 2018). This theory encompasses a framework addressing White supremacy and racial oppression against Blacks and other racial minorities. The goal of CRT is to implement changes in America that allow for equality amongst all races (Brooks, 2017). This theory has been expanded to challenge racial inequities in colleges and universities (Delgado & Stafancic, 2017; Dixson, 2018; Harper et al., 2018). McCoy (2018) articulates that CRT addressed how educational institutions' policies and practices are not inclusive of Black students.

Research Question

What are the lived experiences of Black, master-level graduate students enrolled in predominately White counseling programs in Texas?

Limitations

Participants' willingness to participate is a limitation of the study. Furthermore, participants may not feel comfortable sharing experiences that may be perceived as negative and in opposition of current professors, programs, and institutions in which they are enrolled.

Delimitations

The delimitations of the study include choosing to interview Black graduate students enrolled in a predominately White counseling program in Texas. The universities chosen also present a geographical delimitation

Assumptions

I am assuming that the participants, Black graduate students, have experienced some sort of racial prejudice and may harbor negative feelings or heightened sensitivity because of those encounters. The students may harbor negative feelings stemming from forced isolation, symptoms related to depression, anxiety, paranoia, or be socially withdrawn. It is also my assumption that participants will be honest during the interview process.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter I includes the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, definition of terms, research questions, limitations, delimitations, and the assumptions inherent to the research study. Chapter II contains a review of pertinent literature. The literature review includes pertinent history, college student identity development, racial and ethnic identity, minority identity development model, Black identity development

model, identity development of Black students, college student retention, education barriers for Black students, education barriers for Black graduate students, Critical Race Theory, stereotype threat, imposter syndrome, multicultural education, multicultural education in university settings, and qualitative research design.

Chapter III includes an overview of the phenomenological methodology utilized for the purposes of this dissertation, including: (a) research design, (b) population and sampling, (c) data collection, (d) instrumentation, (e) grand tour questions, (f) data analysis, and (g) trustworthiness. In Chapter IV presents the results of the analysis including the description of participants and the themes that emerged from participant interviews. To conclude the dissertation, Chapter V includes a summary of the study, discussion of research findings, implications, limitations, recommendations for future research, and conclusion.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the 17th century, White European settlers began to import enslaved Africans to satisfy the labor needs of the rapidly growing North American colonies (Bayor, 2003; Fehrenbacher, 1978).   Europeans would trick, force, and kidnap African people onto slave ships (Diouf, 2001; Sharp & Schomp, 2007). The journey from Africa to the Americas was called The Middle Passage. During the Middle Passage, enslaved Africans were forced into tight spaces and exposed to alarming temperatures for at least six and up to fourteen weeks (Diouf, 2001; Sharp & Schomp, 2007). In addition, they were starved, subjected to deplorable and disease-ridden areas, raped, and beaten (Diouf, 2001). To convey the great suffering that occurred, the Middle Passage has also been named the African Holocaust or the Black Holocaust (Sharp & Schomp, 2007). According to Sharp and Schomp (2007), enslaved Africans were transported to one of three places: Central and South America (58%), West Indies (37%), and North America (5%). Children who were born into slavery knew of the dreadful conditions surrounding them, the bleak future that laid ahead of them, and that "they were at the bottom of society" (Diouf, 2001, p. 25). Enslaved Africanswere sold like property and traded like animals, weighed and sold at the price per pound of a hog (Diouf, 2001).

By the end of the 18th century, many Northern U.S. states abolished slavery, but enslavement of African people was vital to the economy of Southern states (Fehrenbacher, 1978). Two categories of Blacks existed in the U.S.—slaves and free Blacks (Levine & Levine, 2014). Most free Blacks and freed slaves lived in the Northern states, while slavery was prevalent in the Southern states (Roebuck & Murty, 1993).

During slavery, parents of slave children had no say in their children's lives (Diouf, 2001). Often children would witness their parents and family members being sold and beaten (Diouf, 2001). Unification was critical to survival. Elder slaves would take care of enslaved children whose parents were sold. Upholding African tradition, children would refer to elders their parents' age as aunts and uncles and children their age as sisters and brothers (Diouf, 2001). Preserving elements of their African culture and creating an African-American culture served as a survival strategy (Bayor, 2003). Enslaved individuals, children included, worked with no compensation and lived in squalor, enduring degrading and cruel treatment (Diouf, 2001). Throughout this time, those enslaved were denied basic human rights to social interactions, personal development, and education (Diouf, 2001; Levine & Levine, 2014; Wilson & Ferris, 1989).

Under slavery, extreme, inhumane standards and laws were implemented solely to make Black people feel subhuman and worthless (Diouf, 2001; Karst, 1989). Enslaved parents equipped their children with vital skills to survive (Diouf, 2001). Discretion and concealment were valued survival skills that enslaved elders instilled in their children (Diouf, 2001). African slave children learned to be discrete in the matters that they discussed, often keeping from Whites what was being discussed and images they had seen to keep their family safe and out of danger (Diouf, 2001). Enslaved children were also taught to conceal their true feelings, "control their impulses and display a happy face" (Diouf, 2001, p. 65). If the slave owners were to detect any contempt or anger, the children and their families would be punished (Diouf, 2001). To survive the horrific conditions and continuous hardships, children exhibited courage and

resiliency (Diouf, 2001). Enslaved children often had to overcome natural, normal physiological needs, such as hunger and thirst, conquer consistent fear of the unknown, and fight anxiety daily (Diouf, 2001).

To maintain Black subservience, formal education and literacy training of African-Americans, both slaves and free, were non-existent (Wilson & Ferris, 1989). "Slavery as a system was based on coercion and cruelty" (Bayor, 2003, p. 80). Enslaved children were discrete in learning to read and write. Educating slaves was illegal because Whites believed educated slaves might rebel against their degrading situation (Diouf, 2001). Slaves would be subjected to beatings, loss of a digit, imprisonment, or fines if they were being taught or caught teaching slaves to read or write (Diouf, 2001). Enslaved African-Americans were motivated to learn to read and write to better themselves and prove that they were as intellectually capable as Whites (Diouf, 2001). To survive, children learned to play dumb and hide their intelligence when it was necessary (Diouf, 2001). Enslaved parents often encouraged their children to run away, knowing that one person had a better chance of reaching freedom compared to a group (Diouf, 2001).

At the end of the American Revolutionary War, America won its freedom from the British and slavery was legal in all 13 colonies (Bayor, 2003; Feagin, 2016; Fehrenbacher, 1978). While slavery was prevalent in the South, Northerners did not enforce these harsh conditions for Blacks (Fehrenbacher, 1978; Urofsky, 2012). Though many free Blacks lived in the North, and not legally a slave, they were often subjected to discriminatory restrictions and excluded from privileges of American freedom (Fehrenbacher, 1978; Karst, 1989).

To inaugurate their new independence, the founding fathers began creating the Constitution. The Constitutional Convention of 1787 marked a major struggle regarding legislative power between small and large states (Fehrenbacher, 1978; Urofsky, 2012). The struggle was between: (a) larger states—that preferred congressional representation based on a state's population and (b) smaller states—that wanted equal representation in House of Representatives (Graber, 2006). Within this debate, there was controversy related to who was eligible to be counted in the population. The Southern states had larger populations than Northern states based on the slave population. By counting those enslaved in the Southern population, Southern representatives would have an overwhelming political representation to push forward their pro-slavery agenda (Graber, 2006).

To accommodate the opposition, the Three-Fifths Compromise was implemented and declared that slaves will count as three-fifths of *White* when determining political representation (Bayor, 2003; Graber, 2006). The population was then calculated to equal the "[t]otal number of free persons and 3/5 of all other persons" (Fehrenbacher, 1978, p. 20). The implementation of the Three-Fifths Compromise greatly increased the representation of slave-owning states and granted political power to secure their distinct interests (Graber, 2006). The Three-Fifths Compromise is one of America's most controversial topics, negating enslaved Americans' personhood measuring everyone against *White* (Bayor, 2003, p. 42). To further engrain the mindset that slaves are property, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 constitutionally enforced that escaped slaves be returned to their owners. A second Fugitive Slave Act was enforced in 1850 increasing penalties for escaped slaves. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 revoked runaway slaves'

new freedom and required citizens to participate in their capture (Diouf, 2001). Greed and turmoil rooted from this act, where free Blacks were kidnapped by Whites, forced into slavery, and denied protection by the constitution.

In 1799, Dred Scott was born enslaved in Virginia and was owned by Peter Blow (Karst, 1989; Kutler, 1967). Over time he moved across states with Mr. Blow, and by 1830 he lived in Missouri (Karst, 1989; Kutler, 1967; Urofsky, 2012). Upon Mr. Blow's death, Scott was sold to an army surgeon, Dr. Emerson, and traveled the U.S.—living in free territories for an extended period (Kutler, 1967; Urofsky, 2012). It is unknown why Scott did not claim his freedom immediately; speculations suggest he may not have been aware of his freedom at the time (Urofsky, 2012). Upon Emerson's death, Scott, who was currently married, and his family wanted to pursue freedom (Kutler, 1967). In 1846, upon being denied the opportunity to buy his freedom, Scott and his wife, Harriet, sued for their family's freedom from Mrs. Emerson, Dr. Emerson's widow (Kutler, 1967). Based on previous cases, such as *Somerset v. Stewart* (1772) and *Rachel v. Walker* (1836), Scott had a fair chance of winning his case. Over the next 11 years, the Scott family would be in and out of court striving for freedom. Throughout that time, the Scotts were sold from the Emerson family to the Sanford family, Mrs. Emerson's brother. The Dred Scott case eventually went to the U.S. Supreme Court and in 1857 the final rulings were issued:

- Slaves, former or free, nor their descendants, were not American citizens or citizens or another country.

- Free U.S. born Blacks are not eligible for U.S. citizenship, but Congress could grant naturalization to any one of color born under the allegiance to another government.

- Blacks could be citizens of a particular state, but state citizenship does not influence national citizenship.

- Only Congress has the right to grant U.S. citizenship.

- *Sua Sponte*—Blacks are a subordinate class and are not allowed to associate with Whites.

- Slavery could not be prohibited in American territories, thus the U.S.'s ban on slavery was unconstitutional (Brooks, 2017; Graber, 2006; Karst, 1989; Kutler, 1967; Urofsky, 2012).

The Supreme Court decision demonstrated that Blacks were denied respect and the opportunity of equal citizenship rightfully granted through the inalienable rights (Karst, 1989). Brooks (2017) categorized this decision as juridical subordination—denoting "judicial decision-making that inhibits racial advancement by suppressing the [B]lack equality interests in civil rights cases" (p. 12). The Dred Scott decision of 1857 remains one of America's most controversial rulings to date, and the worst outcome of the Supreme Court attempting to impose a solution to a political issue (Graber, 2006; Karst, 1989; Kutler, 1967; Urofsky, 2012).

The Civil War began in 1861 between the Union and Confederacy. The war was a result of tension between Northern states (i.e., the Union) and Southern states (i.e., the Confederacy) regarding, states' rights, expansion, and slavery (Masur, 2011). President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, an action that freed slaves in

January 1863. Although the slaves were freed in 1863, the 13th amendment, which was adopted in 1865, officially abolished slavery (Masur, 2011). May 1865 marked the end of the Civil War and the Confederate states rejoined the Union to once again become the United States of America (Masur, 2011). The South's economy was in shambles after the Civil War. At this time, there were four million former slaves of which more than one million were children (Diouf, 2001).

Although the Emancipation Proclamation was passed in January 1863, word to free the slaves came later to southern states. With Texas in particular, the slave owners were reluctant to abide by the new law and withheld the news of freedom from the slaves. Texas was not heavily involved in the Civil War, and on June 19, 1865, Major General Granger landed in Texas declaring that all slaves were free. This notification occurred two and half years after the Emancipation Proclamation was passed. In commemoration of this monumental moment, Juneteenth is observed in Texas. In 1865, after the enactment of the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, the Three-Fifths Compromise was rendered obsolete.

At the end of slavery, Black Americans were not politically recognized as full citizens and were constantly denied equal access. It would not be until the 14th Amendment passed in 1868 that equal protection was granted to Black Americans (Behnke, 2017). The objective of the Reconstruction period, from 1865-1877, was to unify Southern states to the union and advocate for the rights of Blacks (Behnke, 2017). Though Southern states were rebuilding their economy, former slaves found themselves still living in a brutal world (Behnke, 2017; Diouf, 2001). The Supreme Court's interpretations of Reconstruction Civil Rights laws were used to treat Blacks as second-

class citizens (Behnke, 2017). Blacks coped with dreary, bleak situations by utilizing

resources within their families and communities (Diouf, 2001). Although children of

slavery were portrayed as being ignorant and naïve, they gained physical and mental

strength to face hunger, injustice, racism, violence, isolation, and humiliation.

During this time, *Black Codes* were implemented. *Black Codes* were laws

created to deprive former African-American slaves from achieving their lawful freedom

(Bayor, 2003). Southern states implemented *Black Codes* restricting freedom and

minimizing lawful rights of Black American citizens (Urofsky, 2012). With resilience,

Blacks were able to persevere against the terrible conditions implemented for their

defeat. The *Black Codes* remained in effect from 1865-1964, the beginning of the Civil

Rights Movement.

In 1896, racially segregated institutions established a separate but equal doctrine

via the court case *Plessy v. Ferguson* (USDE, 1991; Wilson & Ferris, 1989). This

separate-but-equal decision legalized *de jure* segregation and served as a gateway for

Whites to perpetuate a caste system (Wilson & Ferris, 1989). This federal ruling created

a public education system for Blacks that was inundated with inferior facilities, outdated

materials, and poorly trained leaders (Wilson & Ferris, 1989). This lawfully enforced

segregation is known as "Jim Crow" (Bayor, 2003, p. 101).

During the Jim Crow era, racial separation was enforced for Black Americans in

every aspect of life. This demeaning caste system defined Blacks by ratios of 1/32 of

Black blood (Bayor, 2003). Blacks were prohibited entry into public places, subjected to

separate drinking fountains, and were denied a fair chance to earn a living (Bayor, 2003;

Pettigrew, 1975). Southern Black American citizens experienced racial discrimination

that excluded them from basic rights based on their skin color and appearance alone (Pettigrew, 1975). By 1900, approximately 90% of Black Americans lived in the South (Wilson & Ferris, 1989). The inequalities of the segregated school system were distinct and southern Blacks began to migrate north.

In a White dominated society, Blacks were limited in the information and opportunities received towards obtaining gainful employment and substantial education (Pettigrew, 1975; Schwartz, 2003). Most Southern states enforced laws requiring Blacks to be separate from Whites in public establishments, including schools (Anderson & Bolden, 2018; Somervill, 2010). During that time, Black students were segregated to separate schools, typically with less than adequate resources. The direct discrimination against Southern Black American citizens restricted attendance to particular institutions, leading to diminished opportunities and less advanced educational training (Pettigrew, 1975).

The U.S. Supreme Court issued a ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* in May 1954, unanimously determining that racial segregation in public schools violated equal protection to any person within its jurisdiction (Cashin, 2004). The ruling declared that separate educational facilities were essentially unequal. Following the ruling, Chief Justice Warren stated "To separate [Blacks] from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely to ever be undone" (Chief Justice Warren as cited in Cashin, 2004, p. 207). Segregation yielded harmful, negative psychological effects on Black students (Foley, 2010; Somervill, 2010). Following the ruling, Black students had the right to attend historically White schools.

But efforts such as the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, which was created by the Mississippi Legislature for the express purpose of thwarting efforts to desegregate schools, resulted in delays in the implementation of the Brown decision (Bowers, 2010). One year later, the Supreme Court issued the Brown II decision (Somervill, 2010). The Brown II decision did not indicate a deadline for the integration of schools, and therefore, protected school systems that purposely delayed integration efforts (Somervill, 2010).

Desegregating schools was an intimidating process, and often required law enforcement to protect Black students. Although the law required the desegregation of schools, it could not be assumed that by ending segregation the schools and students would benefit (Pettigrew, 1975). Desegregation simply means that segregation is illegal and brings students together in one atmosphere, despite the quality of that atmosphere (Pettigrew, 1975). Desegregated schools continued to have the ability to maintain internal segregation with students (Pettigrew, 1975). The law mandated our nation be desegregated, but integration was not addressed. The importance of integration is addressing the quality of interactions within a desegregated environment (Pettigrew, 1975).

Prior to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, Black educators were heavily involved in advocating for Black students (Walker, 2013). With desegregated schools, Black students were required to advocate for themselves. By legal mandate, Black Americans were being admitted to White colleges in the South (Anderson & Bolden, 2018; Somervill, 2010). This mandate was not met with eagerness and much rebuttal

and resistance was exercised. Police and military personnel were often required to escort Black students into desegregated schools.

Currently, constitutional amendments and laws are in place to protect Black Americans and enforce their rights as American citizens. For nearly 400 years, Africans, African-Americans, and now Black Americans have endured racial discrimination and pervasive hardships. Despite these historical and present hardships, Black Americans have made tremendous progress and history.

Although Black students have been allowed to attend Traditionally White Institutions (TWIs), the culture and curriculum of TWIs have often remained substantially the same. "Black students are seldom exposed to scholarly work related to the Black experience and must construct their young adult racial identities from the raw and flawed racial stereotypes perpetuated in the media and popular culture" (Adams, 2005, p. 285). Black Americans have made tremendous strides in accomplishing life tasks despite historically inequitable treatment, including pursuing higher education.

Following the American Revolution, free Blacks established private churches and schools (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). In 1860, there were approximately 27 million Whites and four million Blacks in the U.S.; over 90% of Black Americans lived in the Southern states (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). Prior to the Civil War, approximately 90% of Southern Blacks were illiterate and by law could not pursue education (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). There was no organized, public education system for Blacks (Urofsky, 2012). Segregation extremely limited Blacks' rights, hindering Blacks from receiving a decent education (Matthews, 2018). At this time, only 28 Black Americans had received a Bachelor's degree (Roebuck & Murty, 1993).

In 1862, a year prior to the emancipation of slaves, President Lincoln signed the Morrill Act into law. The Morrill Act, also known as the Land Grant College Act, donated public land to several states, aiding in the establishment of colleges (Matthew, 2018). However, the colleges and universities established were open to White students only. Yet, after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed, Blacks sought out higher education. Between 1866 and 1890, over 200 private Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were established (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). Nearly 30 years later, in 1890, the second Morrill Act was signed and land grants were issued for the creation of public Black institutions.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities, developed out of segregation, held a unique challenge to create higher education institutions while serving students who were not previously formally educated (Gasman & Tudico, 2008). The education of Blacks was tolerated to obtain work as dictated by Whites (Antell, 1978). Many HBCUs developed under the 1890 Morrill Act focused on agricultural enrichment and strayed away from a liberal education (Roebuck & Murty, 1993).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities provided a supportive college experience that could prepare Black students to enter and succeed in a world filled with racial tension (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). Historically Black Colleges and Universities eased the *cultural shock* from the Black culture into a White-dominated society, and students could escape racial conflicts that are prominent on TWIs' campuses (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). In 1917, 10% of Blacks were completing college-level curriculum and 75% were completing elementary curriculum (Matthews, 2018). By 1931, 60% of Blacks were completing college-level curriculum (Matthews, 2018). Although, these

were huge achievements for the Black race, lower levels of education reflected "the larger societal problems of racism and economic discrimination" as opposed to lack of motivation or interest (Antell, 1978, p. 3).

Although the number of Black students enrolling in college is increasing, the likelihood of these students completing a degree is lower than their White peers (Lee & Barnes, 2015). This situation may be caused by overt and covert racism in America. College campuses are "social microcosms in which the values of the larger society, including the biases and prejudices, are reflected among students, faculty, and staff" (Greer, 2008, p. 69). Historically, traditionally White southern higher education institutions have remained somewhat separate and unequal (Wilson & Ferris, 1989). Culture and environment of some TWIs has not changed, maintaining racist oppressive institutional cultures (McCoy, 2018). The racial inequities present in TWIs is infiltrated with discriminatory and prejudice practices (McCoy, 2018; Phelps-Ward, Allen, & Howard, 2017).

Identity Development

Student identity development. The social construction of identity development is influenced by: (a) context and interaction with others, (b) societal norms, and (c) cultural expectations (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). These influencers can yield unique and specific results across multiple situations. Individuals construct their identity through a social context dictated by dominant norms and expectations. Students' identities are organized into three domains—cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal (Weidman, DeAngelo, & Bethea, 2014). As students progress in school, they develop their identity specific to that environment.

College student identity development. College is a significant developmental period for students as they explore and define their identities (Jourdan, 2006). Torres et al. (2009) found that college student identity development theories provided insight to understanding how to assist college students in reaching their goals. Within the collegiate atmosphere, identity encompasses students' personal beliefs in relation to social groups in a specific atmosphere (Torres et al., 2009). College student identity development is comprised of: (a) discovering abilities, (b) setting goals, and (c) organizing experiences within the college environment (Torres et al., 2009). As students enter college, in addition to personal identity development, they must balance newly introduced demands of collegiate life (Torres et al., 2009). Students' identities can be influenced, negatively or positively, by interactions with peers, staff, faculty, and administrators on college campuses (Weidman, 2003). Chaudhari and Pizzolato (2008) stated university faculty, staff, and administrators tend to be prejudice toward students based on phenotypical racial features. Although race is not directly addressed in the college student identity development model, significant experiences can occur based on race.

Racial and ethnic identity. Identity development is essential to forming a positive foundation of self, self-pride, and cultural pride. Race and ethnicity are used interchangeably amongst researchers to label individuals with similar physical features, skin tone, customs, and traditions (Trimble, 2007). Although race and ethnicity are socially constructed (Tatum, 1997), for the purposes of this study, a distinction will be made between the two terms.

Race is a social construct created to enforce a caste system used to perpetuate racism (Tatum, 1997; Trimble, 2007). Racial identity defines the magnitude that individuals are aware of and experience their world through their particular racial group (McClain, Beasley, Jones, Awosogba, Jackson, & Cokley, 2016). The development of racial identity is an essential life task and influences self-concept (Plummer, 1995). Examples of racial identity include, but are not limited to: Black, Asian, White, and Latinx (Johnston-Guerrero, 2016).

Ethnicity socially defines a group of individuals based on culture, such as shared language, traditions, and history (Tatum, 1997). Ethnic identity encompasses two constructs: self-identification and self-labeling (Trimble, 2007). Individuals may identify as a member of an ethnic group, such as Nigerian, Italian, German, etc. (Tatum, 1997). Consequently, ethnic identity development theories have been applied to understand college student development (Johnston-Guerrero, 2016).

It is important to consider the intersection of race and ethnicity (Johnston-Guerrero, 2016). Race and ethnicity intersect to marginalize ethnic and racial minorities and normalize White dominance (Johnston-Guerrero, 2016). Racially identifying as Black and ethnically identifying as Caribbean provides an individual with a unique, meaningful perspective, thereby strengthening individual identity development (Tatum, 1997). While focusing on one, ethnicity or race, and not the other is permissible, denying their intersection can be harmful (Johnston-Guerrero, 2016).

Enculturation signifies adopting historical, traditional African-American customs, beliefs, and principles (Cokley & Helm, 2007). For Blacks, examples of enculturation include: (a) subscribing to socialization and religious practices, (b) eating traditional

foods, and (c) having a healthy suspicion toward Whites because of historical oppression of Blacks (Cokley & Helm, 2007). Cokley and Helm (2007) found that Blacks with a strong racial identity and anti-White attitudes were more enculturated to African-American culture. Cokley and Helm (2007) reported that a strong predictor of African-American enculturation was apparent in collegiate decisions to attend a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) or a Traditionally White Institution (TWI). Race and ethnicity will be addressed as it pertains to minority students in educational settings.

Minority identity development. The United States is a diverse nation representing a multitude of nations from all over the world. Racial and ethnic minority identity labels are defined in a social context and conditioned by the environment (Jensen, 2011; Tatum, 1997; Trimble, 2007). Minority identity development involves personal transformation that is enabled through environmental interactions, and development concepts consist of personality identity and social identity (Yakushko, Mack, & Iwanmoto, 2010). Minority identity development models are created on the assumption that racial and ethnic minorities live within a discriminatory, oppressive environment (Yakushko et al., 2010). Minority identity development serves as a protective factor for self-esteem, influencing increased self-esteem and higher levels of integrating on college campuses.

From a young age, individuals are influenced by interactions and social situations. Parents and peers are tremendous influencers on how minority youth formulate their identities (Yakushko et al., 2010). The school setting is a major social environment where minority youth develop self-perceptions (Rose, Joe, Shields, & Caldwell, 2014; Yakushko et al., 2010). Within social contexts, constructed by the dominant, mainstream

White culture, minorities are faced with and constantly deal with how their culture is perceived.

Black identity development. Racial identity is the most researched topic with Black-American populations and is considered one of the most important psychological constructs researched with Black participants, and should be understood by researchers that study Black participants and practitioners that serve these clients (Cokley & Helm, 2007). Examining cultural constructs and racial identity contributes to understanding the functioning of Black-Americans (Cokley & Helm, 2007).

Cross (1971) developed the Black identity development model, also known as the Nigrescense Model, which has been essential in affirming a Black identity (Wilson & Gavarappan, 2018; Yakushko et al., 2010). Within the American society, this model serves a framework for decreasing Black self-hatred and increasing Black self-acceptance (Wilson & Gavarappan, 2018). The Nigrescense Model, which serves as the foundation for models of minority development, encompasses five stages: (a) Preencounter, (b) Encounter, (c) Immersion/Emersion, (d) Internalization, and (e) Internalization/Commitment. In this model, Cross (1971) characterized visual or verbal encounters that cause individuals to synthesize information and make new meaning to stress the importance of race.

Progressing through the five stages, Black individuals are evolving and affirming their *Blackness*. In the Preencounter stage, individuals encompass characteristics of their old identity or the identity to be changed. In the Encounter stage, socialization occurs and a new perspective can be obtained. The Immersion/Emersion stage encompasses two parts: (a) the individual who recently realized *Blackness* and (b) a critical analysis (Cross,

1971). The Internalization stage and the Internalization/Commitment stage make the distinction between emergent *Blackness* and Black identity being internalized (Cross, 1971). Although the Nigrescense model does not delineate age intervals, ownership of one's racial identity typically happens during late adolescence or early adulthood (Plummer, 1995).

Identity of Black students. Segregation based on race in educational settings was favored because of the fear that White students would receive lower academic scores when integrated with racially diverse students (Maynor & Katzenmeyer, 1974). Whites viewed Blacks as ignorant, subordinate humans (Bayor, 2003). "Yet [B]lack people persevered and found ways to eke out a living, to school their children, to maintain their self-respect" (Bayor, 2003, p. 105). According to Butler-Barnes, Chavous, Hurd, and Varner (2013), Black students who experience classroom-based discrimination tend to have lower levels of educational outcomes. Therefore, to overcome negative stereotypes, Black students may use the opportunity of achieving in school (Hurd et al., 2012). Despite the discrimination, having a Black peer in the class helped boost self-efficacy of the Black student (Marsh, Chaney, & Jones, 2012). Moreover, healthy diverse student interactions are ideal, and successful integration in school was a significant predictor of Black students' increased mental health (Rose et al., 2014).

Black students who do not possess a solid foundation of self-identity are more susceptible to feelings of doubt, isolation, and disengagement from academics (Ross et al., 2016). Black students encounter negative stereotypes directly and indirectly, in and out of the classroom, which potentially negatively influence academic and personal success (Ross et al., 2016). This imbalance can cause psychological anguish, academic

distress, and negative self-perception, which can negatively influence the trajectory Black students' success.

Microaggressions—subtle racial insults that occur in daily interactions between Whites and Blacks—tend to have crucial, long-term, negative effects of students' intellectual capabilities and overall sense of self (Allen, Scott, & Lewis, 2013; Harper et al., 2018). Racial microaggressions can be detrimental to students' psychological well-being, social-emotional satisfaction, and intellectual development (Allen et al., 2013).

Collegiate choice. Black students attending predominately White high schools felt as though they were "living in two different worlds" and felt a responsibility to positively represent their entire culture (Freeman, 1999, p. 100). The described feeling is identical to Du Bois' (2003) definition of double consciousness. Furthermore, these students reported considering attending TWIs, but were more likely to attend HBCUs to gain a sense of community and connection to their African-American heritage (Freeman, 1999). Contrarily, Black students attending a predominantly Black high school tend to consider attending TWIs as valuable (Freeman, 1999).

Perceived discrimination and isolation served as barriers for Blacks students considering attending Traditionally White Institutions (Teranishi & Briscoe, 2008). For instance, Black students have not been incorporated into the mission of and do not have power in TWIs (Stikes, 1984), thus presenting unique psychological, social, and academic challenges to Black students enrolled in Traditionally White Institutions (Shahid, Nelson, & Cardemil, 2018).

Identity development of Black college students. The experiences of Black college students combine elements of the college student identity development model and

the Black identity development model. The unique identity of Black college students is a progressive notion to historic and oppressive actions against Blacks. In addition to the stresses associated with attending college, Black students' minority status exerts a negative influence on their psychological functioning (McClain et al., 2016). The depreciation towards education for Blacks influences systemic racism found in some higher education institutions, particularity those that are historically and predominately White (Feagin, 2016).

Cokley (2003) asserted that despite lower academic achievement, Blacks have high academic self-concept. An important aspect to consider regarding Black college students is the context, environment, and campus racial composition in which they are being educated (Cokley, 2003). Cokley (2003) cited significant differences in reported quality of faculty-student relationships on campus, perceived fairness of evaluation, and overall GPA among Black students' college settings.

Black students enrolled in HBCUs. There were no organized public higher education opportunities for Black students prior to the Civil War (USDE, 1991). In the 1896 Supreme Court's decision *Plessy v. Ferguson,* racially segregated institutions established a separate but equal doctrine (USDE, 1991). However, HBCUs were developed despite segregation. During reconstruction, Black students were not allowed to attend universities where White students attended. Historically Black Colleges and Universities were created to advance Black students' level of education and were the only institutions Blacks students could attend prior to integration (USDE, 1991). In the early 1900s, HBCUs initially offered secondary-level courses for Blacks students to prepare them for collegiate level courses.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities are fundamental in providing Blacks students with access to higher education (Beeks & Graves, 2017). Staff and administrators at HBCUs promote academic success to students through academic involvement strategies (Melius, 2011). Typically, Black students enrolled in HBCUs have higher graduation rates, higher retention rates, and are more likely to pursue advanced degrees compared to their Black peers enrolled in Predominantly White Institutions (Beeks & Graves, 2017).

Black students enrolled in Traditionally White Institutions. In addition to general college pressure, minority status stress is also a major psychological stressor for Black students enrolled in Traditionally White Institutions (Greer, 2008; McClain et al., 2016). Black students often perceive the racial discrimination and prejudice prevalent at Traditionally White Institutions (Shahid et al., 2018). The cultural environment and racial climate at TWIs can be detrimental to the optimal psychological adjustment and functioning of Black students (Cokley, 2003; McClain et al., 2016). Black students pursuing postsecondary education struggle with the contradiction of the TWIs' college environment and Black culture (Neville, Heppner, Ji, & Thye, 2004). Due to experiencing social and cultural alienation, Black college students may endure isolation and feel invisible on TWI campuses (Alexander-Snow, 2010; Greer, 2008; McClain et al., 2016).

During their college experience at TWIs, Black students become aware of the implications of what it means to be Black (Ritchey, 2014; Ross et al., 2016). Their experiences imply feelings of double consciousness, existing in two different worlds (Freeman, 1999); "the world of their upbringing and that of higher education" (Gardner

& Holley, 2011, p. 84). In an effort to gain social acceptance and be treated equally, Blacks are required to behave and talk like Whites (Ogbu, 2004). Black students must learn to become bi-cultural and bi-dialectical because they attend an institution at which they are expected to think, act, and participate in a particular way (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Ogbu, 2004). Historically, social interactions between Blacks and Whites required Blacks to respond in "certain prescribed ways" (Ogbu, 2004, p. 9). Some Black students find that they must consciously assimilate into the White culture in order to survive and ultimately graduate from a Traditionally White Institution (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002).

Black students attending TWIs are left largely alone to formulate their idea of their Black identity. Black students express having their attention diverted from their studies by being a lone representative of their culture (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). When speaking, Black students feel that they are the *Black voice* representing their entire race, especially when discussing racial and cultural issues (Freeman, 1999; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Shaid, Nelson, & Cardemil, 2018). Black students also face a lack of social support, as well as discomfort with the social climate of the school. These students lack a sense of belonging and experience alienation, resistance, and a different dominant culture (Ross et al., 2016).

In addition, enduring non-cognitive factors, such as perceived racism and social interactions, negatively impacts Black students' adjustment to college at TWIs tremendously (Greer, 2008). Upon attending a TWI, Black students engaged in "significant social and psychological relearning" (Alexander-Snow, 2010, p. 187). Prior to college, Black students may not be familiar with or have not interacted with mainstream culture or interacted with hostility as often. Ogbu (2004) asserted that while

through expressive discrimination some Whites may no longer consider Blacks inferior to Whites, remnants of the old mindset remain (Ogbu, 2004).

According to Fries-Britt and Turner (2002), Black students attending TWIs felt the institution was working against them. Some Black students may feel that in TWIs they are abandoning their culture, defending the prevalence of academic disidentification (Schwartz, 2003). Black students reported having more negative experiences at TWIs than at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Freeman, 1999; Greer & Brown, 2011). In addition, when compared to Black students attending HBCUs, Black students attending TWIs generally have difficulty adjusting to college, experience negative situations, have lower achievement outcomes, and higher attrition levels (Freeman, 1999; Greer & Brown, 2011).

Black women enrolled in Traditionally White Institutions. Belonging to two historically marginalized groups, Black women are more likely to suffer with mental health conditions than women of other races (Jerald, Cole, Ward, & Avery, 2017; Shahid et al., 2018). In navigating predominately White higher education environments, Black women endure exclusive challenges and tend to have higher levels of stress compared to Black males (Greer, 2008; Phelps-Ward et al., 2017; Shahid et al., 2018). Although these women are graduating at higher rates than Black men, they often are faced with more anxiety and obstacles surrounding the intersection of being Black and being women (Greer, 2008; Shahid et al., 2018). The intersection of race and gender creates a specific form of discrimination distinct to this population of students, and they need continued support (Greer, 2008; Jerald et al., 2017). Furthermore, Black women enrolled in TWIs have the difficult task of navigating the campus culture (Phelps-Ward et al., 2017). Yet

despite these hardships, Black women tend to associate increased Black identity with academic achievement (Cokley, 2003).

Black men enrolled in Traditionally White Institutions. In higher education settings, the needs of Black women are often overshadowed by the needs of Black men (Phelps-Ward et al., 2017). Black males are disproportionately underrepresented on college campuses (Frazier & Rhoden, 2011). Frazier and Rhoden (2011) address the invisibility of this population on the campuses of TWIs by revealing four themes: (a) masking, (b) hiding in plain sight, (c) marginalizing, and (d) lacking representation to the diverse backgrounds of Black men. Cokley (2001) reported Black male's racial identity association with Black role models and perceived opportunities, and increased disengagement from academic achievement. Levels of academic disengagement and academic self-concept are lower for Black men enrolled in TWIs than at Historically Blacks Colleges and Universities (Cokley, 2003).

College Student Retention

Tinto (1975) focused on college dropouts and created a model to interpret the multiple factors of student retention. This model directly addresses the social environment of universities and student retention. College students' ability to immerse themselves into the institutional environment correlates with the students' levels of academic and social persistence in that environment (French, 2017; Tinto, 1975). Tinto's (1975) primary focus was divided into institutional commitment and student's goal commitment. While the student's goal commitment was demonstrated to largely influence academic integration, the institution's commitment largely influenced social integration. Academic and social integration, as Tinto (1975) demonstrated in his model,

largely influenced student's dropout decisions negatively. In developing collegiate

identity, academic and social integration is essential to increasing students' sense of

belonging (Tinto, 2017). In some cases, students are able to integrate academically or

socially, but persistence is lower. In addition to the factors presented in Tinto's (1975;

2017) models, minority college students experience race-related stressors (Fries-Britt &

Turner, 2002). However, Tinto's model does not address culture, race, or ethnicity.

Addressing and implementing programs for all students—encompassing racial and

cultural differences—is imperative for student retention.

College Student Socialization

Weidman's (1989) undergraduate socialization model encompasses five

socialization impacts: (a) student background and characteristics, (b) non-college

reference groups, (c) parent socialization (d) collegiate experience, and (e) socialization

outcomes. Within college student socialization, Black students' backgrounds and

characteristics are major contributors to potential interactions with peers, staff, faculty,

and administration. Personal relationships influence the two normative contexts,

academic and social (Weidman, 1989; Weidman et al., 2014). The academic dimension

of normative context includes actions that contribute to the institutional mission

(Weidman, 1989). The social dimension of the normative context refers to the manner

and organization of institution's members (Weidman, 1989). Further, the academic and

social normative dimensions are categorized into formal and informal components

(Weidman, 1989). The function of the formal component is to achieve objectives of the

institution, and the informal component is more elastic and incorporates individuals'

needs based on the demands of the formal structure (Weidman, 1989).

This socialization model was expanded to include the process of graduate students (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). Graduate students' socialization begins immediately after admission into the program and continues through entry into a professional career (Weidman et al., 2001). There are two interactive perspectives of socialization for graduate students: linear socialization and nonlinear socialization (Weidman et al., 2001). The linear model is simple and depicts admission into graduate school, some form of prescribed socialization, followed by graduation (Weidman et al., 2001). The nonlinear approach is more encompassing of student involvement and feedback (Weidman et al., 2001). This approach is dynamic, interactive, and collaborative (Weidman et al., 2001). The core of the graduate students' socialization experiences encompasses the campus institutional culture—academic programs and peer climate, socialization processes— interaction, integration, and learning, and the core elements of socialization—knowledge, acquisition, investment, and involvement (Weidman et al., 2001). Based on the oppressive institutional socialization, Black graduate students enrolled in a TWI can feel like they are in an "intellectual war zone" (McCoy, 2018, p. 326).

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged as a response to hindered efforts during the Civil Rights era (Delgado & Stafancic, 2017; Dixson, 2018). Critical Race Scholars delineated CRT as a radical legal movement used to revolutionize "the relationship among race, racism, and power" (Delgado & Stafancic, 2017, p. 3). This theory encompasses a framework focused on White supremacy and racial oppression against Blacks and other racial minorities. Principles of CRT include:

- Race is a social construct—manipulated by society—that is difficult to address because it is not a biological reality (Delgado & Stafancic, 2017; Stovall, 2016; Tatum, 1997).

- Racism is viewed as the normal way society functions that "advances the interests of both white elites (materially) and the working-class Caucasians (psychically)" (Delgado & Stafancic, 2017, p. 9).

- Critical Race theorists typically agreed that racism is a system that creates White-dominance within society (Delgado & Stafancic, 2017; Harper et al., 2018).

The goal of CRT is to "transform the American sociocultural order that gives all groups a seat at the table" (Brooks, 2017, p. 118). Critical race scholars expressed dissatisfaction with the idea of *colorblindness* and took monumental actions to address historical wrongs and promote group empowerment (Delgado & Stafancic, 2017). Critical Race Theory has been expanded to address and understand racial inequities in postsecondary environments (Delgado & Stafancic, 2017; Dixson, 2018).

In examining higher education, CRT has been crucial in exploring racial inequality (Harper et al., 2018). McCoy (2018) articulates that CRT addressed how educational institutions' policies and practices are not inclusive of diverse perspectives. The application of CRT allows researchers to "more critically racialize widely held assumptions about why some students succeed and others do not" (Harper et al., 2018, p. 5). McCoy (2018) asserted that racism is embedded in the policies and procedures of TWIs based on how the institutions were founded. Discriminatory and prejudice

mindsets have influenced and continue to influence TWIs yielding new forms of oppressive practices preserving educational inequities (McCoy, 2018).

Addressing Racial Minorities

In the United States, there is a racial prejudice system that operates in a way that Whites have an advantage over people of color (Tatum, 1997). The prejudice system prescribes to cultural messages and influences institutional policies that strengthen discrimination (Tatum, 1997). Denoting the systematic structure is critical to understanding racism in America (Tatum, 1997). The focus on the Black experience is not to negate any racism toward other racial minorities in this country. However, to understand the horrific, pervasive, degrading, historical treatment of Blacks in America is significant to understanding racism.

Blacks and Hispanics. There have been difficulties for collaboration between Blacks and Hispanics in their struggles to obtain equal opportunities in employment and education (Foley, 2010). To expect largely marginalized minority groups, such as Blacks and Hispanics, to form solidarity is unfair (Foley, 2010). Interracial solidarity requires racial groups to have a certain level of identification with each other in order to be willing to act on behalf of the group (Foley, 2010). Since the 1960s, 48% of Latinos in the United States identified their race as White in the 2000 census, although this group is regarded as a minority group (Foley, 2010). Blacks are apprehensive of Hispanics for identifying as both "culturally brown and racially white" (Foley, 2010, p. 146).

Focus on Black Americans. Racism is a division of humankind socially constructed to belittle targeted individuals and groups based on physical characteristics (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Tatum, 1997). For Blacks, skin tone is

associated with racism (Clark et al., 1999). Based on racism, discrimination and prejudicial behavior can be directed toward a group of people. Racial discrimination and prejudice against Blacks in America has been widely documented, and Blacks have suffered horrendous oppression (Antell, 1978; Pieterse, Todd, Neville, & Carter, 2012). The perception of racism can exacerbate psychological and physiological stress (Clark et al., 1999). Perceived racism can include overt and covert racism, including actions that others of a dominant group may not label as racist (Clark et al., 1999).

A heightened awareness of prejudice can also lead to consciousness of perceived discrimination. Perceived discrimination is the belief that one has been treated unfairly based on race (Jerald et al., 2017). For example, perceived discrimination is a potential threat to Black Americans' livelihood and impedes optimal mental functioning (Cokley, Smith, Bernard, Hurst, Jackson, Stone, . . . Roberts, 2017; Pieterse et al., 2012). For Blacks, perceived discrimination is strictly race-based as opposed to other ethnic groups, such as Mexican-Americans or Asian-Americans, who may perceive discrimination related to being a foreigner (Cokley et al., 2017). In addition, Blacks reported the highest level of lifetime discrimination and were more likely to endorse racial discrimination as stressful compared to other ethnic groups (Cokley, Hall-Clark, & Hicks, 2011).

Common forms of discriminatory and prejudicial behavior can be categorized in three domains: (a) individual, (b) institutional, and (c) cultural (Pieterse et al., 2012). Blacks fiercely identify with their race to remember their history and not let others diminish it (Foley, 2010). Blacks have faced and progressed through historical and contemporary barriers to enjoy basic human rights (Cokley, Obaseki, Moran-Jackson, Jones, Vohra-Gupta, 2016). Black individuals feel forced to separate themselves from

their culture of origin and adopt mainstream culture, resulting in their increased feelings

of guilt, depression, and identity confusion (Ross et al., 2016). Blacks also experience

"status problems", are historically viewed as inferior, and may encounter racially-

degrading situations (Ogbu, 2004, p. 4). Ogbu (2004) noted that Black Americans

experience status problems created by White Americans through external dynamics that

mark them distinct from the remainder of the population. Black Americans, when

relegated to a subordinate status, may experience difficulty when solving problems within

the existing majority system (Ogbu, 2004). The main issues that are addressed in status

problems are: (a) involuntary incorporation into society, (b) instrumental discrimination,

(c) social subordination, and (d) expressive mistreatment (Ogbu, 2004).

Historic involuntary incorporation dates to Whites separating Africans into a caste

system through enslavement. Involuntary incorporation is demonstrated present-day

when Black Americans are constantly denied equal access to housing, employment, and

education.   Instrumental discrimination and social subordination describes when Black

Americans are faced with social segregation, violence, and hostility toward interracial

interactions, including marriage.

Black Americans, in general and individually, are impacted by status problems.

For instance, Ogbu (2004) wrote that "minorities experience their mistreatment

regardless of their individual differences in education and ability, in status, physical

appearance, or place of residence" (p. 5). Blacks cannot easily escape from the affiliation

of the subordinate group and know that they do not have the option to join the dominant

group (Ogbu, 2004). Expressive mistreatment includes overt disparaging of Black

identity, culture, and intellect (Ogbu, 2004).

While under oppression, Black Americans developed a distinct culture and an English dialect distinct from the mainstream and typical White way of behaving and talking (Ogbu, 2004). Black Americans learned to create and present a version of themselves that is more acceptable to mainstream society. As a result, Black students may struggle with downplaying their cultural norms and realize they must learn to speak, look, and behave White in order to be accepted (Ross et al., 2016). Consequently, Black identity can be complicated in regard to being accepted in various situations, including academic and social settings.

Black adults ensure Black children are privy to their racial status in this country and typically train them at an early age with skills to interact and survive in predominately White environments (Plummer, 1995). McClain et al. (2016) reported racial identity had a positive relationship with mental health outcomes and was also negatively associated with lower levels of psychological distress. McClain et al. (2016) also reported that ethnic identity is the strongest predictor of a positive relationship with personal well-being, resilience, and overall mental health. Neville and Cross (2017) coined the term racial awakening to target an experience that triggered personal exploration of one's heritage and the histories of Black racialized ethnic group. Neville and Cross (2017) also indicated that many participants experienced a racial awakening at some point in their lives.

Black College Students

There are decreasing numbers of Black students enrolled in higher education institutions in the United States (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education [JBHE], 2018b). In the 2016-2017 school year, there were over three and half million Black students

enrolled in higher education institutions (JBHE, 2018b). Black students made up 13.2% of enrollment, a decline from 14.4% two years ago (JBHE, 2018b).

College campuses represent social environments encompassing values of the larger society, including racial biases and discrimination (Greer, 2008). At non-HBCUs, Black students often report a lack of representation and belonging on college campuses (Harper et al., 2018; Shaid et al., 2018). Concurrently, during this period of adjustment to college, ethnic minorities are coping with being in an environment where they may experience discrimination, aggressions, racism, and isolation (McClain et al., 2016). Of the various ethnic minorities, Black students report higher levels of race-related stressors and discouraging campus climates (Cokley, McClain, Enciso, & Martinez, 2013; McClain et al., 2016). According to Cokley et al. (2013):

> African American students may find adjustment to a predominately White university harder and more stressful compared with other ethnic minority students because African Americans often endure the most negative racial stereotypes and also tend to come from more racially segregated communities than other ethnic minorities. (p. 90)

The percentage of students entering college with mental health concerns is also increasing (McClain et al., 2016). Limited research is available studying Black college students and psychosociocultural factors as variables (McClain et al., 2016). In past studies, minority status stress and perceived discrimination on college campuses negatively contributed to an unfavorable racial climate and Black college students reported higher levels of perceived discrimination (Cokley et al., 2017; Greer, 2008). Moreover, minority status stress encompassed difficult situations encountered at TWIs

based on affiliation to an ethnic or racial group (Greer, 2008). In addition, the stress of

racial stratification exacerbated mental health problems (Cokley et al., 2011).

  Black graduate students. Traditionally, graduate students are older and may

have more life experiences than undergraduate students. Although there is an overall

decline of Black college students enrolled, Black graduate student enrollment has

remained steady (JBHE, 2018a). Currently, there is a lack of research on Black graduate

students enrolled in Predominately White Institutions.

  Blacks within the African Diaspora. The increased number of immigrants from

Africa and the Caribbean enrolling in college poses challenges for Black Americans

(Cokley et al., 2016). Black Americans are descendants of individuals who were

enslaved Africans in the U.S., who were subjected to tremendous obstacles during the

Reconstruction era, Jim Crow era, and beyond (Cokley et al., 2016). Blacks "can't

directly identify themselves within a nation-state outside of the United States. They are

trapped in America. However unjust and painful, their experiences are wholly made in

America" (Klor de Alva et al., 1997). Black Americans may develop a culturally

oppositional approach to society, ultimately rejecting White Americans' cultural norms

(Cokley, 2003).

  Exploring the diversity within the Black population on college campuses, foreign-

born Blacks are significantly over-represented (Cokley et al., 2016). Descendants of

Black immigrants may identify with their ancestors' native country—for example,

Jamaican-American or Nigerian-American—as opposed to African-American or Black

(Cokley et al., 2016). As a result, Black immigrants who do not culturally identify as

Black may be impeding on the postsecondary education opportunities created by

affirmative action for Black Americans as a racial minority, suggesting that barriers to higher education are more challenging for Black Americans than for Black immigrants (Cokley et al., 2016). Black Americans may experience noncognitive or cultural factors that negatively influence that groups' underachievement (Cokley, 2003). Cokley (2003) reported a cultural trait present in Black Americans related to associating higher education attainment to "acting White" (p. 525). In general, Blacks attitudes have been shaped by previous and experienced White racism (Schwartz, 2003).

Generally, Black immigrants are typically more advanced than Black Americans in terms of income, housing, and education (Cokley et al., 2016). Black American students are consistently in a position where they are not academically prepared for collegiate curriculum (Cokley et al., 2016). Because there is an educational gap between Black Americans and other racial, ethnic, and cultural groups, Black immigrants included, research efforts should focus on this group (Cokley et al., 2016). Given the diversity within the African Diaspora, increasing diversity should focus on Black Americans (Cokley et al., 2016).

Tinto's Models

College student retention. Tinto (1975) theorized that students leave college based on multiple aspects, including: (a) family attributes, (b) individual attributes, (c) prior qualifications, (d) debt, (e) counseling, (f) medical status, (g) teaching, and (h) learning support. The aforementioned factors do not include the student's goal commitment or the institution's commitment, which are two major factors influencing student dropout. Tinto's primary focus of student dropout decisions was split between institutional commitment and student goal commitment, concurrently influenced by

social integration and academic integration, respectively (Tinto, 1975). This version of Tinto's model does not address culture. Although all the elements Tinto presented are relevant, researchers indicated that culture plays a huge role in students' campus life (McCoy, 2018). McCoy (2018) stated it is problematic if equitable connections are not provided for marginalized groups. Traditionally White Institutions recklessly lack socialization to develop and encourage Black identity development (McCoy, 2018). Traditionally White Institutions customarily maintain oppressive practices of exclusion towards racial minorities, thus, affecting their academic and social integration (McCoy, 2018). Traditionally White Institutions adhere to affirmative action and diversity quotas, but fail to create an inclusionary environment (McCoy, 2018).

Student retention through institutional action. In his model, Tinto (2017) explored and illuminated ways in which institutions can increase student motivation to persist and complete their degree. Tinto (2017) designed the model focused on college campus experiences that enhance or diminish student motivation, both of which are within the institution's capacity to facilitate learning, improve retention, and increase graduation rates. In addition, Tinto created a student persistence model, suggesting that students' goals influenced their level of motivation, which in turn influenced their persistence. Regarding motivation, Tinto (2017) assessed: (a) self-efficacy, (b) sense of belonging, and (c) perception of curriculum. Tinto (2017) focused on experiences that influenced: (a) students' self-efficacy, (b) their sense of belonging, and (c) perceptions of the relevance of the curriculum presented, which in turn influenced motivation to persist. The factors of students' experiences (i.e., self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and

perception of curriculum) do affect motivation. Similar to the first model addressed, Tinto's persistence model does not address culture.

      Self-efficacy. Tinto (2017) defined self-efficacy as the manifestation of how individuals perceive themselves through social interactions. Students who enter college confident in their ability to succeed can encounter challenges that serve to weaken their sense of self-efficacy (Tinto, 2017). Although students can enter college with confidence, encountering challenges, such as discrimination, can weaken their self-efficacy. Although self-efficacy is constantly being renegotiated, it can be pervasive, affecting more than academics. Throughout their collegiate career, students' self-efficacy must be created, maintained, and reinforced (Tinto, 2017).

      Social belonging. Tinto (2017) defined social belonging as students believing they can persist to complete a task and view themselves as members of a college community. Students' sense of belonging serves as their psychological sense of identification and affiliation with the campus community (Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, & Woods, 2009). Students' sense of belonging is not isolated to the social environment but encompasses their perceptions of their academic belonging as well (Tinto, 2017). Integration into the social and intellectual fabric of the institution is an important predictor of student persistence (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007). Members of socially stigmatized groups, such as Blacks, may be relatively more uncertain about their social belonging in mainstream institutions—i.e., school and work (Walton & Cohen, 2011). Based on their historically disadvantaged minority status in the U.S., Black college students, collectively, are regarded as an inferior group in higher education (Altbach & Lomotey, 1991; Lige et al., 2017).

Because Black individuals are often negatively stereotyped and marginalized, they may be unsure of whether they will be fully included in positive social relationships in school settings (Walton & Cohen, 2011). Sense of belonging is influenced by campus climate and interaction with campus community, which may create a negative environment (Tinto, 2017). It is imperative that Black students perceive themselves as vital members of the university community, which includes students, professors, and staff (Tinto, 2017). According to Altbach and Lomotey (1991), Black students reported that White professors limit recognition of their ideas and often avoid eye contact. Increased stress exhibited by Black students, who question their belonging on a college campus could contribute to the Imposter Syndrome in these students (McClain et al., 2016). Social support provided by college counselors is critical to increasing social belonging enhancing self-efficacy and decreasing stress and dissatisfaction (Shaid et al., 2018).

Perception of curriculum. Perception of curriculum is defined as students' perceived relevance of the course content presented (Tinto, 2017). Curriculum is facts and knowledge influenced by "a set of values", in addition to perceptions that are subjectively judged appropriate to the analysis of those facts (Tinto, 2017, p. 259). Perceptions of the quality and relevance of the curriculum reflect a complex interplay among a variety of academic issues, including faculty teaching methods, perceived institutional quality, and student learning style preferences and values (Tinto, 2017).

Researchers support that culturally relevant instruction is a huge factor for Black students' academic achievement and personal development (Chapman-Hilliard et al., 2016). Black college students' academic outcomes and cultural identity development are positively impacted by culturally empowering courses (Chapman-Hilliard et al., 2016).

Students want to feel as though they can relate to the information being presented. When Black students' academic interests are not supported by the institution, they may experience academic disconnect—feeling disconnected and/or marginalized when pertinent historical facts are omitted (Tinto, 2017). Culturally empowering courses can serve as a change agent creating an environment to demystify elements of Black culture, contradict negative stereotypes, combat microaggressions, and provide affirming messages to Black students (Allen et al., 2013; Chapman-Hilliard et al., 2016). Meaningfulness of the curriculum is a factor in students' educational experience, especially students from ethnically diverse and underrepresented populations (Alexander-Snow, 2010; Tinto, 2017).

Recognizing and accommodating for diversity in curriculum is a challenge for educators and may be controversial. (Chan, 2010). According to Chan (2010):

The inclusion of culture in the curriculum as a means of helping students to develop positive racial attitudes has been identified as one of many well-documented personal, professional, and societal benefits associated with welcoming diverse cultures and languages into school contexts. (p. 635)

There is a gap in postsecondary education in creating culturally empowering courses (Chapman-Hilliard et al., 2016). Creating culturally empowering courses to empower Black students can positively influence their perceived level of safety, academic growth, and identity development (Chapman-Hilliard et al., 2016). Chapman-Hilliard et al. (2016) found that Black college students who took a culturally empowering course, compared to Black students who had not taken a culturally empowering course, had higher scores of ethnic identity. The researchers concluded that culturally

empowering courses may be a feasible option to create a necessary, safe environment for

Black students to process cultural identity (Chapman-Hilliard et al., 2016). The omission

of culture can be isolating for cultural groups. Creating an environment of cultural

affirmation can combat microaggressions that Black students and other ethnically diverse

students endure in their educational environment (Allen et al., 2013).

Education Barriers for Black Students

Earning a college degree is a major academic achievement (Melius, 2011). Black

students are completing undergraduate degrees at a lower rate than their White peers

(Lige, Peteet, & Brown, 2017). Traditionally White Institutions continue to utilize the

melting pot theory, where everyone is expected to fit into the mainstream White middle-

class culture (Ritchey, 2014). A deeper perspective of the experiences of Black students

can be valuable to understanding protective factors and coping mechanisms they adopt to

persist at Traditionally White Institutions (Tauriac & Liem, 2012). Adjustment issues for

Black students include, but are not limited to, dealing with prejudice, experiencing

feelings of isolation, and being separated from the mainstream culture on campus

(Gardner, Barrett, & Pearson, 2014). White students are not faced with experiencing

these adjustment barriers at Traditionally White Institutions.

This educational resilience for Black students encompasses protective factors,

enabling their success (Williams & Bryan, 2013). Psychological distress may be a major

factor of underachievement of Black students enrolled in Traditionally White Institutions

(Hurd, Tan, & Loeb, 2016). Due to underrepresentation, Black students at TWIs tend to

be more susceptible to psychological stressors (Hurd et al., 2016). Social outlets are

necessary for Black students' emotional well-being (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). Being

knowledgeable about strategies to navigate discrimination is useful for Black students enrolled at Traditionally White Institutions (Lee & Barnes, 2015).

Education Barriers for Black Graduate Students. The number of Black students pursuing graduate education has remained steady at postsecondary institutions in recent years (JBHE, 2018b). However, Black graduate students' retention rates are lower than those of Black undergraduate students (Johnson-Bailey, Valentine, Cervero, & Bowles, 2008). In addition to being academically adept, Black students must also maintain a socially acceptable, mainstream attitude in the school setting. Non-cognitive variables, such as understanding of and ability to deal with racism, are significant predictors of academic success in Black students (Ewing, Richardson, James-Myers, & Russell, 1996; McCoy, 2018). An in-depth interpretation of Black graduate student experiences could shed light on national trends observed.

Furthermore, TWIs are socially representative of the oppressive nature of society and the quality of the graduate school experience can be negatively affected (Ewing et al., 1996). Diversity awareness is increasing in the United States, but some colleges lack an inclusive educational environment (Tuitt, 2012).   Also, attending graduate school is an endeavor that may not be fully understood by the students' family. Gardner and Holley (2011) conducted a qualitative study in which participants' responses included parental support in completing an undergraduate degree, but less parental support for pursuing a graduate degree. The aforementioned concepts can be magnified to encompass Black graduate students' social and academic experiences at Traditionally White Institutions.

Academic disidentification. The phenomenon of academic disidentification is present when one's academic performance does not impact self-perception in the same

manner as it does for others (Cokley, McClain, Jones, Johnson, 2012; McClain & Cokley, 2017). The term disidentification conveys the lack of a relationship between global self-esteem and academic self-esteem (Osborne, 1997). Students who disidentify with academics will not be motivated to perform well academically (McClain & Cokley, 2017). Ultimately, academic performance does not have a significant impact on self-esteem of disidentified students (Cokley et al., 2012; McClain & Cokley, 2017). Although emphasis is placed on scholastic academic achievement, i.e., grade point average, Cokley (2003) found that Black students did not perceive a direct relationship between grades and effort. As a protective factor and a method to reject White culture, Black students are more likely to devalue academics than other groups (Cokley et al., 2012; McClain & Cokley, 2017). Moreover, Osborne (1997) asserted that Hispanic students reported lower levels of pervasive disidentification compared to Black students. Cokley et al. (2012) reported that despite Black students' equivalent level of self-esteem to White participants, Blacks had lower levels of academic achievement. Black students may not feel that grade point average is an adequate representation of their academic capabilities based on their teachers' interactions with and perceptions of them (Cokley et al., 2012). These students did not view academic achievement as a reward or lack of academic achievement as a punishment (Osborne, 1997).

Academic disidentification is prevalent in Black male college students (McClain & Cokley, 2017). Researchers reported the occurrence of academic disidentification during the adolescence period for Black males and a significant increase in Black males over time (Cokley et al., 2012). To address academic disidentification, emphasis should be placed on how to create a sense of belonging for Black students within the academic

environment (Griffin, 2002). Teachers are challenged to implement methods for Black students to achieve academic success, despite marginalized, cultural messages (Griffin, 2002). By utilizing culturally inclusive teaching methods, Black students can begin to build a sense of academic success without harboring feelings of cultural isolation (Griffin, 2002).

Stereotype threat. Stereotype threat primarily affects stigmatized groups and is extremely detrimental to students' internalized intellectual inferiority (Allen et al., 2013; Smith & Cokley, 2016). Stereotype threat also explains the achievement gap between White students and students of color (Owens & Lynch, 2012; Smith & Cokley, 2016). This underachievement phenomenon is measured by minority students' increased awareness of negative academic stereotypes that leads to decreased task performance (Cokley, McClain, Enciso, & Martinez, 2013; Smith & Cokley, 2016). Moreover, stereotype threat negatively affects minority students' psychological mindset, reducing their academic effort and performance (Owens & Lynch, 2012; Shaid et al., 2018). Minority students are more likely to underperform in situations when they feel they are being evaluated through the lens of race and performance (Allen et al., 2013). Across daily academic and social encounters, minority students internalize and externalize negative stereotypes simultaneously (Owens & Lynch, 2012).

Steele and Aronson (1995) initially studied underperformance in Black students and found that those students performed significantly worse than White students (Smith & Cokley, 2016). Striving to avoid confirming negative stereotypes, Black students feel pressured to perform well (Owens & Lynch, 2012). By possibly internalizing negative stereotypes about their racial group, Black students may also reduce their academic effort

(Owens & Lynch, 2012). The externalization of negative stereotypes, often called academic performance burden, produces additional psychological stress (Owens & Lynch, 2012). Stereotype threat is related to lower levels of academic achievement; however, it is insufficient to explain reduced achievement alone (McClain et al., 2016).

Imposter syndrome. Imposter Syndrome was developed by Clance and Imes (1978) to identify internal experiences of intellectual phoniness. Imposter Syndrome is an internal psychological experience negatively evaluating performance beyond the reality of one's actual performance (Peteet, Brown, Lige, & Lanaway, 2015). Individuals suffering from *impostorism* tend to contradict external evidence of success with opposing internal negative beliefs (Clance & Imes, 1978). These individuals reject internal attributions of success, such as skill or intelligence, and experience difficulty internalizing their achievements (Cokley et al., 2013). Imposter Syndrome is correlated with clinical symptoms related to generalized anxiety, lack of self-confidence, depression, low self-esteem, and frustration (Clance & Imes, 1978; Cokley et al., 2013; Kolligian & Sternberg, 1991; Langford & Clance, 1993; McClain et al., 2016; McGregor, Gee, & Posey, 2008). Imposter Syndrome, which is not identical to nervousness, is not confined to one specific situation (Rakestraw, 2017). For an individual suffering from impostorism the nervousness may not subside (Rakestraw, 2017). For example, Imposter Syndrome can be related to an adjustment period or change in an individual's life. Experiencing adjustments tends to transform an individual's point of view (Rakestraw, 2017). Thus, impostorism can be common in specific settings or environments, for example academia, but is not easily detectable (Rakestraw, 2017).

Imposter Syndrome has also been related to higher levels of academic achievement (McClain et al., 2016). High-achieving students who also have Imposter Syndrome tend to strive to repeat instances of academic success, but each time with increased anxiety because they tend to attribute successes to temporary causes (Clance & Imes, 1978; Cokley et al., 2017; McClain et al., 2016). Therefore, while victims of imposter syndrome tend to obtain advanced degrees, they are generally successful through the opinions of others (Rakestraw, 2017).

Imposter syndrome in academia. Students suffering from impostorism tend to overestimate peers' intellect and compare personal weakness to peers' strengths (Hoang, 2013). Although students' may be recognized as being successful by external standards, they tend experience a lack of internal success (Chrisman, Pieper, Clance, Holland, & Glickauf-Hughes, 1995; Clance & Imes, 1978; Langford & Clance, 1993). Often, students who experience impostorism are described as energetic, intelligent, and hardworking compared to their peers (Hoang, 2013). The students may feel compelled to constantly strive to receive validation for intellectual competence (Clance & Imes, 1978). McGregor et al. (2008) stated depressive symptoms may impede the student's level of productivity, resulting in a reduction in achievement. College students experiencing negative feelings relating to impostorism and psychological distress experience a detrimental effect on academic success (Peteet et al., 2015). Imposter Syndrome can also be related to a life event, such as being enrolled in graduate school. Graduate students often feel underprepared and attribute their entrance into the institutions as a mistake (Clance & Imes, 1978; Hoang, 2013). Students consistently fear they will be unable to

maintain their success and reaching success does not necessarily reduce the symptoms of impostorism (Langford & Clance, 1993; Rakestraw, 2017).

Imposter syndrome as an emergent identity. Imposter Syndrome differs from stereotype threat in serving as an "emergent identity" (McClain et al., 2016, p. 103). As reported by McClain et al. (2016), emergent identity is a students' self-perception as a result of other appraisals. Adopting this perception of impostorism as an emergent identity, McClain et al. (2016) stated that condition might be pervasive across contexts and affect multiple domains in the students' personal and academic functioning. Cokley et al. (2013) reported Imposter Syndrome and psychological distress having a positive relationship, and Imposter Syndrome and psychological well-being having a negative relationship across several ethnic minorities. In addition, Imposter Syndrome is related to mental health outcomes and may exacerbate negative effects of perceived discrimination (Cokley et al., 2017; Cokley et al., 2013). Furthermore, researchers have found no differences in gender in the degree in which students experience impostorism (Langford & Clance, 1993).

Imposter syndrome and being Black. Few researchers have examined cultural implications on Imposter Syndrome, nor have they specifically focused on Black students (Cokley et al., 2013; McClain et al., 2016). Impostorism, combined with minority status stress, negatively contributes to diminished mental health for Black college students (Cokley et al., 2013; Cokley et al., 2017). Cokley et al. (2017) stated that impostorism in Black college students is related to feelings of survivor guilt and depression. Imposter Syndrome is associated with poor psychological well-being and can be exacerbated by being a Black student within the educational system (Cokley et al., 2013; McClain et al,

2016). Being exposed to overt and covert racial educational policies, cultural incongruity, insensitive instructors and curriculum, and interracial group tension increases Black college students' psychological distress (Cokley et al., 2013). In addition to experiencing impostorism, Black college students may feel like they do not belong culturally and socially (McCoy, 2018). Black students who experience impostorism may attribute their admission into graduate school as an error or a factor of affirmative action (Hoang, 2013; Kolligian & Sternberg, 1991).

Black students feel increased anxiety based on the intersection of impostorism, based on the climate of TWIs, and interactions with White peers (McCoy, 2018). Dealing with the stress of being a minority, coupled with impostorism, can intensify Black students' feelings of fraudulence with feelings of being devalued and worthless (McClain et al., 2016; McCoy, 2018).

Black graduate students may feel like they do not belong in school or with their family. Gardner and Holley (2011) interviewed graduate students who indicated their parents were "considerably less supportive and understanding of their decision to pursue a graduate degree" (p. 84). Researchers Peteet, Montgomery, and Weekes (2015) included a of majority Black participants (73%) and concluded that identifying predictors of the Imposter Syndrome can provide a better understanding of the psychological health of Black students.

Multicultural Education

Banks (1993) developed a consensus on multicultural education. The major goal of multicultural education is to allow students of diverse backgrounds access to educational equality. Teachers' perceptions of and responses to Black students can

negatively affect mental health (Cokley et al., 2014). Biased teachers tend to address external symptoms as opposed to being mindful of internal causes (Cokley et al., 2014). Compared to their White peers, Black students are more likely to be labeled as having a mental health, emotional, or behavioral disorders (Cokley et al., 2014). Teachers who possess negative stereotypes about Black students tend to react out of cultural incompetence and consult their personal biases (Cokley et al., 2014). Banks (1993) emphasized that for multicultural education to be successful, changes must occur at the institutional level, including, but not limited to: changed attitudes of the staff, altering the curriculum, and changing the culture of the institution.

The five dimensions of multicultural education are: (a) content integration, (b) knowledge of the construction process, (c) prejudice reeducation, (d) equity pedagogy, and (e) an empowering school culture and social structure (Banks, 1993). The dimensions are recursive and reflexive, and the major premise is for teachers to be inclusive of all students in the classroom. Throughout the evolution of multicultural education, experts of various ethnic groups were included (Banks, 1993). Black students have unmet mental health needs and tend to be affected by sociopolitical situations unique to this culture (Cokley et al., 2014).

Multicultural Education in University Settings. Attending college is a critical period of growth. According to Tinto (2017), institutions cannot assume that all students enter college believing they can succeed or that their beliefs in their abilities to succeed do not change over the course of the first year. Students are influenced at an early age, beginning with their family and also by experiences in primary and secondary schools.

Institutions should address the existence of stereotype threats through interventions that provide alternative ways of understanding students' identity (Yeager & Walton, 2011). Black students reported unwelcoming, unsupportive, and hostile atmospheres in Traditionally White Institutions (Bourke, 2016; McCoy, 2018). Demographic differences and historical backgrounds serve as protective barriers to maintain institutional insensitivity to new students' needs (Pettigrew, 1975). Few researchers have addressed the culture, attitude, and norms of the universities. Universities should be agents of change through counseling support to enhance Black students' chances for success (Ross et al., 2016). The support of faculty and administrators is crucial, as they set the tone for the institution's commitment to diversity (Tinto, 2017). According to Yakushko et al. (2010):

> In addition to providing school personnel and students with a basic understanding of Minority Identity Development, it is imperative that a brief and broadly outlined set of applications be provided as an example for addressing the needs and expectations of students and school personnel working together in an ever-diversifying climate. (p. 628)

Specifically, "it is critical for student affairs professionals to be knowledgeable in Black identity development since a positive racial identity is linked to academic and personal success" (Ritchey, 2014, p. 100). As universities are becoming more diverse, addressing and meeting the mental health needs of Black students is imperative (Cokley et al., 2014).

Melius (2011) suggested institutional-level approaches targeted to increase students' engagement level, and ultimately increase academic performance. By utilizing an ecological perspective in the college campus environment, the students' individual

perspective can be evaluated. The ecological theory symbolizes the students' unique characteristics and their current environment (Melius, 2011).

Qualitative Research Measures

Qualitative research consists of interpretative practices used to understand a phenomenon through the experiences of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomena refer to conscious experiences that are observable (Moustakas, 1994). Throughout our lives, various phenomena become evident, generate knowledge, and serve as a starting point for research. By studying natural experiences, researchers attempt to interpret meanings of situations to transform the world (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Phenomenological Approach

Philosophical roots. Phenomenology is the study of conscious human experiences and developing descriptions of these experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenology has strong philosophical roots and has provided a significant outlook for investigating human experience and deriving knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). Edmund Husserl, a philosopher, was a primary contributor to phenomenological research methodology. Husserl studied human consciousness and believed that individuals' perception of their experience contributed to creating knowledge (Moustakas, 1994).

Thus, the purpose of phenomenological research is to describe the universal experience of a phenomenon by reducing individual experiences with the phenomenon and describing the *universal essence* (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75). Phenomenological research is "derived from first-person reports of life experiences" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 84), and allows the researcher to explore an experienced phenomenon and gather

individual participants' responses to articulate commonalities of the phenomenon, providing deeper understanding (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Phenomenological data collection of subjective experiences can be useful in learning about common experiences. The defining features for a phenomenological research study include: (a) interviewing individuals who have experienced the phenomenon, (b) following a systematic procedure for data analysis, and (c) writing a description of the essence of the experience for the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The composite description of the essence of the participants' lived experiences consists of "'what' they experienced and 'how' they experienced it" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75; Moustakas, 1994). Based on the topic of the current study, two relevant approaches used to conduct a phenomenological, qualitative research study will be discussed: (a) hermeneutics, and (b) transcendental phenomenology (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Hermeneutics. "Hermeneutic science involves the art of reading a text so that the intention and meaning behind appearances are fully understood" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 9). The central focus is on consciousness and experience (Moustakas, 1994). To understand the essence of a phenomenon, Moustakas (1994) stated that the researcher must understand the central meaning of the phenomenon experienced, including "the direct conscious description of experience and the underlying dynamics or structures that account for the experience" (p. 9). Consequently, historical context enhances the meaning of human experiences. However, to understand the essence of an experience, one must understand that experiences are dependent on historical grounds and reflect upon political and economic activities, settlements, and wars—including slavery and

racial disparities (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, in addition to the description of the experience, understanding the pertinent history is essential to understanding the entirety of experiences, which are dependent on historical groundings (Moustakas, 1994, p. 8). Based on the topic of this research study, *What are the lived experiences of Black, master-level graduate students enrolled in predominately White counseling programs in Texas?,* the hermeneutic approach could be useful throughout the participant interviews and data collection process. However, the data analysis will not include the hermeneutic approach.

The hermeneutic analysis incorporates reflections and interpretations of the researcher. In this analysis, the researcher is an influential variable—potentially altering the analysis, increasing the potential for multiple interpretations. The researcher's experience with and understanding of the phenomenon directly affects the interpretation of the data, leading to multiple interpretations (Moustakas, 1994). For the purpose of this study, hermeneutic analysis will not be used to enhance the validity of the study.

Transcendental Phenomenological Approach. While philosophical science is based on material objects, and lacks focus on human consciousness and the experiencing person, transcendental science was developed from the disconnections from philosophy (Moustakas, 1994). Criteria of transcendental phenomenology are: (a) beginning with experiences themselves, (b) seeking to determine meanings of experiences, (c) encompassing real and possible essences, and (d) seeking to expand knowledge. According to Moustakas (1994), "[f]rom the perspective of transcendental philosophy, all objects of knowledge must conform to experience. Knowledge of objects resides in the subjective sources of self" (p. 44). Transcendental phenomenology research design is a

scientific study of a phenomenon as it is consciously experienced (Moustakas, 1994). This research approach is focused on the subjective openness of the researcher and his or her commitment to view things as they actually appear (Moustakas, 1994). Conscious thoughts and experiences are found to be subjectively self-evident, true, uncover knowledge, and discover theories to apply to human science (Moustakas, 1994).

The major focus of transcendental phenomenology is *realism*—encompassing objects that exist in or out of subjective experience, with or without evidence of the object (Moustakas, 1994). The transcendental phenomenological approach allows researchers to describe common meanings of the participants' experiences while recognizing the researchers' knowledge and personal experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Woodard, 2004). The term *transcendental* describes the essence from which a fresh perspective is adopted, and an experience is perceived as if for the first time (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher is to set aside personal experiences to examine the phenomenon with a fresh perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach uses data that is available to the consciousness and derives knowledge through a systematic, disciplined method (Moustakas, 1994). Knowledge is gained when the researcher identifies with the reality of the subjective consciousness of the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

Conducting Transcendental Phenomenological Research

Phenomenological research is based on subjective reports of life experiences. However, by adhering to an organized scientific process, created knowledge can be validated. To minimize researchers' bias, Moustakas (1994) created a systematic investigation that includes four vital processes when conducting transcendental

phenomenological research: (a) Epoche, (b) Transcendental-Phenomenological

Reduction, (c) Imaginative Variation, and (d) Synthesis.

Epoche. Epoche is an experience, allowing openness to experiences without

being hindered by previous or current patterns of thinking (Moustakas, 1994). Epoche

allows a clearing of the mind and provides an unambiguous viewpoint (Moustakas,

1994). This creation of an unpolluted mental space allows the researcher to embrace

what is truly being presented in the study (Moustakas, 1994). In this space, new ideas,

feelings, awareness, and understanding are created (Moustakas, 1994).

Husserl developed the term *Epoche* (Moustakas, 1994), which translates to

bracketing, allowing the researcher to separate personal lived experiences from the

participants' lived experiences. Researchers should engage in Epoche to reduce any held

preconceived notions regarding the studied phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Wertz,

2005). By engaging in Epoche, the researcher examines participants' experiences as they

exist— "prior to and independent of scientific knowledge" (Wertz, 2005, p. 168).

Woodard (2004) concurred and described using Epoche to "suspend his judgment,

bracket his biases, and to remain open and receptive to new ways of understanding and

perceiving" (p. 891).

Researchers are encouraged to increase awareness of biases by describing

personal experiences with the phenomenon, and their perspectives of those experiences,

prior to conducting phenomenological research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once these

biases and prejudgments are bracketed, the researcher can be cleared of ordinary, natural

daily thoughts. According to Moustakas (1994), "the phenomenological Epoche does not

eliminate everything, does not deny the reality of everything, does not doubt

everything—only the natural attitude, the biases of everyday knowledge, and a bases for the truth and reality" (p. 85).

The Epoche process is not unflawed. One flaw is some experiences may not be *bracketable*—meaning these are pivotal experiences embedded in the psyche (Moustakas, 1994, p. 90). Deeply embedded traumatic or influential experiences may indicate that it is impossible for researchers to create a pure consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers should be aware of their potentially influential biases and suspend them, decreasing influence on the research study. Thus, Epoche is a necessary first step to reduce researcher biases that may decrease the validity of the study (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34).

Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction. The second step in the process is the Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction. The term transcendental means that the experiences will be perceived from a pure mindset—free from biases—as if for the first time (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The term phenomenology refers to transforming the world "into mere phenomena" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). Reduction simply refers to the return to the root of the meaning and existence of the world experienced, exuding *what* was experienced (Moustakas, 1994). From this phenomenological reduction, an analysis of the experience can be created from a clear viewpoint (Moustakas, 1994).

Imaginative Variation. Imaginative Variation is a reflection phase that seeks multiple possible meanings. During this stage, various approaches to the phenomenon are explored. The focal point of Imaginative Variation is to develop themes and discover the *essence* of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, the goal of Imaginative

Variation is to capture *how* participants experienced the phenomenon—generating a structural description of the participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Woodard, 2004)

     Synthesis. Synthesis is the necessary culminating step to make meaning of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). By integrating the aforementioned components, a textual-structural synthesis was formed—explaining the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Synthesis is the "intuitive integration of the fundamental textual and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). Essence is universal, and the textual-structural synthesis "represents the essences at a particular time and place from the vantage point of an individual researcher" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). The knowledge gleaned from the textual-structural synthesis, essentially the *essence*, is the epitome of understanding the experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 51).

Functions of Transcendental Phenomenology

     This method is structured so that knowledge can emerge from a pure consciousness to be free from my personal biases (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, the Transcendental Phenomenological method allowed me to "encounter life freshly" and provided a rational path to do so (Moustakas, 1994, p. 41). By engaging in Epoche, I bracketed personal experiences prior to collecting data and conducted this research study with a concrete, systematic approach. Therefore, I was able to discern personal experiences from participants' experiences while immersed in the data, allowing me to be more objective in my analysis. Moreover, the Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction and Imaginative Variation processes allowed me to produce the textual and

structural descriptions of the participants' experiences, respectively. Textual analysis explained *what* was experienced, while structural description explained *how* it was experienced. Combining and synthesizing these descriptions constructed the essence of the phenomenon studied, thus addressing the research question: *What are the lived experiences of Black, master-level graduate students enrolled in predominately White counseling programs in Texas?*

Consciousness. There are several functions unique to Transcendental Phenomenology, including: (a) consciousness, (b) act, (c) perception, and (d) intuition (Moustakas, 1994). *Consciousness* is composed of openness and directed towards a phenomenon. Consciousness is intentional, containing intentional content, which is comprised of external and internal perceptions (Moustakas, 1994). External perceptions solely rely on physical phenomenon and cannot be proven true (Moustakas, 1994). External perceptions can involve discriminatory acts experienced by individuals, which when completed, will fade or *dematerialize*, and all that will remain will be the internal perception. Internal perceptions are the subjective representations of real experiences that exist in consciousness, and are dependable and verifiable (Moustakas, 1994). Moreover, dependable and verifiable internal perceptions are a "unique source of absolute existence"—encompassing knowledge gleaned from *what* is perceived and sensed from participants' experiences (Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015, p. 2). Participants' internal perceptions were essential to the essence of the phenomenon.

According to Moustakas (1994):

> Things can emerge in our consciousness in an empty manner and thus our
> experience moves toward fulfilling them by virtue of looking and looking again,

or they can in thought in a fulfilled manner, the seeing itself bringing about a

sense of completion or wholeness of perception. (p. 50)

In a phenomenological study, there is no difference if the experience actually exists or is

in the internal consciousness of the participant. Through reflection, the experienced

phenomenon gains meaning as it is continuously analyzed and expanded. Therefore,

because the internal experience—which encompasses the objective experience and the

subjective meaning attributed to that act—now represents a person's real and actual

experience, the participants' internal experiences or consciousness was the foci of study.

Intentionality. Intentionality is often used as a synonym for consciousness,

referring to "the internal experience of being conscious of something" (Moustakas, 1994,

p. 28). Intentions include the appearance or representation of a phenomenon in the mind,

and intentionality specifically refers to one's consciousness connecting to something

(Moustakas, 1994; Woodard, 2004). *Intentionality directs the consciousness toward*

something (Moustakas, 1994, p. 68). Directedness of the mind, whether the phenomenon

is real or not, is a central component of intentionality (Moustakas, 1994). Intentionality

is a source of meaning derived from one's previous experiences—which are essential to

understanding consciousness (Moustakas, 1994; Woodard, 2004). Intentionality requires

knowledge that meaning is formed based on inseparable components of self and the

world (Moustakas, 1994).

Noema and Noesis. Woodard (2004), influenced by Moustakas and Husserl,

stated intentionality engages *noema* and *noesis* (p. 888). Noema and noesis refer to

meaning (Moustakas, 1994). *Noema*, or *what* appears or is presented, allows for a

description of *what* happened in a noncognitive, nonemotional manner. Noema

constitutes the object of an experience, providing consciousness toward specific objects (Moustakas, 1994). Foci and emphasis are on that which is experienced; that is, understanding *what* something is and *what* it means. This intuitive, prereflective state describes *what* one perceives. Physical, noematic experiences yield data to create textual descriptions. The reflective process, *noesis*, allows for the discovery of concealed meanings. Noesis is the conscious "act of experience"—perceiving an experience (Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015, p. 6). Noesis, encompassing the mind and spirit, assigns meaning to what is perceived (Woodard, 2004; Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015). This reflective process denotes *how* the phenomenon is experienced (Moustakas, 1994, p. 69). Mental, noetic experiences yield data to create structural descriptions. For each noema, there is a noesis; and for each noesis, there is a noema (Moustakas, 1994, Woodard, 2004, Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015). According to Moustakas (1994), "Description of the noematic qualities is the objective component and always relates to a subjective consciousness, the noesis. A noetic description is always subjective and connects with the object as perceived" (p. 73).

Reflections of experiences that utilize the noema-noesis process can stimulate deeper exploration and can reveal conscious experiences of a phenomenon. The challenge is to utilize each ideal experience to create a precise and complete description of an experience. Throughout this dissertation, the term *experience* will be expressed often. Experiences are comprised of realism (material) and idealism (ideal). For the purposes of this study, emphasis will be placed on idealism. Within idealism exist two critical components to understanding human science research investigations toward the search for knowledge—noema and noesis (Moustakas, 1994).

Act. *Acts* contain evidence of the phenomenon and meaningful experiences. Through reflection, feelings and images of past experiences are brought to the present (Moustakas, 1994; Woodard, 2004). The intentional act of perceiving is an objectifying, concrete, independent, and intentional experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 29). Acts, defined by presence within the consciousness, are intentional experiences (Moustakas, 1994). These intentional experiences emphasize meaning of a phenomenon to include judgments, perceptions, or memories of an act; and the features and properties of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Perception. Perception is simply defined as the framework in which one interprets the way things are (Moustakas, 1994). Through perception knowledge is expanded. Although perception does not accurately describe what is in the consciousness, it is a primary, confirmable source of knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). Contributions to knowledge are fulfilled through new perceptions—uniting past, present, and future (Moustakas, 1994).

Intuition. Intuition is essential to describing the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Intuition is crucial in describing what is presented or actually given (Moustakas, 1994). Humans are intuitive beings that use an "intuitive-reflective process" in which all things become clear (Moustakas, 1994, p. 32). The researcher gained clarity through the transformation of what was presented and then through the intuitive-reflective process. Moustakas (1994) defined an intuitive-reflective researcher as one who "doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wishes for or against senses, imagines" (p. 32).

Summary

During slavery, Black Americans were adamantly denied education and it was illegal for enslaved individuals to read. Historically, Blacks have been denied equal access to education. Prior to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, Black and White students were not allowed to attend school together, maintaining gaps in education between the two racial groups. Since the end of segregation, Blacks were legally allowed to integrate with their White counterparts. The climate for Blacks integrating schools was not inviting and often required police escorts. Although Black students were allowed to enroll in TWIs, the educational environment was deemed uninviting. In addition to the decline of Black college students enrolled, the number of those students completing a degree is lower than Whites. Furthermore, even though there has been an increase in the diversity in the student body, the overall university culture and curriculum has remained substantially the same.

Although HBCUs promote academic success, Black students attending TWIs are left to formulate their own idea of Black identity. Black students attending TWIs often reported feeling isolated and discriminated against in these academic environments. Black students utilizing personal and cultural assets tended to persevere academically despite discrimination at school (Butler-Barnes et al., 2013).

Although Tinto's university retention development model sheds light on students' concerns, the model does not mention culture or ethnicity. In this perspective, utilizing the framework of Critical Race Theory and Cross' (1971) Black identity development is appropriate for this study because of the focus on the intersection of being a college student and being Black. Based on previous research, TWIs have developed separate

programs in an effort to improve the experiences of Black students (Lee & Barnes, 2015).

Hurd, Sellers, Cogburn, Butler-Barnes, and Zimmerman (2012) stated that Black adults

might benefit from settings and communities where they feel respected, affirmed, and

valued. Because positive racial identity is linked to academic and personal success, it is

essential for mental health professionals to be knowledgeable in Black identity

development (Ross et al., 2016). Black graduate students enrolled in TWIs should feel

welcomed and appreciated on campus. In assisting Black students to reach maximum

potential, they should, like their White peers, have positive racial encounters across

campus. Diversity should be addressed and inclusivity mandated.

A qualitative research approach was determined to be appropriate to gather data to

describe the participants' lived experiences. Conducting transcendental

phenomenological research includes engaging in *Epoche*, transcendental-

phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis. The functions of this

qualitative method were utilized to conduct the current research study. In the next

chapter methods of exploring the lived experiences of Black master-level graduate

students enrolled in predominately White, CACREP-accredited Counseling programs in

Texas will be explained.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of Black master-level graduate students enrolled in predominately White, CACREP-accredited Counseling programs in Texas. The study was designed to answer the research question, *What are the lived experiences of Black, master-level graduate students enrolled in predominately White counseling programs in Texas?* In this qualitative study, phenomenological methodology was used to describe common meanings for several individuals' lived experiences of this phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this chapter, I outline the research methodology, addressing the following components: (a) research design, (b) population and sampling, (c) data collection, (d) instrumentation, (e) grand tour questions, (f) data analysis, and (g) trustworthiness.

Rationale for Using Transcendental Phenomenological Qualitative Methodology

Most previous research describing the experiences of Black students at Predominately White Institutions was conducted primarily through quantitative methods. The limitations to quantitative research are: (a) the use of structured questionnaires—yielding limiting outcomes, (b) the absence of exploring the full complexity of human experiences and perceptions, and (c) the inability to explore the *how* or *why* of a phenomenon. For example, Adams' (2005) study was limited to correlational outcomes, and the researcher stated the findings do not "lend to clarification of each significant relationship among the variables" (p. 143).

Therefore, to gain a comprehensive, in-depth understanding of this phenomenon, I utilized a qualitative approach in this research study. Of the several approaches of

qualitative inquiry, I determined that a transcendental phenomenological approach, using a scientific method and significantly limiting researcher bias, was the most effective method to use for this study. I used this phenomenological qualitative approach to gather thick, rich data to describe the lived experiences of a select phenomenon as perceived by individuals who experienced this phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach was used to answer the research question, *What are the lived experiences of Black master-level graduate students enrolled in predominately White counseling programs in Texas?*

Population and Sampling

General and demographic characteristics of the population included students who self-identified as Black. The population included current graduate students enrolled in a predominately White, master-level Counseling programs in Texas. The counseling programs were identified and selected from Traditionally White Institutions. The demographics for each counseling program were verified via CACREP vital statistics report provided by the identified department representative of the university. Upon approval from the dissertation committee, the relevant information regarding the research study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Sam Houston State University. After the IRB approved the research study, I identified seven Traditionally White Institutions (TWIs) in the Southeast region of Texas. Upon identifying the TWIs, racial demographics within the CACREP-accredited, Clinical Mental Health Counseling Programs at the institutions were consulted. Appropriate counseling program representatives were contacted requesting the most recent racial data for students enrolled. The qualifying Predominately White Counseling Programs (PWCPs) were

identified and appropriate representatives were contacted to disperse the current research information to recruit voluntary participants. Informed consent was obtained from the participants, informing them of their rights as participants.

The general characteristics of the population from which participants were sampled from included that they: (a) identify as Black, (b) are currently enrolled in a predominately White, master-level graduate counseling program, and (c) have earned an undergraduate degree from a Traditionally White Institution. For the purposes of this study, participants who self-identified as Black typically identify as individuals who have an ancestor that was enslaved in America or migrated from Africa.

Sampling. Qualitative researchers tend to use a select few sampling strategies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In selecting participants for a phenomenological study, it is fundamental that the chosen participants have experienced the phenomenon being researched (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, and McKibbon (2015) identified variations of sampling and defined the term to include exclusive data sources selected by researchers collecting data and addressing research objectives. Purposeful sampling, an intentional sample of participants who can best inform the researcher about the phenomenon, was commonly used in this phenomenological research and allowed the researcher to select participants, because the selected participants can give insight to the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gentles et al., 2015). Additionally, criterion sampling denotes the sample of participants meeting the standards set forth by the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, the researcher used criterion-based, purposeful sampling. The criterion, developed by the researcher, seeks participants who: (a) identify as Black, (b) are currently enrolled in a predominately White, master-level

graduate Counseling program, and (c) earned an undergraduate degree from a Traditionally White Institution. Moreover, snowball sampling was used to identify "cases of interest from people who know people who knows what cases are information-rich" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 159). Snowball sampling helped identify participants who were be a good fit for the study but were scattered and not found in clusters (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008).

As the goal is to acquire pertinent information, qualitative researchers obtain smaller sample sizes (Gentles et al., 2015), although it is challenging to specify in advance the ideal sample size, a sample size between "3 to 4 individuals to 10 to 15" is recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 76). Based upon the research question and research design used for this study, a total of eight participants was a sufficient sample size.

Data Collection

The participants were contacted to schedule interviews. The semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face and via an electronic platform. Participants engaged in reflection throughout the process to describe their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The participants' reflection process allowed for the formation of the textual descriptions of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The transcribed data was analyzed to identify themes to describe the essence of the phenomenon being researched. I interviewed eight participants to reach saturation. Saturation is achieved when "new information obtained does not provide further insight into the category" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 203).

Instrumentation

The key instrumentation used to address the research question was a semi-structured interview. Using a semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to explore the lived experiences of the participants. The researcher also served as an instrument in the process (Maxwell, 2005). A challenge of transcendental phenomenology is the researcher's self-reflective process increases knowledge of self throughout the study (Moustakas, 1994). Addressing researcher bias was essential to increasing the trustworthiness of the study. The researcher was interviewed to gain awareness of and record any biases. By gaining self-awareness, the researcher was able to properly bracket personal experiences from the participants' experiences.

Grand Tour Questions

1. How would you describe your overall experience in your counseling program?

2. What are your experiences as a Black graduate student enrolled in a predominately White counseling program?

3. What challenges, past and present, have you faced as a racial minority student on this campus?

4. How would you describe your cultural experiences with (a) faculty and (b) staff?

5. How would you describe your cultural experiences with peers?

6. What is your experience being a racial minority in class when the topic of race comes up?

7. What support have you had as a racial minority student on campus?

8. How is your experience different at the graduate level verses the undergraduate level?

9. What else would you like to add?

Data Analysis

Moustakas' (1994) data analysis procedure included systematic steps to convey the overall essence of the participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moustakas (1994) modified Van Kaam's (1959, 1966) method of analysis of phenomenological data. Upon the transcription of participant interviews, eight steps were completed (Moustakas, 1994; Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015). The first seven steps were applied to each participant's responses individually. The eighth step is a composite of participants' responses to reach the essence of the phenomenon.

1. Listing and Preliminary Grouping (Horizonalization)

2. Reduction and Elimination: To determine Invariant Constituents

3. Clustering and Thematizing the Invariant Constituents (Core themes)

4. Validation: Final Identification of the Invariant Constituents and Themes by Application

5. Create Individual Textual Description of the experience

6. Create Individual Structural Description of the experience

7. Construct Textual-Structural Description of the meanings and essences of the experience

8. From Textual-Structural Descriptions, develop a Composite Description of the meanings and essences of the experience, representing the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994; Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015).

The horizonalization process included the researcher and coding team listing every expression relevant to the experience from verbatim transcripts. Because researchers are to be "receptive to every statement" of the participants' experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122), each horizon was treated with equal value as it contributes to understanding the meaning of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). In addition, each horizon increasingly portrayed the thoughts and feelings of the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

In the reduction and elimination step, each horizon was analyzed. Each expression was evaluated for two requirements: (a) it is necessary and sufficient for experiencing the phenomenon and (b) it is not possible for abstraction or to label it (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher and coding team removed information that was irrelevant, repetitive, and/or overlapping. The remaining horizons describing the phenomenon were labeled as invariant constituents. "This step of the phenomenological reduction describes the phenomena in 'textual language'" (Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015, p. 11).

To create core themes, the researcher and coding team clustered and thematized the invariant constituents. Moustakas asserted that "(t)he clustered and labeled constituents are the core themes of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). Yüksel and Yildirim (2015) concurred with Moustakas' (1994) assertion. Therefore, each theme has one meaning.

To validate the invariant constituents and the assigned theme, the researcher compared multiple data sources. The researcher compared the invariant constituents and themes to the original interview transcript, notes, and observations (Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015). The researcher ensured the themes of the invariant constituents were: (a)

expressed explicitly in the transcription, (b) compatible, if not explicitly expressed, or (c) deleted, if they are not explicitly stated or compatible (Moustakas, 1994).

The next step included creating textual descriptions for the participants' individual experience. The textual descriptions of the experience were created from validated invariant constituents and themes. "The textual description is a narrative that explains participants' perceptions of a phenomenon" (Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015, p. 12). The researcher included verbatim examples of the transcribed interview and explained meaning in a narrative format (Moustakas, 1994; Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015).

Based on the textual description created and using Imaginative Variation, structural descriptions were created (Moustakas, 1994; Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015). The Researcher and coding team used Imaginative Variation to envision *how* the experience occurred to construct individual structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994; Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015). It is through Imaginative Variation that meaning was discovered (Woodard, 2004).

For each participant, the researcher constructed textual-structural descriptions of the meanings and essences of the experiences (Moustakas, 1994). This composite description "incorporate[d] the textual description into a structure explaining how the experience occurred" (Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015, p. 12). This process aided in the comprehension of the phenomenon (Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015).

In the final step, I created a composite description of all participants' responses, representing the group as a whole. The individual textual-structural descriptions were synthesized to create a universal description of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015). This composite expression included meaning units common

to all participants, and eliminated individual meaning units (Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015). "A meaning unit is a unit of expression that carries meaning" (Woodard, 2004, p. 899). Each meaning unit was weighed equally. Thus, the essence of the phenomenon emerged.

Trustworthiness

To increase trustworthiness, the researcher completed validation strategies to address and rule out threats to validity and increase credibility of the study (Maxwell, 2005). The researcher checked the accuracy of the results through: (a) rich, thick data, (b) member checking, (c) triangulating of data, and (d) clarifying researcher bias.

Rich, Thick Data. Rich, thick data was collected through intense interviews with participants who have experienced the phenomenon. The rich, thick data collected included ample details describing the participants' lived experiences. The researcher focused on the consciousness of the participant's internal, subjective experiences. By utilizing the *noema-noesis* framework, the researcher gathered *what* happened as well as *how* it happened to attribute meaning to the participants' experiences. The data is "detailed and varied enough that they provide a full and revealing picture of what is going on" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 126). The researcher was responsible for checking the accuracy and validating the findings of the research.

Member Checking. Validation measures from the participants' perspective are essential and were achieved by seeking participant feedback. Member checking, also known as respondent validation, is a critical way of limiting misinterpretations from participants (Maxwell, 2013). Member checking allowed the researcher to gain clarification about the participants' responses and identifiable themes. Participants were allowed to review the transcripts created from the audio-recorded interview and

confirmed or enhanced their responses. Member checking increased the trustworthiness of the study by ensuring the participants' responses were captured. Five participants participated in the member checking process by reviewing and verifying their transcript. The remaining three participants opted out of the member checking process. Potential researcher misinterpretation was significantly reduced through member checking. Hence, member checking was ideal in this transcendental phenomenological research design.

Triangulation. Triangulation was achieved through "corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 260). Several sources of data were included to enhance the trustworthiness of the study and the accuracy of participants' responses by verifying the written accounts of participants from multiple sources—i.e. interviews, observations, member checking, and utilization of research assistants. Collecting data using a variety of methods reduced the risk of biases and associations (Maxwell, 2005). In addition, involving additional perspectives beyond the researcher enhanced validation measures. Two doctoral level students were enlisted to evaluate the transcriptions of the interviews of the participants. The doctoral level students completed the data analysis process for each participant. A third doctoral-level student was consulted to validate findings of the researcher and coding team.

Researcher bias. Prior to conducting interviews, the researcher increased awareness of bias through reflexivity and took note of personal biases as well. By engaging in reflexivity, "the researcher discloses their understandings about the biases, values, and experiences" that were brought into the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 261). The selected criterion for potential participants represented the researcher's racial

identity and collegiate educational experience. The researcher engaged in Epoche to bracket personal experiences, minimizing influence and potential biased interpretations of the results (Moustakas, 1994). To further reduce researcher bias, the dissertation director and a neutral professional interviewed the researcher.

I am a Black female who attended TWIs for the entirety of my collegiate career. I earned an undergraduate degree and a graduate degree from two TWIs in Southeast Texas. I am a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) and currently enrolled in a CACREP-accredited, predominately White, doctoral-level counseling program at a TWI in Southeast Texas. Although my demographics were similar to the participants of the study, my background served as a major contributor of my interest in the topic. The coding team included three doctoral-level students currently enrolled in a CACREP-accredited, predominately White counseling program at a TWI in Southeast Texas. The coding team consisted of one White female, one Black female, and one Hispanic male, two of whom are LPCs and one of whom is a LPC-S.

Summary

This transcendental phenomenological study was conducted to explore the lived experiences of Black, master-level graduate students enrolled in predominately White counseling programs in Texas. In the current chapter, I described the qualitative methodology that was used in the research study. A transcendental, phenomenological qualitative inquiry was conducted to explore the lived experiences of Black graduate students enrolled in predominately White counseling programs in Texas. Purposeful, criterion sampling was used to select eight participants. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were used to gather information to portray the participants' experiences.

Following IRB approval at Sam Houston State University, informed consent was obtained from participants. Once selected, participants completed a demographic questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. Data analysis included transcribing the interview responses and identifying common themes to describe the essence of the phenomenon. To increase the trustworthiness of my study, I utilized validation methods to include: (a) rich, thick data, (b) member checking, (c) triangulating data, and (d) clarifying researcher bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Maxwell, 2005).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of Black, master-level graduate students enrolled in predominately White, CACREP-accredited counseling programs in Texas. The study was designed to answer the research question, *What are the lived experiences of Black, master-level graduate students enrolled in predominately White counseling programs in Texas?* I utilized a semi-structured interview protocol for the collection of qualitative data, in which interviews were conducted in a safe location identified by participants.

Through convenience sampling, I identified seven Traditionally White Institutions (TWIs) in the Southeast region of Texas that were established prior to 1964, historically excluded Black students, and had a CACREP-accredited or CACREP-aligned Clinical Mental Health Counseling Program. The Southeast region of Texas was identified as a purposeful area based on the historical context previously explained, including Juneteenth. Of the seven TWIs identified, two were private institutions and five were public institutions. Additionally, from the TWIs identified, the racial demographics were considered.

Upon identifying TWIs, I collected racial demographics within the Clinical Mental Health Counseling Programs at the institutions. For six of the Clinical Mental Health Counseling Programs, I contacted appropriate representatives requesting the most recent racial data for students enrolled. For one university, the demographic information was available online via the institutional effectiveness department. Of the seven Clinical Mental Health Counseling Programs contacted, three Predominately White Counseling

Programs (PWCPs) were identified—having more than 50% of current students that identify as White.

Recruiting

An email was sent to the same representatives that provided the racial demographic data informing them of the findings and the current research study. A recruitment flyer was created and shared with program representatives at the three identified PWCPs for distribution to potential participants. The PWCP representatives were asked to forward the recruitment flyer to students enrolled in their program. In addition to marketing the recruitment flyer, some participants self-selected to participate in the study through snowball sampling.

Students expressing an interest in the study were asked to acknowledge and confirm they met the research criteria and sign informed consent documents provided by the researcher. Upon receiving the signed informed consent documents, the participants completed demographics questionnaires. To protect anonymity of the participants and increase levels of comfort, participants chose a comfortable area to complete the interview. Seven of the eight research interviews were conducted electronically. Interviews conducted electronically required the participants to download a HIPAA-compliant video application, VSee. The confidential VSee link was emailed to the students to download at no cost. Based on the preference of the participant, one interview was conducted face-to-face.

The interviews lasted approximately 30-50 minutes and were audio recorded. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and specific information was removed to protect the identity of the participants. I utilized a transcription software program, Trint,

to convert audio files into text. I replayed the audio and verified the information was transcribed correctly and sent it to the participants for member checking. Each participant either verified, made minor edits, or opted out of the member checking process. The results of the member checking process are included in Table 1. Upon the completion of the member checking process, the audio files were destroyed.

Table 1

Participants' Pseudonyms and Member Checking Results

Pseudonym	Member Checking Decision
Ava	Opted out
Danielle	Contributed Minor Grammatical/ Content Edits
Evette	Opted out
Jasmine	Verified
Kara	Opted out
Natalie	Verified
Nikki	Contributed Minor Grammatical Edits
Renee	Verified

Each transcript was then analyzed by a coding team consisting of the researcher and two doctoral candidates. The researcher is a Black, female doctoral candidate. The coding team consisted of one Black, female doctoral candidate and one White, female doctoral candidate. The coding team met over several days and completed Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kaam's (1959, 1966) method of data analysis for each participant's

interview. Further data analysis was completed to verify emerged themes with a Hispanic, male doctoral candidate. Through an in-depth examination of their lived experiences, Chapter IV includes the results of eight Black graduate students enrolled in Predominately White Counseling Programs (PWCPs).

Demographics

The demographic questionnaire utilized in this study can be found in Appendix H. The demographics questionnaire included participants' (a) pseudonym, (b) age, (c) description of their ethnic background, (d) gender, (e) current graduate institution, (f) current major, (g) perceived racial makeup of graduate institution, (h) undergraduate institution attended, (i) perceived racial makeup of undergraduate institution, (j) high school attended, and (k) perceived racial makeup of high school attended.

All of the participants were enrolled in a CACREP-accredited Clinical Mental Health Counseling program, which was identified as a PWCP, within a Predominately White Institution (PWI) in the Southeast region of Texas. Of the eight participants interviewed, 100% were female. The participants self-identified as Black or African-American, meeting the criteria for the research study. The ethnicity question of the demographic questionnaire was open-ended. Using their own descriptions, the ethnicities represented by the participants are demonstrated in Table 2.

All participants acknowledged that they attended a PWI or a non-HBCU for their undergraduate education. The term non-HBCU was used to identify institutions that were not originally created for Black students and/or do not have a majority of the total students enrolled identify as Black. The age of the participants, self-defined ethnicity, and racial high school makeup, and are included below.

Table 2

Participants' Pseudonyms and Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Age	Self-defined Ethnicity	High School Racial Makeup
Ava	25	Black/African-American	Predominately non-Black High School
Danielle	38	African-American	Predominately White High School
Evette	26	Black/African-American	Predominately non-Black High School
Jasmine	21	Black	Predominately Black High School
Kara	25	African-American	Predominately White High School
Natalie	38	Black/White	Predominately non-Black High School
Nikki	24	African-American	Unsure, Predominately non-Black High School
Renee	22	Black American	Predominately minority High School

Themes

Seven general themes emerged from the interview responses after conducting

Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kaam's (1959, 1966) method of analysis. The general

themes were (a) racism, (b) multiculturalism, (c) race-related classroom challenges, (d)

the Black Unicorn syndrome, (e) belonging within the Black community, (f) coping, and

(g) worrying about the future of the counseling profession. Each theme and the corresponding subthemes are presented below.

1. Racism

    a. Influential personal trauma

    b. Normalizing White spaces

2. Multiculturalism

    a. I am culturally competent

    b. Lack of cultural competency of my White peers

    c. Cultural disconnect with White peers

    d. Cultural disconnect with non-Black professors

3. Race-related classroom challenges

    a. Being the Black representative

    b. Experiencing microaggressions from White professors

    c. Perceived biases from White peers

    d. Censorship

    e. Educating others

4. The Black Unicorn syndrome

    a. Feeling pressure to prove self

    b. Fighting against negative stereotypes

    c. Feeling isolated

    d. Feeling uncomfortable

    e. Lacking knowledge of support

5. Belonging within the Black community

    a. Belonging with Black peers

    b. Belonging with Black profs

    c. Acknowledging differences within the African Diaspora

    d. *It's bigger than me* phenomena

6. Coping

    a. Regulating emotional distress

    b. Confronting the problem/Speaking up

    c. Creating a network of social support outside of the classroom

7. Worrying about the future of the counseling profession

    a. Lack of multicultural awareness of White peers

    b. Possibility of negative cultural experiences with clients

    c. Developing Black counselor identity

    d. Desire for Black counseling role models

Theme 1: Racism

Racism, as defined in Chapter I, is an oppressive system in America, operating to the advantage of White Americans and to the disadvantage of people of color (Tatum, 1997). According to Tatum (1997), racism is designed to maintain a caste system solely based on skin color and involves "cultural messages and institutional policies and practices as well as the beliefs and actions of individuals" (p. 7). This general theme incorporates two subthemes: (a) influential personal trauma and (b) normalizing White spaces.

Influential personal trauma. Feagin (2014) stated in order to understand the prevalence of institutional racism, it is vital to understand the intensities and complexities of historical racial discrimination. According to Feagin (2014), the impacts of racial disparities in America are prevalent today and participants shared personal examples. Seven participants reflected on prior experiences that currently impacted them in their predominately White academic settings. Nikki spoke about being hyper aware of her race in the academic setting and the root cause of her position:

I think maybe just being a Black American, especially growing up in Texas, I am aware of my color when I walk in a room. Especially if I am the only person of color in the room…I started developing that when—probably when I was younger… Most of where I grew up [was] *predominantly another race. So the majority of the places that I remember spending my childhood, the majority of people in my neighborhood, and the people that I'm friends with were Hispanic or White. So, I think that's kind of where my awareness sort of started coming forth.*

Kara expressed issues surrounding her safety attending a predominantly White school:

[T]*he first time that I had to drive to* [city in East Texas]*, I asked my boyfriend to drive up with me. And even though it was kind of inconvenient for him, I had never driven to* [city in East Texas] *and I didn't really know what to expect when I was there; and there are a lot of back streets and things like that. So I didn't feel safe initially going into an environment that I had heard* [discriminatory] *things about, that I didn't know much about myself. So he came with me and sort of waited for me to get done with my class. And I know it may sound kind of ridiculous, but it made me feel a lot better. Because I ended up being the only*

Black person in my class that night; and so, as you know, even though nothing

happened it was helpful to have another person be with me as a resource.

Danielle expressed previous experiences with racism: "*I've experienced racism on the*

academic level as a kid. I remember that…by teachers and by students". She further

explained a personal, significant experience with racism that impacted her to date:

I can think of one experience that I've had professionally that is like a—that's like

a trigger for me all the time; and I think about it often where I was working in

[city in East Texas]. *It was one of those, one of those places where a lot of people*

know there is racial tension there. So I'm in a store and I am reading something

in my binder, and I have this lady, this older white lady and her husband pass by

me, and she-- she stops by me and she whispers and she says, 'Now you know you

not supposed to be doing that.' And it's things like that that trigger me 'cause I'm

like, I knew what she was talking about—I'm not supposed to be reading. So, I

think that's what triggers me and like, and feeling like, I have to prove Caucasians

wrong—that Black people are not dumb. And when I was in that cultural class, I

do remember that someone put as their bias that we [Black people] *are dumb and*

that all we do—that we're entertainers and that we're athletes. And, so, paired

with what that lady told me and the fact that I am also hearing this in the year of

2018 yeah… that makes me feel—that makes me guard myself… So, when I'm

sitting in those classrooms, and I'm the only Black person, one of them could be

her kid or grandchild thinking that same thing, like 'how did you—how did you

get to this level that I am at?... you're reading?!...how dare you read!'. So, I'm

trying to destroy every bias that you have about me, [and] *about my people.*

Normalizing White spaces. All participants have spent the entirety of their collegiate career being in predominately White academic environments. Six participants described being able to adapt to this perceived unwelcoming environment. Overtime, the participants have become accustomed to the challenges this environment presents and altered the way they interact with others. Jasmine stated: "*It's a little bit uncomfortable and now like thinking about it more… because I've gotten to the point where- not that I'm used to it- but, that it's not uncommon*".

Kara stated:

> *I think maybe it's because I went to a predominantly White high school and college that there are a lot of things that I just kind of got used to. And then I had to understand that you know whatever field you work in, you're going to have to have these interactions with people who aren't Black and so I just have to find a way to navigate them.*

Ava added and discussed prolonged exposure to predominantly White school environments:

> *I was the only Black girl in my grade school for a long time, so this is nothing new for me. It's not like I went to predominantly Black schools and was just thrown into this graduate program with White people. No, I've always been in the minority.*

Theme 2: Multiculturalism

Professional counselors are expected to acquire and maintain multicultural competency to work effectively with diverse populations (Clark, Moe, & Hays, 2017). According to Ivers, Johnson, Clarke, Newsome, and Berry (2016), the concept of

multicultural counselor competency (MCC) encompasses knowledge, awareness, and skills of counselors that will impact the services provided to individuals outside of the cultural the counselors are familiar with. With the focus of this research study being on Black individuals studying to pursue careers within the helping field, the participants noted the importance of cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity. The subthemes within the multiculturalism theme are (a) I am culturally competent, (b) lack of cultural competency of my White peers, (c) cultural disconnect with White peers, (d) cultural disconnect with non-Black professors.

I am culturally competent. Each participant expressed and demonstrated cultural competency through examples of being able to connect with diverse individuals by increased awareness and sensitivity to differences of others. The underlying tone in each response was a sense of pride in being able to connect and communicate with individuals from backgrounds different from their own. Natalie stated:

I *am very diverse. I'm very multicultural. I think that for the most part I can meet people where they are. That's something that I pride myself on. I didn't even realize that I was able to do that. But like wherever somebody is I usually meet them where they are and I like to embrace other cultures too, to learn because different cultures teach you different things about yourself.*

Kara stated: "*I consider myself to be a pretty liberal-minded person and I did have some concerns going to [university] that the environment would be a little more conservative than what I'm use to*". Renee stated: "*I think it's powerful to be able to connect with all types of people even if my foot is out the door*". Jasmine stated: "*I feel like me having*

that different experience and then also being able to hear theirs' is going to make me a better counselor because I get to have all these different experiences in front of me".

Lack of cultural competency of my White peers. Each participant expressed that their White peers were not culturally adept in their interactions with Black peers. Danielle was shocked at the realization of her peers' lack of cultural awareness, stating:

> *Yeah, it's uncomfortable…. it's like right in my face that people are not as culturally aware as I thought and here we are in 2019, and we've had a Black president and a first Black family and it's like, 'Are you serious*?'

Renee expressed shock when she explained the lack of diversity specifically to the counseling profession:

> *If I were getting my master's in math for example, like my sister; she is the only Black person in her program. And we weren't surprised that… My family wasn't surprised by it. And we are not surprised that she is running into situations where people… just don't get it. But in a helping field, where the expectation is to branch out and learn about people who are different from you, I had this expectation that people were going to do that (laughter); but they didn't (laughter).*

When the topic of race comes up in classes, Kara is shocked too:

> *[I]n other random classes, I would have instances in which a White student would want to process the idea that they can't be completely empathetic with a person of color… we'll be talking about how important empathy is in the counseling field. And, you know, the professor would usually bring up how you should make sure you are educated about the different cultures of your clients, that you understand*

that, so you can feel a deeper sense of empathy for them. And it seemed like that

would sort of offend some White students, because they felt because they know

people of color in their daily lives that they shouldn't have issues in empathizing

with their clients who are Black or other ethnicities. And so that would often lead

to some conflict because as a Black person, maybe it's because I'm a person of

color, I never had an issue with the idea that, you know, in order to serve

someone the best in the counseling field that need you to educate yourself about

where they're coming from. And so the fact there would be multiple times in which

I would see a White student get offended by the idea of having to educate

themselves about someone who is different from them, which is kind of annoying

for me.

Ava stated: "[I]*t's very convenient for them* [White peers] *to stick around their ethnic group or stick around White people and so they may not be as educated about other minorities and how much diversity is in one ethnic group*".

Cultural disconnect with White peers. When initially asked about overall experiences in the graduate program, seven participants stated surface-level, positive responses. Similar responses were gathered when participants responded to overt experiences with White peers. When asked about specific interactions with White peers, the participants' responses indicated a disconnect in culture. When describing interactions with White peers, Kara stated:

I would say they've mostly been positive, mostly it's been good, but there have

been some instances where I've had classes with a White peer who is very touchy

about the subject of race, and the subject of White privilege and just, you know,

any old topic just could set them off. Like the topic of like multiculturalism; I don't know; just empathy, just different things like that could just lead them to want to process their political beliefs. In those situations, I learned to stay away from them and not engage with them that much because I feel like we wouldn't mesh well together. But I think I've gotten better being able to navigate when a peer would be a good resource for me and when we're just two different to have a dialogue.

Ava, who attended a non-Black high school, stated*: "I feel like it's easy for me to connect with my White peers just because I've had so many over the years. You know we have the same study habits, and the same interests"* and went on to describe her interaction with her White peers as surface-level "*I feel like my cultural… my interaction with my White peers is very surface level*".

Participants, knowingly or unknowingly, reported not fully being themselves in classroom—essentially leaving a part of themselves outside the class door. Danielle discussed the lack of connection with White peers throughout her duration in predominately White academic environments:

[W]*hat's crazy is that fact that I always been in predominantly White institutions; I only have 3 people that are not Black that I consider my friends. Isn't that interesting? You would think that, I would think that I would have made, you know better relationships and connections through school, but I really haven't. And I don't know if it's me or if it's just, just the opportunity just wasn't—the connection just wasn't that strong.*

Ava said:

> *I have White friends too… I feel like my cultural interaction with my White peers*
>
> *is very surface level…. I feel like it's hard for them to necessarily understand me.*
>
> *I feel like I, I'm just very different. Just like how I grew up, and how I talk, and*
>
> *like my family life.*

Nikki concurred and stated: "[T]*here's a little bit of a disconnect when it comes to*
relating to peers that are not Black". Jasmine noted a major cultural disconnect for
herself with White peers and said:

> *I've only done a project with one White person so far; and nothing about culture*
>
> *came up. But we, we have like, the same study habits and we're making about the*
>
> *same grades in the classes. So, that's how I try to identify with her…It was more*
>
> *like, since I can't connect with you on that* [cultural] *level, we're not even going to*
>
> *go there, we're just going to see how we connect in other ways…That's how I try*
>
> *to connect with people who are not, you know, if we are in a class setting… who*
>
> *are not of my same race, because… It kind of sounds bad, but not that we*
>
> *wouldn't have anything in common from our childhood, but I wouldn't even try to*
>
> *compare how we grew up or any of our cultures against each other. So, I would*
>
> *just try to keep it at academic similarities.*

Kara noted significant cultural disconnections:

> *I would say that most of the challenges have been a bit emotional for me. There*
>
> *have been times in this program where there's been, you know, police brutality*
>
> *incidents- where Black people have been murdered or… even instances like the*
>
> *Colin Kaepernick protest, protests all over the new, undocumented people… just*

a lot of….since, I guess, the Trump administration. And I was in this program when he was elected. A lot of that was processed within the classes because a lot of professors are really open about you know having open and honest conversations, which is great. But when most of the classes are full of White students and the professors are White, the opinions that I would get would be more conservative… There have been some instances where I've had classes with a White peer who is very touchy about the subject of race, and the subject of White privilege and just, you know, any old topic just could set them off. Like the topic of like multiculturalism, I don't know, just empathy, just different things like that could just lead them to want to process their political beliefs. In those situations, I kind of like learned to stay away from them and not engage with them that much because I feel like we wouldn't mesh well together. But I think I've gotten better in being able to navigate when a peer would be a good resource for me and when we're just to different to have a dialogue, if that makes sense.

Graduate students in counseling programs are also required to develop basic counseling skills. Practicing basic skills often takes place in the classroom. Danielle stated her beliefs of how the differences between her and her White peers' cultural background may affect that experience:

I feel like one of the challenges I am going to have is in my pre-practicum class; where I'm going to have to, to actually, not… I don't know how to explain this (long pause). So with people that are my, my race it's easy to kind of talk to them on…. like practice with them with counseling techniques to where… people who

are not my race I have…. it's just going to be challenging for me because we are

different.

Cultural disconnect with non-Black professors. All participants expressed gratitude and comprehension on content-related topics discussed in class, but five noted not being able to fully connect in class. Throughout their collegiate experience, the participants reported not having had many courses taught by Black professors. Furthermore, half of the participants have not had a course taught by a Black professor in graduate school. In describing cultural experiences with non-Black professors, Ava reported being "*treated fairly"* and *"feel*[ing] *like it's hard for them to necessarily understand me*". Evette stated: [B]*ut I don't feel like they* [White professor] *wouldn't listen. I feel like they* [White professor] *would, but I don't think that they* [White professor] *would know to expound on or develop in a more meaningful way*. Renee stated:

> *There's a certain level of comfort and support that students can get from their*
>
> *professors regardless of their identity or cultural background or anything like*
>
> *that; because they understand the road that you are going down. And, then that*
>
> *added layer of me coming from the same background or we identify the same*
>
> *way; that sort of thing; there's another layer because the experiences that I have*
>
> *as a Black student, a Black professor can relate to you and validate; where a*
>
> *White professors or a Chinese professor or a non-Black professor would say you*
>
> *know that is tough and it not fair, and I wish I could understand what you are*
>
> *going through and the sad part is I don't. And it's nice but it's not enough.*

Theme 3: Race-related classroom challenges

When asked about challenges experienced in their current academic environment, all participants discussed race-related challenges. Four of the participants initially stated they did not perceive any challenges in their graduate programs, and almost immediately corrected their response to express challenges. To gain clarification, the researcher asked the participants about their initial responses and correction. Participants stated that they initially thought of academic challenges, but then immediately recognized race-related challenges—i.e. non-academic challenges—and other legitimate issues. For example, after initially responding that she had not experienced a challenge, Danielle corrected her response and stated: "*Okay, so, maybe I have faced a challenge—it was challenging to be in a class like that knowing that my voice spoke for African-Americans*". Jasmine said: "*I wouldn't say yes, that there* [are] *any challenges that I can think of right now other than like me being in my head or feeling out of place*". Nikki stated:

> *I don't know I've had any challenges per say, but I think just, you know, not having many people whether it's professors or students that sort of look like me and share in the same sort of experiences that I have; I guess is a challenge in of itself.*

This piqued my interest, and I noted in my field notes that this might be experienced unconsciously for participants. The remaining four participants immediately expressed challenges in the program, all related to race-related challenges—i.e. non-academic, emotional, racial, or cultural. The subthemes of the race-related classroom challenges theme are (a) being the Black representative (b) experiencing

microaggressions from White professors, (c) perceived biases from White peers, (d) censorship, and (e) educating others.

Being the Black representative. The term Black representative, for all intents and purposes of this research study, denotes how participants expressed their position in the classroom. All of the participants discussed experiences being the sole person in the academic classroom representing Black cultural and racial experiences. Danielle noted challenges regarding this phenomenon:

> *I probably was the only* [Black] *person that some of these people have ever come in contact with to discuss social issues and cultural issues and to actually gain an understanding of…. what it means to be Black in the United States…. I'm looked to as kind of like they want to say what they think it means, but they look to me for the permission. Also, if it's something that maybe I don't know like quote unquote that only Black people would know then it's like they kind of wait for me to say something first.*

Nikki stated:

> *I think when the topic of race is discussed in a classroom setting, there's always sort of that—you're the only person that can speak on behalf of his race. So it's kind of like that turning towards you, kind of, being the sounding board for that race or you being the only sort of voice for that race… I've definitely had those experiences where I kind of have to speak on behalf of my race. And when it comes to talking about racial things, I would say that's kind of been my experience with that in the classroom.*

Evette said:

>*When that's the case, when there are few* [Black students]*, it kind of feels—if the topic of race comes up, it's like a pressure to feel like a spokesperson. And I'm like, 'Look, I am not the spokesperson for all the Black people' (laughs). So, it feels—even if I were to say something that is true like, 'Oh, this was my experience growing up'; it still feels kind of weird because I wouldn't want anyone to interpret that as being the same for all Black people everywhere.*

Kara stated:

>*I would get looked at. Alot of people looking for me to speak or intervene and I shouldn't feel comfortable being one of the Black students or the only Black student being like a sounding board for all Blacks.*

Renee stated: "[I]*f we are specifically talking about the Black experience I know that people are trying to not immediately turn to me; but there's is like this, 'ok, ok…what's [Renee] going to say?* '".

>***Conflicting experiences.*** When discussing experiences of being the Black spokesperson in their academic environment, the participants experienced opposing feelings. Evette discussed positive feelings toward being the Black expert and feelings of hesitation. She stated:

>[I]*f the topic of race comes up, it's like a pressure to feel like a spokesperson. And I'm like, 'Look, I am not the spokesperson for all the Black people' (laughs). So, It feels—even if I were to say something that is true like, 'Oh, this was my experience growing up'; it still feels kind of weird because I wouldn't want anyone to interpret that as being the same for all Black people everywhere.*

Nikki concurred and stated:

> *It's kind of a two-sided thing because on one hand, I kind of feel a responsibility*
> *to sort of speak up and say certain things, clarify certain things; but at the same*
> *time it's always a bit strange, because I'm not a sounding board for my race and*
> *I'm definitely what, I feel like Black people are. There's a lot of different types of*
> *us so we're not just one thing. So I can't necessarily be the most representative of*
> *what Black people are because they are so vast and so different… So there*
> *definitely is that sort of tug at not wanting to be a sounding board because I don't*
> *represent everybody, but also wanting to be the sounding board since I'm the only*
> *person there and I feel like I kind of have to.*

Renee stated:

> *I feel just like I'm the source of Black knowledge in nearly every classroom and if*
> *there is another Black person then we are just co-teaching what does it mean to*
> *be Black. Which, on one hand, I'm glad that I am in position where I can help*
> *other people understand the Black experience and on the other hand I don't want*
> *that burden. I'm trying to live my life and not have to have the burden of*
> *educating my peers when I'm trying to learn too.*

Kara initially stated being the Black expert as not being an issue, and further explained
the burden and unwelcomed responsibility that comes along with the designation. She
stated:

> *[T]hat happened a few times. And usually it's, it's fine. I mean, usually it is not—*
> *it's not an issue. It's normally something that happens in the movies and everyone*
> *wants to talk about it. And because the class was mostly White and the teachers*

are mostly White; I think that that's where it emboldens people to say things. And because I could be quiet, maybe they forget that I'm in the room. And so part of me feels like if I don't say anything then no one will say anything and they will continue to have these racist views and or go on to counsel people of color and they'll have these biases. But I also feel like, you know, I'm not a professor I'm a colleague or a fellow student, I'm in your cohort and it's not my responsibility to have to educate you about these things.

Ava explained that she felt empowered, and also felt unqualified: "*I just feel like I can't necessarily give the most accurate depiction of an African-American woman just because I feel like there are so many different types of African-Americans….I guess I have mixed feelings*".

Experiencing microaggressions from White professors. Microaggressions are subtle racial insults that occur in daily interactions between Whites and Blacks and tend to have crucial, long-term, negative effects of students' intellectual capabilities and overall sense of self (Allen et al., 2013; Harper et al., 2018). Although all participants recounted mostly positive experiences with White professors, four participants mentioned experiencing microaggressions against them from White professors. Noting full awareness of the microaggressions, the participants seemingly excused the behavior of the aggressors. Kara shared her experience of microaggressions from her professor:

I had a class last year in which my professor always got me and the only other Black girl in the class mixed up and would call us each other's names every class and would make comments about our hair and stuff like that. So it was never

anything that's… ill-intentioned. But I mean sometimes there are

microaggressions.

The perceived microaggressions are subtle and may not be recognized by others, but are felt by and are significant to the participants. Ava stated:

I had an issue with a professor last semester and I think that—I wouldn't say she

was racist, per se, or that it was very obvious, but I remember the first day of

class she spoke about children in the prison system and how it was very sad, and

how she felt compassion for them. We had a break for class, in the middle of

class, and she pulled me aside. It was my first time meeting her—I didn't know

her at all—and she told me—She pointed out that I looked sad during her little

lecture and I was like, 'Of course I'm sad. It is a very sensitive topic.' And she

asked me why I was sad. And I told her that, 'Children acting out is extremely

sad.' And I told her that, 'my sister is in law school and my dad worked in the

prison system when he was in college at [University]'; and I think she was

expecting for me to say that my parents were in prison; and that was the story she

was speaking about—children that were acting out because of their parents being

in prison. So, I think she was expecting me to say I shared that same experience,

which in my case was racial profiling because a lot of African-Americans do

share that reality, that their parents are in prison or in jail for some reason. And I

just found it interesting that she singled me out. I was the only African-American

in the class of seven people. And, you know, I do realize that I wasn't the only

person that looked sad in my class. So, why me? So it was very interesting, very

interesting.

The participants were familiar with being in predominately White environments and had a heightened awareness in these settings. Jasmine explained a situation where Black students sitting with other Black students or other students of color was not widely accepted by the professor in a predominantly White academic setting:

> *I wasn't surprised, because that's usually how it works. Like if you just think about high school, you think about college, you know, like when you first come in undergrad and then your classes are kind of smaller you know like the 30-people classes. And it's like, 'Okay, you know, like… that's a problem right there.'* [referring to Black students sitting together] *And I'm just like… I don't remember specifically what class that was, but that's happened on several occasions. Even if I'm not a part of that group, because I don't know those people like that, it's still like, 'Whatever group that is y'all need to split up' or 'You sit over here, and you sit over there' or 'We're going to have assigned seats and you are going to sit right where you are today.' Like, okay, first of all we're in college. So, that's how I know that—It's like you can tell. It's those little microaggressions. You can tell with certain professors.*

Perceived biases from White peers. Six participants openly recognized biases held by their White peers regarding the Black race. These participants stated the biases that were either blatantly expressed or interpreted through their interactions with White peers. Danielle stated biases she perceived from her interactions with White peers: "*I feel like those of other races think that they have their bias that Black people are not smart*". In reference to an interaction and conversation with a White peer, Natalie stated: "[S]*he*

immediately saw me as a threat and was intimidated by me—for what reason I don't

know". Ava reflected and said:

> *I think their* [White peers] *depiction of us obviously, they are seeing us* [Black
>
> students] *in an educational setting and we're smart, and we're going to contribute,*
>
> *and I don't think that's their normal viewpoint of African-Americans. I wouldn't*
>
> *say they see us as being locked up or in jail or as criminals, but I think that it's*
>
> *very natural for them to see us as athletes, and to see us as maybe drug dealers*
>
> *sometimes, and to see us as just trying to get out… So, I think the people in our*
>
> *program probably see or hear certain stereotypes and may place that on us when*
>
> *we walk in a classroom, for sure.*

Censorship. Censorship denotes verbal suppression of ideas, thoughts, and

opinions in the classroom setting of the participants and their peers. Renee stated that

censorship included: "*Trying to decide when to hold my tongue and when to address*

things". Seven participants stated actual experiences of censorship for themselves and

their peers.

Prior to class, Natalie included being censored in order to prepare for classes: "*I*

just had to realize like I had to get censored before I went to class". Once in class,

participants felt that they may not be in a space to speak openly and freely. Renee

expressed that she censors herself in class: "[W]*ithin the classroom, I really don't say*

much".

In regards to addressing race-related challenges, Renee stated: "*I think the end*

result lately has been positive outside of the classroom, but I think within the classroom I

really don't say much… when things are smaller and hidden under the surface, I don't

really say anything in class. Actually, I just go home upset (laughs)". Based on historical context, the need and use of censorship was necessary for survival. Now, we see several participants using censorship in their everyday lives. Natalie recounted her experience with censorship:

> *But she was like '[Natalie], sometimes people are intimidated by your confidence.' And I was like 'How?'. To me that's a personal problem. But it took a long time for me to be able to be confident and not be insecure with my confidence and my intelligence. I used to be intimidated about it. I used to not really talk much about it. I used not talk about anything. I would be quiet, be withdrawn, because when you get attacked about it so much, it's just like, 'Fine, I just won't say anything.' So, I go in meetings and like, '[Natalie], why don't you say anything?' Because anytime I say something it's a problem, someone gets offended. You know, so, I'm not going to say anything.*

Kara stated: "*I just didn't feel like there was space for me to have those conversations without there potentially being some conflict with the others or with the professor*". Ava concurred and stated: "*I have to be careful with my words*". Upon deciding to say something, Natalie stated: "*I'm going to respond, but I'm going to be very careful about how I say what I say*".

 Regarding censorship of non-Black peers, Danielle shared an example of actual censorship from her peers during a class activity:

> *We did an exercise where the professor called out different cultural groups and anonymously everybody wrote what came to their head when they heard that group called out and after the exercise we all shared. We all exchanged papers so*

you wouldn't know whose was whose. When we got to those cultural groups, you said what it was that person wrote down—what they automatically thought when that cultural group name came up. So, when African-Americans came up, there were a few people in the class that ...there were a few people in the class that actually put on their paper that they did not want to answer so there would not be any controversy and that they wouldn't want to hurt anybody's feelings. And that is the ONLY (emphasized) cultural group that somebody put that on there.

Educating others. Noted across all participants' responses was the notion to educate non-Black individuals. Being the only Black person in the class setting, each participant felt a sense of responsibility to educate others in the class, peers and professors alike, about Black culture. Based on their personal experiences and prolonged interaction in predominately White environments, the participants' responses indicated feeling responsible for educating others and feeling burden by the unwelcomed responsibility.

Responsibility. Participants felt forced to educate non-Black people about being Black and the Black culture, despite not feeling qualified to do so. Nikki stated:

One of the topics that we talked about was [Colin Kaepernick] *kneeling at the anthem...I don't know if it had to do with me being Black, but I just knew a lot about the topic and so I kind of educated a lot of people about, you know, sort of the origins of how that started and the reasons behind it.*

Ava stated:

[W]*e were discussing the [Author's] book and it brought up how to counsel different types of races of people. So you have Latinos, you have Asians, you have*

White people, and you have Blacks. I remember this verbatim, it said in the book

that, 'African-Americans are high-key, animated, and can get heated, and there

was a certain way to counsel them.' And I read that in the book, and… it

infuriated me—that we would actually be teaching this to other people. So, I

brought it up in class, well, I brought it up to her [professor] *during the break.*

And I showed her the book and of course she couldn't recall it… She assigned this

reading to us but can't recall it. And she was like well, 'Would you mind bringing

it up to the class?' and I was like, 'Of course I would not mind; I would love to'…

I read it out loud and I told the class that I don't relate to this experience and I

don't necessarily agree with it. I feel like you may know some people that are this

way.

Burden. Participants expressed feeling responsible for educating others in the

academic setting can a burden. Participants expressed the toll of this unwelcomed task

and wanted to relinquish this responsibility. Kara stated:

I didn't feel like it should have been my responsibility to educate them and usually

it's, it's fine. I mean, usually it is not—it's not an issue. It's normally something

that happens in the movies and everyone wants to talk about it. But I also feel like,

you know, I'm not a professor, I'm a colleague of a fellow student, I'm in your

cohort and it's not my responsibility to have to educate you about these things.

Renee stated:

I'm in a position that I don't feel I'm obligated to be in or I should feel be

obligated to be. And yet I am, simply because I am Black. And simply because of

the way I was born, I have to go this extra mile to educate people on my life, and

it's not the reverse in my class. I'm surrounded by classmates who do not have the

burden of trying to educate me on what it means to be White.

Theme 4: The Black Unicorn syndrome

Each participant expressed feelings toward experiences being the only Black

person, or one of few Black students, in their classes that were qualitatively different

from their experiences being the Black representative. Some participants also made an

addendum, stating a unique position regarding being the only Black woman representing

the entire race in the classroom. Participants reported (a) feeling pressure to prove self,

(b) fighting against negative stereotypes, (c) feeling isolated, (d) feeling uncomfortable,

and (e) lacking knowledge of support.

Feeling pressure to prove self. All participants expressed feeling pressure

regarding being the only Black students, or one of few, in their courses. In regard to

being the only Black student, the participants expressed feeling like they had to prove

themselves. Danielle stated:

> [B]*eing the only African-American and going to these predominantly White*
>
> *schools has taught me that I can't lose my footing, like, I have to stay focused on*
>
> *what it is that I want to do… I feel that pressure. And the fact that I am doing—*
>
> *will be practicing counseling skills; it's kind of like I know in the back of my head-*
>
> *I'm thinking, 'What are they thinking, you know, if I mess up?' and I'm also kind*
>
> *of thinking, 'I want to prove them wrong'. I'm going to be the best counselor*
>
> *ever, but I don't want those type of distractions.*

Fight against negative stereotypes. All participants felt the need to constantly

portray themselves in a positive light. This was motivation to contradict common

stereotypes about Black students and Black women. Participants noted withholding opposing remarks to avoid being labeled with negative stereotypes common to the unique intersection of their ethnicity and gender. Renee reflected on navigating situations with White peers: "…*generally just trying to navigate certain social situations with my peers. When I'm faced with a situation where I don't know if I should address something or not because of the angry black woman stereotype*".

When asked to explain what that stereotype means for her, Renee stated:

> *It is an assumption that when a Black woman expresses a negative feeling, it's because she's angry and validates the idea that Black women always have something to be angry about. And for me, it's something that I deal with a lot because I'm a very expressive person; I really emotionally aware person; and when I see something that does not sit right with me whether someone is attacking me or attacking another person, I feel like I need to say something; but if I do then it might be invalidated by that stereotype that I'm just saying something because I'm angry and I'm bitter; and not because something wrong it happening.*

Danielle stated:

> *I don't give off a vibe that I would be upset. I was very vocal in the class about situations- and yeah I thought that was pretty unfair and automatically it made me think—Ok, so, they do think that we are all these negatives things that maybe the media portrays… and it also made me feel like they don't talk to other Black people... I'm trying to destroy every bias that you have about me* [and] *about my people; and because I'm thinking to myself like especially when that person put on their paper that their bias that Black people are not intelligent and all we do…*

we're athletes and we're entertainers like I wanted to tell them so bad, "do you

know I have a 4.0" (laughs).

Feeling isolated. All participants reported feelings of isolation and loneliness. Some participants reported an increased sense of isolation at the graduate level, compared to their undergraduate experience, because of the lack of representation in their graduate classes. Renee stated: "*As for as being a Black* [graduate] *student, however, I didn't feel so isolated as an undergrad*". Reflecting on her experiences in graduate school, Renee expressed isolation: "*I feel surprisingly like an outsider. I thought there were going to be more Black people honestly*". In reference to being in predominately White environments for an extended amount of time, Nikki stated; "*I think sometimes it does feel a little bit lonely when you know you're the only person there*". Natalie stated: "*I have always been in that situation. So, you do feel isolated*".

Feeling uncomfortable. All participants noted feeling uncomfortable being the only Black person in the classroom setting. In regard to discussing cultural differences in the classroom setting, Kara stated feeling uncomfortable and being compelled to conduct her own cultural research outside of the classroom:

> *I didn't feel comfortable processing that within the classes… [I]t just would have been nicer if I felt comfortable bringing those questions up within my classes. Because in a lot of my classes, I would be either the only Black person or one of three Black people in class of 10, or12, or 15; and I just didn't feel like there was space for me to have those conversations without there potentially being some conflict with the others or with the professor.*

Danielle stated constantly feeling uncomfortable, and constantly being in this uncomfortable position:

> [B]*eing the only African-American and going to these predominantly White schools has taught me that I can't lose my footing, like, I have to stay focused on what it is that I want to do; I can't get comfortable; I can't let my guard down.*

Jasmine stated:

> *Whenever I hear about the experiences of my White colleagues and everything, I'm just, like, you know… I feel kind of out of place… Whenever I say out of place I mean, like I said there's not many people that look like me, or you know like have the same background as me in the space that I was in. And so, it kind of was intimidating for me when I walked into the classroom and majority, 80% White females in there.*

Lacking knowledge of support. When asked about social resources on campus, seven of the eight participants were unaware of any. The participant that was aware of social support was not involved in the identified programs. Renee stated: "*I have no idea. I don't know if there are any. I wouldn't be surprise if there were, but I just have seen anything*". Kara stated: "*I don't know of any clubs or things like that...that can help me to process outside of classes… I don't know of any organized resources*". Danielle stated: "*I haven't really gotten myself involved like that to know if there is anything to support me*". Evette noted: "*I can honestly say I'm not sure. I feel like I'm not really all that aware of all the things that are available*".

Nikki concurred noting no awareness of organized social support systems but created a social support of her own. "*I've made social connections. I don't know if there's*

any through the department, like any social resources department, but I think I've sort of

forged those social connections on my own with my peers". Natalie also noted not being

aware of social supports at the university, but stated learning more about the counseling

field was helpful for her:

> *I don't even know, because I don't even pay attention to those e-mails and stuff. I*
>
> *perceive some of the workshops they have as social events. I love the workshops. I*
>
> *came for the human trafficking workshop. I think it was last year, that was*
>
> *amazing. To me, that's social because I'm just hungry to learn all that I can learn*
>
> *about every aspect of counseling and, you know, how to be a better counselor.*

Theme 5: Belonging within the Black community

All participants reported feelings of belonging when around Black individuals.

Based on the participants' responses, there is an unmistakable connection between Black

individuals, peers and professors alike, in the academic environment—possibly because

of the sparse amount of representation. Intermingling with other Black individuals

throughout the graduate program has been a unanimous and resoundingly positive

experience. This positive, validating experience negates previous subthemes identified in

being the only Black person in class, and includes subthemes of (a) belonging with Black

peers, (b) belonging with Black professors, (c) acknowledging differences amongst the

African Diaspora and (d) *It's bigger than me* phenomena.

Belonging with Black peers. All participants reported feeling a sense of

belonging with Black peers. Although the interactions are limited, participants

thoroughly enjoy those moments of connection with Black peers. Subthemes include

validation and reassurance.

Validation. When discussing being around her Black peers, Danielle exhibited a large smile, a joyful giggle and stated:

> *I describe that as liberating, comfortable, and also open too. I love being Black. I love being an African-American. I love my people. Not to say I don't love other people either, but I just have a connection there… that is undeniable.*

When asked about her experience being around other Black students, Evette stated: "*I was like, 'Oh my God; I feel so accepted right now!' Just felt, like, very, very accepted. So I would say that it's very healing, and warm, and encouraging, and it's honestly even confidence boosting*".

Nikki noted a positive experience with Black peers, opposing previous experiences such as isolation and feeling uncomfortable with White peers:

> [I]*t seems like a lot of us identify with each other… I think that's a really positive experience…especially if there are any conversations about Blackness that do come up, that there's sort of another person there to give a different perspective so that there's not just like this one perspective; and this is just kind of like the defining feature of Blackness coming from my perspective, but somebody or that other person might have a different experience. But it also can be that person can sort of be a sounding board to agree and say, 'Yeah, you know, I've had that same experience' or 'Yeah, this is how it is for me' or just kind of agree with what you're saying.*

Although interactions with Black peers are limited, they are identified as being impactful and significant. Ava stated:

I haven't had that many interactions with my Black peers; just because in my

classes I've only had maybe one or two Black peers, and it's not like we became

best friends. But, you know, whenever we did talk or speak about things we had

had a lot of topics in common.

Kara stated:

[M]*y cohort just does not include a lot of Black people. When I have interacted*

with Black peers, it's usually been positive. I remember one of my first classes that

I took in the program, I was in it with two other Black peers and we just sort of

naturally gravitated to each other and did all of our group projects together. We

would sit together and talk about our week together and it was great. But after

that class, I never saw them again… So, yeah it's been kind of unfortunate that I

haven't had a lot of classes with Black peers, but when I do, I feel a sense of

kinship usually.

Renee shared being emotional regarding feeling racially and culturally

represented in the program—specifically learning about the current research study.

Renee stated:

I'm just really glad that you are doing this. I was sitting in class and we were

talking about how to start a [research] *study, like, where do you start and what*

does it look like. Your questions were an example that we were looking at and I

was sitting there in this class, it's just me, I'm like the only Black person in the

class—and I was sitting there looking at it; and I like started to tear up and I was

like, 'Aww, this is so dramatic.' I'm like, 'It's not real [Renee], it's probably just

an example [the professor] probably got on Google.' And [the professor] was

like, 'Well, yeah, this is actually a real study.' And, I was like, 'Oh my God!

Wow, this is so great!' It's SO validating; just knowing the study exists in the first

place, and I'm am such an emotional person. Okay, it's validating and it is eye-

opening and I expect that more people will look into the stuff that you are looking

into because of this study. So, thank you for doing it.

Reassurance. Participants gained reassurance with Black peers. Nikki stated:

So it definitely is comforting; I would say just to see that there's another person

there that looks like you and even with the varying types of Blackness, Black

culture, and Black people that there are the world, I still feel like there's sort of a

universal experience that Black people kind of have some elements of a universal

culture that Black people have. And so, I think just sort of that sense of community

and comfort that comes with seeing someone else that looks like you and knowing

that they might be experiencing some of the things that you might be experiencing.

They might be thinking the same thing, you know, when they walk in a room and

they see you in the room so there might be that sense comfort for them as well.

Renee stated:

It's relieving. I feel such a relief when I'm talking to other Black people; because I

feel that even if we are not talking about that feeling of being an outsider or

isolated, that comfort is still there—that there's someone else that I know

understands the way I feel in the class too… Yeah, it's not that added component of,

'Well, I've got to educate so and so on this and that', when it's just me and another

Black student… [R]arely do I have any kind of pressure; rarely do I feel this burden

to model a certain idea or teach a certain topic or anything; it's just me being

myself; So, that… I like.

Kara stated having more representation in class, with more Black students, was a

significant experience and yielded different feelings than a class that was not as racially

diverse. Kara stated:

Luckily for my multicultural counseling class it was a pretty good mix of Black

students and White students and other students of color. So, I didn't feel that

same weight that I did in a lot of the other classes.

Belonging with Black Professors. Four participants reported not having a Black

professor in the duration of their current graduate program. The remaining four

participants reported having only one Black professor while enrolled in this program.

Overall, with taking a course taught by a Black professor, the four participants noted

connection and comfort.

Connection. Participants noted a connection with the professor, the classroom

discussions, and presentation of materials. Participants shared experiences of being more

in tune and being able to relate more in class. Danielle stated:

[T]*hat's probably, obviously probably, the only the only professor I connected*

with on a cultural level. Like when she would explain things to the class, I knew

what she was talking about, and I would probably be the only one. I was the only

[student]*, nodding my head in agreement.*

Evette discussed her cultural experiences with her Black professor compared to potential

cultural experiences with White professors. She stated:

[T]his [Black] professor and I share a lot of the same, similar values we talk

about it- not entirely freely- but we know that those similarities are there; and so

because those similarities are there we talk about it more than we would, or than

I would with other professors.

Jasmine stated that by having a Black professor, she felt her "*experience will be more*

understood and it wouldn't be questioned as much". Jasmine further stated:

Since the Black experience is so underrepresented when it comes to PWIs, and

White professors, you know, and their understanding of the Black experience at a

PWI, it is more comfortable having a Black professor, because he can

understand. You know, if he points it out several times... like, 'this is crazy having

this many…(laughs)'. He said, 'I have such a diverse classroom' and he said

that, 'This semester is his first semester having such a diverse student base in his

classroom.' So, I was like if this is a shock for you, then that means that we're

doing something right.

   Comfort. Evette's and Jasmine's responses are unique based on their experience

being enrolled in a course with a Black professor and half of the students were Black.

Evette stated:

[W]ith my class now, half of us are Black… I feel like whenever the when the

topic of race comes up, and being a racial minority comes up, I feel very

comfortable sharing and I feel like people can relate to those experiences.

Jasmine stated:

I feel like if I write about my experience or if I write about something that

happens there's more of an understanding in that environment having a Black

professor… I've only had one class where race was really discussed and that's in

the cultural class. I can tell that… if the professor wasn't Black in that class, and

most of us weren't Black in that class, that would be a very uncomfortable class

for me.

Jasmine continued and stated:

[T]*his is the only class that I have ever just spoken about my culture and just*

being Black and stuff like that. So, he points out a lot of examples from his

childhood where it wasn't very comfortable to be African-American; and you

could see that all the faces of people who aren't Black like, 'Woah, this

happened? Oh my goodness'.

Because Jasmine's experiences of being in a classroom with a Black professor

and half of the students were Black, I asked her what she imagined her feelings would be

if there were fewer Black students or she was the only Black student, but still had a Black

professor. She stated:

I feel like if the professor was Black, and there was only one Black person or I

was the only other Black person, I would still feel more comfortable, just because,

you know, the person who is teaching us, the person who is the person in charge

of our grades, the person who is basically determining whether we stay in the

program or not, looks like me… makes me feel more comfortable.

Acknowledging differences amongst the African Diaspora. Although all

participants noted and explained existing differences amongst Black individuals within

the African Diaspora, each expressed a sense of belonging with Black individuals,

regardless of cultural differences.

Danielle stated:

> [S]*ometimes it can be different. Although we are Black, we have it in common, we still have different viewpoints on Black issues. So, it's insightful because, like I said, you didn't know that Black person thought that way. And as an example, the whole Kapernick and the kneeling situation… you would think all Black people would be on board but no.*

Nikki stated:

> *There is sort of that sense when you see another person in the room that looks like you, there is that sort of sense of kind of... community there that, 'Hey, I'm not the only one in the room'. Even if we're completely different people, there is that sort of connection there.*

Nikki went on to say:

> *So it's definitely is comforting I would say; just to see that there's another person there that looks like you and even with the varying types of Blackness, Black culture, and Black people that there are the world; I still feel like there's sort of a universal experience that Black people kind of have some elements of a universal culture that Black people have… I think there's sort of a shared experience that Black people have just in general as a relates to just sort of existing in the world. Especially, I think, being in America and in Texas, just being someone who's of color, and you know regionally or in your country.*

Despite the obvious cultural differences within the Black race, there is an underlying, undeniable sense of connection within the race for Black students in an academic setting.

***It's bigger than me* phenomena.** The expression *for the culture* was used by several participants and gleaned from others as a nod to historical triumphs and future successes of their racial heritage. All participants felt a sense of connectedness to the Black culture so much so that underlying motivation for success included contributing to the advancement of the Black culture. There is this motivation for success, not only themselves, but as a contribution to Black culture. Danielle stated: "[T]*hat's the kind of energy I have deep in my soul. That I just, I feel like—I'm doing it for the culture… to prove that we're better than what, what you think*". Natalie stated:

> [I]*t makes me feel like I need to educate more African-American people about the importance of education, about the importance of mental illness; and how their contribution can positively impact others in their own communities or other communities and can encourage and motivate other people to pursue that field or to educate the people about the importance of mental illness.*

Renee stated:

> [H]*onestly just representing… when you walk into a counseling session and you see someone who looks like you, you automatically feel a little bit safer. So, I think my being in the field makes a difference… and my thinking of the experiences that I have had and my looking for the answers so that they can stop happening. That's something that I think that I can provide.*

Theme 6: Coping

There was a theme of coping across the participants' responses. Being in a predominately White collegiate environment, yielded undesirable feelings for the participants. To protect themselves and mediate negative feelings, the participants

engaged in coping strategies—which is not uncommon for this population (Vassilliere, Holahan, & Holahan, 2016). Vassilliere et al. (2016) reported coping strategies are often categorized into two approaches: strategies used to regulate emotional distress and strategies used to confront the problem. These two approaches were recognized in the participants' responses. The subthemes presented in the theme of coping are: (a) regulating emotional distress, (b) confronting the problem/ speaking up, and (c) creating a network of social support outside the classroom.

Regulating emotional distress. There are harmful effects of racial discrimination on the mental health of Black college students (Polanco-Roman, Danies, & Anglin, 2016). Polanco-Roman et al. (2016) stated that rumination and avoidance are passive coping strategies typically used by Black college students in response to race-related stress. I noticed that through sharing their experiences, seven participants were using avoidance coping strategies. Whether knowingly or unknowingly, avoiding was beneficial for the participants' daily interactions and overall success. Namely, the participants used emotional suppression and masking.

Emotional suppression. Emotional suppression was evident in the participants' responses and recounted experiences. As noted earlier, participants did not feel as though they could express themselves and share their thoughts in the classroom setting. To continue with the graduate degree program and achieve the ultimate goal of graduation, participants reported hiding how they truly felt in alarming, painful situations. Renee stated:

> *I have to suppress them* [feelings] *so I can learn, because if I address them*
> [feelings]*; it's probably going to disrupt the class; and then it's going to go back*

to the angry Black woman thing. And then if I keep them [feelings] *to myself then I'm like ruminating on it; then I miss the lecture.*

Kara stated:

I just kind of stay respectful. You know if the professor gets my name mixed up with another Black student, I'll correct them, but kindly and just kind of move on because again I haven't had a situation in which I felt people will be offended. And so I just sort of been able to you know process it for what it is and just sort of move on about it. Again, I don't want to—if the program is so small, I really would just like to leave without having any large, traumatic interactions with anyone.

Natalie stated:

[I]*t's easy to get caught up in that moment and then that's where anxiety and depression sets in and I don't have time for that. Because I have too many things that I am destined to do. I have too many people whose lives I want to help positively impact, too many children who I want to help realize that you don't have to be a victim of circumstances—you can grow up in this way or this can happen to you; but you can still become whatever you want to be.*

Masking. Some participants used laughter as a coping mechanism. After explaining a painful situation, a participant would then giggle or laugh. When sharing a painful experience, participants would attempt to cover their pain with laughter. Either consciously or unconsciously, participants shared examples of how they masked their pain or masked their pain in their responses. When reflecting on a frustrating experience in the classroom, Renee stated: "*Things like that really stress me out (laughs)*". When

faced with the reality of the academic environment, Evette stated: "[I]*f the topic of race comes up, it's like a pressure to feel like a spokesperson. And I'm like, 'Look, I am not the spokesperson for all the Black people (laughs)*". In reflecting about her expectations for White peers cultural awareness and the reality faced, Renee stated: "*But in a helping field, where the expectation is to branch out and learn about people who are different from you, I had this expectation that people were going to do that (laughter); but they didn't (laughter)*". Similar to the other participants in a state of frustration, Danielle masks her pain and stated: "*I felt rage, like I was so upset that she said that; however, I laughed it off*".

Confronting the problem/Speaking up. Meeting the criteria for the research study, these participants have been in predominately White academic environments for their entire collegiate experience. Previously in this chapter, the theme of censorship was expressed. To combat this, five participants noted instances where they confronted the issue at hand and spoke up for themselves. Ava shared an experience and stated:

> *I think I've really found my voice this last semester. I just feel like it was a situation where I couldn't just hold my tongue and I had to do something, say something, put something on the record. So that's what I did.*

Nikki concurred and explained her racial development and growth to begin using her voice in the classroom settings,

> *I am in my racial identity development of my racial identity that I'm really proud and I'm really—something that I speak to about all the time, you know, I speak— as far as my unique perspective of being a person of color, that's not something*

that I shy away from saying in class. And I do say it frequently when we're talking

about different topics.

Danielle noted her feelings regarding speaking up:

[I]*t's intimidating yet challenging; but I stood my ground and I stand my ground*

and I continue to do that with every class because now it is kind of expected that

I'm going to be the only Black person in the class.

To express the personal difficulty she experienced with speaking up for herself and the

importance of doing so, Natalie stated:

[I]*t took a long time for me to be able to be confident and not be insecure with my*

confidence and my intelligence... So, I had to start working on myself after that,

that's when I really started working myself... I think it's all about using the

platform that you have in the right way. It's all about that; because we all have a

platform, but how we use it is instrumental in how our message is going to be

delivered. Because if you don't use your platform, it's kind of like you were there

for no reason. You are just standing on a blank platform and you're not saying

anything to the masses and you have this opportunity.

Creating a network of social support outside the classroom. Belonging is an

important component of collegiate life that Black students may be missing. Seven

participants reported often seeking support outside of the classroom setting. Black

graduate students do not always have the opportunity to be in class with other Black

students, combined with the reported lack of immediate Black academic role models, the

participants felt forced to create a network of support outside the classroom. Danielle

stated:

I've always gone to a school where there is a small percentage of Black people…
social media has allowed me to connect more with people who are like minded as
me and can understand my frustrations and who can experience, who have
experienced the same things that I've experienced.

Natalie stated:

I encourage myself; and my family definitely encourages me. I have; most of my
friends have an education and they are striving towards achieving some form of
goal. So, I try to surround myself with like-minded individuals, or people who are
going to embrace, you know, my mindset and my dreams and aspirations and help
encourage me when I get down, I call someone positive—and these are all Black
women mind you, I call people who are positive, who are leaders in the world to
me, who are leaders in our community- who I respect and love and who have my
best interests in mind.

Kara stated:

[U]sually I would process that with my friends, who are people of color. There
are some groups on online that I'm a part of that are for women of color in the
counseling field. So those are these safe spaces that I would go to process these
things, get advice for them. But it never really happened within the class. It helps
me to know that I have resources back home that can be there for me and help me
to process any, you know, racist or sexist incidents that may happen to me, either
in my classes or in my practicum.

Theme 7: Worrying about the future of the counseling profession

Participants expressed feelings of worry for the future of the counseling profession regarding (a) the lack of multicultural awareness of White peers, (b) the possibility of negative cultural experiences with clients, (c) developing their Black counselor identity, and (d) the desire for Black counseling role models.

Lack of multicultural awareness of White peers. Because this study is focused on the counseling field, the participants profusely noted the expectations they had for their fellow White peers, regarding cultural awareness and acceptance. Five participants expressed the expectations that their White peers would be culturally sensitive, and throughout the interview experienced opposing findings. This was alarming and shocking for all the participants. For example, Renee stated:

> *One of my classes, we recently talked about microaggressions and there was*
> *another Black student that was talking about an experience that she had, and the*
> *point of the story was to say that when people are faced with racial discrimination*
> *saying things like, 'Well, I tell my child not to see race and blah blah blah'…*
> *doesn't help the situation, that was the point of her story. But another student,*
> *who was White, cut her off in the middle story and tried to justify someone using*
> *racial slurs against her. Because she asked, 'Well, were they joking though?, or*
> *were they serious?'—and that was a week ago, and I am still thinking about that*
> *because we all have these goals that we want to help people and not just people of*
> *our own community, but people from different communities; and for her to be in*
> *that mindset right now, stresses me out and most of the people in the class were*
> *also ticked off by it; but they can go home and brush it off because, things like*

that aren't going to affect their personal lives or say, affect their racial community. When Black people seek counseling and they have a counselor that thinks it ok to throw racial slurs at people. Things like that really stress me out (laughs).

Kara stated:

[T]*hey* [White peers] *felt because they know people of color in their daily lives that they shouldn't have issues in empathizing with their clients who are Black or other ethnicities. And so that would often lead to some conflict because as a Black person, maybe it's because I'm a person of color, I never had an issue with the idea that, you know, in order to serve someone the best in the counseling field that* [you] *need to educate yourself about where they're coming from. And so, the fact there would be multiple times in which I would see a White student get offended by the idea of having to educate themselves about someone who is different from them, which is kind of annoying for me… I just felt there were times where I felt sort of disappointed in myself because I was in these discussions within my classes with students who, you know, clearly felt that their voice was the most important in the room because they were the majority. And so it embolded them to say things that weren't sensitive and weren't thoughtful about the experiences of people of color in this country. And so I think a little bit of that has made me a little concerned about the type of people who have decided to become counselors, because when I'm in the classes with them and I'm hearing them… I really think it makes me wonder how empathetic they truly are…* [I]*if they feel safe enough to say these things with their peers, but in front of their clients they may be saying*

something else. So that's something I've been contemplating a lot… I don't know, I guess I feel that as a counselor one of the most important things is to be willing to be open minded and to be educated about things that you don't know… So I just hope that those [White] *students have the capacity to do that for their clients. So, that's the most concern of mine.*

Possibility of negative cultural experiences with clients. According to Feagin (2014), this country was founded on racism and continues to impact society to date. As previously presented in the first and third theme, the participants have expressed some less than desirable race-related challenges with White individuals, peers and professors included. As these participants were preparing to become counselors, qualified to serve individuals of all races, four expressed some worry regarding being accepted by White clients. Nikki stated:

[A]*s somebody that's Black, you might have certain experiences where you know you might experience where a client uses a racial slur towards you…I definitely do have times where I think about, you know, what do I do if I have a client that maybe has certain prejudices—'How do you navigate that?'—especially if it's something specific to being—to Black people like, how would I handle that if I'm in that environment.*

Kara stated:

[W]*hen preparing to do my practicum and I knew that I would have to do it in a mostly White and conservative neighborhood. So, I had questions about you know what should I do if I have a client who says something racist or sexist or… how do I bridge that gap and ensure that, you know, I'm being fair to the client, but*

that also I'm not putting myself in an environment in which it will be hard for me

to be the best counselor that I could be for the client. And so those are definitely

some concerns for me.

    Developing Black counselor identity. Although the participants mostly noted positive experiences with all professors, five of the participants expressed concerns regarding the mystery regarding specifically being a Black counselor. Previous themes presented indicated that participants experienced a cultural disconnect with their interactions with non-Black professors and did not feel comfortable discussing cultural issues in class. The emerged theme indicated the participants' struggle to develop their Black counselor identity. Kara stated:

[W]hen I first started there and I realized there weren't any Black professors- that

was definitely surprising to me. And so I bonded with one professor who was a

woman of color and so that was helpful but I never, I never really felt comfortable

asking my professors about the issues we encountered as a Black woman in the

therapy session just because I didn't want to offend them or I wasn't sure they

would really understand.

Nikki stated:

I think that's something as far as being specifically identifying myself as a Black

therapist. I don't know if there's anything specific that I received in my training

that has prepared me for that. Right now it's just learning through, you know, the

basics of being a therapist or being a counselor, but I think that it would be

beneficial for me to sort of have those conversations or have those, I don't know,

necessary trainings or I guess just conversations about what it means to be a

counselor of color and how that's different from, you know, an experience that

someone who is Caucasian or somebody that's White would have. I think that

would be beneficial for me to have to prepare me for that in the future. But I think

that there is something unique to being a person of color and this sort of

profession that I think needs a certain amount of attention. That, yeah, that just

needs a certain amount of attention that it's not getting as much of.

Renee made mention of confusion regarding her development as a Black counselor:

I guess the problems that I face—some of the negative experiences have all the

questions marks in my head like, 'Why is this this way?' or 'How can this be

better?'. And I think that if I can dig into those questions and find answers for

them, then I can do something about it. And I can also give those answers to

people so they can do something about it to, because I don't want there to be

question marks by the time I'm a counselor.

Desire for Black counseling role models. Seven participants noted desires for Black counseling role models. As presented in the fifth theme, connection and representation is ideal for the participants. Having a representative role model to aspire to be is a longing for the participants. Kara stated: "*I had a mentor who's a* [non-Black] *woman of color in the program, and even with her it's just sort of different*". Although four participants have not experienced having a Black professor at the graduate level, the remaining four participants noted having only one Black professor. Renee, who has not had a Black professor, was overjoyed at the idea that a Black professor was working in the department. Renee stated:

*I didn't know we had Black faculty until like 2 weeks ago. One professor, and I
can't even remember this professor's name. I don't even think I saw that person
at the orientation, but now that I know she exists… I NEED (emphasis) to meet
her. And, I think that would give me such a level of comfort and support; that I
don't think I can get from anywhere else in the program.*

Nikki stated:

*I would definitely love to have a person of color or Black faculty somewhere to
relate to. I think, just* [having] *that sense of community; and I also feel like there
are certain things that I could get from that professor—as far as their experience,
their specific experience of being a Black counselor. I always wonder about that.
Especially, kind of, through research and things like that… So, I would like to
have that so I can ask them what has been their experience in the field when it
comes to being specifically a Black person working in mental health and working
as a mental health professional.*

Nikki further elaborated:

*I think that there would be a different level connection that I would be able to
have with that professor. And a different level of understanding that I could get
about what being a Black therapist is going to be for me. Because, you know, I
can get a general understanding of what being a counselor, being a therapist is
going to be. But being that I am Black, there is a certain experience that I'm going
to have that it's not just a general experience for therapist. So I think just having
that perspective would be really helpful, really insightful…I think that it would—*

as far as impacting as an aspiring counselor or therapist, I think it would be nice

to sort of explore what that means for me as a therapist.

Summary

In chapter IV, the data was analyzed according to the data analysis steps detailed in Chapter III. I utilized Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kaam's (1959, 1966) method of analysis of qualitative, phenomenological data. The qualitative interviews with eight Black graduate students enrolled in a predominately White counseling program were conducted utilizing a semi-structured interview protocol. The protocol allowed for me to obtain the data necessary to conduct an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon. Participants' voices were included by analyzing verbatim transcription of their experiences with the phenomenon. As a result of the data analysis process, seven of themes were reported. The themes of my research attempted to capture the essence of what it is to be a Black graduate student enrolled in a predominately White counseling program. The participants' responses generated the themes of (a) racism, (b) multiculturalism, (c) race-related classroom challenges, (d) the Black unicorn syndrome, (e) belonging within the Black community, (f) coping, and (g) worrying about the future of the counseling profession.

In Chapter V, a summary of the study, discussion of the findings, implications, limitations, recommendations, and conclusion are included.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

In this transcendental phenomenological study, I explored the lived experiences of Black master-level graduate students enrolled in predominately White counseling programs in Texas. The following is a summary of the study, discussion of findings, implications, limitations, recommendations for future research, and conclusion. An expanded discussion of the participants' experiences and findings are included to promote awareness and a greater understanding concerning Black graduate students enrolled in predominately White counseling programs.

Summary of the Study

Obtaining a college degree is an academic milestone (Melius, 2011). Furthermore, earning a graduate degree is monumental academic accomplishment. Historically, the oppression of Black Americans compromised their basic rights, including privileges to education—which were banned, withheld, and underfunded (Diouf, 2001; Somervill, 2010; Wilson & Ferris, 1989). In 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation was signed and in 1865, enslaved Black Americans were freed (Ewing et al., 1996). Upon gaining freedom, some previously enslaved Black Americans pursued higher education (Beeks & Graves, 2017; USDE, 1991). However, immediately following the end of slavery, segregation was enforced via the Jim Crow Laws (Bayor, 2003; Urofsky, 2012; Wilson & Ferris, 1989), legally separating Black Americans from White Americans. Furthermore, segregation within the education setting generated negative emotional and psychological effects on Black students (Foley, 2010; Somervill, 2010). In May 1954, the Supreme Court's notable ruling in *Brown v. Board of*

Education unanimously terminated segregation (Cashin, 2004), and Black students were legally allowed to enroll and attend formerly White-only institutions.

The former White-only institutions, noted in this research study as Traditionally White Institutions, are microcosms of the racially and socially oppressive nature of society (Ewing et al., 1996; Feagin, 2016). Traditionally White Institutions (TWIs) typically lack a racially inclusive educational environment (Greer, 2008; Tuitt, 2012), and Black students at TWIs have reported higher levels of race-related stressors and depressing campus climates (Cokley, McClain, Enciso, & Martinez, 2013; McClain et al., 2016). Hence, Blacks students' degree completion rates have been lower than their White peers (Lee & Barnes, 2015; Lige, Peteet, & Brown, 2017). And while recently Black graduate student enrollment has remained steady (JBHE, 2018b), retention rates are lower than those of Black undergraduate students (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2008).

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of Black master-level graduate students enrolled in predominately White counseling programs. I compiled research literature, presented in Chapter II, to describe historical underpinnings of segregation and desegregation, specifically within the American education system. The research question addressed was: *What are the lived experiences of Black master-level graduate students enrolled in predominately White counseling programs in Texas?* I conducted eight individual, semi-structured interviews. The eight participants were all female between the ages of 21 to 38. A coding team, including myself and two doctoral students, utilized Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kaam's (1959, 1966) method of data analysis of verbatim transcript of each participant's interview. From the participants' responses during the interview, seven themes emerged.

The seven themes depicted the essence of the participants' experiences in their academic environment.

Discussion of Findings

With limited research regarding this phenomenon, my goal was to address a gap in literature on this topic. In one such study, Haskins et al. (2013) found that Black graduate counseling students enrolled in Predominately White Institutions experienced: "(a) isolation as a Black student, (b) tokenization as a Black student, (c) lack of inclusion of Black counselor perspectives within course work, (d) differences between support received by faculty of color and support received by White faculty, and (e) access to support from people of color and White peers" (p. 168). However, unlike the Haskins et al. (2013) study, the themes from the present study emerged from individual interviews rather than focus group interviews, which might have allowed for more depth of participant expression when exploring their experience of the research topic.

The current study utilized semi-structured individual interviews, and the themes that emerged are listed below and addressed the research question: *What are the lived experiences of Black, master-level graduate students enrolled in predominately White counseling programs in Texas?* Seven major themes from the current study emerged which included: (a) racism, (b) multiculturalism, (c) race-related classroom challenges, (d) the Black Unicorn syndrome, (e) belonging within the Black community, (f) coping, and (g) worrying about the future of the counseling profession. Subthemes emerged within each major theme.

Discussion of Theme 1: Racism

Racism is an oppressive system in America, operating to the advantage of White Americans and reinforcing inequity amongst racial groups (Garcia & Sharif, 2015; Tatum, 1997). *Racism* emerged as a theme, which aligned with the historical impact of racial issues and segregation in America. This theme incorporated two subthemes, the first being *influential personal trauma*. The subtheme *influential personal trauma* compiled participants' personal experiences with racism and the relevance to current experiences in their graduate program. For example, Danielle shared an impactful story depicting how participants carry personal experiences, as well as historical traumas. Danielle's personal experience depicts racial injustices that have plagued this country throughout its history (Garcia & Sharif, 2015), further demonstrating that for participants in this study the psychological and intergenerational trauma was vast and relevant to participants' daily lives, while also encompassing the unending effects of slavery, racism, and discrimination (Marbley, 2011).

Prolonged exposure in predominately White academic environments seemingly contributed to the participants' ability to navigate within this uncomfortable setting, and supported the emergence of the second subtheme *normalizing White spaces*. Each participant was enrolled in a TWI for the duration of her undergraduate and graduate career, and was conditioned to conform within the uncomfortable academic environment. As an example, when faced with less than desirable situations and feeling out of place, Jasmine stated "*it's not uncommon*". This subtheme is consistent with the research presented by Haynes (2019), conforming that some racially biased predominately White academic spaces have been normalized by Black students.

Discussion of Theme 2: Multiculturalism

Culturally competent counseling is essential to the therapeutic relationship between the counselor and the client. Counselors who are aware of their cultural biases are more adept in understanding a client's cultural background (Zeleke, Karayiğit, & Myers‑Brooks, 2018). Moreover, previous researchers suggested that Black graduate students tend to have higher levels of multicultural self-awareness (Haskins et al., 2013).

Multiculturalism included the participants' emphasis on the importance of cultural knowledge and awareness, in that they expressed certain expectations for multicultural competence for themselves and their peers. These expectations were rooted in the decision of their educational and career choice to pursue counseling. Because TWIs were not created with Black students' success in mind (Brown & Dancy, 2010; Eakins & Eakins, 2017; Hults, 1999), these institutions consistently fail to foster diversity on campus (Eakins & Eakins, 2017). The policies of the institution are enforced by systemic societal ideals, which may affect the various colleges and departments on campus (Eakins & Eakins, 2017)—including counseling.

The first subtheme within the *multiculturalism* theme was *I am culturally competent*. Participants emphasized awareness of their culture and cultures different from theirs. Each participant noted a high level of cultural awareness, which included being sensitive to differences amongst themselves and others. The participants' levels of possessed cultural awareness were viewed not only as a strength, but as a necessity. Because enslaved Africans were banned from formal education, they developed keen sense of survival (Diouf, 2001), which included cultural awareness. While the overt oppression of Blacks has seemingly improved, the mentality of the Black American

mindset is still influenced by their ancestors, which was "passed down from generation to generation" (Eakins & Eakins, 2017, p. 52).

The second subtheme was *lack of cultural competency of my White peers*. This subtheme emerged from the participants' perceptions of their White peers' lack of cultural competency. Participants, such as Danielle, Kara and Ava, conveyed notable stories of how their White peers were not aware of cultural differences and emulated a preferential approach toward White, dominate culture. Eakins and Eakins (2017) asserted that oppressive systematic matters that are embedded in society and influence institutions must be deliberately contested. Based on traditions and historical underpinnings, intolerance and White privilege are embedded in the American culture (Eakins & Eakins, 2017).   Similarly, the participants stated how surprising this revelation was and how their expectations for their peers' heightened cultural awareness was not met.

Participants included in this research study had been enrolled in TWIs for their collegiate career, and shared experiences contributing to a third subtheme, *cultural disconnect with White peers*. Lack of community within a campus culture is a major experience as a Black graduate student (Haskins et al., 2013), and while participants described interactions with White peers, they expressed not being able to connect with them on a cultural level. The participants felt as though they could not fully be themselves around their White peers, and typically only found connections with them on an academic level as opposed to a more personal or cultural level.

Additionally, participants noted their appreciation for their non-Black professors' teaching the basic counseling skills necessary for career success. Though their

appreciation was sincere, participants communicated a void in their educational preparation, thus yielding the fourth subtheme *cultural disconnect with non-Black professors*. Guiffrida and Douthit (2010) stated that "Black students are often unable to form strong relationships with White faculty at PWIs" (p. 312). Within the realm of race and culture, the participants indicated that they felt a lack of connection between themselves and their non-Black professors. The general consensus is that participants felt that non-Black professors could not understand their racial viewpoints or position in society or academia. Haskins et al. (2013) reported that Black students at TWIs typically have less interaction with faculty members compared to Black students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Consistent with Haskins et al. (2013) research findings, the participants felt less connected and therefore forged less authentic relationships with non-Black professors.

Discussion of Theme 3: Race-related classroom challenges

To perform well in graduate school, Black students must manage academic ability and cultural biases (Williams, Brewley, Reed, White, & Davis-Haley, 2005). The participants made confident statements toward the racial challenges that they experienced in the academic setting. Participants explained the experiences as completely unrelated to academia, but consistently presented as race-related challenges nonetheless.

The *race-related classroom challenges* theme encompassed five subthemes. The first subtheme was *being the Black representative*, encompassing participants feeling as though they represented the entire Black culture in their classroom setting. Although some participants embraced this role, all participants felt as though non-Black professors and peers forced this position on them. Nonetheless, participants found themselves

consistently being in the stressful position of representing the Black race. The findings

are consistent with previous research (Haynes, 2019; Hults, 1999; Shahid, et al., 2018)

Additionally, participants described *experiencing microaggressions from White*

professors, the second subtheme. Haskins et al. (2013) stated "Black students experience

racial microaggressions by White faculty and cultural insensitivity" (p. 164), supporting

the findings of the current research study. The participants were aware of the

microaggressions and seemingly brushed them off in the moment, but were able to recall

the incidents vividly.

Additionally, participants discussed experiencing *perceived biases from their*

White peers, a third subtheme. According to Walkington (2017), Black women are

negatively impacted by negative racial stereotypes "in ways gender discrimination alone

cannot explain" (p. 52). Thus, the experiences of Black women are exclusively

significant in aspects of racism and sexism (Jerald et al., 2017). Jerald et al. (2017)

asserted that in addition to unique discriminatory consequences related to the intersection

of being a Black woman, "Black women's awareness of others holding negative

stereotypes of their group has detrimental consequences for their health and well-being"

(p. 487). Consistent with the literature, interactions with White peers resulted in the

participants being faced with the negative biases that their peers held.

The fourth subtheme, *censorship*, emerged from participants' experiences being

in a constant state of awareness and vigilance in the classroom setting, and lead students

to be cautious of when to and what to share when they were in the presence of non-Black

professors and peers. They often contained their reactions and reflections, refraining

from sharing their opinions. Many times, participants felt they would be misunderstood,

misjudged, or their reaction would be taken out of context. To avoid feeling this way, participants would opt to not communicate their opinions or speak in a manner that would appease non-Black listeners—thus censoring themselves in the classroom setting. Although previous research addresses Black students feeling invisible on predominantly White campuses (Shahid et al, 2018; Shen-Miller, Forrest, & Burt, 2012), no previous research addresses this subtheme.

The fifth subtheme, *educating others*, included participants' unanimous challenge of educating other non-Black peers and professors. When topics related to the Black culture, news-related incidents, or ethnic terms were introduced in the classroom, the participants felt responsible for, and in some instances, burdened by educating their peers and professors. Participants felt that their personal experiences of being Black were not identical to others and may not represent the entire race's experiences. Hults (1999) reported similar findings, reporting that, "instructors seemed to expect them [Black students] to know everything there is to know about African Americans" (p. 352).

Discussion of Theme 4: The Black Unicorn syndrome

In the participants' responses, there was an overtone of being the only Black person in the academic environment, thus yielding *the Black Unicorn syndrome* theme. Participants communicated a noticeable decrease of Black peers from undergraduate to graduate school, which is supported by a smaller number of Black students pursuing graduate degrees compared to undergraduate degrees (Haskins et al., 2013; JBHE, 2018b).

The first emerged subtheme in *the Black Unicorn syndrome* was *feeling pressure to prove self*. Being the only Black student in their academic setting, participants felt

pressured to succeed and excel. As suggested by Haynes (2019), their academic environment pressured participants to constantly consider their unique position fueling an unfair academic standard and their desire to prove they deserved to be there.

In the second subtheme, participants found themselves *fighting against negative stereotypes*. Participants felt pressured to constantly behave and present themselves in a manner that would not affirm negative stereotypes against their race and/or gender, which is supported by Williams et al. (2005), who stated that Black students attending predominately White institutions "must maintain yielding persistence in achieving the goals, no matter the controversy" (p. 187).

The third subtheme, *feeling isolated*, addressed participants' isolation within the academic environment. When comparing their undergraduate and graduate experiences, the participants specifically noted the lack of Black students in their graduate program, which was also reported in Haskins et al. (2013) study, which found that Black graduate students tend to convey feelings of loneliness and isolation being in predominately White academic environments.

Being the only Black persons in their classrooms, participants reported *feeling uncomfortable*, the fourth subtheme. Additionally, being in a predominately White setting left the participants feeling unwelcomed. With less graduate students enrolled, there were limited opportunities for Black students to connect with individuals of a similar cultural background. With limited diversity, there is often reduced cross-racial group interactions and diminished classroom discussions (Eakins & Eakins, 2017), thus contributing to Black students' feeling uncomfortable (Shahid et al., 2018).

The fifth subtheme, *lacking knowledge of support*, emerged based on participants not being able to identify resources on campus. A majority of participants were unaware of resources available to them, contributing to feelings of isolation. Similarly, Walkington (2017) noted that Black women have "limited access to resources in higher education" (p. 55), which is consistent with the presence and identification of this subtheme.

Discussion of Theme 5: Belonging within the Black community

Connecting with someone in academia with a similar cultural background is comforting to Black students (Williams et al., 2005), supporting the emerged theme of *belonging with the Black community*. This theme included a subtheme of *belonging with Black peers*. Guiffrida and Douthit (2010) stated that Black college students might benefit from interacting with other Black students to gain a sense of belonging and help them to foster a comfortable place to socialize, and in this study, participants found comfort and acceptance when interacting with Black peers.

The second subtheme was *belonging with Black professors*. Previous research indicates that faculty-student relationships are influential in students' success and institution satisfaction (Beasley, Chapman-Hilliard, & McClain, 2016; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Hults, 1999). Guiffrida and Douthit (2010) noted that Black students' interactions with Black faculty were positive and improved the experiences of Black students. Although four participants expressed experiencing a Black professor in their graduate career, all participants were able to recall at least one Black professor throughout their collegiate experience, and participants' responses indicated a strong connection with their Black professor(s).

The third subtheme was *acknowledging differences amongst the African Diaspora*. The African Diaspora consists of peoples of African ancestry across multiple societies, typically belonging to various cultures (Palmer, 2018). Despite the cultural differences, "members of a Diaspora share an emotional attachment to their ancestral land" (Palmer, 2018, p. 216). Furthermore, skin tone is associated with racism (Clark et al., 1999) and the oppressive American society might increase unity amongst individuals within the African Diaspora. Although participants noted cultural and familial differences amongst the African Diaspora, they felt welcomed and embraced by other Black people.

The fourth subtheme was *it's bigger than me phenomena*. Participants reported that they felt their success would have a greater influence on the Black culture, beyond their tenure in academia. Tremendous progress has been achieved for the Black community since the end of the Jim Crow Era. Based on the efforts of individuals and groups of pioneers, the entire race has been given opportunities. For example, the current study may influence other Black counselors and counselor-in-training. Renee stated, "*I'm just really glad that you are doing this*". Authors such as Amen (2011) and Taharka (2018) has demonstrated the unity amongst Blacks and culture that thrives on community.

Discussion of Theme 6: Coping

The coping strategies used to deal with racial discrimination and the distress of the higher education environment can have detrimental effects on mental health (Polanco-Roman et al., 2016). For example, racial discrimination is associated with symptoms of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, isolation, and identity

confusion (Alexander-Snow, 2010; Greer, 2008; McClain et al., 2016; Polanco-Roman et al., 2016; Ross et al., 2016; Shahid et al., 2018). Participants found multiple ways to cope with feeling uncomfortable in a Predominantly White Counseling Program.

The first subtheme is *regulating emotional distress*. Some participants forced themselves to manage and balance their emotions when in a state of distress. Participants often suppressed or masked their painful emotions forcing them to be in a constant state of survival. For example, in one study, Shahid et al. (2018) found that Black women enrolled in TWIs coped with the negatively racially charged environment through social support and less active forms of coping—including mental distraction, disengagement, and detachment, a finding consistent with the present study.

The second subtheme, *confronting the problem*, emerged from participants' experiences of standing up for themselves when race-based issues arose. Shahid et al. (2018) suggested that avoidance coping strategies have been associated with lower academic performance for undergraduate Black students, yet the current students seems not to demonstrate avoidance as a coping strategy. Because the participants were high-achieving graduate students, the findings of the current study should be further explored to examine differences between graduate and undergraduate students, or other dimensions that may contribute to less avoidant behavior when race-based issues arise.

The third subtheme was *creating a network of social support outside the classroom*. Shahid et al. (2018) noted that the Black culture encompasses socialization as a coping mechanism; furthermore, Black students found social support to serve as a critical coping mechanism while adjusting to predominantly White academic environments. Because the participants noted being disconnected in their academic

setting, they found comfort in a support system personally created outside the classroom setting.

Discussion of Theme 7: Worrying about the future of the counseling profession

Participants described *worrying about the future of the counseling profession* based on their interactions with non-Black counselors-in-training, anticipating interactions with non-Black clients, and considering how they fit into the counseling field. As an example, Kara stated "*there would be multiple times in which I would see a White student get offended by the idea of having to educate themselves about someone who is different from them*".

The first subtheme addressed *the lack of multicultural awareness of White peers*. Participants viewed their non-Black peers' lack of multicultural awareness and knowledge as a factor that created some worry for potential clients of these counselors-in-training. Specifically, participants expressed worry at the thought of White peers lacking cultural competency when interacting with a Black client. They imagined scenarios of potential interactions of Black clients with their non-Black peers and reported feeling unnerved. In support of this finding, Chang and Yoon (2011) reported that White counselors displayed discomfort during inter-racial interactions with clients.

The second subtheme captured participants' responses toward *the possibility of negative cultural experiences with clients*. Chang and Yoon (2011) noted race is an important variable in the counselor-client relationship, and clients' perception of race heavily influences the therapeutic relationship. Similarly, participants expressed worry about the potentially serving clients that have racist views, which could be similar to personal experiences or viewpoints of their peers. Moreover, several participants

pondered the idea of having a client with biases against Black individuals and being confused and how they would handle the situation.

Although participants credited their professors for mastering the basic counseling skills, they were puzzled about *developing their Black counselor identity*, the third subtheme. They noted that their future experiences as Black counselors would yield different proficiencies compared to non-Black counselors. And while previous researchers (Haynes, 2019; Karkouti, 2016; Shahid et al., 2018) addressed academic identity, there is no current research specifically addressed this subtheme within the counseling field.

Moreover, the participants noted *the desire for Black counseling role models*, the fourth subtheme. The relationship between Black mentors and Black graduate students appears to be critical to the personal success of both parties (Walkington, 2017). Haskins et al. (2013) noted that Black graduate students might experience dissatisfaction because of the lack of Black faculty in the program. Research suggests that Black graduate students "need mentors and opportunities to network in order to adjust to these stressful environments" (Williams et al., 2005, p. 181). Similarly, participants expressed appreciation for all their professors; however, they also noted the desire for Black counseling faculty.

Discussion in Context of Conceptual Frameworks

The participants reported not being able to fully be themselves when in predominately White classroom settings. Existing in their daily lives with family and friends is natural, but the participants noted that predominately White academic environments evoke hyper-vigilance. The descriptions of their experiences mirror the

double consciousness notion presented by W. E. B. DuBois (DuBois, 1903; DuBois & Griffin, 2003). To explore this experience further, the participants' responses will be discussed through the framework of the Black identity development model, Tinto's student retention through institutional action model, Critical Race Theory, academic disidentification, stereotype threat, and imposter syndrome.

Black identity development. The Black identity development model (Cross, 1971) encompasses five stages: (a) Preencounter, (b) Encounter, (c) Immersion/Emersion, (d) Internalization, and (e) Internalization/Commitment. Each stage delineates the experience of encounters that results in synthesis of information creating new meaning and stressing the importance of race. The Nigrescense model does not incorporate age variables, as individuals may progress through the model at various age points in life. Black individuals progressing through the Nigrescense model are evolving and affirming their Blackness. Through the five stages, individuals undergo changes in their characteristics until the final stage where their Black identity becomes internalized (Cross, 1971).

Based on their responses, participants may identify with varying stages in Cross' (1971) Black identity development model. Participants were aware of their ethnic identity and the role this identity played in their higher education experiences. Participants' responses differed on the details shared, which may be due to the participants' stage in the Nigrescense model. It would only be an assumption of the researcher that participants expressing detailed responses possess higher levels of awareness and would identify in a higher stage of Nigrescence, compared to participants sharing less details, potentially having less awareness and would identify in a lower stage

of Nigrescence. A lower level of awareness could be categorized by participants' limited response but may also signify unconscious suppression of unresolved feelings.

Tinto's student retention through institutional action model. Tinto (2017) focused on students' motivation in college to include three main variables: (a) students' self-efficacy, (b) students' sense of belonging, and (c) students' perceptions of the relevance of the curriculum presented. However, this model was based on the experiences of undergraduate students, while the present study was addressing graduate students. Because the number of Black students pursuing graduate school is lower than those pursuing undergrad, I wanted to utilize Tinto's approach to examine his approach within graduate school.

The participants' responses suggested a positive relationship between self-efficacy and motivation. Although participants expressed a lack of belonging in their predominately White counseling programs, the lack of belonging seemingly did not affect their level of motivation to complete the program. The participants were determined to succeed, and their determination seemingly motivated them to excel. Shahid et al. (2018) presented the Strong Black Woman concept, which can serve as a protective factor for Black women, allowing them to portray "strength through being independent, hardworking, selfless, and emotionally stoic" (Shahid et al., 2018, p. 9). This concept may explain the resiliency of the participants and their prolonged exposure in predominantly White academic environments.

Regarding curriculum, participants declared the basic counseling-related content as relevant to their profession, and simultaneously noted a lack of material that focused on Black culture. In instances when Black culture was a topic of interest, the participants

stated feeling as though they were teaching the class—peers and professor alike. Black graduate students noted aspects of the curriculum that lacked relevance to their experiences. The participants' responses aligned with Haskins et al. (2013) findings that stated Black students reported an "absence of culturally appropriate training on theories and practice of counseling" (p.164). For example, Ava avidly addressed the negative stereotypical portrayal of Black clients in the course textbook. Moreover, all participants in the current study noted cultural competency through personal attainment of cultural knowledge and awareness, essential to personal and professional success.

Critical Race Theory. In addition to the power differential between student and faculty member, an additional factor is race, and based on the participants' responses there were racial inequities that they experienced in their higher education setting. Utilizing Critical Race Theory (CRT) within the context of the research question can be beneficial in addressing racial differences amongst the non-Black professors and peers of Black students. Therefore, I used CRT to understand racial inequities in postsecondary environments.

The goal of CRT is to allow diverse individuals a seat at the table, and critical race theorists do not yield to the term *colorblindness* (Delgado & Stafancic, 2017), which minimizes the consequences of institutional racism (Shen-Miller et al., 2012). In addition, Critical Race Theory addresses how educational institutions' policies and practices are not inclusive of diverse perspectives (McCoy, 2018). Obtaining equality in predominately White higher education institutions can be a daunting task for Black students, because these institutions continue to fail in creating a diversity, inclusive campus environment (Eakins & Eakins, 2017).

Cultural and racial awareness is crucial to understanding the impacts of racial inequities in the community and ultimately the collegiate environment. Being knowledgeable about racial disparities are indicative of facilitating change. McCoy (2018) asserted that current TWI environments are microcosms of the current racial climate. The racially flawed mindsets of leaders at TWIs influence the institutions' policies and culture (McCoy, 2018). Furthermore, racially biased mindsets of faculty and staff within a predominately White counseling program tend to place Black students at a disadvantage (Eakins & Eakins, 2017).

Based on the participants' responses, there was no indication of the use of CRT in their current programs. The participants shared experiences of negative biases and microaggressions in their predominately White academic environment. It appears that CRT could be useful in conversations in the classroom setting, departmental meetings, and across institutions.

Addressing Education Barriers

Academic disidentification. Despite hardships, Black students have prevailed when giving the opportunity to in academic settings. Academic disidentification occurs when students' self-esteem is not impacted by their academic performance (McClain & Cokley, 2017). The majority of the participants did not speak about grades or current GPA, but when they did it was presented as an additional benefit. For example, when Danielle spoke about her grades, she was proud that she had a perfect GPA and used that as a way to prove her intelligence to White peers with negative biases. When Ava discussed repeating a class, she did not speak of it in a way that nullified her intelligence, she noted that it was a one-time incident or fluke. With the participants' responses, it

appeared that their self-evaluation was not solely determined by grades—whether high or lower.

Stereotype threat. Participants experienced pressure to perform well and act in a manner that they felt would not affirm negative racial stereotypes. This was a huge premise in participants' responses. The negative stereotype associated with Blacks' lower level of academic intelligence or achievement was felt by participants and often used as a motivating factor to excel academically. The participants wanted to prove to White peers that Black people are smart and academically adept. Although Allen et al. (2013) stated that minority students are more likely to underperform in situations when they feel they are being evaluated through the lens of race, the participants' responses did not indicate a reduction in their academic effort or performance. The participants articulated awareness regarding negative stereotypes about their racial group and made steadfast efforts not to affirm those biases. An explanation for why these participants were not underperforming when compared to White peers is that Black women tend possess the Strong Black Woman concept, yielding to positive academic self-concept, being independent, and hardworking (Shahid et al., 2018)

Imposter syndrome. Cokley et al. (2013) stated that Imposter Syndrome characterizes individuals who reject internal attributions of success, and experience difficulty internalizing their achievements. Furthermore, Imposter Syndrome has been related to high-achieving students striving to repeat instances of academic success (McClain et al., 2016), with increased apprehension due to attributing successes to temporary causes (Clance & Imes, 1978; Cokley et al., 2017; McClain et al., 2016). While Imposter Syndrome was not detected in the participants' responses, Imposter

Syndrome is not easily detectable (Rakestraw, 2017), and the participants' responses

could be explained as examples of fortitude and resilience, having become "culturally

ingrained in the lives of Black women" (Shahid et al., 2018, p. 9). Again, the *Strong*

Black Woman concept may serve as a buffer for Black female students to aid in their

academic and personal success, acting as a protective factor to "maintain the façade of

having it all together" (Shahid et al., 2018, p. 9).

Implications

      Addressing relation to Haskins et al. research. Themes of (a) multiculturalism,

(b) race-related classroom challenges, (c) the Black unicorn syndrome, and (d) worrying

about the future of the counseling profession found in this study are similar to Haskins et

al. (2013) research findings. Although Haskins et al. (2013) data were gathered from

focus groups, the findings were consistent with those from individual interviews

identified in the present study. Moreover, member checking was conducted in the current

study to increase the validity of the findings.

      Compared to Haskins et al. (2013) findings, (a) racism, (b) belonging within the

Black community, and (c) coping, were additional themes found in this study to

contribute to the literature. The additional emerged themes may be explained based on

the phenomenological inquiry through individual interviews, exclusionary criteria set

forth for the participants and/or delimitations set by the researcher. Participants in the

current study were able to focus on themselves and their personal experiences compared

to being in a group setting—which, while beneficial for comfort, may have simplified

responses. Implications discussed in Haskins et al. (2013) findings seem to remain

prevalent, such as personal changes within the faculty members and their approach with

Black students, and the same issues are present in the current study. Additionally, the

presented issues may also remain prevalent based on the level of institutional racism and

the powerful impact it has (Eakins & Eakins, 2017; Karkouti, 2016).

  Addressing CACREP. As part of their implications based on their findings,

Haskins et al. (2013) addressed 2009 CACREP-accreditation standards, which have since

been updated to the 2016 standards, and Counselor Education programs seeking 2016

CACREP status must abide by and endorse these prescribed standards. The mandated

2016 CACREP standards are addressed in six sections: (a) the learning environment, (b)

professional counseling identity, (c) professional practice, (d) evaluation of the program,

(e) entry-level specialty areas, and (f) doctoral standards. The first section, the learning

environment, encompasses three components (a) the institution, (b) the academic unit,

and (c) the faculty and staff. Within the academic unit, 2016 CACREP standards require

that counseling programs make "continuous and systematic efforts to attract, enroll, and

retain a diverse group of students and to create and support an inclusive learning

community" (p. 7). Additionally, during admission procedures for program candidates,

academic units are to consider applicants' "respect for cultural differences" (CACREP, p.

7). Hence, it is the responsibility of 2016 CACREP-accredited programs to maintain a

diverse group of students and follow protocols to assess admitted students' level of

regard for cultural differences.

  Furthermore, the 2016 CACREP standards delineated that faculty have "relevant

preparation and experience in relation to the courses they teach" (p. 8). However, they do

not include specific diversity and/ or multicultural standards. Current 2016 CACREP

standards assess professional identity by faculty having "the authority to determine

program curricula and to establish operational policies and procedures for the program"

(p. 8). Essentially, according to CACREP standards, professional identity could

conceivably be established without faculty demonstrating multicultural competency.

However, faculty multicultural competency and communication regarding diversity is

influential to and may affect students' beliefs (Shen-Miller et al., 2012).

 The CACREP (2016) Board provided standards in eight common core areas of all

entry-level counseling graduate students. The first core area explained is professional

counseling orientation and ethical practice. In regard to the entry-level counselor, the

first core area provides standards emphasizing providing assistance to clients, which

include "advocacy processes needed to address institutional and social barriers that

impede access, equity, and success for clients" (p. 10). However, this core area does not

specifically address personal experiences related to various cultures. Therefore, there

appears to be a gap in addressing professional counseling orientation and addressing

cultural barriers within an organization for oneself and/or a colleague. While there is a

mandate of "strategies for personal and professional self-evaluation and implications for

practice" (p.11), there is no requirement of experience or practice. As a gatekeeping-

oriented profession, self-evaluation with respect to multicultural competency should be

assessed during coursework, at a professional level, as well as during the admission and

interview process.

 Diversity is explicitly addressed in the second core area: social and cultural

diversity, requiring "strategies for identifying and eliminating barriers, prejudices, and

processes of intentional and unintentional oppression and discrimination" (p. 11).

Excluding the second core area, all CACREP (2016) core areas included one identical

statement each: "ethical and culturally relevant strategies for…" named core area (p. 21-37). Section three of the six standards encompasses professional practice, including practicum and internship. Within this section, there is no mention of addressing culture or ethics, and requirements for diversity are not mandated. In a professional field that requires dense fulfillment of supervision, practicum, and internship, it is startling that nothing is in place ensuring diversity, inclusion, and equality are being practiced. To effectively confirm that multicultural awareness and knowledge are introduced and demonstrated, future versions of the CACREP standards should establish guidelines for educational entities to encourage students to seek culturally diverse practicum, internship, and supervision opportunities. For at least 25 years, the American Psychological Association and clinical and counseling Psychology programs have addressed multicultural competency, delivery, and interactions in internship (Peters et al., 2011; Proctor & Rogers, 2013; Speight, Thomas, Kennel, & Anderson, 1995). There is no current research addressing multicultural competency or interactions within the field of counseling or within the CACREP 2016 standards with respect to internship experiences.

Recommendations for Predominately White Counseling Programs

CACREP (2016) accredited counseling programs are required to ensure counselors-in-training enroll in a multicultural counseling course. While each program can customize the course, fundamental activities should be required. For counselors-in-training, it may be beneficial to utilize the multicultural counseling self-reports previously mentioned (Lu, 2017; Zeleke et al., 2018). CACREP-accredited counseling programs may also benefit from mandating that each student complete a cultural self-report to increase cultural self-awareness, thus potentially increasing cultural knowledge.

Counseling faculty and hiring committees should also consider the needs of current and potential students. Participants' responses yielded an undeniable sense of isolation, concurrent with Eakins and Eakins' (2017) research study. For example, the participants reported the desire for more representation in the faculty. These students are receiving education in basic counseling skills, yet might still feel like they are missing how this field and future clients may accept them as Black clinicians. This overwhelming desire for Black counseling role models should not be ignored.

It is recommended that admissions and recruitment processes be evaluated to ensure inclusion and diversity are sought out and implemented. Eakins and Eakins (2017) presented a recruitment plan for institutions to implement to increase diversities on predominately White campuses. Counselor education departments could also partner with the admissions department on their campus to implement a diversity plan for recruitment and retention (Eakins & Eakins, 2017). One model proposed by Eakins and Eakins (2017) is the Collaborative Style Cohort Recruitment Model, which was designed to create social support programs that will assist Black students facing increased stress levels in predominately White academic settings.

Furthermore, I suggest the counselor education department develop and implement a mentorship program designed to address the concern of these students. Williams et al. (2005) stated a positive impact on Black students connecting with Black professionals in academia. While it may not be feasible to immediately hire additional Black faculty, creating increased opportunities for these students to connect with individuals in the field, alumni, and current students that share similar cultural

backgrounds could address the lack of exposure to Black counseling professions that some Black students are experiencing in their programs (Eakins & Eakins, 2017).

Recommendations for Counselor Education Faculty

Awareness and knowledge toward multicultural competency is beneficial for counselor educators, counselors, and counselors-in-training. The four participants that experienced a graduate class with a Black professor noted how encouraging the course was for them. The participants went on to explain how they felt understood and comfortable sharing personal experiences in class. Jasmine specifically stated, "*there's more of an understanding in that environment having a Black professor*".

All participants explained experiences with non-Black professors in the graduate counseling program that were less than ideal, specifically noting perceived microaggressions and feeling disconnected. To combat this issue, professors should aim to incorporate Black students in counseling course materials and literature. According to Koch et al. (2018), while there has been research concentrated on training students, little focus has been on the faculty tasked with the responsibility of training those students.

Professors could also create a multicultural education environment to allow diverse students access to educational equality (Banks, 1993). Utilizing Banks (1993) five dimensions of multicultural education—(a) content integration, (b) knowledge of the construction process, (c) prejudice reeducation, (d) equity pedagogy, and (e) an empowering school culture and social structure—could increase equality amongst diversity. Counseling faculty might also be encouraged to assess the classroom climate for students of varying cultures in an effort to create a safe space for all students.

Recommendations for Counselors

Vital components to increase multicultural competency for counselors and counselors-in-training include assessing multicultural awareness and increasing cultural sensitivity to various racial and ethnic groups (Marbley, 2011). For instance, multicultural counseling competencies address counselors' level of awareness, affect, knowledge, and skills in being able to assist clients of different backgrounds and cultures (Lu, 2017; Zeleke et al., 2018), and there are a few self-reports available for clinicians to access to further address multicultural counseling competencies of training clinicians. For example, Lu (2017) noted these assessments: the Cross-Cultural Counseling Inventory – Revised (CCCI-R), Multicultural Awareness/Knowledge/Skills Survey (MAKSS), Multicultural Counseling Inventory (MCI), the Multicultural Counseling Knowledge and Awareness Scale (MCKAS), and the Multicultural Counseling Knowledge and Awareness Scale- Revised (MCKAS-R). It is imperative and ethically responsible for counselors to gain and maintain cultural competency for racially and ethnically diverse clients.

Despite the awareness of the importance of multicultural competency, some mental health services in the United States are not meeting the needs of diverse clients (Marbley, 2011). Moreover, Black clients tend to have higher attrition and premature termination rates (Marbley, 2011). Because TWIs are typically representative of mainstream society, the counseling centers on TWIs' campuses may not meet the needs of diverse clients. Devoting resources to these clinicians to increase cultural awareness and sensitivity can be vital to Black students' level of comfort and overall success.

I suggest implementing broaching as a counseling practice in the therapeutic relationship. Broaching includes addressing differing racial and cultural factors and how these factors may affect the counselor-client relationship (Bayne & Branco, 2018). Addressing racial and cultural differences upfront may increase the trust and build rapport within the counseling relationship. Avoiding topics related to race and culture may leave the client feeling as though the counselor may not be able to fully comprehend their issues, potential microaggressions or misunderstandings (Bayne & Branco, 2018).

Limitations

The overall majority female gender composition of the counseling field is a contributing factor to the synonymous gender of the participants in the current study. Because the study did not include any male participants, the results may not be transferable across gender. However, considering that the majority of the counseling student population is female, counselor educators may find these results applicable to large portions of their student body.

Additionally, the participants were recruited from a regional area in Texas, which may also limit transferability across geographical areas. However, while the results may not be transferable to all, they may be transferable to some Black female graduate students enrolled in predominantly White counseling programs in the regional area. Moreover, there was diversity amongst the participant group regarding age and high school racial make-up.

An added limitation may be the participants' enrollment status at their university. The participants were enrolled in the counseling program about which they are sharing their experiences and because of ongoing evaluation, may not have been entirely

forthcoming of all experiences to avoid potential negative repercussions of their statements. However, my similar cultural background as a Black female counselor and graduate student may have served as comforting factor for the participants while conducting the semi-structured interviews.

Recommendations for Future Research

Assessing the impact of race in academia. Future researchers may address how racial encounters in academia affects students' racial identity development. Cross' Black identity development model does not delineate age ranges, but late adolescence to early adulthood may be a critical point for identity development. This age range does capture the time period that some students are in graduate school. Six of the eight participants are in their early- to mid-twenties and have been forming their racial identity in predominantly White settings for several years. The impact this specific environment has on their racial identity formation is unknown. Exploring racial identity models for Black graduate students in predominately White settings has not been explored at this time.

Intersection of race and gender. Participants' responses suggested a positive relationship between self-efficacy and motivation. Future researchers should explore the intersection of being Black and being female. This research study and its findings are vital due to the lack of literature on Black women's higher education experiences (Shahid et al., 2018; Williams et al, 2005). Walkington (2017) stated Black graduate students "face a double-bind of racial and gender discrimination at every level of academic life" (p. 52). To better understand how to assist Black female graduate students through unfortunate experiences in higher education, Walkington (2017) suggested, "utilizing intersectionality as an analytic tool" (p. 52). Williams et al. (2005) stated "for Black

female graduate students, sharing their graduate school experiences has the potential to empower them as they navigate through graduate work" (p. 182). Shahid et al. (2018) introduced the Strong Black Woman concept to explain Black women's interactions in society. These concepts should further be explored within the academic environment. In academic environments, high-achieving Black women are successful, yet their successes "do not protect them from feeling the anxiety, loneliness, and frustration that comes from being marginalized" (Haynes, 2019, p. 999). Furthermore, given the limited research on Black males in counseling programs, exploring the intersection of being a Black male in a counseling program should be explored. The participants in the current study were all female and their responses may not be representative of how Black males may have responded.

Assessing racial identity in Black graduate students. The current study utilized Cross' (1971) Black identity development model as framework to understand the experiences of Black graduate students. However, participants' Black identity was not directly assessed. Future research should assess Black identity of participants in relation to their experiences as Black graduate students.

Educators' perceptions of Black students. Because all individuals possess inherent bias, future researchers may focus on counselor educators' perceptions of Black students. Counselors-in-training and researchers are taught to bracket their personal experiences and attend to the client and data with a fresh, untainted perspective. Utilizing this bracketed approach with professors might reduce further bias and microaggressions that the participants experienced. Contributions to the literature regarding this topic could impact diversity and race-related conversations in academia.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of the current study demonstrate Black graduate students in predominantly White counseling programs are experiencing race-related issues in the classroom setting from their non-Black peers and professors. These students are resilient, determined, and intelligent in their pursuit of their graduate degree. At this level of education and prolonged exposure to a predominantly White academic collegiate setting, the participants expressed a long history of being careful in their behaviors, comments, and interactions.

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APPENDIX A

Date: Jan 27, 2019 11:30 AM CST

TO: Shay Carper
      Jeffrey Sullivan

FROM: SHSU IRB

PROJECT TITLE: The Lived Experiences of Black Graduate Students Enrolled in Predominately White Counseling Programs in Texas

PROTOCOL #: IRB-2018-187
SUBMISSION TYPE: Initial

ACTION: Approved

DECISION DATE: January 26, 2019
EXPIRATION DATE: January 26, 2020

EXPEDITED REVIEW CATEGORY:

    6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
    7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Greetings,

    The above-referenced submission has been reviewed by the IRB and it has been Approved. This decision expires on January 26, 2020. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

    Since Cayuse IRB does not currently possess the ability to provide a "stamp of approval" on any recruitment or consent documentation, it is the strong recommendation of this office to please include the following approval language in the footer of those recruitment and consent documents: IRB-2018-187/January 26, 2019/January 26, 2020.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Modifications: Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please submit a Modification Submission through Cayuse IRB for this procedure.

Incidents: All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please submit an Incident Submission through Cayuse IRB for this procedure. All Department of Health and Human Services and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

Renewals: Based on the risks, this project requires renewal reviews by this committee on an annual basis. Please submit a Renewal Submission through Cayuse IRB for this procedure. Your documentation for renewal must be received with sufficient time for review and updated approval before the expiration date of January 26, 2020.

Closures: When you have completed the project, a Closure Submission must be submitted through Cayuse IRB in order to close the project file.

Please note that all research records should be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact the Sharla Miles at 936-294-4875 or irb@shsu.edu. Please include your protocol number in all correspondence with this committee.

Sincerely,

Donna Desforges
IRB Chair, PHSC
PHSC-IRB

APPENDIX B
Email to Collect Racial Data

Hello Counseling program representative,

My name is Shay Carper. I am a current doctoral candidate at Sam Houston State University. I am currently completing my dissertation focused on The Lived Experiences of Black Graduate Students Enrolled in Predominately White Counseling Programs in Texas. I am reaching out to you to gain information regarding vital statistics (specifically race) for the students enrolled in the Clinical Mental Health Program at your institution. The vital statistics will be used to determine if the Clinical Mental Health Program at your institution would be an appropriate place to seek participants. Please reach out to me if you have any additional questions or concerns. If you are not the correct contact person for this information, can you please let me know or forward this message.

Thanks,

Shay Carper, MA, LPC
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Counselor Education
Sam Houston State University

APPENDIX C
Email sent to reach potential participants

Hello,

Thank you so much for your help! It was determined that the counseling program at your institution is predominately White and may have participants that fit my research study. I wanted to reach out again to see if you know of any students that may be interested in participating in this study.

All of your help is appreciated.

Thanks,

Shay Carper, MA, LPC
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Counselor Education
Sam Houston State University

APPENDIX D
Flyer
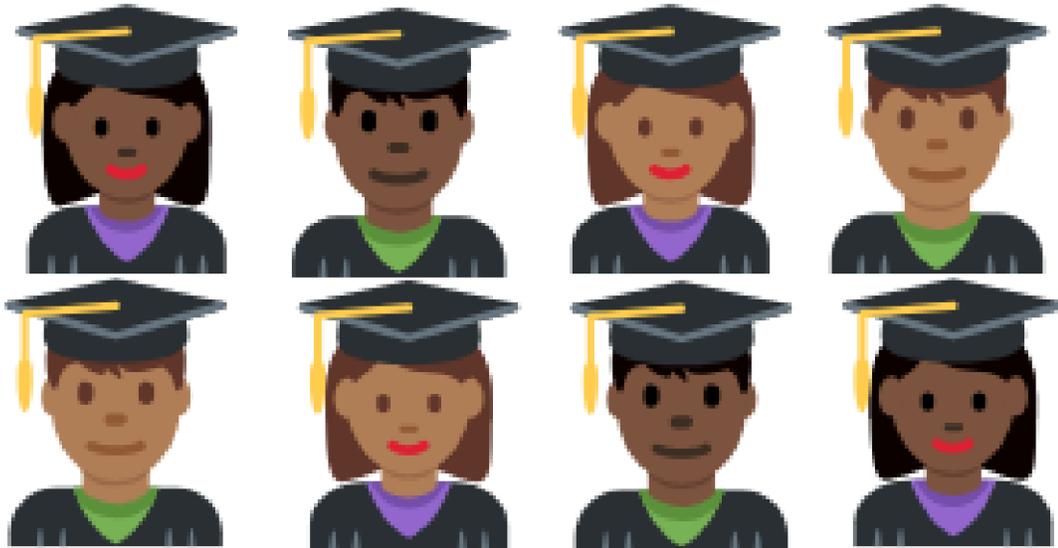
The Lived Experiences of Black Graduate

Seeking participants for qualitative research study!

To participate in this study you must:

1. Identify as Black or African-American
2. Be Currently Enrolled in a Master-Level, CACREP -Accredited or -Aligned Counseling Program
3. Have Earned an Undergraduate Degree from a **Non**-Historically Black College and University (HBCU)
4. Be Willing to Complete a 1-Hour Interview

If you are interested in participating in this study or would like to learn more information,
contact Shay Carper (stc017@shsu.edu).

Title of Study: The Lived Experiences of Black Graduate Students Enrolled in Predominately White Counseling Programs in Texas
Researcher: Shay Carper, Sam Houston State University Doctoral Candidate
Email: stc017@shsu.edu
Chair: Dr. Jeffrey Sullivan, Sam Houston State University Professor

*All inquiries and data collected will be kept confidential.

SH
Sam Houston State University

APPENDIX E
Email sent to potential participants

Hi,

Thank you for reaching out to me! I am elated to learn of your interest to participate in this unique research study. I have listed the full criteria I am seeking below. I encourage you to read the criteria created to ensure you meet the criteria to participate in the study. It is a specific criteria to enhance the results of the study. Please reach out to me if you have clarifying questions.

Once it has been determined that you meet the criteria, we can schedule an interview time (Please reserve 1 hour in a quiet space where you will not be interrupted and can speak freely). Prior to the interview, I will need to collect the signed pages of the 2 informed consent letters (attached) and the demographic questionnaire (which will be distributed 48 hours prior to the scheduled interview).

I am currently still seeking participants so, if you know someone who may fit this criteria, please forward the recruitment flyer (attached). I will be scheduling Skype interviews this month.

I am seeking participants who meet the following criteria:

- Identify as a Black/African-American college student
- Is enrolled in a master-level, graduate CACREP-accredited or CACREP-aligned counseling program
- The counseling program is at a non-Historically Black College and University (non-HBCU) [The institutions can include Predominately White Institutions (PWIs), Traditionally White Institutions (TWIs), Historically White Institutions (HWIs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) or other]
- The counseling program enrolled in include student population that is predominately White students

Thanks,

Shay Carper, MA, LPC
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Counselor Education
Sam Houston State University

APPENDIX F
Informed consent cover letter

INFORMED CONSENT

My name is Shay Carper, and I am a doctoral candidate of the Department of Counselor Education at Sam Houston State University. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study *Exploring the Lived Experiences of Black Graduate Students Enrolled in Predominately White Counseling Programs in Texas.* I am conducting this research under the direction of Dr. Jeffrey Sullivan. The purpose of this study is to discover and give voice to the lived experiences of Black graduate students enrolled in predominately White counseling programs in Texas. You have been asked to participate in the research because you identify as a Black/African-American student currently enrolled in a predominantly White counseling program and may be eligible to participate.

The research is relatively straightforward, and we do not expect the research to pose any risk to any of the volunteer participants. If you consent to participate in this research, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview. Any data obtained from you will only be used for the purpose of contributing to the lack of knowledge on this topic and for better understanding levels of support for Black students on Traditionally White and non-HBCU campuses. Your data will remain confidential and under no circumstances will you or any other participants be identified. Your participation will require approximately 45-60 minutes of your time. Participants will not be paid or otherwise compensated for their participation in this project. An audiotape recording of you will be used for transcription purposes and your identity will be protected or disguised. The transcriptions will be typed, and you will be able to review the transcribed interview. Upon the completion of the research study, the data (audio recordings and typed transcriptions) will destroyed after 3 years.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision about whether or not to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled, and you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask me using the contact information below. If you are interested, the results of this study will be available at the conclusion of the project.

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me, Shay Carper, or Dr. Jeffrey Sullivan. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as research participants, please contact Sharla Miles, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, using her contact information below.

A copy of this consent form is available for your records.

Ms. Shay Carper	Dr. Jeffrey Sullivan	Sharla Miles
SHSU Department of Counselor Education	SHSU Department of Counselor Education	Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
Sam Houston State University	Sam Houston State University	Sam Houston State University
Huntsville, TX 77341	Huntsville, TX 77341	Huntsville, TX 77341
Phone: 713-392-0675	Phone: (936) 294-4657	Phone: (936) 294-4875
E-mail: stc017@shsu.edu	E-mail: jms107@shsu.edu	Email: irb@shsu.edu

☐ I understand the above and consent to participate.

☐ I do not wish to participate in the current study

A copy of this consent form is available for your records.

APPENDIX G

Sam Houston State University

Consent for Participation in Research

The Lived Experiences of Black Graduate Students Enrolled in Counseling Programs at Predominately White Institutions

<u>Why am I being asked?</u>

You are being asked to be a participant in a research study exploring the lived experiences of Black graduate students enrolled in predominantly White counseling programs, conducted by Shay Carper, doctoral candidate in the Department of Counselor Education at Sam Houston State University. I am conducting this research under the direction of Dr. Jeffrey Sullivan. You have been asked to participate in the research because you identify as a Black/African-American student currently enrolled in a predominantly White counseling program and may be eligible to participate. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the research.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, and you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

<u>Why is this research being done?</u>

Recently, there has been an overall decline in Blacks students enrolled in higher education institutions. However, the number of Black students pursuing graduate education has remained steady at postsecondary institutions. The purpose of the study is to discover and give voice to the lived experiences of Black graduate students enrolled in predominately White counseling programs in Texas. Risks involved are minimal, as you will be sharing past experiences within collegiate, educational settings. Possible benefits include contributing to the lack of knowledge on this topic and better understanding the level of support for Black students on Traditionally White and non-HBCU campuses.

<u>What is the purpose of this research?</u>

The purpose of the study is to discover and give voice to the lived experiences of Black graduate students enrolled in predominantly White counseling programs.

<u>What procedures are involved?</u>

If you agree to be in this research, we would ask you to do the following things:
Potential participants will be provided an informed consent denoting details of the study, risks, and benefits. Once the participants consent to be in the study, you will be interviewed by the researcher. The interview will take place in a secure, neutral place. Each interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. The researcher will interview the participants via a semi-structured interview. The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed for data analysis. The transcription will remove all identifying

information about the participants, and participants will be able to review the typed transcription. Approximately 10-12 participants may be involved in this research at Traditionally White Institutions Texas.

What are the potential risks and discomforts?
The potential risks associated with this study are minimal. Although the projected risk is limited, the participants are reflecting on personal experiences. The experiences divulged may increase the participants' awareness, ultimately having an acute effect on their mood. Support resources will be provided to each participant upon completing the interview.

Are there benefits to taking part in the research?
The data gathered from this research study will contribute to the field and to traditionally White collegiate environments/ non-HBCUs. Collegiate administration, faculty, and staff may gain increased knowledge pertinent to interacting with and supporting Black students enrolled in non-HBCU college campuses. There will be no direct benefits to the participant from their participation outside of personal gratification for their contribution. There will be no payment, compensation, or reimbursement for participation.

What about privacy and confidentiality?
The only person who will be aware of your participation in this study is the researcher.   Upon transcribing the interviews, all identifying information will be removed. No information about you, your institution, or program provided by you during the interview will be disclosed to others without your written permission, except:
- if necessary to protect your rights or welfare (for example, if you are injured and need emergency care or when the SHSU Protection of Human Subjects monitors the research or consent process); or
- if required by law.

When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity. The audiotape recordings of you will be used for transcription purposes and your identity will be protected or disguised. Throughout the study, the audio-recorded interviews will be stored on a digital recording device. The recording device will only be in the researcher's possession or locked in a personal safe in a locked closet in the researcher's home. The researcher will have sole access to the closet. The typed transcriptions will be saved on a password protected USB and on a password protected file on the researcher's hard drive. The researcher has sole access. You will be able to review the transcribed interview.
Any information obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Any identifying information provided by the participants' interview would be removed in the transcription (i.e., professors' name, universities attended, etc.). Pseudonyms will be assigned to each participant and used throughout the study to conceal participants' identity and protect confidentiality. In the data analysis, participants will be referred to by their pseudonym only.

Upon the completion of the research study, the data (audio recordings, typed transcriptions, and password protected USBs) will be locked in a safe for 3 years. After this time, all data will be destroyed.

What if I am injured as a result of my participation?

In the event of injury related to this research study, you should contact your physician or the University Health Center. However, you or your third party payer, if any, will be responsible for payment of this treatment. There is no compensation and/or payment for medical treatment from Sam Houston State University for any injury you have from participating in this research, except as may by required of the University by law. If you feel you have been injured, you may contact the researcher, Shay Carper at (713) 392-0675.

What are the costs for participating in this research?

There are no upfront costs for participation in this research study. Minimal costs to the participants may include transportation to the interview location. The participant is responsible for these costs.

Will I be reimbursed for any of my expenses or paid for my participation in this research?

As a participant in the research study, you will be not be paid for your participation. There will not be any reimbursement for any costs accrued during your participation in this study, including expenses such as parking, bus/taxi, baby-sitter, travel companion/assistant, etc.

Can I withdraw or be removed from the study?

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

The researcher conducting this study is Shay Carper. Ms. Carper is under the direction of Dr. Jeffrey Sullivan. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact the researcher or the director at: stc017@shsu.edu or jms107@shsu.edu. Phone: (713) 392-0675 or (936) 294-4657.

What are my rights as a research subject?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP) – Sharla Miles at 936-294-4875 or e-mail ORSP at sharla_miles@shsu.edu.

You may choose not to participate or to stop your participation in this research at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, and you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you are a student, this will not affect your class standing or grades at SHSU. The investigator may also end your participation in the research. If this happens, your class standing or grades will not be affected.

You will not be offered or receive any special consideration if you participate in this research.

Agreement to Participate

I have read the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research.

Consent: I have read and understand the above information, and I willingly consent to participate in this study. I understand that if I should have any questions about my rights as a research subject, I can contact Shay Carper at (713) 392-0675 or by email at stc017@shsu.edu. I have received a copy of this consent form.

Your name (printed): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

AUDIO RECORDING RELEASE CONSENT

As part of this project, an audio recording will be made of you during your participation in this research project for transcription purposes only. This is completely voluntary. In any use of the audio recording, your name will not be identified. The audiotape recordings of you will be used for transcription purposes and your identity will be protected or disguised. The transcriptions will be typed; and you will be able to review the transcribed interview. Upon the completion of the research study, the data (audio recordings and typed transcriptions) will be locked in a safe for 3 years. After this time, all data will be destroyed. You may request to stop the recording at any time or to erase any portion of your recording.

Your name (printed): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX H
Demographic Questionnaire

To ensure anonymity, you will be identified using an assumed name during the interview. What would you like your pseudonym to be?

_____

What is your age? _____

What is your racial/ethnic background? _____

Please choose a gender.   Female   Male   Choose not to identify

What is the highest level of education you have completed? _____

Name and state of **current** institution _____

Current Major: _____

How would you categorize the racial make-up of the **current** institution you attend?

HBCU   Non-HBCU:

                TWI   HSI   PWI   Not Sure
        (Traditionally White) (Hispanic Serving) (Predominantly White)

Name and state of **undergraduate** institution _____

How would you categorize the racial make-up of the **undergraduate** institution you attended?

HBCU   Non-HBCU:

                TWI   HSI   PWI   Not Sure
        (Traditionally White) (Hispanic Serving) (Predominantly White)

Name and state of **high school** attended _____

How would you categorize the racial make-up of your **high school**?
Ex: predominately Black students, predominately non-Black students, etc.

_____

APPENDIX I

Grand Tour Questions

1. How would you describe your overall experience in your counseling program?

2. What are your experiences as a Black graduate student enrolled in a predominately White counseling program?

3. What challenges, past and present, have you faced as a racial minority student on this campus?

4. How would you describe your cultural experiences with (a) faculty and (b) staff?

5. How would you describe your cultural experiences with peers?

6. What is your experience being a racial minority in class when the topic of race comes up?

7. What support have you had as a racial minority student on campus?

8. How is your experience different at the graduate level verses the undergraduate level?

9. What else would you like to add?

VITA

<u>EDUCATION</u>
PhD in Counselor Education **CACREP Accredited*   December 2019
Sam Houston State University   Huntsville, Texas
Dissertation: The Lived Experiences of Black Master-Level Graduate Students Enrolled in Predominately White Counseling Programs in Texas: A Transcendental Phenomenological Approach

M.A. in Psychology   May 2013
Houston Baptist University   Houston, Texas
Thesis: How Perceived Social Support is Related to the Interpretation of Life Hassles and Procrastination

B.A. in Psychology, Minor in Philosophy   May 2010
University of St. Thomas   Houston, Texas

<u>LICENSE & CERTIFICATIONS</u>
Licensed Professional Counselor   Expires April 2020
Texas State Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors

Global Career Development Facilitator (GCDF)   Expires Sep 2024
Center for Credential & Education

Mental Health First Aid Responder   Expires June 2021
NAMI

<u>RESEARCH & PRESENTATIONS</u>
Carper, S., Sullivan, J. (2019). *The melting pot that isn't: The lived experiences of Black female Graduate students attending a predominately White counseling program in Texas.* Presentation, TCA 2019 Annual Conference.
Carper, S., & Key, R. (2019). *Assessing and Addressing Implicit Bias*. National Career Development Association [NCDA] 2019 Conference. Houston, Texas.
Sullivan, J., & **Carper, S.** (2018). *The melting pot that wasn't: Exploring the lived experiences of Black college students attending predominately White institutions.* Presentation, TCA 2018 Annual Conference.
Carper, S. & Hand, L. (2018). *How to use cognitive complexity to improve your supervision* Presentation, TACES 2018 Annual Conference.
Carper, S. (2012). *How perceived social support is related to the interpretation of life hassles and procrastination*. Graduate Research Project, Houston Baptist University, Houston, Texas.
Carper, S., (2010). *Optimism and Resiliency*. Independent study. University of St. Thomas, Houston, Texas.
Hernandez, C., **Carper, S.**, Garcia, A., Hutcheson, E., Meier-Marquis, J. (2010). *The use of meditation to elicit forgiveness in young children*. Poster presented at the University of St. Thomas' Undergraduate Research Symposium, Houston, Texas.
Carper, S., Weaver, M., D'Souza, R. (2009). *Self- efficacy in first generation and non-first generation college students*. Undergraduate Research Project, University of St. Thomas, Houston, Texas.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Adjunct Professor	2018-present
Houston Community College, Psychology Department	Houston, Texas

- Course taught: General Psychology

Co-Lecturer	Summer 2018
Sam Houston State University	Huntsville, Texas

- Course taught: Research Methods

Guest Lecturer	2015-2018
Sam Houston State University	Huntsville, Texas
University of St. Thomas	Houston, Texas

PROFESSIONAL AND LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

Licensed Professional Counselor	2019-present
Houston Community College-Southwest College	Houston, Texas
Licensed Professional Counselor	2018-present
Re:Mind	Houston, Texas
Student Support Counselor	2017-2018
YES Prep, Brays Oaks Campus	Houston, Texas
Counseling Practicum Supervisor	2015-2017
Career Counselor	2014-2017
University of St. Thomas, Career Services	Houston, Texas

MEMBERSHIPS & AFFILIATIONS

Texas Association of Counselor Education and Supervision	2018-present
Texas Counselor Association	2017-present
Texas Association of Colleges and Universities	
Student Personnel Administrators	2015-2017
National Career Development Association	2014-present
American Counseling Association	2014-present
American College Counseling Association	2014-2017
Houston Area Consortium of Career Centers	2014-2017
AmeriCorps Alum, Houston Chapter	2014-present
Psi Chi, Psychology International Honor Society	2012-present
American Psychological Association	2011-present