The Lived Experiences of African American Males in Becoming Counselors and Counselor Educators

by

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Abstract

The counseling profession has evolved over the years from traditional White men dominating the profession to a more diverse culture of helping professionals that vary in race, gender, and age. Despite the growth and revolution of the profession, African American male counselors and counselor educators are still underrepresented in the counseling profession. The paucity of African American male counselors and counselor educators negatively impacts participation in counseling services among African American men and the degree to which they pursue careers in the counseling profession. To become counselors and counselor educators, African American men who currently serve in the counseling profession had to overcome the negative stigma and stereotypes of counseling and mental health, which are prominent in the African American community. The purpose of this study was to discover common themes in the career paths among African American male counselors and counselor educators who overcame negative stigma and stereotypes of counseling and mental health to pursue a career in the counseling profession. Through phenomenological analysis, five themes emerged from data collected via individual interviews. Implications of these findings for counselor education, including strategies to recruit and retain Black men in the counseling profession, are discussed.

Dedication

I would like to first dedicate this dissertation to the men who made it possible for me to even consider obtaining a PhD. I read the book entitled *The Pact: Three young men make a promise and fulfill a dream* in the spring of 2002 and as a result of reading this book my life was changed forever. Thank you to the authors of this book Drs. Sampson Davis, Rameck Hunt and George Jenkins. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to the men who personally challenged my thinking personally and professionally Drs. Julian L. Magee and Dr. Taiwo A. Togun. The both of you pushed me to step completely outside of my comfort zone to become a better student and a better man. We made a decision to establish our own Pact in the spring of 2006 when we promised each other that we would become doctors in our particular field. I'm the third and final member of this Pact to obtain my Doctorate and now the Pact is complete. Last but certainly not least this dissertation is dedicated to all of the African American men in the counseling profession who work so hard towards changing the narrative of Black men within the African American community. I believe that Women represent the Heart of the African American family and the Men represent the Head. As Men, if we are unable to maintain ourselves within the Head it's only a matter of time before we lose our Heart, which could lead to the extinction of our entire culture. As Men, we have to make sure that we are taking care of our Heads so we can ensure that we are able to take care of our Hearts…

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decided to dedicate my work and research to uplifting all Black men in all aspects of life. Thank

you for being the first group of men on this level that I could serve.

To all of my mentees this is an example of what's yet to come for you. Let my passion and work speak for how things will happen for you by returning the favor to someone else. Work hard, stop at nothing, and become the best version of you possible. There is nothing stopping you but you. Let's get it. You got next!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The African American community has been underserved and underrepresented in the

counseling profession for many years. More specifically, African American men are

underrepresented as clients, counselors, and counselor educators (Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy,

2002). Creating a culture of counselors and counselor educators that mirrors the demographics

of the United States population is preferable within the counseling profession (Haizlip, 2012).

According to the estimates of the United States Census Bureau report from 2010, the total

population in the United States was 308.7 million people. Out of the 308.7 million people only

13% identified as African American (United States Census Brief, 2010). The Black

Demographics website reported that African American men represent 48% of the entire African

American population in the United States (Black Demographics, 2013). Specific to the

counseling profession, out of all of the counseling programs accredited by the Council for

Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), only 3% of

counseling faculty identify as African American (Haizlip, 2012). The CACREP report does not

specify if the African American faculty are male or female. To emulate the United States census

report from 2010 and to estimate the number of African Americans separated by male to female

gender according to the Black Demographics website, African American male professors only

equal 1.4% of faculty from all CACREP-accredited programs.

Men in Counseling

Despite many innovations in the counseling profession and the types of counselor's available from diverse ethnic/racial backgrounds, age, and nationalities, men participate in counseling at a lower rate compared to women (Evans, Duffey & Englar-Carlson, 2013). Men have underutilized counseling services for years due to beliefs, traditional gender roles, and concerns of masculinity (Evans et al., 2013). Traditional male gender roles have made an impact on men choosing not to seek assistance from utilizing counseling services (Evans et al., 2013). Vogel, Wester, Hammer, and Downing-Matibag (2014) noted in their study of referring men to seek help, that the underutilization of mental health services by men is due to the view of participating in counseling services as a conflict with traditional Western male gender roles of being viewed by others as being weak or unmanly by seeking help from a counselor. The authors also reported that the Western culture demands for men to be strong, maintain control of their emotions and problems, and to be capable of handling life stresses and issues own their own without asking for help (Vogel et al., 2014). Gender roles are not the only concern that has served as a barrier for men participating in counseling services, the idea of what's perceived as masculinity also contributes to the lack of participation in counseling among men.

Braly, Parent, and DeLucia (2017) defined masculinity as "a commodity that is earned and maintained through behaviors that are an ideal representation of what it means to be a man" (p.1). In order to maintain the idea of masculinity it must be earned and maintained or it will be lost. Seeking assistance from others can be perceived by men as a loss or threat of losing masculinity (Braly et al., 2017). In a study on the applications for counseling men Duffet and

Haberstroh (2012) discussed that there is a contradictory message that men receive as young boys that influence old rules of defining masculinity. The contradiction causes an inconsistent response to current concerns that are appropriate in the present day that were not appropriate in the past based on the male views of masculinity (Duffet & Haberstoh, 2012). The researchers reported two major disconnects that contribute to the current trend of some men's concerns with masculinity as they relate to trends in counseling. The major disconnects are (a) the disconnection from vulnerable feelings like sadness and fear, which are normal and appropriate parts of life, and (b) disconnection from the vocabulary of emotions, which many men have never adequately learned (Duffet & Haberstoh, 2012).

Vogel et al. (2014) also reported in their study that counseling and mental health has a negative stigma attached due to previous beliefs and ideas related to what takes place in a counseling setting (Vogel et al., 2014). There are men that have gained information about what is counseling through the media, family, and within their communities that provided a skewed view about counseling, which does not include factual information about what actually takes place in a counseling setting (Vogel et al., 2014). Most men are referred to participate in counseling if they do not have an interest in going on their own and are mainly encouraged by women including their wives, mothers, partners, or female friends (Vogel et al., 2014). The men who reject the notion to consider participating in counseling are hesitant due to due to previous beliefs, negative stigma, and stereotypes related to counseling and mental health (Vogel et al., 2014). For example, some men still hold false beliefs and perceptions about counseling and think that they must be crazy or weak to consider participating in counseling (Kohli, 2016).

There are men that believe counseling is a waste of time that consists of spending several years talking about his problems in therapy. (Kohli, 2016). The past beliefs that some men still

have related to counseling continues to serve as a barrier to participating in counseling, which could change if they are made aware of the current trends and changes that have taken place in the counseling profession over the years. Many of the previous ideas and thoughts are no longer relevant to the counseling profession, however if the factual information about counseling is not provided to men then the results may remain the same.

In today's society, counselors are various genders, from different ethnic or racial backgrounds, and vary in age and nationality (Evans, Duffey & Englar-Carlson, 2013). The prospective male client does not have to be viewed as weak or crazy to consider participating in counseling. Any counselor can assist a male client with navigating through healthy transitions in their lives without giving advice while maintaining a non-biased and non-judgmental approach (Gelb, 2015).   The facts are that Men in counseling have the ability to engage in a confidential and relaxed environment where they do not have to pay a ton of money, he will not have to remain in counseling for the rest of their life, and he are not required to lay on the couch to talk about problems because they have the option to sit on the couch if he they choose (Gelb, 2015).

Based on facts presented about counseling many of the beliefs and perceptions some men have about counseling are invalid, however, many men still believe in these ideas because of the lack of exposure and education provided to them about what actually takes place in a counseling session. Years of conditioning to believe what has been observed and heard about counseling from people who are not counselors, former or current clients or knowing someone in the profession to provide a more accurate description of what truly takes place in a counseling setting (Kohli, 2016). Despite the truth about what takes place in a counseling session most men are not willing to look beyond their own beliefs and ideas to make an attempt to gain new information and insight about what really happens in a counseling session (Vogel et al., 2014).

This disparity causes men to continue to underutilize counseling services and for those who reject the idea of participating in counseling will continue to spread false ideas and beliefs to other men which perpetuates the negative stigma and beliefs about counseling (Vogel et al., 2014). These barriers and concerns are more intense for African American males due to historical, cultural, and systematic barriers related to counseling and mental health services that have made an impact within the African American community.

Cultural and Systemic Barriers to Counseling

Several reasons contribute to the negative stigma of counseling and mental health within the African American community including the lack of knowledge about counseling, religious beliefs, and financial concerns (Thompson & Bazile, 2004). Historical and cultural barriers prevent active participation in counseling services among African American men (Thompson & Bazile, 2004). The cultural barriers include, but are not limited to the following: (a) the lack of mentorship to connect potential clients to counseling and to help them understand the value and importance of counseling, (b) the lack of trust of White male counselors, (c) the lack of recruitment and retention of African American men in graduate programs, and (d) the lack of African American men in the counseling profession (Thompson & Bazile, 2004). Many of these barriers are still prominent and continue to decrease active participation of African American men in the counseling profession as clients, counselors and counselor educators.

The Stigma of Counseling

The disparity in the lack of African American counselor educators plus the low number of African American males within the U.S population causes several concerns within the counseling profession and the African American community. The African American community displays resistance towards counseling because of prior beliefs about counseling and the lack of

trust towards counselors and other helping professionals. In Henfield, Woo and Washington's (2013) study on African American counselor education students challenging experiences, the researchers found three themes of concern for African American students. The authors report that students faced increased stressed from feelings of isolation in academia, poor mentoring and supportive relationships, and issues with African American male student and faculty retention (Henfield, Woo & Washington, 2013). The negative stigma towards counseling remains prevalent for African American men due to aspects of religion, cultural barriers, belief, and lack of exposure to counseling services and the counseling profession (Ward & Besson, 2013).

The counseling profession has made efforts to reduce the negative stigma of counseling through education and advocacy for potential clients. For example, Smith and Roysircar (2010) report in their study that African American leaders in the counseling profession have contribute to the reduction of the negative stigma and provide support and advocacy by serving as a voice for minority clients, reducing health disparities through policy change, serving as allies, and increasing mental health research within minority population (Smith & Roysircar, 2010). Counseling is valuable in that it has serves as a tool to promote healthy change and provide assistance for clients in need of services and active participation in counseling has been described as a measure of increasing a person's well-being (Ward & Besson, 2013). Despite these facts, the negative stigma of counseling and mental health continues to serve as a barrier for African Americans who are seeking counseling (Masuda, Anderson, & Edmonds, 2012). Among other ethnic minorities and women, African American men suffer the most from the lack of awareness and participation in counseling services (Ward & Brown, 2015). The stigma of counseling is a major barrier that prevents African American men from engaging and remaining involved in counseling services (Ward & Brown, 2015).

Research suggests that there are two forms of stigma that contribute to the resistance to counseling: self-stigma and public stigma (Wester, Arndt, Sedivy, & Arndt, 2010). Self-stigma has is defined as the loss of self-esteem a client, especially a male, perceives of himself about participating in counseling (Tucker, Hammer, Vogel, Bitman, Wade, & Maier, 2013). This negative view is based on previous ideas related to counseling and a conflict within one's self to seek assistance for dealing with a personal concern and needing support from a counselor (Lannin, Vogel, Brenner, Abraham, Heath, 2015). In Lannin et al.'s (2015) study on self-stigma, the researchers investigated whether self-stigma reduced the probability of a potential client seeking mental health information and treatment. Lannin et al. (2015) surveyed a total of 370 undergraduate students from a large Midwestern university from different age groups, gender, cultural backgrounds, and sexual orientation with only 4% of the participants being African American. The researchers found that students who were not aware of their mental health status had a decreased interest in seeking counseling services once they were provided education about their mental health status and new information about counseling (Lannin et al., 2015) The authors also reported that the participants' levels of self-stigma increased when the participants discovered that they may be dealing with a mental health concern, which caused them to become more insecure and cautious about seeking treatment because of their own personal views (Lannin et al., 2015). The participants who may have been interested in seeking treatment became hesitant once they thought about how they would be viewed by others for seeking or participating in treatment. Overall the researchers of this study found that participants with higher levels of self-stigma were less likely to participate in counseling services compared to those with a lower sense of self-stigma (Lannin et al., 2015).

According to Wester, Arndt, Sedivy & Arndt's (2010) study, public stigma related to counseling involves a bias that society or a group has that counseling is socially unacceptable (Wester et al., 2010). The concern of public stigma is even more difficult for men to overcome due to cultural perspectives about gender roles. African American men have more negative attitudes about counseling and mental health than women (Wester et al., 2010). This concern is due to the value system and gender roles that are shared within the African American community (Vogel, Wade, & Hackler, 2007). Self stigma, or the negative perception that a person can have about themselves, is based on public stigma which causes counseling and mental health concerns to be perceived as negative (Vogel, Wade, & Hackler, 2007).

The fear of being labeled or viewed as being weak or crazy contributes to African American men choosing not to participate in counseling services as well as the fear of being misdiagnosed or hospitalized and distrusting helping professionals (Justice & Williams, 1997). The outcome of avoiding participating in counseling in order to avert negative labels may lead to unhealthy ways of coping with daily stressors and concerns, such as engaging in drugs and alcohol use or other vices (Justice & Williams, 1997). There are African American men who have been able to overcome self and public stigmas of counseling and mental health to actively participate in counseling. However, these men then risk being misdiagnosed due to clinicians' racial bias and cultural differences regarding how mental health symptoms are expressed (Carpenter-Song, Whitley, Lawson, Quimby, & Drake, 2011). An example of this conflict is when African American men are stereotyped as "the angry black man" which can lead a clinician to interpret the reaction of anger as a diagnosable disorder (Bilkins, Allen, Davey, & Davey, 2016). African American men who have overcome their own personal negative beliefs about

counseling may participate in counseling, but never reveal that information to anyone because of the risk of being labeled (Trahan & Lemberger, 2014).

Cultural Norms

Within the African American community, men are responsible for being the leaders and providers who are able to handle family problems and concerns (Wester, Arndt, Sedivy & Arndt's, 2010). Considering participation in counseling or seeking help can contrast with an African American male's idea of maintaining masculinity and leadership because of the specific gender role with which he identifies (Wester et al., 2010). For some men, masculinity of the associated gender roles contribute to the belief that it is socially unacceptable to seek treatment or counseling because it conflicts with the value of male gender roles (Wester et al., 2010). An additional factor to consider is that several qualitative studies (Kelleher, Taylor, & Rickert, 1992; Vogel & Heimerdinger-Edwards, 2013; Ward & Besson, 2013) suggest the stigma about counseling and mental health is increased in rural areas because of the sense of independence, self-resilience, and autonomy that are part of cultural norm in rural areas (Hammer, Vogel, & Heimerdinger-Edwards, 2013).

The cultural norms developed are related to a contributing factor to the cultural norms held by African American men that may manifest from the lack of a male presence for those men who have been raised by their mothers in a single parent household (Gantt & Greif, 2009). African American men raised in single parent households may hold closer to the value and belief system of being the leader and providing for their families because they were considered as the "man of the home" and responsible for taking care of household responsibilities so they often do not display signs of fear or the inability to handle personal issues on their own (Gantt & Greif, 2009). African American males are at a higher risk of underutilizing counseling services than

African American women possibly due to the engrained masculinity and gender roles stemming from childhood. Due to this risk, considering participation in counseling is inconsistent with the beliefs of being considered a "real man" and leader in the household (Hammer et al., 2013). African American men raised in single parent households may be limited in their understanding of male gender roles because of the absence of a male figure in the home (Gantt & Greif, 2009).

According to the United States Census Bureau, African American male youth are more likely to live in a single parent household which prevent an African American male from gaining insight on how to deal with daily stressors from a male perspective. The limitation of a lack of a positive male presence contributes to African American men finding any available resource to deal with daily stressors instead of seeking support and assistance by utilizing counseling services (Gantt & Greif, 2009). Traditionally within the African American male culture, guidance is sought through familial experiences and social activities such as church, pastors, close friends, the barbershop, bars, social organizations, and fraternities (Allen, Davey, & Davey, 2010). The lack of knowledge and experience in professional counseling preserves the negative perception of counseling services and decreases the amount of participation in counseling services among African American males (Allen, Davey, & Davey, 2010).

Thompson and Bazile (2004) conducted a qualitative study with 201 African American males and females (134 women 66 men, one participant did not share information on gender) by utilizing 24 mixed sex focus groups ranging from 3 to 12 participants to gain insight on the perception of psychotherapy and psychotherapists. Results from the focus group report that participants counseling was necessary to treat serious mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, clinical depression, and suicidal ideations (Thompson & Bazile, 2004). Participants of this study also stated that other life events such as stress, depression, rape, domestic violence, sexual abuse,

and drug and alcohol abuse were not severe enough to consider professional counseling services (Thompson & Bazile, 2004). Participants shared that coping with life stressors such as grief, relationship issues, finances, and discrimination were appropriate reasons to consider participating in counseling services; however, none of the participants were willing to participate in counseling themselves as a client even after speaking about how important going to counseling was for assistance in coping with life stressors (Thompson & Bazile, 2004).

Members of the focus group who did not have prior knowledge, experience, and understanding of mental health and counseling services reported their dislike for the terminology used to describe counseling. For example, participants shared that they prefer the term counseling over the word psychotherapy. The word psychotherapy was an unfamiliar term which they associated with the negative stigma of mental illness (Thompson & Bazile, 2004). The findings from this study are consistent with the the lack of knowledge and understanding of how counseling influences the level of stigma within a population reported by Jones, Cook, and Wang (2011). However, higher levels of knowledge and understanding about counseling and mental health has been found to reduce the stigma of mental health and counseling (Jones, Cook, & Wang, 2011).

Effects of Slavery and Systemic Racism among African American Men

The psychological damage from slavery, discrimination, segregation, and racism still has a lasting affect on African Americans in the United States (Carten, 2015). The historical perspective of African American's mistreatment and violation of their human rights dates back to slavery from the early 1800's until the unofficial ending in 1865 (Carten, 2015). After slavery ended, African Americans were still excluded from fair and equal treatment, access to education, health care, human rights, and connection with social and economic resources (Carten, 2015).

Acknowledging this historical perspective is important because of the current trends, stereotypes, and negative views that the majority population may have towards African Americans, especially men. For many African American's being descendants of people who were enslaved reminds them of feelings of shame and embarrassment associated from the history of slavery (Carten, 2015).

The founder of the Equal Justice Initiative, Bryan Stevenson (2015) stated that, "The institution of American slavery developed as a permeant hereditary system centrally tied to race" (Stevenson, 2015, p.1). Stevenson (2015) reported that racial bias is still common today, including that the assumption of guilt is assigned to people of color, more specifically African American men and boys, who are disproportionately arrested, convicted of crimes they did not commit, and sent to prison due to racial profiling (Stevenson, 2015). African American men are the most disproportionately incarcerated group in the United States (Cooke, 2015). An estimate of more than 800,000 African American men are currently incarcerated in jails or prisons in the United States (Cooke, 2015). Due to the current incarceration rates among African American men, 1 in 4 African American men will be incarcerated in his lifetime (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2017). African Americans make up 13% of the U.S Population; however, they represent 40% of the prison population (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2017). According to the Sentencing Project, African Americans are more likely than White Americans to be arrested and are six times more likely to be sentenced to prison for the same crime as a White person (Criminal Justice Facts, 2017). Stevenson asserts that slavery did not end in 1865, it has evolved into racial dynamics of the criminal justice system and mass incarceration (Stevenson, 2015).

These alarming statistics display the reality of the number of African American men who have no chance of serving as counselors or counselor educators due to restrictions such as being

ineligible for financial aid to pursue higher education, being unable to gain access to certain counseling careers and opportunities, and possibly disqualifying for professional licensure in some states. In addition, these men may be in need of counseling services after being released from prison in order to manage post traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, or other mental health concerns, and yet they too often lack the knowledge and resources to obtain professional counseling services. Many of these men shy away from counseling services due to the belief that counselors who are not African American will stereotype and discriminate against them because of their involvement in the prison system (Cooke, 2015). Thereby, leading them to often eventually fall victim to homelessness, joblessness, breaking down the family system, or turn to drugs and alcohol to cope with the current status of their lives after incarceration (Cooke, 2015).

Mistrust and Conflict due to the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment

One of the most nationally recognized concerns of mistrust and conflicts after slavery that the African American community had against White men, was the development of the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment (Carmack, Bates, & Harter, 2008). The Tuskegee Experiment was created in 1932 for the purpose of comparing the effects of syphilis between racial groups, primarily African Americans and Whites (Carmack et. al., 2008). The Public Health Service collaborated with the Tuskegee Institute in several rural counties in Alabama to conduct this study in hopes to reveal racial differences in how African Americans and Whites suffered from the disease, which was later considered as moral astigmatism (Carmack et al., 2008). Medical workers in the segregated south informed the participants that they were being treated for "bad blood" which was euphemism for syphilis (Associated Press, 2017). None of the men were asked to consent to participate in the study and to entice the men to participate they were being

offered hot meals, transportation to the clinic, yearly physicals, and burial stipends for the families of the participants (Carmack et al., 2008). The unsuspecting men infected with the sexually transmitted disease were being untreated intentionally for the purpose of tracking the progression of the disease and dissecting their bodies afterwards (Associated Press, 2017).

The experiment lasted for 40 years. It was finally exposed in 1972 and shut down. The participants and their families sued and were awarded a $9-million-dollar settlement (Associated Press, 2017). It was not until 25 years later in 1997, that former President Bill Clinton offered a public apology on behalf of the United States government for the damages caused by the results of the Tuskegee Experiment (Associated Press, 2017). For decades the Tuskegee experiment was believed to be the catalyst for the distrust among African Americans towards the medical community, specifically clinical trials and other tests (Associated Press, 2017). The results from this experiment caused many issues and concerns within the African American community with in regards of abuse, neglect, and mistrust of White men in helping professions.

Stereotyping of the African American Male

Stereotypes of African American men affect how others outside and within the African American culture perceive African American men. Stereotyping is defined as "cognitive structures that hold and organize the knowledge, beliefs and expectations a person has about a group of individuals" (Sanders & Ramasubramanian, 2012, p.18). Research in psychology suggested that stereotypes can assist in the assessment of accurate judgment as well as increasing positive social interaction; however, inaccurate stereotyping creates strong beliefs can produce negative attitudes and behaviors towards certain individuals and groups (Moskowitz et. al, 2012). Those individuals or group members who are stereotyped are expected to possess a certain behavior or attitude that may not be accurate (Moskowitz et. al, 2012). The intentional ideology

of creating ideas and beliefs that degrade and dehumanize African American men continue to plague the African American male in the present day. For example, after the verdict of the Trayvon Martin case where an unarmed 17-year-old African American male was shot and killed because he was viewed as a threat based on his appearance, former United States President Barack Obama made a statement during a press conference about the results of the verdict and spoke to his own experience of being an African American man in America:

> You know, when Trayvon Martin was first shot, I said that this could have been my son. Another way of saying that is Trayvon Martin could have been me 35 years ago.... The African American community is looking at this issue through a set of experiences and a history that doesn't go away. There are very few African American men in this country who haven't had the experience of being followed when they were shopping in a department store. That includes me. There are very few African American men who haven't had the experience of walking across the street and hearing the locks click on the doors of cars. That happens to me—at least before I was a senator. There are very few African Americans who haven't had the experience of getting on an elevator and a woman clutching her purse nervously and holding her breath until she had a chance to get off. That happens often (Obama, 2013, p.1).

These sentiments from the former president serve as evidence of how deeply rooted negative stereotypes are about African American men. His authentic remarks about race and stereotypes displayed that no matter the social class, status, education, or background an African American male has, he is still perceived as a threat and a danger to society because of longstanding myths and stereotypes about African American men that dates back to slavery.

There are limited resources available that address specific needs of African American men in the counseling field. Unfortunately, some clinicians still struggle with overcoming biases and stereotypes of African American men due to the lack of participation in training to increase their cultural competence (Moskowitz et. al, 2012). In addition to the mistreatment of African American men, they are still faced with stereotypes and myths about their culture of being violent, predators, and criminals (Moskowitz et. al, 2012). These false accusations towards African American men continue to serve as a barrier for African American men to progress in today's society. Such issues have caused damage to many African American men who are currently experiencing depression, anxiety, mental health issues, and addiction. These men are left without access mental health treatment because of their concerns of self-stigma and public stigma, as well as due to insufficient culturally competent services, which can result in further mistrust of White men who dominate the counseling profession as clinicians and counselor educators (Lannin et al., 2015). African American men are at a disadvantage because they have not been exposed to African Americans in many aspects of the counseling profession (Ward & Besson, 2013).

The Role of Religion

African Americans relied on their faith and religion to overcome the sufferings of slavery. The belief in a higher power cultivated into a belief system that is higher than any man. More specifically, this belief system included mistrust of White men due to the oppression and abuse of African Americans during slavery (Gutierrez, Goodwin, Kirkinis, & Mattis, 2014). In the African American community, religion, and spirituality play a major role in family dynamics and upbringing (Gutierrez, Goodwin, Kirkinis, & Mattis, 2014). The manifestations of religion in African American culture are often passed down for many generations and are infused in

parenting children, value systems, beliefs, and sources for support and assistance in difficult times (Gutierrez et al., 2014). Religion and spirituality have served as a form of security and faith, a source of strength, and a coping strategy to deal with daily stressors and concerns within and outside of the home (Gutierrez et al., 2014). For instance, Gantt and Greif (2009) conducted a qualitative study about single African American mothers raising their sons. The researchers reported that single mothers raising their sons promoted prayer within the home and taught their sons how to pray when they were in need of help. Single mothers encouraged prayer and made no mention of counseling services or other resources to get help for daily emotional or mental health problems. The study also reported that African American mothers use prayer themselves to cope with their own lives and teach this same method to their sons (Gantt & Greif, 2009).

African American men who grow up in a religious environment were taught how to deal with problems and stressors in ways that do not include seeking guidance from a professional counselor. Historically and currently, the Black church serves as the place of refuge for many African Americans (Bilkins, Allen, Davey, & Davey, 2016). The Black clergy serves an important role in providing mental health care because it is often the first place that many African Americans seek support for physical and mental health concerns. "Praying the issues away" has been a belief of effective treatment for some members in the African American community (Bilkins et al., 2016). Religion has served as a form of assistance that may be restricted in facing concrete problems and putting one's faith to the forefront to handle concerns of stress, anxiety, and depression. Therefore, religion is sought as a solution to problems as opposed to seeking professional help from a counselor.

Invisibility Syndrome

The invisibility syndrome is defined as "repeated experiences of perceived racial discrimination that perpetuate a feelings of low self-worth in the individual" (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000, p.33). Even if an African American male has high self-esteem and displays confidence, this constant clash of trying to prove one's worth can have a lasting impression on a client's attitude towards counseling and his therapist (Carr & West, 2013). As an African American male attempts to overcome the stereotypes about his race and culture, he may feel isolated and rejected, which contributes to the feeling of being invisible by societal standards (Carr & West, 2013). The lack of awareness and understanding of how African American male clients may deal with invisibility on a daily basis can cause more of a divide between the counselor and the client. The clinician must make attempts to become culturally aware of the struggles of invisibility among African American men in order to assist in building healthier relationships between African American men and White counselors (Carr & West, 2013).

Counselors' Responsibilities in Working with African American Men

Counselors who uphold high standards of cultural competency must be willing to overcome their own personal biases, stereotypes, and beliefs of other cultures in order to maintain cultural competence with their clients (Barden, Sherrell, Matthews, 2017). According to the *ACA Ethics* (2014) standard A.2.c. counselors must be able to demonstrate cultural competence and cultural sensitivity. Counselors who are unable or unwilling to demonstrate cultural competence will violate ethical standards by imposing their own values and beliefs or harming clients by violating their clients cultural beliefs and values. A national survey on multicultural competence for professional counselors stated that counselors and counselors in training should be knowledgeable of cultural values and have self awareness of their own

cultural background and personal biases in order to integrate culturally relevant and appropriate interventions to their clients (Barden, Sherrell, Matthews, 2017).

Fortunately, there has been an increased interest in promoting growth and change for training more culturally competent clinicians. The Association for Multicultural Counseling (AMCD) formed a diverse committee designed to revise and update the Multicultural Counseling Competences (MCC) that were originally developed in 1992 by Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis. MCC were designed to assist counselors, psychologists, and other mental health professionals in addressing the needs of culturally diverse clients and groups (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2016). The purpose of the revision was to display a more inclusive and current understanding of culture and diversity. It is also instrumental in addressing the role professional counselors have in increasing cultural competence, providing advocacy, and social justice to diverse individuals and groups. The revised version of the (MCC) transitioned into the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC). The MSJCC was designed for three specific measures: (a) address current practices and future needs of the counseling profession, (b) serve as a guideline for creating multicultural and social justice competency for the profession in concerns to accreditation, education, training, supervision, etc., and (c) to integrate multicultural and social justice counseling constructs and literature (Ratts, et. al., 2016). The attempt to bring more awareness to the profession regarding cultural differences took place 24 years ago to aid in providing information specifically about multicultural groups and individuals.

Currently, the MSJCC displays the progress made in the profession, however there is a responsibility of the clinician to work towards becoming more culturally aware of populations that may have been neglected or ignored in the past. The development of the MSJCC provides a

clear response in assisting counselors and counselors in training with increasing awareness to the issues of privilege and oppression that effects clients of color. The more aware clinicians are of their own privilege and ability to assist underserved population the more prepared they are to decrease the stigma of mental health and counseling within the African American community. Counselors have a responsibility in serving clients equally no matter racial differences, cultures, attitudes, or beliefs.

African American Men in Academia

Despite many African American men being victims of racism, discrimination, and oppression does not mean that the majority or all African American men are faced with the same experiences. In the face of racial divide and conflict, there are many African American men who have been able to find ways to resist being dehumanized (Johnson, 2006). For example, during slavery, African American men did not just dream and talk about freedom, they chose to resist oppression from slave owners and the slave trade by running away, fighting back, and working collectively towards freeing themselves and others to establish solidarity (Franklin, 1992). This concept is parallel to African Americans who have been able to overcome stereotypes, discrimination, false beliefs, and myths about African American men to accomplish what were once unattainable goals of not only graduating from high school, but going further to obtain a bachelor or master's, or doctoral degree.

Racial Disparities in Academia

Throughout the history of America, African Americans' educational opportunities have been limited (Garibaldi, 2014). African American men are graduating from high school at a very

low rate compared to other groups and a very low number of them are going further in achieving a college degree. For instance, the national high school graduation rate for 2011-2012 year was 80%, and yet African American high school students' graduation rate was 69% and only 52% for African American male students (Garibaldi, 2014). African American men make up less than 2% of teachers even though minorities make up a majority of students in public school system (McClain, 2016). African American males currently account for only 3.5% of the total enrollment in colleges and universities (Farmer & Hope, 2015). For those African American males who are able to gain admission into college less than 40% graduate and that's within a 6-year period at 4 year institutions (Farmer & Hope, 2015).

African American college students are disproportionately represented compared to students of other races. African American students are at an increased risk of withdrawing from college due to financial concerns, lower academic performance, lack of support, resources, lack of mentorship and having a negative college experience (Farmer & Hope, 2015). The enrollment numbers decrease as they progress through higher education receiving a masters and are abysmally lower for obtaining a doctoral degree in higher education. Bradley and Holcomb (2003) reported that only 3% of the 160,000 counselor education faculty in CACREP accredited programs in the United States that work at Research I and II institutions identify as being a member of an ethnic minority group. Further, most ethnic minority faculty are untenured and hold junior faculty or adjunct positions (Bradley & Holcomb, 2003).

Overcoming Obstacles

Some African American men have not fallen victim to the prison system and avoided death by the hands of White police officers to go even further and obtain masters and doctoral degrees. These select few have overcome all obstacles that have plagued African American men

since their transport from Africa to the United States during the slave trade. More specifically, there have been a select few who have overcome these obstacles as well as the stigmas and barriers of mental health and counseling within the African American community to become counselors and counselor educators. The challenge of not only gaining acceptance into a rigorous CACREP-accredited master's or doctoral program, but to matriculate through all of the requirements to successfully graduate is a major accomplishment for any African American male (Henfield, Woo, & Washington, 2013). Despite the overall achievement, there is very limited literature on the experiences that African American male graduate students have in order to obtain a master's or doctoral degree in counselor education programs (Henfield, Woo, & Washington, 2013).

In 2004, Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies, and Smith conducted a qualitative study on African American Ph.D. students at a predominately White Research-I institution. They interviewed a total of eight students: four graduates and four current students. Five of the students were female and three were male. From the interviews, the researchers found four common themes among the students: (a) feelings of isolation: the students reported that they felt like "uninvited guests in a strange land," (b) the students stood out as being different: the students reported that there was no one else around like them and struggled to connect with mentors to assist them through the process, (c) relationship with peers: students reported that they felt they were a part of a diversity strategy by the university and unable to connect with their White peers, (d) negotiating the system: the students reported a feeling of having to be "self-reliant" because no one offered support and assistance of how to figure out aspects of life out in a Ph.D. program (Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies, & Smith, 2004). Despite several of these common themes that occur for African American men, many make the necessary adjustments to achieve success at

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predominantly White institutions (Allen, 1992). The success of African Americans who earn Ph.D.'s provides the beginning of the process of shaping a new narrative for African American graduate students in counselor education programs.

Brown, Rosnick, and Segrist (2017) also investigated the experiences of African American males in higher education by exploring sociocultural factors, including the relationship between internalized racial oppression and higher education values among African Americans (Brown, Rosnick, & Segrist, 2017). Brown et al. (2017) suggested that there are few studies that report findings on higher education values within the African American community, and instead, the current literature is more focused on achievement for African American children and adolescents (Brown et al., 2017). From their survey of 156 African American college students, the researchers found that there was an inverse relationship between internalized racial oppression and the value the students placed on higher education (Brown et al., 2017). The finding of the internalization of racial oppression, regardless of higher education status, serves as another barrier among African Americans who are in the pursuit of higher education and those who chose not to continue to pursue higher education due to the current trends of racial oppression within the African American community.

The results from Brown et al.'s (2017) study are consistent with reports from Ford, Moore, and Troutman-Scott (2011) on key theories and frameworks for the recruitment and retention of on African American students in gifted education. Ford et al. (2011) stated that African American students were aware of the importance of higher education; however, the connection to higher education for some African Americans is viewed mainly for the financial advancement. Ford et al. (2011) reported that African American students' awareness of racial

oppression could reduce the motivation and desire to seek careers in higher education because it can be viewed as another barrier rather than a reward to pursue a career in higher education.

African American Men in the Counseling Profession

The views that some African American men may have towards White Americans carry a burden of mistrust, resentment, and protecting themselves by not engaging in aspects of mental health and counseling which have been dominated by White men. The majority of the historical figures that are celebrated and studied in counseling programs are White men. White men dominated the counseling profession for many years and later integrated women and people of color into the profession. African American men are faced with resistance and stereotyped views about them when dealing with law enforcement, especially White men in authority (Ward & Besson, 2013). The tension between African American men and White men in authority has served as a conflict for many years dating back to enslavement of African Americans, the civil rights movement, which has now migrated into the Black Lives Matter movement (Landers, Rollock, Rolfes, & Moore, 2011).

The lack of African American men presenting in the counseling profession causes a decreased interest among African American men in pursuing a career in the counseling profession. In a study to investigate the number of African American students in CACREP-accredited programs, Johnson, Bradley, Knight, and Bradshaw (2007) reported that out of the 825 students enrolled in 29 CACREP counseling programs that participated in their survey, 148 (17.9%) were African American and only 44 (5.3%) were men (Johnson, Bradley, Knight, & Bradshaw, 2007). The researchers suggested that African American doctoral students are adequately represented in counselor education programs (Johnson et al., 2007). However, these

numbers indicated that there is still a disparity in the amount of African American male graduate students.

Fortunately, African American male leadership within the counseling profession serves as a voice for several minorities to reduce the stigma about mental health and counseling through changes in policy and increased research within the literature and advocate for minority populations (Smith & Roysircar, 2010). There has been an increase in the development of separate counseling related divisions created under the umbrella of the American Counseling Association (ACA). Currently, there are a total of 20 divisions to be more specific, with the purpose of enhancing professional identity for specific interests and practice areas (ACA, 2017). More specifically, the with the creation of Association of Non-White concerns in personnel and guidance created in 1972 (ACA, 2017). As with many aspects of growth and development in the counseling profession the division was later renamed the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (ACA, 2017). The Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD) is an international professional development organization that provides global leadership, research, training, and development for multicultural counseling professionals with a focus on racial and ethnic issues (ACA, 2017). African American male counselors and counselor educators within AMCD have work towards creating a more inclusive counseling environment that reaches many students and counselors of color to meet cultural needs and reduce the discrimination and isolation of minority groups. These men serve an important role in influencing organizational change that speaks volumes to those who are currently in the profession and those graduate students of color, specifically African American males, who may not have had a voice, felt isolated, excluded, and underrepresented (Smith & Roysircar, 2010).

The creation of the Counselor Educators African-American Men's Retreat (CEAAMR) in 2017 provided African American male master's and doctoral students a place of support and advocacy from current and past professional counselors and counselor educators who are African American men. Although this group is still in its developmental stages and is not an officially recognized group by the ACA, it has been designed to provide mentorship, support, training, networking, advocacy, and leadership development for African American male counselors and counselor educators in training. The creation of this group was made in part by African American counselor educators attempt to give back to the counseling profession and the future African American male counselor educators. This was only possible due to the integration of African American men into the counseling profession almost 100 years ago. The first African American male to earn a Ph.D. in Psychology was Dr. Francis Sumner in 1920. Dr. Francis contributed to the profession by his presence and two published articles concerning strategies for the higher education of African American youth (Sawyer, 2000). There was not a specific group or collaboration of support and mentorship designed for African American men since it's integration in 1920 which displays how much African American men have been at a disadvantage compared to other groups in counselor education.

The Value and Importance of Mentorship

One of the most valuable assets to assist African American male graduate students with pursuing professorship upon completion of graduate studies is the benefit of mentorship (Haizlip, 2012). For instance, Lewis et al.'s (2004) phenomenological investigation of African American counselor education students' experiences in graduate programs at Predominately White Institutions (PWI's) presented outcomes consistent to similar studies that reported African American students share bouts of social isolation, also often described as invisibility. The study

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also reported that the students lacked the involvement in mentorship opportunities and meaningful relationships with cohort members and peers (Lewis et al., 2004). According to Butler, Evans, Brooks, Williams, and Bailey (2013), mentorship has been defined as a developmental partnership through which one person shares knowledge, skills, information, and perspective to foster the personal growth of someone else.

African American students gravitate toward racially similar support systems to navigate the doctoral experience, which has served as support and assistance in successful completion of master's and doctoral programs (Lewis et al., 2004). In the counseling profession, there is a consensus that professional mentorship from faculty advisors can influence a student's desire to pursue an academic career (Hill, Castillo, Ngu, & Pepion, 1999). If African American male students are not provided mentorship throughout their graduate programs, they may successfully complete their graduate studies at a lesser rate compared to their White counterparts who do have the resources of mentorship, or at least someone who looks like them in their program (Butler et al., 2013). For African American males, having access to an African American male to serve as a mentor can increase the outcomes for African American males entering into the counseling profession as counselors and counselor educators, including increasing the rates of recruitment, retention, and successful transition from graduate school to a faculty member in counselor education (Butler et al., 2013).

Mentorship plays an instrumental role in mitigating the achievement declines experienced by African American men (Butler et al., 2013). Within the counseling profession, counselor educators are natural role models and leaders who provide mentorship, intentionally or unintentionally, by virtue of their presence and engagement with students in academia (Butler et al., 2013). African American graduate students who have access to a mentor with the ability to

understand cultural barriers, frustrations, ideals, and beliefs of the African American male experience can serve as a guide to assist in navigating the experience in doctoral programs and later assisting them with navigating the life in higher education as a counselor educator (Butler et al., 2013). The contribution that African American male counselor educators can make is the ability to plant seeds in African American male students for future achievement and a new perspective about counseling and counselor education (Butler et al., 2013). These students in turn will be more inclined to provide the same assistance as they mature and develop within the counseling profession. The presence of having more African American men serving as counselor educators will increase African American men's desires and interests in becoming counselors and counselor educators. Further, a greater presence will also increase African American males' participation in counseling due to by having a representative who they believe will assist them with their concerns because of cultural similarities and perceiving an African American male as counselors (Butler et al., 2013).

Current Trends in the Counselor Education Profession

African American men are underrepresented in the counseling profession as licensed counselors and serving as private practice practitioners compared to other groups (Thompson, Bazile, & Akbar, 2004). These trends may result from the lack of mentorship, decreased successful completion of graduate studies, lack of guidance to explore career opportunities after graduation, and observing a lack of African American men in the counseling profession (Thompson, Bazile, & Akbar, 2004). The lack of perception of African American male professional counselors contributes to the limited number of African American males who participate in counseling services.

As the stigma of mental health and counseling continues to plague African American men from participating in counseling services, African American men are also underrepresented as professional counselors and counselor educators and supervisors. The results from the limited research in this area found that African American male counselor educators serving as faculty members are considerably lower in number compared to their White counterparts (Brooks & Steen, 2010). The reason for the disparity are consistent within the literature stating factors related to low graduation rates, lack of mentorship, support, and deficits in recruitment and retention (Brooks & Steen, 2010).

For those African American men who have been able to attain degrees and infiltrate counselor education and secure employment in higher education, they are then faced with concerns related to retention, limited financial and mentoring support, resistance issues with getting promoted and tenured, and the conflict of working in an unhealthy and unwelcoming work environment (Brooks & Steen, 2010). There is still an issue with this dynamic which can possibly be traced back to the negative beliefs majority populations may have against African American men. Another conflict faced by African American male counselor educators is their desire to produce research that is focused on their experiences and cultural background that is met with resistance or results in feelings of isolation or marginalization because their research agendas are focused on disparities for underrepresented populations and culture (Brooks & Steen, 2010). For instance, Brooks and Steen (2010) interviewed 26 participants who were tenured or tenure-seeking faculty members in CACREP-accredited counselor education programs throughout the United States.

They discovered three themes in their responses: (a) life in academia is flexible which allows them to be passionate and dedicated to students and the profession, (b) they have

opportunities to do meaningful work by contributing to current research for the concerns of underserved groups, and (c) the African American faculty reported that they were not aware of specific recruitment and retention strategies for African American males in their colleges and universities. They shared frustration over the lack of effort the profession and institutions had to recruit and retain African American Male Counselor Educators (Brooks & Steen, 2010). Brooks and Steen (2010) conclude in their study that in order to begin the process of changing the current dynamic within the profession there is a huge need for the intentional recruitment and retention of African American male counselor educators and graduate students (Brooks & Steen, 2010).

Summary of the Literature

Many aspects of the past and current trends of society make it difficult for African American men to move forward and become more progressive due to many years of mistreatment and disregard from the White majority of society. These concerns have lead to African American male isolation, exclusion, and low self esteem and sense of self worth. From the past to the present, African American men have been experiencing racism, discrimination; incarceration of the innocent'; racial profiling'; and stereotyping as dangerous, aggressive, and uneducated (Sanders & Ramasubramanian, 2012). The unhealthy belief system that has been engendered in African American men has made an impact on how people process information regarding the outlook of this group compared to others that can lead to unfair and inaccurate treatment and impressions to the African American community as a whole (Sanders & Ramasubramanian, 2012). Because of the many factors explored, many African American men

often internalize false beliefs about themselves and their culture and begin to develop self fulfilling prophecies. A self-fulfilling prophecy can be defined as ideas that become reality simply because someone believes them to be true (Aaronson, 2005).

Despite all of the concerns, there is a select group of African American men who have overcome the biases, statistics, stereotypes, and stigma of mental health and counseling to actively participate in counseling services, and some even chose a career in the counseling profession. Some men go further to not only graduate from high school but also to gain admission into college and graduate. There are African American men who decide to continue their journey to pursue a master's degree in counseling and who go on to become professional counselors who establish a practice or work in the community mental health setting (Brooks & Steen, 2010). There are others, from an even smaller select group, who progress even further by pursuing a doctoral degree in counselor education and supervision and graduate to serve as facilitators for instruction and supervisors to counselors-in-training. The amazing feat of overcoming all barriers to get involved in an area that the literature reports many African American males do not get involved in requires them to ignore the status quo and keep going pushing towards giving back and serving others in the helping profession. These men have beat the odds and found their place in an elite group of men who now have the opportunity to increase the visibility of African American men in the counseling profession (Brooks & Steen, 2010). They can serve as mentors to other African American men who may not have considered a career in the counseling profession. They can assist in the recruitment and retention of African American men in counselor education programs. They can serve as counselors and counselor educators

Significance of the Study

The African American community is faced with the negative stigma and stereotypes related to counseling and mental health profession (Masuda, Anderson & Edmonds, 2012). Specifically, African American males are disproportionately represented within the counseling profession serving as counselors, counselor educators, and potential clients utilizing counseling and mental health services. The disparity of African American males' participation in counseling is limited because of factors that prevent the engagement, involvement, and sustainability in participation in services (Ward & Brown, 2015). Due to this disparity, African American males are underrepresented in the counseling profession and will benefit from more exposure to African American male counselors and counselor educators to aid in decreasing the negative stigma and stereotype related to counseling and mental health. Despite the current trends, there have been some African American males who have overcome the barriers and challenges of mental health and counseling within the culture to gain access and participation in the counseling profession as counselors and counselor educators.

The interest of male participants specifically is due to African American men having more negative attitudes about counseling and mental health compared to women (Wester et al., 2010). Interviewing African American counselors and counselor educators about their experiences may provide more insight into ways to recruit African American male clients, counselors, and counselor educators in order to increase participation and engagement within the counseling profession. The results found in the proposed study will provide more suggestions on the reasons African American males are not participating in the counseling profession as well as strategies to increase the representation of African American males within the counseling profession.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to discover the experiences of African American men who have successfully overcome the stigma, stereotypes, and myths about counseling and mental health in order to choose a career in the counseling profession. Brooks and Steen (2010) conducted a study related to African American male instructors' perceptions of the counselor education profession reported that there is a lack of African American males serving as counselor educators to make a difference in the African American community as a whole in regards of counseling (Brooks & Steen, 2010). According to Palmer and Maramba's (2011) study on African American male achievement in higher education they reported that even though "the number of African American men entering higher education has increased over the years, African American men continue to lag behind their female and White male counterparts with respect to college participation, retention, and degree completion rates" (Palmer & Maramba, 2011, p.435). The goal of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African American male counselors and counselor educators and to give voice to their shared stories of successfully gaining access to a career in the counseling profession. More specifically, this study obtained the lived experiences of the participants and provided a more detailed understanding of ways to support, retain, and recruit African American men in the counseling profession as clients, counselors, and counselor educators.

Research Question

Consistent with phenomenological method, the research question for this study is, "What are the lived experiences of African American men in becoming counselors and counselor educators?"

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

In order to gain a better understanding of the African American male counselors and counselor educators experiences, a hermeneutical phenomenological approach was utilized to conduct this study. Phenomenology is defined as obtaining a holistic perspective of an individual or group of shared experiences through interviews (Creswell, 2013). According to Creswell (2007), hermeneutical phenomenology is defined as a collaboration of subjective reality of an individual or group of shared experiences that represent a phenomenon. The hermeneutical phenomenological approach is utilized to provides an in depth understanding of the description of a lived experience (Van Manen, 1990). The current researcher conducted twelve research interviews and collected data on the lived experiences of the African American male participants. The utilization of research interviews provided a way of learning about the world of others, which for this study the interest was the world to be explored in the current study is that of African American male counselors and counselor educators (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Qu and Dumay (2011) stated that "the research interview is one of the most important qualitative data collection methods that has been widely used in conducting field studies and ethnographic research" (p. 238). The authors also reported that by gaining the lived experience of a particular group from their personal testimonies will provide a deeper understanding of the essence of a selected groups experience (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

The research interviews were semi-structured and specifically designed to obtain in depth information about the lived experiences of African American male counselors and counselor

educators in their journey into the counseling profession. The researcher utilized semi-structured interviews were utilized in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). Qu and Dumay (2011) assert, that "semi-structured interviews are flexible, accessible and capable of disclosing important and often hidden facets of human behavior and involves prepared questions guided by identified themes in a consistent and systematic manner interposed with probes designed to elicit more elaborate responses" (p. 246). According to Van Manen (1990) the researcher is responsible for gaining an in-depth understanding of lived experiences of the participants who are being studied. The researcher of the current study found several common themes among the participants interviews and gained a rich understanding into the worldview and phenomenon of the twelve African American men without imposing his own experiences as an African American male counselor and counselor educator in training (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

The researcher investigated the phenomena of African American males overcoming a variety of barriers to pursue a career in the counseling profession. Hays and Wood (2011) stated that "Phenomenology is a tradition that is consistent with counseling because assessing detailed information about client experiences is a natural part of professional practice" (Hays & Wood, 2011, p. 291). Van Manen (2017b) explained a more in depth description of the purpose of using a phenomenological approach which correlates with the researcher's intention for this study. Van Manen (2017) stated that "genuine phenomenological inquiry is challenging and satisfying precisely because its meaningful revelations must be original and existentially compelling to the soul" (Van Manen, 2017a, p.779). Van Manen (2017) also shared that when conducting a study utilizing a phenomenological approach, it is not just an attempt at hearing about the emotional

connection from lived experiences, but to interpret, analyze and understand the depth of the concrete experience of an individual or group (Van Manen, 2017a).

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in phenomenological research is to serve as the instrument to conduct a study on the lived experiences of African American male counselors and counselor educators. As an AA male counselor, the researcher has experienced and overcome the barriers and stigma of counseling and mental health discussed in the literature to pursue a career in the counseling profession. The researcher became interested in this study to observe any similarities or differences with other African American men within the counseling profession. Further, the researcher was also interested in exploring any themes that may be found from interviewing other African American counselors and counselor educators. The nature of the researcher's experiences and personal connection to aspects of the study made him at risk of decreasing the validity and credibility when conducting the study because he could contribute his own personal bias which could change the outcome of the study. In addition, the researcher may have also influenced the quality of the study with researcher bias if there was not a plan in place to assist in maintaining validity and credibility throughout the study (Van Manen, 1990). To increase validity and credibility of the study and decrease researcher bias the researcher provided a detailed description of his plans throughout the study by utilizing research memos, member checking and consultation with the peer reviewer when defining his role as the researcher.

Hunt (2011) stated that qualitative research is influenced by the person who is conducting the study because the researcher may be part of the process. According to Onwuegbuzie (2003), researcher bias occurs when the researcher has personal bias or assumptions that may be

subconsciously transferred to the participants that influences the behaviors, attitudes, or experiences of the participants (Onwuegbuzie, 2003). He also acknowledged that researcher bias is a common threat due to the researcher serving as the primary instrument for data collection (Onwuegbuzie, 2003). As an African American male counselor and counselor educator in training, I was aware of the possible biases that could have taken place during this study. For example, hearing and reading the stories, feelings, and perspectives shared by the participants could have made an impact on me because I may have experienced a similar narrative. Van Manen (1990) explained that, "My own life experiences are immediately accessible to me in a way that no one else's are. However, the phenomenologist does not want to trouble the reader with purely private, autobiographical facticities of one's life" (p.54). In order to monitor, decrease, and prevent my own biases from influencing the study and to come to terms with my assumptions, prior knowledge, and perceptions I utilized bracketing, reflective journaling, and created an audit trail to document my thoughts and experiences throughout the study, more specifically before and after the participant interviews. Van Manen (1990) defined bracketing as "the act of suspending one's various beliefs in the reality of the natural world in order to study the essential structures of the world" (Van Manen, 1990, p.175).

Before conducting the study, I bracketed my thoughts by exploring underlying beliefs, theories, and ideas. I used this method to ensure that I exhausted my ideas and beliefs about the topic at the beginning and throughout the study as more thoughts and judgments were triggered from the responses during the interviews and follow up. Hays and Wood (2011) noted that counseling researchers must refrain from including their own judgment about a phenomenon, which is described as epoche. A researcher who has a new perspective and willing to bracket their assumptions is an important aspect of being objective with research participants who may

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share a similar phenomenon (Hays & Wood, 2011). I remained as objective as possible by maintaining professionalism and in the role of the researcher while conducting the interviews. Rapport was established quickly within the interviews because of the connection of speaking with another Black male counselor and counselor educator in training. Some of the participants viewed me differently than my role as a researcher due to shared cultural experiences, my understanding of slang and terminology, our backgrounds and appearance. Although the participants were able to relate to me due to being an African American male who happens to be a counselor and counselor educator in training, Miles and Huberman (1994) report that researcher bias can be reduced by selecting a heterogeneous sample of participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In an effort to reduce researcher bias I recruited African American male participants who are from diverse backgrounds and areas across the United States that had a variety of disciplines including school counseling and clinical mental health counseling.

Another step in reducing my biases in reflexivity was creating a reflective journal to capture as many of my thoughts, perceptions, and ideas before and after each interview of the participants in the study. By journaling throughout the study I was able to focus my attention on the lived experiences of the participants and did not allow my own judgment or perception to interfere with the outcome of the study. Sharing my thoughts and feelings through a reflective journal also allowed me to process when the participants shared thoughts and ideas about the study or their experience that triggered thoughts and feelings that I was not able to analyze through my bracketing experience. Clearing my mind by utilizing bracketing and writing in a reflective journal provided me with the tools to ensure that my past and current perspective was being set aside to focus on the participants lived experiences which aids in reduction as suggested by Van Manen (1990). Utilizing Van Manen's (1990) approaches of reduction and

epoche I was able to go above and beyond my own worldview by setting my biases aside to determine the lived experiences from an individual or group while remaining objective (Van Manen, 1990).

Van Manen (1990) also noted that researchers must be open minded to new ideas that may come up during the process of working with participants who share similar experiences expressed in a research study (Van Manen, 1990). As the primary investigator of the study and having similar lived experiences of the participants I am aware that the candid debriefing before, during and after the interviews would bring up new ideas and concepts that I may not have considered prior to conducting the interviews. I shared all of my thoughts and experiences in between each interview in my reflective journal to ensure that I continued to exhaust my ideas during the study. Van Manen described epoche as placing the researcher's biases aside to determine the lived experiences of an individual or group of the phenomena that's being studied (Van Manen, 1990). I maintained and upheld standards of producing a work that does not reflect my experiences by being attentive to subjectivity and reflexivity, and sought to only report the perspectives and shared experiences of the participants involved in this study. An additional step that I took in reducing my biases and reflexivity was to maintain a reflective audit trail. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined an audit trail as a records that are kept by the researcher that provides a transparent description of the research steps taken from the start of a research project to the reporting of the findings. Utilizing an audit trail provided me with a system to observe how my plans, thoughts, feelings and assumptions may change throughout the study and I can pinpoint different times, days and scenarios to reflect back on in chronological order. Having an audit trail allowed me to address and decrease my biases from seeing different entries throughout the study. Maintaining all three methods of reflexivity to reduce my biases served as a system of

accountability to protect the participants and increased credibility and trustworthiness throughout this study.

Procedures

Participants

For this study 12 African American males were purposefully sampled as participants for this study. According to Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, and Hoagwood (2015) qualitative researchers use purposeful sampling in order to identify and select information-rich participants that are closely related to the phenomenon of interest. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants who meet specific criteria for participation in this study. The researcher also utilized snowball sampling to recruit more African American male participants for this study. Marcus, Weigelt, Hergert, Gurt, and Gelléri, (2017) defined snowball sampling as "any type of sample recruitment strategy, whereby all or a portion of participants who are asked to provide data are not directly recruited by the researcher but through other persons who connect them to other persons as participants" (p. 636). The snowball approach allowed each participant in the study to identify other African American male counselors or counselor educators who could serve as a participant to add saturation to the study. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) described saturation as "the more similar participants in a sample are in their experiences with respect to the research domain, the sooner the researcher would expect to reach saturation" (p.76).

According to Will and Morgan (2008) snowball sampling is a useful tool in qualitative research to obtain participants when there is no resources or specific lists available. Due to the small number of African American men in the counseling profession, snowball sampling was an

effective approach to saturating the sample of 12 African American male participants. The inclusion criterion for this study included (a) identifying as an African American man, (b) currently holding a full time position for at least one or more years as a professional counselor or counselor educator, and (c) consenting to participating in two in-depth interviews and having the interviews recorded for data collection. The exclusion criteria were any counselor or counselor educator that is not an African American male and has not been a counselor or counselor educator for at least one year.

In order to recruit participants, the researcher posted the study invitation to various professional listserves including CESNET, ALCA, OCA, and ACA divisions. The researcher utilized snowball sampling once he was able to connect with potential participants for the study. For the participants who are unable to meet the inclusion criteria, snowball sampling was requested of those participants to share the invitation to other African American men who may meet the inclusion criteria. When potential participants reported an interest in the study, the researcher screened them for inclusion criteria, provided a copy of the consent form and upon completion scheduled the first interview.

The researcher was interested in selecting participants from across the United States to observe any differences related to location, time served in the profession, age, religion, and other demographic information to gain a thorough understanding of the potential client's status prior to the interview. Religion was selected due to the findings that in the African American community religion and spirituality play a major role in family dynamics and upbringing (Gutierrez, Goodwin, Kirkinis, & Mattis, 2014). The researcher collected this information by utilizing a demographic questionnaire prior to beginning the participant interviews after they agreed to participate in the study (see Appendix B).

Data Collection

The researcher interviewed African American male counselors and counselor educators about their experiences to explore, describe, predict and explain a phenomenon to reach a central idea or outcome was the goal of using phenomenology in this study (Hays & Wood, 2011). Prior to beginning the first interview and submission to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher conducted a practice interview with the selected peer reviewer to rehearse how the interviews will flow as well as made changes to the research questions. Qu and Dumay (2011) suggested that the researcher must not only possess various skills to aid in the research process such as active listening skills and note taking, but strategic planning and preparation before, during and after the interviews to collect interview data that's useful for research purposes. The researcher then requested the consent of the research participants (see Appendix A) and received their completed demographic form (see Appendix B). The researcher conducted two different interviews to promote more discussion, changes or updates from the initial interview. The participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol to allow for variation among the questions based on the participant's responses.

The researcher conducted the interviews using a Sony audio recorder to capture the discussions of the participant's experiences of overcoming the barriers of mental health and counseling. The interview protocol includes 15 questions and the researcher asked follow up questions as necessary during the interview to attain a rich description of participants' experiences (see Appendix C). The interviews were held for approximately 45-60 minutes each. The participants were not compensated for their participation in this study. The participants received a recruitment email to request participation in the study if they met the requirements (see Appendix D).

Data Analysis

According to Van Manen (1990) "Phenomenological themes may be understood as the structures of experience" (Van Manen, 1990. P. 79). He also stated that "when we analyze a phenomenon, we are trying to determine what the themes are, the experiential structures that make up that experience" (Van Manen, 1990. P. 79). At the conclusion of each participant's recorded and documented interviews, the researcher uploaded the data files to the Scribie transcription service platform. Scribie is one of the most advanced transcription services that provides high-quality transcripts from the researcher's audio files. The researcher then analyzed the data, created codes, and recorded themes found from the participants lived experiences found from the transcriptions at the conclusion of the participant interviews. Van Manen (1990) reported that interpreting the meaning of a participants lived experiences is a process of insightful invention and discovery (Van Manen, 1990). Scribie transcription services completed a non-disclosure agreement that stated that uploaded files will be deleted from their database once the transcription has been obtained. Confidentiality is of the utmost importance and the participant's information has been kept on a secure flash drive and was destroyed at the conclusion of the study. The primary investigator was the only person who had access to the secure flash drive. The researcher was the only person aware of the participant's identity and pseudonyms were utilized to ensure confidentiality prior to the completion of the analysis.

The researcher then analyzed the data collected by utilizing the suggestions made by Van Manen (1990) who described three approaches towards uncovering or isolating thematic aspects of a phenomenon, which include sententious, selective, or detailed versions, to conduct data analysis in phenomenological studies (Van Manen, 1990). The researcher utilized all three approaches in order to locate all of the themes of the lived-experiences shared by the participants

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in the study. The first approach was the holistic reading approach that attends to the text as a whole and asks, "What sententious phrase may capture the fundamental meaning or main significance of the text as a whole?" (Van Manen, 1990. p. 93). The researcher reviewed the entire interview of each of the participants and located similar themes that were then documented, correlated and compared to all of the participant's responses from the interview questions.

The second approach utilized was the selective reading approach which the researcher listened and read the text several times and asked, "What statement(s) or phrase(s) seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described?" (Van Manen, 1990. p. 93). The researcher listened and read the transcriptions of the interviews and highlighted the statements and phrases for coding that revealed common themes among the African American men in the study. The final approach that the researcher utilized in analyzing the data was the line-by-line approach and asked "What does this sentence or sentence cluster reveal about the phenomenon or experience being described?" (Van Manen, 1990. p. 93). The researcher meticulously scanned each document to determine what sentences were essential in explaining the phenomena from the African American male experiences or barriers related to their journey into the counseling profession. The researcher compiled the information gathered from the data to ensure that the study captured the lived experiences of African American men by analyzing the themes found from utilizing Van Manen (1990) three approaches of isolating thematic statements from the research participants.

The responsibility of the researcher was to "hold on to the themes by lifting appropriate phrases or by capturing in singular statements the main thrust of the meaning of the themes" (Van Manen, 1990. p. 93). By utilizing Van Manen's approach the researcher gained themes and

thematic statements from phenomenologically sensitive paragraphs (Van Manen, 1990). The researcher continued to journal, bracket, and refer back to the audit trail throughout the study to ensure that any researcher bias did not influence the study. The researcher utilized the peer reviewer selected to assist in maintaining credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

In order to maintain credibility and trustworthiness, the researcher incorporated several standards described by Morrow (2005). Researchers are responsible for being sufficient in their efforts towards immersing themselves in the data, being attentive to subjectivity and reflexivity, and effectively interpreting and presenting accurate data (Morrow, 2005). The researcher maintained credibility by adhering to Morrow's (2005) three suggestions for increasing credibility (a) maintaining prolonged engagement with research participants during the study by participating in two in-depth interviews, (b) utilizing peer reviewers in the study, and (c) seeking participant checks and validation (Morrow, 2005). The researcher utilized research memos and prepared an audit trail to enhance reflexivity and transparency to assist with trustworthiness in the study. Morrow defined an audit trail as a detailed chronology of research activities and processes (Morrow, 2005).

The first method the researcher worked towards increasing credibility based on Morrow's (2005) suggestions is by maintaining prolonged engagement with the research participants was by conducting two separate interviews to saturate the data and obtain a deeper understanding of the participants lived experiences (Morrow, 2005). The interviews were scheduled for an hour each which provided a total of two hours with each participant to obtain as much information as possible to assist with the credibility of the study. The time allotted for the interviews provided an estimate time of interaction between the researcher and the participants, however the time

included during the follow up discussions, building rapport with participants before beginning the interview and debriefing afterwards as well as the utilization of member checking at the conclusion of the data analysis provided the researcher with an extensive amount of time with each participant in the study. The researcher utilized a research memo to document experiences that took place before, during, and after each of the participant interviews.

The second method the researcher utilized was selecting a peer reviewer who was closely related to the topic of this research that aided in maintaining trustworthiness and credibility throughout the study. Merriam (2009) described a peer reviewer as a colleague or professional closely related to the research to discuss concepts and ideas to maintain congruence of the emerging findings with the raw data and tentative interpretations to ensure the findings are plausible, based on the data (Merriam, 2009). The peer reviewer the researcher selected is a colleague who is an African American female counselor who also earned a doctorate in counselor education and supervision from a university in the southeastern United States. The female counselor and counselor educator was selected intentionally to provide a different perspective than the male perspective of the researcher and the male participants to remain objective and to detect any discrepancies within the study. The peer reviewer has conducted several qualitative studies for publication within the counseling profession, which demonstrates her ability to comprehend the researcher's design and analysis of the study. The peer reviewer is a licensed professional counselor, clinical supervisor and assistant professor with over five years in clinical experience as a counselor and counselor educator. The peer reviewers clinical experience and research experience and interests of working with minority populations as well as enhancing multicultural competence within the counseling profession. The peer reviewer served as a mock participant for the study by completing a practice interview with the researcher by

using the semi-structured interview questions developed for this study prior to using the questions with the actual participants (see Appendix C). The peer reviewer also had access to review the researcher's memos, reflective journal, and audit trail to confirm accuracy and consistency within the study. The researcher was aware that the peer reviewer would be critical and authentic throughout her assessment of the study.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described the role of the peer reviewer is to serve as the devil's advocate whose objective is to keep the researcher honest by asking difficult questions about the process, meaning and analysis throughout the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).   The peer reviewer's insight and knowledge in the profession as well as in qualitative research will assisted the researcher with maintaining trustworthiness and credibility for the study. At the conclusion of the study, the researcher connected with the peer reviewer to debrief all aspects of the study to ensure consistency and validity throughout the study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), peer debriefing is another form of inter-rater reliability that's not necessarily empirically based but logically based (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The peer reviewer provided constructive feedback about the selected themes of the study that encouraged the researcher to focus more attention on the lived experiences of the participants. The peer reviewer assisted the researcher with processing ideas related to the themes to simplify, categorize and organize the themes in a more simplify way for the readers of this study. The peer reviewer also provided a different perspective about this study which encouraged a recommendation for a further study to include women in a similar study to discover any similarities or differences in the themes from this study. The peer review process provided the researcher with an outside female perspective to enhance the quality and richness of this study.

The third and final method that the researcher utilized in the method of increasing credibility within the study was member checking. Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that member checking is described the formal and informal process of participants in a study checking the data, analysis, interpretations and conclusions to ensure the accuracy of the data collected, which is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility within a study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) further noted that member checking is one of the most effective ways of eliminating the possibility of misrepresentation and misinterpretation of the participants shared experiences in a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher provided the participants with the opportunity to review their own data to ensure accuracy and validity throughout the study. More specifically, at the completion of the interviews and data analysis the researcher contacted the participants to provide them with opportunity to observe and review the transcripts to share any feedback, corrections, or revisions to the preliminary themes to ensure an accurate description of their responses and participation in the study.

The participants confirmed the accuracy of their responses, checked the data for validity, and verified that the data was based on the information provided by the participants and not the researchers biases or perspective. The researcher provided open dialogue to the participants to share their views, experiences, and any response that assisted in increasing the validity and credibility of the study. Member checking was utilized in the study to further enhance the trustworthiness, validity, reliability and credibility of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

The goal of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African American males in

becoming counselors and counselor educators and to give voice to their shared stories of

successfully gaining access to a career in the counseling profession. More specifically, this study

captured the lived experiences of the participants and provided a more detailed understanding of

ways to support, retain, and recruit African American men in the counseling profession as

clients, counselors, and counselor educators. Hermeneutical phenomenological method was used

to analyze data collected from the twelve participants in this study. Each participant completed

two individual interviews. The first interview was semi-structured (See Appendix C) and lasted

45-60 minutes. The follow up interview with each participant occurred at the conclusion of the

data analysis in order to gain any new information or changes from the interview recording,

transcriptions, themes, and codes found at the conclusion of the data analysis. The completion of

both interviews lasted a total of 90-120 minutes for each of the twelve participants.

Participants

The participants of the study consisted of twelve African American male counselors and

counselor educators from varying geographic locations in the United States. Five of the

participants were located in the Eastern region, three were in the Southern region, three were in

the Western region, and one was located in the Midwest. The researcher was also interested in

learning about where the participants lived currently as well as where they were born to discover any significance in their responses as a reflection of where they were born and raised. Each participant was provided with a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality and protect their identity. The participants of this study ages ranged from 27 to 55 and the mean age of 40. Ten of the participants in this study identified Christianity as their religious preference. The other two participants did not share their religious affiliation. Nine out of the twelve are licensed as a professional counselor. Eleven out of the twelve participants considered themselves to be both a counselor and counselor educator. Out of the eleven who worked directly within the academia setting, only two were tenured faculty. Of the participants who were not tenured, seven were Assistant professors, two were Graduate student counselors pursuing their doctorate, and one served as an Adjunct Faculty.

The following is a brief description of each participant, at the time of the semi-structured recorded phone interviews:

Henry is married and in his 40's, pre-tenured assistant professor and counselor educator who has worked in the counseling profession for 10-15 years. He identified as a Christian and reported that he is not currently licensed but is a nationally certified counselor. He spoke about advocacy, mentorship, and the importance of intentionality.

Charles was in his 40's and partnered but not legally married, who worked in the counseling profession for over 15 years. He was a pre-tenured professor and preferred not to disclose his religious preference. He was licensed as a professional counselor and a nationally certified counselor. He spoke about mentorship, legacy, visibility and inclusion of African American males.

Eugene was in his 20's and was a doctoral student and graduate research assistant. He worked in the counseling profession for 3-5 years and was licensed as a professional counselor. He identified as a Christian-Methodist for his religious preference. He shared his views on visual representation of African American men in the counseling profession, masculinity and professional identity.

Nathaniel was in his 40's and served as a clinical supervisor and worked in private practice, community mental health, and college/university setting. He was licensed as a professional counselor and counseling supervisor. He also worked as an adjunct professor. He identified as a Christian and has worked in the counseling profession for over 15 years. He shared his views on the importance of mentorship, self advocacy, and resilience.

George was in his 50's and was a pre-tenured assistant professor and also worked in private practice. He was a registered psychotherapist with 10-15 years of experience in the counseling profession. He identified as a Christian and shared his views about mentorship, self awareness, visibility and inclusion of African American males.

Robert was in his 40's and served as a pre-tenured assistant professor. He was licensed as a professional counselor and worked in the counseling profession for 7-10 years. His religious preference was Baptist and he shared his thoughts about mentorship, visibility, support and advocacy.

Vertner was in his 30's and married. He was a pre-tenured assistant professor and also a licensed as a professional counselor. He worked in the counseling profession for 7-10 years. His religious preference was Christian and he shared his views about the importance of mentorship, barriers in the profession, support and advocacy for African American men.

Charlie was married and in his 30's. He was a pre-tenured assistant professor and counselor in resident. He was licensed as a professional counselor with 5-7 years of experience in the counseling profession. His religious preference was non-denominational Christian and expressed his thoughts about the lack of awareness, diversity and inclusion, and support and advocacy.

Gregory was married and in his 40's. He was one of the two participants that were tenured. He was an associate professor and also licensed as a professional counselor with over 15 years in the counseling profession. His religious preference was Christian and he discussed the importance of awareness, support, advocacy, and value for African American men within the counseling profession.

Emmanuel was in his 30's, who served as a pre-tenured assistant professor with 7-10 years of experience in the counseling profession. He was also licensed as a professional counselor. He preferred not to disclose his religious preference. He expressed his thoughts about barriers within the profession, lack of awareness, and recruitment and retention of African American men.

James was a married and in his 30's. He was working in private practice after completing his Masters degree in clinical mental health counseling. He was licensed as a professional graduate counselor with 1-3 years of experience within the counseling profession. His religious preference was Christian and he shared his thoughts about mentorship, lack of awareness and barriers within the counseling profession.

Jalen was married and in his 40's. He served as an administrator and was the second participant who was tenured. He had over 15 years in the counseling profession and was licensed as a professional counselor. He worked in a college setting as well as private practice.

His religious preference was Christian and he shared the importance of mentorship, support and advocacy as well as visual representation of African American males within the counseling profession.

Descriptions of the participants include demographic information, age, highest level of education, years in the profession, current license status, work setting, and current position or title which can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Marital Status	Religion	Highest Level of Education	Years in Profession	Independent License/ Provisional License	Work Setting	Position or Title
Henry	40's	Married	Christian	Doctorate	10-15yrs	PL	College/ University	Assistant Professor
Charles	40's	Partnered/not legally married	N/A	Doctorate	15+	IL	College/ University	Assistant Professor
Eugene	20's	Single	Christian	Masters	3-5 years	PL	College/ University	Doctoral Student
Nathaniel	40's	Single	Christian	Doctorate	15+	IL-Supervisor	Private Practice College/ University	Clinical Supervisor/ Adjunct Faculty
George	50's	Single	Christian	Doctorate	10-15yrs	PL	Private Practice College/ University	Assistant Professor
Robert	40's	Single	Baptist	Doctorate	7-10yrs	IL	College/ University	Assistant Professor
Vertner	30's	Married	Christian	Doctorate	7-10yrs	IL	College/ University	Assistant Professor
Charlie	30's	Married	Christian	Doctorate	5-7yrs	IL	College/ University	Assistant Professor
Gregory	40's	Married	Christian	Doctorate	15+	IL	College/ University	Associate Professor (Tenured)
Emmanuel	30's	Single	N/A	Doctorate	7-10yrs	IL	College/ University	Assistant Professor
James	30's	Married	Christian	Masters	1-3yrs	PL	Private Practice	Graduate Counselor
Jalen	40's	Married	Christian	Doctorate	15+	IL	Private Practice College/ University	Administrator & Associate Professor (Tenured)

Discussion of Themes

The participants of this study shared their lived experiences of their journey into the counseling profession. The research question asked in this study was, "What are the lived experiences of African American men in becoming counselors and counselor educators?" At the conclusion of the data analysis, the researcher was able to identify five main themes for the current study. The five main themes, key components and quotes from the participants that spoke to the themes captured in the study are as follows:

able 2

hematic Chart

Themes	Key Components	Quotes
The value of Mentorship	Mentoring Assistance Support Encouragement Awareness Advocacy Relationships Networking Conferences Exposure Knowledge Education Guidance Leadership Legacy	"A Black man can't survive in this profession without it."-Vertner "Someone in the profession helped me"-Charles "I had support in the Masters program"-Robert "Inspired or encouraged by someone who was doing well in the profession"-Eugene "Someone introduced me to counseling"-Vertner "I saw someone who looked like me."-Jalen "Someone was helpful in my success in the program and profession."-Nathaniel
The negative stigma related to counseling still serves as a barrier	Negative stigma Stereotypes of counseling Lack of awareness Lack of understanding Lack of knowledge and facts Not supported Not an option Lack of education Stigma within the community Stigma within the profession Negative connotation Financial burden Masculinity	"I was told that Black people don't do therapy. Black people definitely don't become therapists."- Eugene "It was a stigma because you're black, you're going to be pushed into doing black things."-Vertner "I only participated because it was required in my program."-Gregory "I was told that Black people don't go to counseling."-Emmanuel

	Gender Roles Unwilling to share emotions Not interested in talking about problems Fear of judgment	"We did not talk about it."-Eugene "The stigmas about the profession would vary, that only crazy people go to counseling"-Charles "The normal stigma of you're not gonna make a lot of money in this profession."-Nathaniel
The lack of the representation of the Black Man in the profession	No representation Exclusion Lack of exposure Perceptions No value No people of color No support No community outreach Isolation Hidden Challenging First generation All White No diversity	"It was just all White"-Vertner "I Didn't know anyone in the profession that looked like me."-Henry "I only saw Black men at national conferences."-George "I'm always the only one."-Vertner "things that could deter Black men from wanting to be a part of the profession that they're not represented in."-Charles "Challenges are specific to being a person of color, a man of color, in our profession"-Robert "I was the first to get a PhD at least in my family."-Gregory
The lack of diversity, inclusion, and the value of the Black Man in the profession	Racism Microaggressions Have to work twice as hard No support Speak for my entire race Not accepted as I am Stressful Discouraged Lack of Acceptance Forced to change Work harder Playing the game Not set up for me to win Insecurity	"The counseling profession is still not very welcoming to men of color."-Robert "I mean, I had to work harder, it was a lot of challenges at the time because my university and program wasn't as diverse."-Nathaniel "It was just some of the pressures of trying to stay five steps ahead."-James "I began asking myself do I have to change who I am to be accepted into this community?"-Charlie "Unable to be authentically me"-Jalen

	Isolation Pressure	"Felt like you were accepted to meet a diversity quota or number."-Charles "There were times where I felt like I had to speak for an entire race."-Robert
The importance of recruitment and retention of Black Men in the profession	Go to the source Recruit Intentionality Community Programs Structure Organization Support Advocacy Leadership Tenure Concerns Hiring process Financial Support Honesty and Truth Diversity Networking Celebrated Honesty and truth Necessity Possibilities Visualization Participation Helpful	"I can't be what I can't see"- Jalen "Counseling is a place where we are needed."-Eugene "I think them being exposed to us (Black men). It starts the conversation and educating them about really what we do."-Nathaniel "I think I like having more Black male professors in the classroom can make a difference."-Charlie "I really believe that there's a lot of Black males with plenty of potential that just need the guidance."-Emmanuel "I think we have to let them know that it is possible, that it exists. Like for me, I didn't know it existed."-Vertner "Have more African American men counselors, and do more research and workshops in their area. Go to the neighborhoods where they are and show them that counseling is not that bad."-Robert

Theme 1: The Value of Mentorship

The first theme that emerged focused on the importance of mentorship within the counseling profession. The participants were able to share their experience of how they became exposed to the counseling profession and were able to identify someone who played a role in their transition into the profession. The participants shared similar stories related to their mentorship experience or the lack thereof. Many of the participants were able to pinpoint

exactly who introduced them into the profession and it came from someone that decided to assist

and support them along the way. Many of the participants had no idea about the counseling

profession or had a blueprint for how to get involved in the profession. The participants were

able to express how they were influenced directly or indirectly by someone who was already

involved in the profession which made a difference in the outcome of their lives and careers.

Charles discussed how he was encouraged to go further in his career and in the profession by a

faculty member in his program:

> When I was taking group counseling class my instructor who was an older White man
>
> who was very instrumental and supportive in my journey asked me, "What are you doing
>
> when you are done here?" and I thought he meant when I was done taking the course,
>
> which means I was going to work. He meant when was I graduating because he was in
>
> the process of recruiting me to consider moving forward in my career by applying for
>
> graduate school in counselor education.

Charles shared an example of how someone served as a model of mentorship by demonstrating

what life as a counselor educator could look like:

> My site supervisor during my internship used to do these presentations on campus for
>
> Fraternities and Sororities. She allowed many of us Masters students to tag along with her
>
> for the presentations. Seeing her in a classroom and seeing how she could command a
>
> room and how she challenged and supported people. She just did amazing things and so I
>
> think that was one of the things that lead me to be like, "I would like to do this!" And I
>
> wanted to remain in a university setting. And the idea of being in a classroom was
>
> starting to appeal to me.

Eugene reminisced about his experience at a national counseling conference and meeting a well known African American Psychologist. Eugene shared a conversation that he had with him:

> I think my biggest introduction to the counseling profession was my first time actually meeting counselors at a conference back in 2012. I got to meet and talk to someone that I looked up to in the profession. So I met him and talked to him he said, "This field needs people that look like, sound like, act like, and feel like you."

Eugene's comments mirrored a perspective shared by Nathaniel in relation to being able to see someone who looks like him serving in positions in the counseling profession. Nathaniel stated:

> I think mentorship is very important! Specifically, an African-American male has someone in the program, or a counselor educator, or someone that they can see like them. I think that mentorship helps a lot in your personal development, and just in the profession, in general, because you see men that look just like you [who are] professors, or owning practices, or counselors which make it easy for you.

Jalen shared how he was able to gain mentorship from someone who was in the counseling profession who not only looked like him, but was also a member of the same fraternity he was in. Jalen shared his story of the connection of mentorship with his fraternity brother:

> A fraternity brother of mine, as I was leaving the Masters program, he came in the program as a faculty member. We were there at an event together that he was speaking at, and I just happened to be walking with him across the campus. I just said something like, "Man, I thought about getting a PhD. I used to think about getting a PhD." And this was a brother, an African American brother, the man stopped in his tracks and said, "Hey, man, you serious!?" And I didn't realize what I said. He said, "Man, we can make this happen." When you can see yourself in somebody, that's when you can believe it. And so there was

just a little bit of me that believed it. And so I said, "Okay, man, I'll go ahead and apply."

And of course, the rest is history.

Vertner spoke highly about the value of mentorship from his experience and how he views mentorship as a tool for survival for men of color. Vertner credits mentorship to be a factor in his success and journey throughout the profession. Vertner stated, "Without mentorship, there's no way that Black men would be able to survive. There's just no way." Vertner shared how he was introduced into the profession by a student he met in his class:

I was in summer school and this one army vet was sitting in front of me and he turned around and asked, "Hey, have you heard about the graduate program in counseling?" And I was like, "Well no, what's counseling?" He gave a brief description of what it was. And I was like, "Oh, that actually fits for what I wanna do." And I looked into it and the rest is history.

Charlie, Gregory, and Nathaniel shared similar stories of how a professor or professors in the program decided to encourage them to go further in their careers and education. The responses were similar and how they responded to the encouragement was different. Charlie stated how his co-teaching experience lead him to consider a career as a counselor educator:

I had a chance to co-teach a class with a faculty member and then I was like, "Man, this is fun. I'd love to do this! I don't know how I would." And he was like, "Oh, you just get a PhD and become a counselor educator," and I was like, a counselor educator, what is that?

Gregory shared how his professors also encouraged him to apply to a doctoral program, however he was not interested because he felt that he was not good enough to be competitive in a doctoral program.

Two of my professors on two separate occasions asked me to apply to the doc program

and I was very reluctant to do it. I kind of brushed them off and I didn't think I was doc

material, and they kind of pressed me to apply. So just to spite them, I did, and I got in.

Nathaniel discussed how an African American female professor at his university played a pivotal

role in impacting his life and career by not only being a representative of someone who looks

like him, but deciding to serve as a mentor and teach him aspects of the profession to assist him

on his journey in the counseling profession:

When I was in the Education Specialist Program (EdS), after I graduated with my

Masters, I met a Black female professor who served in the Masters in counseling

program. She mentored me, and from that moment on my life changed. My whole life

changed. She took me under her wing, she made me adjunct professor. So she was

instrumental in me not only seeing what a counsel educator, that was similar to me. And

she's still a female, but that was the only time that I saw someone that looked like me, but

happened to be a female, that took to me and mentored me and the rest is history.

The participant's stories became even more personal as they accounted different people along

their journey who took a personal interest in helping them succeed in their journey in becoming a

counselor and counselor educators. The participants expressed the importance and value of

mentorship as well as currently how mentorship remains apart of their lives and careers.

Participants George, Robert, and Charlie shared the importance that mentorship plays a role in

the counseling profession. George discussed his perspective of how mentorship plays a huge

role in the counseling profession:

I think mentorship is the lifeblood of the profession if we believe that counseling is

largely centered on the relationship. Then also being a cultural informant for those who

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don't know what the journey entails or don't know how to play, sometimes games within

games, or sometimes just lack personal confidence, or we can easily get distracted.

Robert's perspective of mentorship relied heavily on being able to see someone who looks like

him that made a difference in the outcome of his transition into the profession:

The mentorship piece is crucial to development. I think it's the piece that we're missing

and we need to capitalize on it, because they need to have that person that looks like them

that they see has been successful in the field. I believe that it's integral for our young

counselors in training and young counselor educators in training to be successful.

Henry shared his thoughts of how friends and mentors were intentional in their desire to provide

mentorship to him:

I had mutual friends, colleagues, and mentors who made it their business to do everything

they could with their resources and influence for people like me and you to be successful.

Charlie discussed the value and importance of mentorship being used as a tool for potential

counselors and counselor educators because it provides someone who is able to support them

along the way in the journey in the profession:

Mentorship is probably one of the most useful tools you can have as a counselor, as a

counselor educator, because one, to have somebody that you can look up to, have

somebody that you can kind of aspire to be like, but also having somebody where you

can have a space where it's non-judgmental and being able to share your experiences with

someone who really understands

Jalen discusses not only the value of mentorship, but the lifelong connections of men that may

have initially served as mentors then became colleagues or remained a mentor as a colleague and

how they connect with each other even after the transition from being a student to working in the profession:

> I was going to conferences and everything, and so I got an opportunity to meet brothers who were actually doing it in the field. Man, so those brothers became my mentors. And to me, that's just like the dopest [greatest] thing in the world, man, 'cause I'm just hanging out. Man, this is so dope [great]. Man, there's like 10 doctors here, and man, we don't care nothing about what's going on at the university. Man, we're just pouring into each others' lives. And that's why we can continue to do it.

Charles shared a heartfelt story of his connection with an African American male counselor educator who served as one of his mentors that made an impact on his life throughout his journey in the profession. Charles provides an account of his experience with his mentor:

> I have a number of colleagues right now that in a lot of ways are mentors for me. They challenge me, support me, and encourage me. I think those are all traits and characteristics of someone who is in the role of a mentor. It's a cycle that if we want this profession to endure, we all must engage in mentorship, it's critical to our lifeline. When I think of mentorship the first person that comes to mind is my mentor that has made an impact in my life throughout my career. This man did his best to take me under his wing and I've felt like he was always supportive of me, as a person first and my career second. It was really painful when he died a few years ago. I say that as someone who has committed, to what I call or refer to as the cycle of mentoring. I think because of my experiences it engenders me to wanting to provide that support. As my mentor would

say, "I think my shoulders are ready for a folk or two to stand on." Part of that is

mentoring. I think without it, could our profession die, maybe not, just won't be as good

as it could be.

Vertner shared an amazing story about his experience seeing Black male counselor educators for

the first time and connecting with one of those men who played a major role in him completing

his dissertation study. He shared how a Black male counselor educator served as a mentor who

took him in and supported him in completing his research. His brief story displayed the

magnitude in which mentorship can take place depending on who is serving as a mentor:

> What really sparked my mentorship experience was going to The American Counseling
>
> Association (ACA) conference. They had a panel of about 6 or 7 Black counselor
>
> educators. When I tell you…I was sobbing……. I was like, "What!?" Everything they
>
> were saying fit for me. At the end of it I shook
>
> everybody's hand and said, "I really appreciate you and I had no idea that you existed, I'd
>
> really like to get connected. I'm at a major university that has no Black people, please
>
> help me out!"

He described in more detail the events that took place between he and his mentor that went

beyond the conference exchange. His story of what this mentor did for him spoke volumes to

how personal and supportive mentoring was for him during his dissertation phase while earning

his doctorate:

> When I was doing my dissertation, I sent out a call to 200 people all over the country in
>
> counseling programs and not one person responded to it! Not even one person responded
>
> saying, "Hey, we got your email." But I contacted a mentor who was working at a major

university at the time. He was one of the Black men on the panel that I met at the conference, and I called him, and I was like, "Man, I'm not gonna graduate, man." He's like, "Why?" And I was like, "Cause nobody responded to my emails." He's like, "Tell me about your research." So I told him, and he was like, "Actually, we have what you're talking about here at my university." And I was like, "What?" He's like, "Yeah. If you want to, I'll make a call to some fokes tomorrow and we'll get something set up." I was like, "Oh my God! He let me stay in his house for about two weeks, I lived in his home and this man, literally, drove me around in his car, picked me up from the airport, dropped me off at the airport, fed me every night. I even met his faculty members and even interviewed his faculty members for my study. I sat in on some of his classes during those two weeks. Without this mentor, I would not be here today. Because of that mentor, I was able to get all of my participants for my study and complete my dissertation and graduated. It's mainly because of mentorship, I would not have graduated. It was because of this African American male counselor educator that I connecting with at a conference. Without him and without mentorship I wouldn't be here.

Jalen shared an incredible story of how he was able to see someone who looks like him serve in the profession and it sparked an interest that he could possibly do the exact same within his own life. He discussed how he was so excited to see an African American man at the top of his department and his personality and style made a huge impact on the outlook that Jalen had for himself and the way his views changed about the counseling profession:

Man, it was just seeing a Black man as a faculty member as my professor in my first doctoral class, my very first. He came in class, man, and he was confident, and he was himself, and he was clean [well dressed]. Man, he had swag [confidence]. I saw me! I

saw me in him. And I was like, "Man, he is killing it! He's killing it, man." Look at this

dude! I had this mentor that was gonna be there and was gonna ride with me. He said

that he will make sure things happen for me. He was going to look out for me and

basically set me up for success in academia. And I was like, "Whoa, man, this is kind of

like a glimpse of what White privilege is."

George shares his perspective about mentorship from two different mentors. One of his mentors

gave him insight about the journey from his own perspective while the other mentor welcomed

him in and discussed the importance of the role he plays by being an African American male

counselor educator:

In particular, there were two African American male mentors who served as people who

could validate my thoughts and concerns through their own stories, they shared aspects of

my own journey and provided me with a tremendous amounts of encouragement. Those

men have been very helpful in terms of welcoming into the profession and helping me to

understand my place, our place, challenges with tenure, how to navigate different

situations and just being examples.

Robert shared the names of mentors that he felt were very instrumental in assisting him on his

journey within the counseling profession. He stated, "They've all been mentors to me, and so I've

aimed to carve out a network of folks that I can call on and talk to if need be."

The importance of mentorship played a major role in the success of all of the participants

of this study. Mentoring was utilized in a variety of ways by the participants and based on the

lived experiences shared each participant in the study was influenced by having someone to

serve as an advisor or influence to change the outcome in their lives and profession. Mentorship

made a huge impact on all of the participants as evidenced by their shared stories of the influence

of mentorship. Despite mentorship serving an indicator to the success of the participants many of them shared how they had to overcome the negative stigma related to counseling and the counseling profession from their community. Many of the participants shared similar experiences with counseling and mental health concerns from childhood and throughout adulthood before gaining knowledge and experience in the helping profession.

Theme 2: The Negative Stigma Related to Counseling Still Serves as a Barrier

The second theme that emerged in the study was the prevalence of stigma related to counseling and mental health inherent in participants' experiences. The participants shared their views about what they were told in their youth and in adulthood. They discussed insight on how counseling and the counseling profession was perceived within the African American community. The participants also shared interesting responses related to aspects of the stigma related to pursuing a career in the counseling profession. Henry shared his experience as a child growing up hearing about counseling and mental health:

> Counseling just wasn't considered an option for support. When I confronted issues as a kid, some people said "Oh, go to the doctor, go get this service or that service" and counseling was never one of those things. I think I crossed the cultural and familiar lines and boundaries about what it means if you go to counseling by participating in counseling myself and with my family. The stigmas, the challenges and negative connotation of if you need counseling.

Vertner reported similar experiences growing up and hearing about counseling and mental health that was not popular within the African American community:

> It's weird because you know black people don't do therapy. That's what you keep hearing. My grandparents say things like, "Black people don't do therapy." It was this huge stigma

in our community to consider counseling. We use our pastor in the church and things like

that for therapy, and your friends and stuff like that."

Charles reflected a similar view as Henry and discussed more of the stigma within the profession

from the African American community:

The stigmas about the profession would vary, that only crazy people go to counseling, so

If you went to counseling, it was a representation of how you couldn't handle your

business, you couldn't handle your life, you weren't good enough, you didn't cut it, and

you needed outside help.

Eugene said very similar experiences growing up within the African American community:

Growing up, we didn't talk about people going to counseling. That wasn't something that

we talked about in my community. Everybody has issues. You got some problems or

your kid is acting up, so you need to get 'em on some Ritalin. That was what we talked

about. I don't think I ever heard of a single black person going to counseling growing up.

Even more so, I don't think I knew the word depression or anxiety, not within at least a

cultural context.

Other participants shared similar experiences. Emmanuel recalled comments that were made to

him about the counseling within his community and how the label of being considered crazy if

someone within the community decides to seek help:

The only things I knew were the things said affecting the Black community, people

would say so you must be "crazy" if you're going to counseling. "We don't do that,

something's wrong with you."

Jalen contributed to the richness of this theme as well by explaining his feelings of what he heard

growing up about counseling:

I think as a people, there's stigmas around counseling. My folks are like, "Man, you don't go to counseling, you go to church. If something's wrong, it's your spirit. You ain't living right." [laughter]…. In addition to that, you have the cultural piece there. Then you got the masculinity factor. Men, "Okay, I don't need to talk about much stuff. I don't wanna share nothing with nobody."

Many of the participants shared how they participated in counseling at different times in their lives and decided to participate because they were encouraged or required. Gregory stated how he may not have ever participated in counseling if it was a requirement for his master's degree program. After participating in counseling as a client he decided that he could continue to benefit from counseling services even after he was no longer required to participate:

I had anger issues when I was in college, and I would go see the counselor at my college, and he was probably the first counselor that I remember seeing for mental health. After I saw that counselor, I have been in counseling in one way or the other since my grad program. I never stopped going to counseling since my grad program required that we all go to counseling and since my professors recommended that we should all be in counseling.

James described a similar experience serving as a client which changed his perspective about counseling from being a participant:

My first experience in counseling was actually in college. There was a counselor who was probably a graduate doing her hours, and they announced that, "Oh, if you are interested in getting counseling services, we have that available." I was just curious, so I went and set up some sessions, and it was really beneficial. It helped me. I learned a lot from it. That was my first experience with it, which it was positive."

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Several of the participants from the study revealed how they were able to overcome the stigma of counseling by participating in counseling as adults or college students. Majority of the participants shared positive experiences from participating in counseling and their experiences shaped their views about counseling in a different way. George and Jalen discussed similar views after their experience as a counseling client. George stated:

> Yeah, I've been in counseling for 26 years. Since I was 29 years old. I look at that as being a personal and professional investment and just a necessary support for myself in my very capacities, but just also, just to have places of solitude or trust where I can relax, heal and deal, and be real.

Jalen reported a similar appreciation for counseling after being a counseling participant:

> Prior to getting in the counseling profession I did not participate as a client. However, afterwards, I just believed in it so much, that it wasn't a thing that was taboo. In fact, after I got into the program and got my degree and everything, afterwards, I absolutely participated in counseling with no shame or hesitation.

Henry, Charles, Vertner, and Nathaniel reported similar perspectives about the stigma within pursuing a career in the counseling profession that described their lived experiences. Henry described why he felt that African American male students may not be interested in a career in the helping profession due to the lack of participation in services themselves:

> I think many times students don't consider the prospect of becoming a counselor. Unless you're a person who has received counseling services in the past, and the experience has been beneficial. It's hard for me to think that students frequently think of themselves as potentially counselors, individuals consider or envision themselves as becoming professional counselors.

Vertner provided a more comedic, yet honest response to the same concerns based on what he experienced and heard from others while climbing the counselor education ladder:

"Black people definitely don't become therapists." Like, "Whatcha wanna become a therapist for, man? Why'd you wanna get a doctorate of philosophy? Like, "Be a real doctor." [laughter] "Go be a real doctor, what are you doing?" So that was one of the stigmas and the other was, "you're not gonna make a lot of money in this profession." People would always say, "Your Black, so you're gonna see a lot of clients of color. That's gonna be your niche. And then if you wanna become a counselor educator, you better be ready to teach the multicultural classes because that's where you're gonna be asked to teach."

Nathaniel added to the theme's richness of the stigma by sharing his thoughts related to the stigma, profession, and Black men:

Well, first of all, it's a stigma on it, and our community normally doesn't go to counseling. It was also just the fact that Black people don't go to counseling, and just that normal stigma, like people won't pay you to come and sit and talk to you and just the normal stigma that I wouldn't make a lot of money in the counseling profession and it wasn't set up for Black men," because at the time they weren't used to seeing a lot of male therapists at the time. But that was because the environment didn't support it. My community didn't support going to counseling, so I guess people around me didn't see how I could make it a profession.

Robert, Charlie, and Emmanuel spoke about their perspective with men participating in counseling. Robert shared his perspective related to toxic masculinity as a concerns for African American men participating in counseling:

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Toxic masculinity in that Black men may not see the need to share their emotions. And

men may not see the need for going into a field that that is based in having others share

their emotions. And building that empathic bridge. So toxic masculinity can be an

impediment to becoming a counselor.

Charlie described similar concerns as Robert of how men may view themselves as not someone

who can benefit from counseling and that they can figure things out on their own:

I think another barrier is the stigma that people have of like, "This isn't for me, this isn't

for us. We don't go to counseling. You don't have to be in touch with your emotions or

your feelings. But that's also like a societal thing, too, because sometimes a lot of

African-Americans, especially males, you always gonna have to portray this strength.

Emmanuel discussed further of how masculinity is portrayed within the African American

community which continues to serve as a barrier for men to not consider participating in

counseling themselves:

Within the Black community, it's not socialized for us to do this work. It's not socialized

for us to feel, it's not socialized for us to be fully human, it's not socialized for us to be

soft. When it comes to, "Oh, I'm gonna sit down with people and talk about their

emotions all day and be emotional while I'm doing it," that's not what Black men do. We

have to walk around with this armor on all the time just to survive. We're caught in a

stereotype so when it comes to us doing this work, it's difficult.

The participants all shared similar lived experiences within their community about counseling

and mental health as well as the perceptions and stigma related to deciding to pursue a career in

the counseling profession. Despite these experiences all of the men in this study decided to

continue to pursue their goals and dreams of working in the counseling profession for a variety

of reasons that many of them shared within their responses in this study. The men suggest that overcoming the stigma was one of the many challenges faced in pursing a career in the counseling profession. The feeling of being the only Black male was an additional challenge that many of the participants shared their frustration in the lack of representation of Black men in the counseling profession.

Theme 3: The Lack of the Representation of the Black Man in the Profession

The third theme found in this study was the participants shared concerns about the lack of seeing others who looked like them in their journey in the counseling profession. The participants were very candid about how they struggled with no representation, the perceptions that others had about Black men, isolation, and imposter syndrome. Majority of the participants expressed their concerns of not having someone that they could relate to or someone who could not understand the cultural differences of Black men. The lack of visibility was the most common concern and Henry and Vertner explained their views about representation within the counseling profession. Henry described:

> There was something about not seeing myself represented in the profession at the time. There was also something about not seeing a lot of people across the profession, masters, doctoral, or faculty who looked like me.

Vertner explained his surprise and frustration with the reality of not seeing anyone who looked like him:

> So one of the initial challenges that I experienced was that there's no representation. Oh, shit, there's no Black people. There's just none. There's nobody that looks like me. I'm Black and none of my professors were Black. I've never had a Black professor ever.

Throughout undergrad all the way up to my doc program. I've never had one. I wouldn't

even know what a Black professor looks like.

Many of the participants expressed how the stereotypes of Black men were still prevalent in their

experience. Eugene shared his thoughts about the perception of Black men in academia and

within the counseling profession:

It was difficult due to the reality of how I was perceived within my class and my cohort.

Their perception about me could shift based on what someone else says about me. I was

not aware of my maleness as much until an experience I had in my program. I've always

I've always been seen as kinda mild-mannered so I never imagined that people could see

me as aggressive, or angry. I started thinking about all the different ways that my parents

had talked to me about, what does it mean to be Black? And what does it mean to be a

Black male? And just how careful we have to be about being Black and interacting with

people who don't look like us, or don't sound like us, or don't understand our history,

don't understand the dangerous experiences that Black people have everyday.

Many of the participants shared their accounts of feeling like they were selected as a student or

faculty in order to meet a diversity quota for a college or university. Many of the participants

discussed their frustrations with not only being the only person of color, but how they may have

felt like had to change who they were in order to fit in and be included. Emmanuel shared his

thoughts about tokenism:

The faculty will honestly put you on as a token then will leave you to flounder on the

deck like a fish. You are there for a number in some places and that's it. And I didn't

realize how much of an issue that would be until I got in my doc program

Charlie shared his thoughts of questioning his own personality and behavior in order to receive

equal and fair treatment from the majority, which were White people in his department:

> I began asking myself, "Do I have to change who I am to be accepted into this
>
> community? Is this what's happening?" And I think that was probably one of the biggest
>
> challenges specific to being an African-American male counselor, is that, like me
>
> thinking, "Well, maybe I have to sit like this. Or maybe I have to talk more quietly. Or
>
> well, maybe I just can't show that I'm passionate about something. And that'll allow me to
>
> matriculate, or that'll allow me to succeed." Being myself, and being in this field, and
>
> being in this profession, is this challenge. If I didn't write as much as I did, or I didn't
>
> publish, or have the connections I have in the field, I don't think I would have the
>
> privileges that I do have in this profession.

Many of the participants shared how they felt isolated and unaccepted because they were the

only person of color in their program or departments. The isolation and exclusion heightened the

concept of imposter syndrome. George described his experience with imposter syndrome:

> I think I had some isolation too, which even made it unique to me. I was the only Black
>
> person, and only Black male in some cases, throughout the majority of my counseling
>
> program. Impostor syndrome, self confidence, being generally underexposed was the
>
> biggest concerns I had a being the only person of color.

Charlie shared how he felt being the only faculty of color in his department as well how to

successfully navigate his role and representation of his culture as an African American man:

> Another part of navigating the system is understanding my role as an African-American
>
> counselor and counselor educator, especially a PhD. Because when I come into a faculty,

I'm the only African-American male faculty member in my department. And so, that

means that I'm not just representing my culture; I'm also representing my gender as well.

Theme 4: The Lack of Diversity, Inclusion and the Value of the Black Man in the Profession

The fourth theme that emerged from this study was the participants report of the lack of

diversity and inclusion as well as the absence of the value of Black men in the profession. The

participants' lived experiences about the lack of diversity in the profession brought a different

tone to the interviews for the majority of the participants. The researcher noticed that many of

the participants may not have ever had the opportunity to express their frustrations and concerns

about diversity and inclusion without the possibility of being reprimanded for their responses.

The participants relied heavily on the importance of confidentiality and the respect of keeping

their identity hidden to prevent any negative consequences due to their responses. Vertner

discussed what he noticed throughout his experience of everything being "all White":

It was just all White. There's no color. There is not even somebody of Asian descent. It's

nobody. It was just all White people and the African people that I met during the

interview, they weren't even a part of my program. They had just recruited them so I

could see people of color. The program was all White. The master's students were all

White. The cohort members that I had were all White. The cohort above me was all

White. The cohort below me was all White. The cohort that graduated that year was all

White. The year after that was all White. It was just all White!

Several of the participants shared similar concerns of racism and how the dominate culture in

their program was unable to truly understand what it was like for people of color, especially

Black men, in the profession. Henry expressed his concerns of racism and exclusion that he has observed over the years:

Racism and exclusion? Oh yeah, absolutely, not intentional but it's kind of how it is. If we're not intentional about how race or other kinds of identifiers influence our experiences, especially when it comes to lack of opportunity, they're never gonna be addressed. I'm not here to suggest that somebody's being blatantly exclusionary, but what I will say is that if people aren't being intentional about engaging the entire doctoral student community, those are the kinds of things that can't happen.

Vertner expressed his frustration with racism that he experienced in academia and the exclusion that he feels takes place for people of color:

Racism in that academia is still very White, and male dominate, and racist. So it does tend to keep Black men out. Power and privilege of that same coin. And those things, especially access to financial resources for graduate school, and access to graduate programs that are CACREP accredited, that tends to be a barrier. I genuinely feel that White professors just don't know how to educate a Black man. Not only educate, but relate to a Black man. Instead of trying to understand me, they tried to control or change me. I've been dealing with communicating and relating to White people my whole life. And to be able to have the restraint that I had to get to the level of being a doctorate, to know when to speak and when not to speak and how it would be detrimental to your career if you had to confront a White person about their privilege. I had navigated all of that. But they hadn't. They never really had to navigate a relationship with an African American male before. Man, it was just a volatile, tense environment. Something that I would never go through again and I wouldn't wish that upon any African American male

or female ever again. I would not recommend my program either. Good people, but as a faculty and as a community it was not good. So that was what made it so hard at my doc program.

Jalen spoke about his experience with racism and difficulties due to being a Black male from when he was in his Masters program:

I didn't have a great experience when I got my Masters. I experienced some racial stuff I'd never experienced before. I felt a little beat down. I definitely felt alone and felt like the only voice at the table sometimes. You kinda feel like you're speaking for a whole race of people, calling out the cultural insensitivity in the classroom and everything, and feeling like you may feel some repercussions for it.

Nathaniel shared similar views as Jalen, however he concluded his thoughts to accept that these issues faced by Black men is just apart of life and they have to accept it as a normal experience:

I mean, I had to work harder, it was a lot of challenges at the time because my university and program wasn't as diverse. It was also just some of the pressures of trying to stay five steps ahead, I had to step my game up. I was feeling those pressures. And some of the racism, indirect racism in classes and so forth. So I mean that was just probably the normal experience as Black man.

James shared an interesting story about how he was perceived after an incident that took place between him and a faculty member:

There was a disagreement that happened between myself and a White female faculty member, when I spoke to another supervisor who's an African American female, it upset her. She said, "I don't know why they make things more difficult for you all, and then they let other people skate by."

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There was also an unexplainable feeling shared by the participants that there was a game being played and they were never aware of the rules or how to play it. Many participants referenced this idea as "playing the game." George explains his thoughts about the challenges of playing the game:

> I sometimes felt like there was a game being played and I didn't know how to play it. I think I had some isolation too, which even made it unique to me. I was the only black person, and only Black male in some cases, throughout the majority of my counseling program.

Vertner shared similar experiences of playing the game which he referred to as navigating the system:

The second challenge that I faced becoming a counselor and counselor educator was navigating the system. Being able to understand how other people are experiencing me as an African-American male. Not just as an African-American male, but as a big African-American man. Experiencing microaggressions… they're very, very subtle. Because most faculty members are of the dominant culture. Without knowing sometimes, a faculty can have a subtle message that they give to students, which is, "Be more like us, and less like you." I think the challenge is that I can't always control that because there's a lot of people that come into academia with a lot of biases and prejudices that they aren't necessarily aware of all the time. Being able to navigate that and that's what I mean by "the system," it was a challenge.

The value of Black men in the profession was discussed across all of the participants in their stories of how they feel about the value of Black men in the counseling profession. There were comments made about being a token, being the only person of color, and how the profession itself has not displayed enough intentionality and acceptance of Black men in the profession by

valuing their presence or position. Gregory shared his thoughts about the value of the Black

man, or lack thereof, in the counseling profession:

> You've got to first value Black men. That's more than just saying we value Black men,
> but you have to invest in Black men and Black people. And that's just not something that
> the profession wants to openly say and do. And the investment may come in the form of
> speaking to Black male issues. The investment may come in the form of really
> competing for the presence of black men. Again, the counseling profession isn't trying to
> do little or much of any of that. So I think that's how you first get Black men involved
> and attract them to what it is you're doing. African American men have too many options
> and are not considered a commodity by the counseling profession. The counseling
> profession hasn't really embraced Black men. You don't see many Black men doing the
> work of a counselor or a counselor educator because there's no power in being a
> counselor educator to a certain degree. You have to go so far up the chain for you to
> really get some serious power. ACA has only had one Black male to ever serve as
> president. So you don't really see that type of energy being reciprocated.

The lack of diversity and inclusion reported by the participants was an important factor to

consider for African American men in their journey into the counseling profession. Several of

the participants shared how many universities and faculty are not intentional or fully aware of

how they treat men of color. This trend seemed to repeat itself in the interviews with the

participants and the researcher heard a collective chant of the need to change these concerns

within the setting by being more intention in recruiting and retaining African American men.

The participants stated that they feel the dynamics would shift or be different if there were more

Black men in those spaces to change the perception and value of Black men in the counseling profession.

Theme 5: The Importance of Recruitment and Retention of Black Men in the Profession

The fifth theme that emerged was the importance of recruitment and retention of Black men in the counseling profession. All of the participants in this study shared strategies and stories related to how recruitment and retention of African American men could reduce several barriers and challenges for African American men as clients, counseling students, and counselor education faculty. Charles shared his frustration about how, in the year 2018, there are still Black men being represented as the first to accomplish certain tasks, such as being the first Black male to graduate from a CACREP doctoral programs within the United States:

> I think the thing that gets tiring is being the first. We're still in an age when we're having
>
> firsts. So to my knowledge I'm still the only Black man who's graduated with a PhD
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> from the program I went through which was over 18years ago. I think that impacts how
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> young men and women who are coming up in our profession who are Black and people
>
> of color seeing themselves as wanting to be involved and they have to see this
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> environment as being welcoming to you and for you. And I think that's just harder to see
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> when you don't see yourself. Also a huge part of it is that Black people want to live and
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> work in a community that's representative of them and who they are. There are States and
>
> programs where that does not exist which could serve as a deterrence to men and women
>
> of color.

Charles further elaborated his views on how counseling programs are not living up to the standards provided to them in regards of diversity and recruitment:

To ask people willing to buy the product they are selling is the first step. I'm only speaking for accredited programs, sorry if that's bias. Our accreditation standards say to recruit and retain diverse group of students and diverse group of faculty and we don't do that. "So I think the first reality is we need to look at our commitment to the reality of those words. If we're really committed to those words, take action! Take action across programs, gender lines, and race.

Henry described his concerns of how counseling programs may not be as intentional in their efforts of recruiting and retaining men of color. He shared his thoughts on how counseling programs can make more positive changes to support diversity and community within their programs:

Counseling programs have to be intentional. You gotta be intentional about what you want to accomplish, what kind of community you want to establish, what you want to communicate to other people about your program and your learning community. I think what we learned from research is that the responsibility of institutions and the responsibility of the profession is to help facilitate creating community. I also noticed that there is a need, not the option, but the need for community and mentorship. They need mentorship. So the question is for institutions and counseling programs themselves to ask the question of what are they doing to help those candidates, those diverse counselor educators develop community, so that they don't feel so isolated? And it can't be passive, "Oh, I'm here if you need me." No! It is, "Here are the resources here, here are the other people who are here doing this kind of work, and we wanna make sure you're connected to them. Also we wanna provide the funding and support so you can do this kind of research and develop these inter-institutional collaborations."

Many of the participants shared their frustration with being pulled in so many different directions because they were usually the only one to represent an entire race of people in academia. The participants who served as counselor educators stated that they are always the first ones to get called on to sit on a diversity committee, mentor or reprimand a student of color, attend on campus panels, forums and serve as a faculty advisor for African American organizations. They are pulled in so many directions and feel obligated to serve partially because there is no one else and the other is their desire to serve an underrepresented population that the end up running into conflict with their department due to not being able to manage the day to day operations of their job as a counselor educator. Many of the participants shared how they have to set boundaries and limits in order to handle service work for minority populations and the requirements for tenure or maintaining employment at their perspective university. Charlie expressed what this looked like for him in trying to find balance in serving others while maintaining his own sanity:

> And there's a bigger demand for me from the community as an African-American counselor educator, as an African-American PhD in general. If there was more of us who would be able to serve just so people can see that we exist and this is a job, then I think that barrier would be decreased. You get email saying, "Hey, can you talk in this?" or "Hey, can you sit on this panel for this [caucus] or for this Black History Month thing, can you do this or that?" … You have kinda feel an obligation to be able to do some of those things. So, navigating the system in terms of managing my time and managing what I put my energy into, because if I give myself too much to the culture and the community, then I lose my job. And I won't help anybody if I don't have a job.

Robert shared how important it is for faculty and universities to initiative more effort in recruiting men of color into the counseling profession:

The counseling profession is still not very welcoming to men of color. And academia is not either. And so you've got those two forces conflicting with each other. There is a need to have more African American male faculty members, and do more recruitment. I think those challenges are specific to being a person of color, a man of color, in our profession. Especially when you want to go into the professoriate. When you have two tornadoes of sort, you have being a person of color in academia and being a person of color in a counseling profession. And so it's like the perfect storm of exclusion for a person of color in a counselor educator.

As discussed previously many of the participants shared the importance of being able to see someone in the profession that looks like them in order to begin to believe that not only they belong in the profession but change the belief that its actually possible for them to pursue a career as a counselor or counselor educator. Charles explained how things would be different for him if there was a push in the recruitment and retention of Black males, however from his experience it does not seem to be a priority:

There has to be the ability to see the uniqueness of what it's like to be a man of color in these situations, a Black man in these situations. I can remember going to [professional counseling] conferences and see other people who look like me and we would cling to each other because that was our one contact throughout the year. White people don't have those challenges because they are everywhere within the profession. I see those as things that could deter people of color, things that could deter black men from wanting to be a part of the profession that they're not represented in.

Majority of the men from the study shared that they were not aware of Black male counselors and counselor educators prior to getting involved in the counseling profession. The participants

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shared that they did not know anything about the counseling profession or even heard about it, which may have been due to know one who looked like them encouraged or represented the profession in a way to recruit them into a counseling program. The participants all shared that someone may have sparked an interest or encouraged them to consider the profession, however many of those individuals were not African American men. If there were more African American men in the profession to serve as a representative of the profession the results could increase of the participation, diversity and inclusion within the counseling profession. Nathaniel shared how he thinks programs could assist in changing the dynamics of African American male's engagement in the counseling profession:

> Being exposed to us is a key just like it was with me being able to be exposed to Black male professors is the same way. Having more Black males educated in these programs makes a huge difference in the profession itself. Programs have to try to recruit more. Have more Black male adjunct professors. Or even developing a program for Black males that wanna be therapists. Create an organization where we can not only mentor when they come in the program, but we have different brothers doing different things so they can talk to us about their experiences in the academic world and how to get through the maze of it and what kind of options you have coming from someone who looks like them.

James provided suggestions on how to effectively recruit and retain Black males within the counseling profession by going into the African American community:

> I believe that counseling programs can be effective in two ways. If they form a connection with the areas that African American males relate to most in. In my experience, that's church, school, and the community. If the counseling professions

create stronger bonds with churches by supporting pastors, by supporting families. If they

make stronger bonds in the school, then what happens is hopefully counselors build a

positive perception for younger generations [of Black males], and then as they grow they

embrace counseling more. And then they'll see it as something feasible to join the

profession hopefully. And also provide more opportunities for African American males

to get into the profession from where they are.

James elaborated his point further by sharing more ways to aid in the recruitment and retention

of Black men within the profession:

More scholarships, of course, would be beneficial but also more creative ways to convey

the information that needs to be learned. We have to actively recruit and that involves

multiple people, of multiple genders, of multiple races, of multiple ethnicities, recruiting

a diverse group of people to be students, to be faculty. If I'm recruiting a student into the

doctoral program at the institution that I work and they don't see themselves living or

working in the rural area that I'm currently located then I owe it to the profession to

introduce that student to a program, department, a group or a colleague at a different

institution who could train them and raise them to become a counselor or counselor

educator. I think that's a part of the recruiting process, do we want people in the

profession or do we only want people at our programs?

Jalen had a similar response to the financial support and the idea of counseling programs

providing students with opportunities and resources to attend conferences that James hinted to in

his assessment of how universities could support more potential graduate students:

I don't think that universities really put in that time and the energy, and when it comes

down to it, the money for [supporting students of color], to be able to provide funds for

maybe this young brother, young sister to be able to take a couple of extra trips home to

go to conferences that are specific to culture and race.

Gregory discussed his perspective about the importance of programs not just hiring Black men

because they are Black to meet a quota, but to hire Black men who are able to add value to a

program as well as promoting them into leadership positions to display value, support, and

prestige that they deserve. He shared his frustration with how the counseling profession as a

whole has not done their part in supporting Black Men:

You have to hire Black men, and good Black men too, into these positions of power. I

don't particularly care to go any place where I don't see myself being reflected in that

position. Positions of power meaning Dean. I'm not talking about the one or two, but

we're not Deans, we're not full professors, we're not Vice-Provosts, Provosts. You've got

to first value Black men. That's more than just saying we value Black men, but you have

to invest in Black men and Black people. That's just not something that the profession

wants to openly say and do. The investment may come in the form of speaking to Black

male issues. We don't even talk about issues relating to Black men. For example, we

haven't done any real work on police brutality. We have unarmed black men who get shot

and killed every day ever since the days of slavery. And there have been various cultural

outlets that have spoken to police brutality ever since Gil Scott Heron wrote his song "No

Knock back in 1978", and the counseling profession just has not even acknowledged that

this behavior is unacceptable or wrong or that we're gonna at least train our professionals

to be better equipped to deal with such issues. The counseling profession needs to

embrace the culture it wants to treat. And if we want to be generalists then we could say

that, but even then we're not even general in how we develop our treatment protocols.

And I don't mean as an individual agency, I mean as a profession.

The participants of the study shared several ideas that can be adopted by counseling programs across the United States. Several of the ideas shared by the participants have been implemented in some departments and programs, however based on the perspective of many of the participants a more intentional and increased effort of recruitment and retention is needed to aid in support for assisting African American male counselors and counselor educators.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the lived experiences of twelve African American counselors and counselor educators on their journey into the counseling profession. The initial research question in this study was, "What are the lived experiences of African American men in becoming counselors and counselor educators?" The responses from the participant interviews provided the data that was collected an analyzed which emerged into several themes and codes observed by the researcher. The researcher was able to condense all the themes and codes into five essential themes. The first theme was the importance of mentorship. The second was the stigma remains as a barrier within the counseling profession. The third was the lack of representation of the Black man in the counseling profession. The fourth was the lack of diversity and inclusion in the counseling profession. The fifth theme was the need for recruitment and retention of Black men in the counseling profession. The participants honest and detailed account of their lived experiences explained many concerns and ideas to change the outcome of current and upcoming Black men who have decided to pursue a career in the counseling profession. In the next chapter of this study the researcher will provide more discussion on the concepts and themes that emerged from the data collected in this study. The researcher will describe findings from the

study that relate to the literature in counselor education as well as implications and

recommendation for insight about the lived experienced shared by the twelve participants in this

study.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

The five essential themes derived from this study were the following: (a) the value of

mentorship, (b) the negative stigma related to counseling still serves as a barrier, (c) the lack of

the representation of the Black Man in the profession, (d) the lack of diversity, inclusion and the

value of the Black Man in the profession, (e) the importance of recruitment and retention of

Black Men in the profession. The results of the lived experiences of the twelve African

American men in this study correlate with many concerns discussed in the literature review. The

stories shared by the participants closely resemble concerns stated within the literature review

that adds more validity to the study and literature review. Several of the stories and concerns

discussed by the participants are similar to what has been researched in the past related to themes

that emerged from this study. The researcher will highlight some of the areas stated in the

literature that emerged from the results of the lived experiences among the participants in this

study.

The Value of Mentorship

As reflected in the literature, one of the most valuable assets to assist African American

male graduate students with pursuing professorship upon completion of graduate studies is the

benefit of mentorship (Haizlip, 2012). Mentoring has been defined as a developmental

partnership that one person provides knowledge, experience and information to someone else to

aid in their growth and development (Butler et al., 2013). The researcher noticed several trends

within the interviews. Many of the participants not only had similar stories from their

mentorship experience, but many of the mentors discussed were influential African American men in the profession. Some of the same names repeated themselves throughout the study. For instance, in a profile of leadership article, Vereen (2010) interviewed an African American counselor educator who has been in the counseling profession for over 30 years, Dr. Don C. Locke. Dr. Locke [who is now deceased] had served in multiple leadership roles and was known as a mentor for many African American male counselors and counselor educators (Vereen, 2010). In the profile of leadership article, Dr. Locke was interviewed about his experience and journey throughout the profession, and he was asked about his perspective of mentorship. Dr. Locke responded by stating, "I have always hoped that I was making a contribution and that those who come after me would be better able to do the kinds of things that have been important in my life, such as educating and mentoring." Dr. Locke was an advocate for mentorship and education and further discussed his experience and thoughts of the work he has done through mentorship by stating:

> When I decided to go into counseling and ultimately counselor education, I didn't have role models of color, they were almost nonexistent. I started reading and finding that there were indeed people whose ideas were helpful, meaningful, and useful in counseling. I sort of modeled some of their behaviors that I found helpful in my own career. As a result I am hoping that my shoulders are broad enough to help young professionals negotiate the environment that they are in to actually provide the kind of systemic changes that will benefit students and clients in a way that would be pleasing to my mentors. (Vereen, 2010, p. 379).

The participants of this study all shared common stories related to mentorship and how it played a role in their journey in becoming a counselor and counselor educator. The participants shared how they were impacted by having mentors and some of the many lessons learned by trial and error because some did not have mentors in their journey. Many of the men shared how they plan to provide support and assistance to any upcoming counselors and counselor educators as well as developing strategies to assist specifically African American males because of how difficult their journey was being a man of color. The findings of this study regarding mentorship displays how there is a lack of the abundance of Black men in the profession whose presence alone serves as a mentor to many Black men who have not considered participating in counseling, serving as a counselor or becoming a counselor educator.

The Negative Stigma Related to Counseling Still Serves as a Barrier

Despite all of the efforts that have taken place to promote counseling and mental health this study displays how there is still a negative stigma about counseling within the African American community. Several of the participants in this study shared that they did not participate in counseling themselves until they were in college or in their Masters program and were encouraged or required to participate. The participants were able to express concerns of the stigma within the African American community which has been addressed in the literature (Masuda, Anderson, & Edmonds, 2012).; however, the findings from the participants account of becoming counselors and counselor educators was a factor not mentioned or recognized from the literature review of this study.

As stated in the literature review, the Western culture demands for men to be strong, maintain control of their emotions and problems, and to be capable of handling life stresses and issues own their own without asking for help (Vogel et al., 2014). The participants in the study

spoke to the concerns of masculinity in relation to participating in counseling services. Many of the men shared how counseling and mental health was just not a positive topic of conversation within their households. If it was discussed in the home it was not considered as an option for men or people dealing with serious issues or mental illness within their community.

Concerns of Masculinity and Gender roles

The participants reported their concerns of masculinity and how they may be perceived when seeking help. The participants mutually agreed that the concerns of masculinity and gender roles were based on cultural customs and their upbringing that Black men are expected to handle problems on their own or seek help from the clergy. The participants shared that men are viewed differently if they decide to seek outside support or counseling services instead of handling their problems on their own. This finding correlates with the literature that men have underutilized counseling services for years due to beliefs, traditional gender roles, and concerns of masculinity (Evans et al., 2013). Another factor to consider with masculinity based on the responses from the participants in this study is the perspective of pursuing a career in a profession where men are expected to be vulnerable and encouraged to express their feelings and emotions with someone. The participants agreed that the counseling profession does not align with the perceived views of masculinity and gender roles based on what was taught within their community.

Cultural and Systemic Barriers to Counseling

The participants in this study discussed very similar lived experiences of the cultural and systematic barriers to counseling. Several reasons contribute to the negative stigma of counseling and mental health within the African American community including the lack of knowledge about counseling, religious beliefs, and financial concerns (Thompson & Bazile,

2004). Many of the participants in this study shared their perspective about their beliefs and ideas related to the stigma of counseling. The majority of the participants did not have the most positive or healthy discussions about counseling and mental health growing up in their communities. Many of the participants shared stories of how counseling wasn't discussed as an option to manage traumatic experiences, stress, anxiety or depression. The participants also reported that they were not aware of counseling services as an option to consider when dealing with concerns from their lives. There was very rarely anyone in their environment who they knew personally in the profession, advocated for counseling services, or participated in counseling services as a client. The participants of this study report that many of them later developed an appreciation and understanding of counseling services once they began to participate in counseling services themselves. Prior to the experience of participating in counseling the men of this study shared that they were encouraged by their family and community to seek guidance and support through their higher power and religion.

The Role of Religion

Many of the participants shared their views of how religion and spirituality were used in order to deal with problems or concerns throughout their lives. Religion served as a focal point to manage any issues and utilizing professional counseling was not considered as an option for many of the participants in this study. The literature suggests that in the African American community, religion, and spirituality play a major role in family dynamics and upbringing (Gutierrez, Goodwin, Kirkinis, & Mattis, 2014).

The Lack of the Representation of the Black Man in the Profession

As stated in the literature review the African American community has been underserved and underrepresented in the counseling profession for many years. More specifically, African

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American men are underrepresented as clients, counselors, and counselor educators (Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy, 2002). Many of the participants shared how they felt about not seeing anyone that looked like them in their journey into the profession. The participants shared how difficult and isolating their experience was by not having access to someone who looks like them until attending conferences, which took place once or twice per year. The most common responses of the participants were that they feel upon the profession, had a desire to help others, or figured out their career path through trial and error. Several of the participants stated that they may have been exposed to someone in the profession who pointed them into the direction of becoming a counselor or counselor educator, but it was very rare for any of the participants to report that they discovered this profession on their own. The participants all agreed with the value and importance of mentorship having the ability to possibly changing the outcome of representation of African American male counselors involved in the profession.

Research reports that out of all of the counseling programs accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), only 3% of counseling faculty identify as African American (Haizlip, 2012). These numbers are accurate based on the information gained from the participant's stories of their experience. Many of the participants shared that they were the only Black male in their programs as students and more specifically for those who served as counselor educators feel even more isolated and underrepresented because they were the only Black male in their department and programs. Due to the lack of representation the participants shared sentiments of being overwhelmed with serving as the go to person for all Black issues and concerns. They shared their frustration with having to serve as the voice of an entire race. Many of the participants discussed how difficult it

was to balance the normal workload of academia on top of the additional work of serving as the Black expert on all things Black.

The participants shared that due to the lack of representation of African American men in academia they were encouraged to teach the social and cultural classes, serve as a representative to create diversity by serving on all White boards and committees, being forced to meet with students of color for disciplinary issues and the list goes on. The participants shared that the pressure to do the job of an entire team as one person because they were the only one was exhausting and overwhelming. The participants expressed that their experience was very common among other Black males in the profession. The participants voiced their concerns of how the lack of diversity and inclusion of Black men perpetuates burn out and a continuous cycle of not having African American men represented as counselors, clients and counselor educators.

The Lack of Diversity, Inclusion and the Value of the Black Man in the Profession

Many of the participants of this study shared the difficulty they faced of being and African American man in the counseling profession. They were faced with being perceived in certain ways despite their current status as a faculty member or graduate student. Stereotypes of African American men affect how others outside and within the African American culture perceive African American men. Stereotyping is defined as "cognitive structures that hold and organize the knowledge, beliefs and expectations a person has about a group of individuals" (Sanders & Ramasubramanian, 2012, p.18). The participants were very honest in their accounts of being stereotyped, mistreated, intentionally and unintentionally, due to their race. Several of the participants shared their thoughts about feeling like an imposter or invisible because they were the only person of color in the majority of their environments within the journey into the counseling profession. The men of this study shared how difficult it was for them and they

shared how they felt isolated, rejected and not valued due to being a minority. The participants expressed how being unable to see anyone else around them that looked like them or having very limited resources of people who advocated for them was disappointing. As an African American male attempts to overcome the stereotypes about his race and culture, he may feel isolated and rejected, which contributes to the feeling of being invisible by societies standards (Carr & West, 2013). The concerns expressed by the participants correlated with the literature on stereotyping of the African American male. Several of the participants discussed their thoughts about feeling that they didn't belong or felt that they did not have what it takes to survive in this profession and they classified the term as imposter syndrome. Imposter phenomenon, which is now known as imposter syndrome, is used to designate an internal experience of intellectual phonies, which appears to be particularly prevalent and intense among high achieving individuals (Clance & Imes, 1978).

The lived experiences shared by the participants represent the sentiments discussed in the literature review. As an African American male attempts to overcome the stereotypes about his race and culture, he may feel isolated and rejected, which contributes to the feeling of being invisible by societal standards (Carr & West, 2013). The participants of this study shared many of the same concepts of isolation and exclusion referenced in the literature review. The same thoughts and feelings expressed from the literature review the participants of this study shared many of the same concepts of isolation and exclusion. The lack of diversity and inclusion the participants shared in their stories spoke volumes to what is currently taking place in counseling programs across the United States. All of the participants shared similar experiences and their suggestion for changing the current trend is to take a serious and intentional look at recruiting and retaining African American men in the profession.

The Importance of Recruitment and Retention of Black Men in the Profession

The participants in this study shared their frustration with being the only one in their programs, classrooms and departments. The participants expressed how the lack of African American men in the profession increases the workload for them to support and assist other men of color. The participants shared several ideas of how to assist in the recruitment and retention of Black men within the counseling profession. According to Michel, Hall, Hays and Runyan (2013), fewer men are seeking are seeking opportunities in higher education and women outnumber men within the counseling profession two to one in master's degree programs. The authors of a mixed methods study of male recruitment suggest that targeted recruitment efforts aim to increase involvement and representation of of underrepresented groups (Michel et al., 2013). Despite this finding from their study there is a lack of research dedicated to the recruitment and retention of African American men in CACREP programs. The participants of this study shared how they have observed the lack of recruitment efforts due to being the first or only Black male to graduate from their graduate programs as well as serving several years as the only faculty of color.

The mixed methods study also found that several of the male participants had concerns that their voice was not being heard because they were the only male in the room, being unintentionally singled out through acts of tokenism or privilege. The male participants in this study also shared how they have to serve as the voice for all male issues because of the lack of men within their programs (Michel et al., 2013). These findings matched the reports from the participants in this current study. The participants discussed tokenism and serving as the representative for an entire culture or gender. The participants shared their frustration with the current trends of being the year 2018 and they are still representing the firsts. The participants

shared how they are the first member of their families to enter into the counseling profession, first graduate with a master's degree or doctorate at their university. The first to be admitted into their programs, the first Black faculty member, or the first Black male to become tenured in their department. Many of the participants shared similar experiences in their journey and discussed how these concerns could be reduced if mote emphasis was placed on the recruitment and retention of African American men in the profession.

The participants provided similar responses to efforts needed to aid in the recruitment and retention of African American males within the counseling profession. The researcher compiled a list of the responses provided by the participants on their thoughts of how programs can assist in recruitment efforts. The participants shared a total of four strategies to aid in recruitment and retention efforts which are the following: (a) Meet them (Black Men) where they are, (b) create a program to recruit students of color, (c) provide advocacy and support for African American men, (d) improve efforts of mentorship.

Meet Black Men Where They Are

Several of the participants shared how they did not become aware or exposed to the counseling profession until they met someone in their program who gave them information about considering a career in the field of counseling and mental health. Many of the participants shared that they did not know that the profession even existed until someone told them. The participants shared that programs can aid in the recruitment efforts by going to the community where you can find African American males to provide them with information about what the profession is and how to get involved. The participants stated that suggested places were career fairs, local high schools and during their undergraduate studies. The participants shared that if they would have known earlier that the counseling profession was even an option and available

they may have gotten involved a lot earlier. The participants mentioned that going to the source

where African American male students are also displays the value and respect of black men by

showing interest in them earlier than when they are adults in graduate programs. The participants

shared that in order to build credibility and become successful in the profession it takes time, a

strategic plan, and a willingness to jump through the hoops of the profession in order to make it

to the top to compete with other counseling professionals.

Create a Program to Recruit Students of Color

The participants shared that counseling programs can benefit from creating a system to

aid in recruiting efforts that runs itself over time. The participants explained that if there was a

system in place similar to pre-med or pre-law that provided undergraduate students with a system

that sets them up to transition from undergraduate studies to a graduate and possibly doctoral

program. The participants stated that there are several other programs who have identified a

system to aid in recruitment efforts of students and athletes. If this approach was adopted by

counseling programs the efforts would increase the recruitment and retention of African

American men.

Provide Advocacy and Support for African American Men

The participants mentioned that they lacked the support and resources needed to become

successful in their journey in the profession. Many of the participants shared how they made it

through trial and error or it took a long time to figure things out before they received assistance

from someone who knew how things worked in the profession. The participants shared similar

stories of how programs can offer more assistance to students such as financial assistance,

sponsorship, assistance with research, conference attendance, and presentations. The participants

shared how they felt isolated in the journey and know that if up and coming students had some of

these resources it will change the outcome of African American men participating in the profession.

Improve Efforts of Mentorship

Several of the participants agreed that mentorship is the cornerstone of African American men surviving in the profession. Many of the participants mentioned that regardless if the mentor is a person of color or not, having knowledge about opportunities, pitfalls and successes within the profession by someone who is already involved makes a huge difference in the outcome of graduate students and faculty. Having a trusted advisor serves multiple roles to aid in student learning and success. The participants shared that developing mentoring programs to assist students in their journey would be another influence on changing the current trends in recruitment and retention efforts.

Advancing Our Knowledge in the Profession

This study is the first of its kind to discuss the lived experiences of twelve African American male counselors and counselor educators in their journey into the counseling profession. This study not only provided an inside perspective of the lives of twelve African American men, but shared insight on how programs, universities and the counseling profession can develop strategies to aid in increasing the number of African American men involved in the counseling profession. The essence of the lived experiences of these men has given a voice to a culture of African American male counselors and counselor educators.

One of the most interesting findings of this study that can assist in the advancement of the profession was that many of the participants shared that they were later encouraged to seek counseling services, which made a difference in their cultural beliefs and perspective about counseling. The participants all shared that they were exposed and engaged in counseling during

their undergraduate experience or were required to participate in counseling as a Masters level counselors in training. The participants shared that their experience as a client changed their views and perspective about counseling which resulted in a more positive outlook about counseling services. Many of the participants began to buy into counseling services as well as advocate for the profession because of their experience as a client. Many of the participants also discussed that they continue to engage in counseling services and promote it for friends and family because of the benefits of services that they have received. This finding could be beneficial due to the nature that the participants overcome former beliefs about counseling that provided a different outcome after they participated in counseling themselves.

Another finding from this study was the importance of mentorship and how it played a major role in the outcome of each of the stories shared by the participants in this study. Mentorship or the lack thereof made an impact on these men in pursuing a career as a counselor or counselor educator. Majority of the men report that mentoring made an even larger impact by having a person of color that looked like them in position that they never imagined they could fulfill. Having an African American male counselor or counselor educator provided a vision and representation that they too could possibly be a counselor or counselor educator which prior to this observation they may not have considered pursuing a career in the counseling profession. African American men being visible and valued within this profession can change the outcomes of not only African American men pursuing a career in the profession, but could have a large impact on getting more African American men to participate in counseling as clients because they are able to see someone who looks like them serving as a clinician. Mentorship and visibility of African American men are two major factors to consider when being intentional in the recruitment and retention of African American men within the counseling profession.

Implications of Findings for Counseling Practice and Counselor Education

The findings from this study display that there is still a lot of work to be done within the counseling profession to increase of diversity an inclusion for people of color, specifically, African American men. The challenges and successes shared in the essence of these participants' lived experiences displayed how there are still concerns that serve as barriers for African American men in the counseling profession. The themes found in this study provides the counseling profession with more insight to the underrepresented population of African American men in the profession as well as a possible development of strategies that can be implemented to assist African American men with their involvement in the profession as potential clients, counselor and counselor educators.

The researcher also found common barriers among the participants in this study that were more evident of a more global impact of the African American community as a whole. Those barriers include, but are not limited to: (a) the lack of participation in counseling services among the African American men and the African American community, (b) the lack of African American men pursuing a career in the counseling profession, (c) the lack of assistance and support for African American men on their journey throughout the counseling profession, (d) the lack of a universal system designed to aid in the recruitment and retention of people of color in the counseling profession and more specifically, African American men. The barriers described can serve as information to provide service and support to this population in order to change the outcome of these barriers to promote the involvement of the African American Community within the counseling profession. These barriers could also serve as further study needed within this underserved population to create more opportunities for advancement for African American men. The researcher also discovered four key terms that were repeatedly expressed by each

participant in their responses to the research interview. Those key terms were, (a) exposure, (b) education, (c) engagement, (d) mentorship.

Exposure

All of the participants in this study shared accounts of how they were exposed to the counseling profession. They all shared a variety of stories that lead them to the counseling profession and the common factor that played a role in their exposure was a person who introduced them to the counseling profession. This person may have been in the profession themselves and others were not. No matter if they were directly or indirectly involved in the counseling profession those individuals or group of individuals provided some insight to the participants to get them to consider getting involved in the counseling profession. Without these men being exposed to the counseling profession they may have continued their views about counseling and mental health that was provided to them during their upbringing. The exposure to the profession was the first step that all of the men agreed upon that helped them to make the decision to even consider any engagement within the counseling profession. Even though they gained some exposure to know that the profession existed they report the lack of knowledge and awareness about the profession as a whole.

The researcher found that the participants were willing to challenge their own cultural beliefs about counseling and mental health to not only pursue a career in the counseling profession, but to overcome the barriers to participate in counseling as clients.   The existence of cultural beliefs serves as a barrier to African Americans seeking mental health services (Thompson & Bazile, 2004). Many of the participants shared that counseling and mental health was not a positive topic of conversation in their community so they were not aware of the benefits of counseling and was especially not exposed to a career as a counselor or counselor

educator. The researcher found that the participants shared the same behavior and attitude of being willing to try counseling for themselves, which did not reflect what they believed or were taught growing up. The participants overcame their former beliefs and ideas about counseling in order to engage in something different and uncomfortable. The participants shared their willingness to become comfortable being uncomfortable made a difference in the outcome of them overcoming previous beliefs about counseling in order to participate as a client receiving counseling services. The experiences of the men in this study compared to the current literature about the participation in counseling were closely related. According to an article on men in counseling (2013) the authors report that although men and women benefit from counseling services, men in counseling are uncomfortable with exposing their experiences, reluctant to express emotion and vulnerability in a counseling setting (Evans, Duffey & Englar-Carlson, 2013).

The results of the participants actually participating in counseling changed their former beliefs about counseling which served as the change needed for them to consider a career in the counseling profession. Each participant of this study had several reasons why they decided to pursue a career in the counseling profession, however each participant rather intentional or unintentional decided to do something uncomfortable and the results of their decision change the trajectory of their careers. If the participants decide to maintain the beliefs of what was provided to them that was expressed in their community, the outcome of their career paths would be different as evidenced by several of the participants stories of how they decided to pursue a career in counseling.

Education

The men in this study also shared their lack of knowledge and understanding of the profession prior to their involvement and exposure within the counseling profession. In a study of African American perceptions of psychotherapy (2004) Thompson and Bazile investigated that the participants of their study that the lack of information about counseling lead them to consult with the clergy for resources and referrals which correlates with the researcher's findings reported earlier in this study (Thompson & Bazile, 2004). The participants were able to identify how they learned about the counseling profession which changed their views about the profession as a whole. Several of the participants in this study mentioned how they may have majored in psychology, student affairs, pre-med, and other majors and was able to gain more information about the facts of the counseling profession. The participants all agreed that the more they learned about the profession and the opportunities that were available to them the more they decided to switch gears to work in the helping profession because of the knowledge gained about the profession.   The information gained about the counseling profession increased their awareness and attention to promote the engagement in the counseling profession prior to actually getting involved.

The participants all agreed that the more knowledge and information they learned about the profession the more they belief and behavior changed about pursuing a career in the counseling profession. It is of the utmost importance to provide education about counseling and mental health services to the African American community in order to change the perspectives about counseling and mental health (Thompson & Bazile, 2004).   The researcher found that the participants were able to gain access to the facts about counseling instead of relying on the beliefs about counseling that was provided to them in their community and upbringing. Several of the participants shared how they did the work on their own of researching more information

about counseling, mental health and careers in the profession after they became exposed to the profession from a mentor. Once the participants were able to come to a conclusion for themselves many of their cultural beliefs changed and no longer align with previous cultural beliefs. Many of the participants who now participate in counseling and are advocates for the profession shared that they have close family and friends who still refuse to participate in counseling services. The participants admitted that by participating in counseling and counseling programs changed their views about counseling. Some were already open to the idea, however they lacked the knowledge and understanding about counseling. This finding reflects the findings from Fripp and Carlson's study on exploring the influence of attitude and stigma on participation of African American and Latino populations in mental health services (Fripp and Carlson, 2017). The authors suggest that counselor educators and clinical supervisors can work collectively to assist in providing psychoeducational trainings to increase the value and aid in changing the perception about counseling services (Fripp and Carlson, 2017).

Engagement

The majority of the men in this study shared that they engaged in the profession as a student or client prior to getting involved in the profession. They participated in counseling services during at certain stages in their lives as children, teens, young adults or adult which made an impact on their decision to get involved in the profession themselves. Several of the men were able to identify when they participated in counseling and shared their experience as a client and some shared a positive experience while others may not have had a great experience. Overall the men were able to account that their engagement in services as a student or client contributed to their decision to pursue a career or continue their involvement in the counseling profession.

The participants shared how participating in counseling exposed them to aspects about counseling that they were not aware of. Many of the participants shared how they assumed what took place in a counseling session prior to experiencing it for themselves. The participants were encouraged and required to participate in counseling services as clients due to their program requirements. This same approach can be utilized by others who are not required to participate in counseling services. The participants of this study shared how their views shifted by participating in counseling themselves.   According to an article of Africentric and cultural values Wallace and Constantine (2005) report that there are several factors that lead African Americans to consider participating in counseling voluntarily including perceived levels of distress, knowledge and access to resources and the perception and attitude towards counselors and the counseling process (Wallace and Constantine, 2005).   African American's who choose to underutilize counseling services are subject to a variety of barriers that prevent them from participating as well as the lack of knowledge and awareness to gain a more positive perspective about counseling services (Wallace and Constantine, 2005).

Mentorship

All of the participants in this study expressed the value and importance of mentorship due to their experience or lack thereof for mentorship in their journey into the counseling profession. Many of the participants in this study were able to identify a person or persons who played an instrumental role in their journey that served as a trusted advisor who influenced their decision to get involved in the counseling profession. The mentor described was someone who directly or indirectly made an impact on them in some way in order to promote their interest and awareness of the counseling profession. The participants spoke very highly about the importance of visibility of the African American man in the profession. Someone who can serve as a

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representative of that inspires men to engage within the counseling profession as a client, student, or counselor educator. The participants all shared that being able to see someone who looked like them in the profession made a huge difference in their ideas of the possibilities that may be available for them by getting involved in the profession.

Mentorship played a huge role in the outcome of the participants journey within the profession. The researcher found that many of the participants who had mentors later became mentors themselves. They shared that the benefits provided to them by having a mentor gave them a sense of responsibility to return the favor to up and coming students following behind them. According to an article on mentoring African American min during their postsecondary graduate experiences (2013) the authors report that African American men have unique cultural needs that can be address by other African American men to aid in the mentorship process (Butler et al., 2013). The participants of this study expressed that although any form of mentorship is beneficial in the journey, having mentorship from someone who looks like them makes a larger impact on the person being mentored. All of the participants in this study were advocates of mentoring rather they served as an active mentor or not currently mentoring anyone.

Overall these key terms derived from this study could provide some assistance to the counseling profession when intentionally utilized to aid in the recruitment and retention of African American men within the counseling profession. Counseling programs have a responsibility to uphold the Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs (CACREP) standards related to diversity and inclusion. In section I standard J of the 2016 CACREP standards suggests that the accredited program make continuous and systematic efforts to attract, enroll, and retain a diverse group of students and to create and

support an inclusive learning community (CACREP, 2016). CACREP also reports in section I standard Q that the accredited program makes continuous and systematic efforts to recruit, employ, and retain a diverse faculty to create and support an inclusive learning community (CACREP, 2016). The essential themes and key terms emerged from this study could serve as a resource to aid meeting and exceeding the CACREP standards for diversity and inclusion for accredited programs.

The participants in this study provided four suggestions on how to increase recruitment and retention efforts. Their assessment and suggestions match with current findings listed in previous research about recruitment and retention efforts. In the article of addressing the underrepresentation of African Americans in counseling and psychology programs (2012) the author provides an assessment of systems that are currently in place to aid in recruitment and retention efforts. The author shares programs that are already in existence to overcome racial disparity including the Holmes Scholarship Network as well as The Compact for Faculty Diversity organization (Haizlip, 2012). The participants of this study spoke highly about mentorship which is also a reflection of the same article provides insight to some counseling psychology programs who have established formal mentorship programs designed for African American students. Hazlip (2012) reports that graduate and doctoral students of color have a greater chance of success and the completion of programs when faculty go beyond the traditional academic roles to invest in students by creating more more meaningful and intentional professional relationships with students (Haizlip, 2012).

Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of this study was that the majority of the participants were Doctoral level counselor educators. The researcher was interested in getting a balanced

perspective of participants who were Masters level counselors and Doctoral level counselor educators. This limitation could provide skewed results in this study due to the Masters level counselors having less than five years of experience in the profession as well as the age difference. The age difference and years in the field is a factor to consider in the outcome of this study. Hearing the lived experiences from a balanced group of participants could provide a different outcome in the results of this study. Currently the study weighed more on the side of Doctoral level counselor educators who have been involved in the counseling field between 5 and 15 years as well as an age difference of 10 to 15 years. The factors of age, education, and experience provides different answers to the research questions that were asked to the participants of this study.   The difference in the perspective of Masters level counselors and doctoral level counselors could be similar or complete opposites and this study was unable to obtain a balanced perspective due to the participants who were selected due to meeting the inclusion criteria.

The second limitation of this study was that not all of the participants responded to the member checking process of this study. A total of ten out of the twelve participants reviewed and responded to the researchers follow up regarding checking the credibility and accuracy of the transcriptions and proposed themes. The two participants who did not respond may have provided suggestions or feedback that may have determined a different outcome for the themes selected in this study. The researcher decided to follow through with the themes captured and agreed upon with the ten participants who followed up and provided their feedback and suggestion for this study to increase and maintain trustworthiness and credibility.

Recommendations for Future Research

The shared lived experiences of the twelve participants in this study created several ideas to investigate for recommendation for future research. The first recommendation would be to determine if the results of a similar study would be different based on selected participants who experiences were students at a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) verses the majority of the participants of this study experiences were at Predominately White Institutions (PWI). The emerging themes and identified challenges in this study could shift based on the experiences of participants having access to support and resources that are offered at HBCU's that was not provided to them at PWI's. More specifically seeing more men of color in leadership roles and as classmates may determine a different outcome of the lived experiences of participants whose experiences were at a more diverse or historically Black university.

The current study focused on the lived experiences of twelve African American men on their journey into and within the counseling profession. This study provided insight about the experiences as well as possible resources to aid in increasing participation in the profession. The researcher has an increased interest in conducting a similar study with African American female counselors and counselor educators to gain insight on their lived experiences to see any differences or similarities between genders.

There is currently a lack of research dedicated to the recruitment and retention of African American men in CACREP programs. The researcher would highly recommend more studies to investigate the lived experiences of African American males within the counseling profession. More specifically, a relevant area to investigate in a future study is the participants reports from the research interviews displayed that there is some conflict between African American men within the counseling profession. In general and not relating to the findings of this study another area to investigate the negative experiences more deeply including competition among African

Americans, territorialism, and the lack of lack of support and assistance from other African American men in their journey into the profession.

The final recommendation for future studies would be to go even deeper on the lived experiences of African American men who are currently involved in the nine historically Black Greek Letter Organization (BGLO) verses those who are not apart of the Greek culture. The researcher of this study happens to be a member of one of the nine BGLO's and did not take into account the participants perspective of being Greek or Non-Greek and their experiences within the journey in the counseling profession. One of the participants in this study who is not a member of a BGLO shared his thoughts about feeling isolated and excluded from the camaraderie of BGLO's even though he was a part of the African American male culture. A study about the lived experiences of these concerns within Greek life in the journey could also enhance the outcome of African American men in the counseling profession.

Summary

This study provided the lived experiences of twelve African American male counselors and counselor educators from all over the United States. The stories and experiences expressed throughout this study provides some insight to the shared lived experiences of what some African American men may have experienced in their journey into the counseling profession. The themes highlight the challenges, successes and suggestions offered by the participants in their experience on their journey of entering into the counseling profession. The findings of this study reveal that there is still more work to be done to provide assistance, resources, and strategies to increase the participation, recruitment, and retention of African American males within the counseling profession. The limitations of this study as well the lack of research available in the area of African American men as counselors and counselor educators indicate

that further research is needed to address the concerns and needs of African American men in their relation to serving as counselors and counselor educators. Further research and engagement within in these areas could also create more opportunities to aid in the recruitment and retention of African American men which could change the beliefs about counseling and mental health within the African American community.

This phenomenological study on the lived experiences of twelve African American has added to the literature, provided strategies and suggestions for programs and the profession, highlighted the importance and value of mentorship, and developed four key words to aid in advocating for men of color within the profession. The overall outcome in this study suggests if there is an increase of African American men that are able to engage in this profession could determine a different outcome to the perspectives and beliefs about counseling and mental health within the African American community.

CHAPTER 5

MANUSCRIPT FOR PUBLICATION

The Lived Experiences of African American Males in Becoming Counselors and Counselor Educators

Abstract

Although the racial representation within the counseling profession has evolved over the years, African American male counselors and counselor educators remain underrepresented. Using phenomenological method, this study discovered five themes among African American male counselors and counselor educators in their pursuit in a career in the counseling profession.

Keywords: African American, Men, Counseling, Counselor education, Experiences

Introduction

The African American community has been underserved and underrepresented in the counseling profession for many years. More specifically, African American men are underrepresented as clients, counselors, and counselor educators (Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy, 2002). Creating a culture of counselors and counselor educators that mirrors the demographics of the United States population is preferable within the counseling profession (Haizlip, 2012). According to the estimates of the United States Census Bureau report from 2010, the total population in the United States was 308.7 million people. Out of the 308.7 million people only 13% identified as African American (United States Census Brief, 2010). In the counseling profession, out of approximately 29 of the counseling programs accredited by the Council for

Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), only 3% of counseling faculty identify as African American (Haizlip, 2012). The Hazlip (2012) report does not specify if the African American faculty are male or female; however, if the distributions represent the United States 2010 Census Report it can be estimated that African American male professors only equal 1.4% of faculty from all CACREP-accredited programs.

Literature Review

Men in Counseling

Despite many innovations in the counseling profession, men participate in counseling at a lower rate compared to women (Evans, Duffey, & Englar-Carlson, 2013). Men have underutilized counseling services for years due to beliefs, traditional gender roles, and concerns of masculinity (Evans et al., 2013). Traditional male gender roles have made an impact on men choosing not to seek assistance from utilizing counseling services (Evans et al., 2013). Vogel, Wester, Hammer, and Downing-Matibag (2014) noted in their study of referring men to seek help, that the underutilization of mental health services by men is due to the view of participating in counseling services as a conflict with traditional Western male gender roles of being viewed by others as being weak or unmanly by seeking help from a counselor. Gender roles were not the only concern that have served as a barrier for men participating in counseling services, the idea of what's perceived as masculinity also contributed to the lack of participation in counseling among men.

Many men have inaccurate information about counseling because of the lack of exposure and education provided to them about what actually takes place in a counseling session. Years of conditioning to believe what is observed and heard about counseling from people who are not counselors, former or current clients or knowing someone in the profession to provide a more

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accurate description of what truly takes place in a counseling setting (Kohli, 2016). Despite the truth about what takes place in a counseling session most men are not willing to look beyond their own beliefs and ideas to make an attempt to gain new information and insight about what really happens in a counseling session (Vogel et al., 2014). This disparity causes men to continue to underutilize counseling services and for those who reject the idea of participating in counseling will continue to spread false ideas and beliefs to other men which perpetuates the negative stigma and beliefs about counseling (Vogel et al., 2014). These barriers and concerns are more intense for African American males due to historical, cultural, and systematic barriers related to counseling and mental health services that has made an impact within the African American community.

The Stigma of Counseling

The African American community has displayed resistance towards counseling because of prior beliefs about counseling and the lack of trust towards counselors and other helping professionals. In Henfield, Woo, and Washington's (2013) study on African American counselor education students' challenging experiences, the researchers found three themes of concern for African American students. The authors report that students faced: (a) increased stressed from feelings of isolation in academia, (b) poor mentoring and supportive relationships, and (c) the lack of retention of African American male students and faculty (Henfield, Woo & Washington, 2013). The negative stigma towards counseling remains prevalent for African American men due to aspects of religion, cultural barriers, belief, and lack of exposure to counseling services and the counseling profession (Ward & Besson, 2013).

Cultural Norms

Within the African American community, men are responsible for being the leaders and providers who are able to handle family problems and concerns. Considering participation in counseling or seeking help can contrast with an African American male's idea of maintaining masculinity and leadership because of the specific gender role with which he identifies (Wester, Arndt, Sedivy & Arndt., 2010). For some men, masculinity of the associated gender roles contribute to the belief that it is socially unacceptable to seek treatment or counseling because it conflicts with the value of male gender roles (Wester et al., 2010).

Men have underutilized counseling services for years due to beliefs, traditional gender roles, and concerns of masculinity (Evans, Duffey & Englar-Carlson, 2013). Traditional male gender roles have made an impact on men choosing not to seek assistance from utilizing counseling services (Evans et al., 2013). Vogel, Wester, Hammer, and Downing-Matibag (2014) noted in their study of referring men to seek help, that the underutilization of mental health services by men is due to the view of participating in counseling services as a conflict with traditional Western male gender roles of being viewed by others as being weak or unmanly by seeking help from a counselor.

Method

In order to gain a better understanding of the African American male counselors and counselor educators experiences, a hermeneutical phenomenological approach was utilized to conduct this study. Phenomenology is defined as obtaining a holistic perspective of an individual or group of shared experiences through interviews (Creswell, 2013). According to Creswell (2007), hermeneutical phenomenology is defined as a collaboration of subjective reality of an individual or group of shared experiences that represent a phenomenon The hermeneutical phenomenological approach is utilized to provide an in depth understanding of the description of

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a lived experience (Van Manen, 1990). The research question asked in this study was, "What are the lived experiences of African American men in becoming counselors and counselor educators?"

Semi-structured interviews were utilized in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the participants lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). According to Van Manen (1990) the researcher is responsible for gaining an in-depth understanding of lived experiences of the participants who are being studied. The researcher found five common themes among the participants interviews and gained a rich understanding the worldview and phenomenon of the twelve African American men without imposing his own experiences as an African American male counselor and counselor educator in training (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

Procedure and Participants

For this study, the snowball strategy was used to recruit 12 African American males who comprised a purposeful sample . The inclusion criterion for this study included (a) identifying as an African American man, (b) currently holding a full time position for at least one or more years as a professional counselor or counselor educator, and (c) consenting to participating in two in-depth interviews and having the interviews recorded for data collection. The exclusion criteria were any counselor or counselor educator that is not an African American male and has not been a counselor or counselor educator for at least one year. In order to recruit participants, the researcher posted the study invitation to various professional listserves including CESNET and ACA divisions. The snowball approach allowed each participant in the study to identify other African American male counselors or counselor educators who could serve as a participant to add saturation to the study.

The participants of the study consisted of twelve African American male counselors and counselor educators from varying geographic locations in the United States. Five of the participants were located in the Eastern region, three were in the Southern region, three were in the Western region and one was located in the Midwest. Each participant was provided with a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality and protect their identity. The participants of this study ages ranged from 27 to 55 and the mean age of 40. Ten of the participants in this study identified Christianity as their religious preference. The other two participants did not share their religious affiliation. Nine out of the twelve are licensed as a professional counselor. Eleven out of the twelve participants considered themselves to be both a counselor and counselor educator. Out of the eleven who worked directly within the academia setting, only two were tenured faculty. The other participants who were not tenured there were a total of seven participants who were Assistant professors, two were Graduate student counselors, and one served as an Adjunct Faculty.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher has experienced and overcome the barriers and stigma of counseling and mental health discussed in the literature to pursue a career in the counseling profession. The researcher became interested in this study to investigate the essence of the experiences of African American men within the counseling profession.

As an African American male counselor and counselor educator in training, I was aware of the possible biases that could have taken place during this study. For example, hearing and reading the stories, feelings, and perspectives shared by the participants could have made an impact on me because I may have experienced a similar narrative. Van Manen (1990) explained that, "My own life experiences are immediately accessible to me in a way that no one else's are.

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However, the phenomenologist does not want to trouble the reader with purely private, autobiographical facticities of one's life" (p.54).   In order to monitor, decrease, and prevent my own biases from influencing the study and to come to terms with my assumptions, prior knowledge, and perceptions I utilized bracketing, reflective journaling, and created an audit trail to document my thoughts and experiences throughout the study, more specifically before and after the participant interviews. I continued to use these strategies throughout the study to minimize bias.

Data Collection

The researcher interviewed African American male counselors and counselor educators about their experiences. Phenomenology was used in this study to explore, describe, predict, and explain the phenomenon of African American men in their journey into the counseling profession (Hays & Wood, 2011). The researcher conducted two interviews with each participant to promote discussion, allow opportunities for participants to request changes or updates to the information they provided in the initial interview. The participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol to allow for variation among the questions based on the participant's responses.

The interview protocol includes 15 questions and the researcher asked follow up questions as necessary during the interview to attain a rich description of participants' experiences. The interviews were held for approximately 45-60 minutes each and the participants were not compensated for their participation in this study.

Data Analysis

The researcher was the only person aware of the participant's identity and pseudonyms were utilized to ensure confidentiality of data. According to Van Manen (1990) "When we

analyze a phenomenon, we are trying to determine what the themes are, the experiential structures that make up that experience" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 79). After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher analyzed the data, created codes, and recorded themes found within the participants' lived experiences. Van Manen (1990) reported that interpreting the meaning of a participants lived experiences is a process of insightful invention and discovery (Van Manen, 1990).

The researcher analyzed the data collected by utilizing the suggestions of Van Manen (1990) to conduct data analysis in phenomenological studies. He described three approaches towards uncovering or isolating thematic aspects of a phenomenon, which included sententious, selective, and detailed versions, (Van Manen, 1990). The researcher utilized all three approaches in order to locate the themes of the lived-experiences shared by the participants in the study. The researcher also utilized member checking and a peer reviewer to assist in maintaining credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

In order to maintain credibility and trustworthiness, the researcher incorporated several standards described by Morrow (2005). Researchers are responsible for being sufficient in their efforts towards immersing themselves in the data, being attentive to subjectivity and reflexivity, and effectively interpreting and presenting accurate data (Morrow, 2005). The researcher maintained credibility by adhering to Morrow's (2005) three suggestions for increasing credibility (a) maintaining prolonged engagement with research participants during the study by participating in two in-depth interviews, (b) utilizing peer reviewers in the study, and (c) seeking participant checks (i.e., member checking) and validation (Morrow, 2005).

Results

The participants of this study shared their lived experiences of their journey into the counseling profession. At the conclusion of the data analysis, the researcher was able to identify five main themes for the current study. The five main themes, key components and quotes from the participants that spoke to the themes captured in the study. A table has been created to capture the themes, key components and quotes from the participants which can be found in (Table 1).

Theme 1: The Value of Mentorship

The first theme that emerged focused on the importance of mentorship within the counseling profession. The participants were able to share their experience of how they became exposed to the counseling profession and was able to identify someone who played a role in their transition into the profession. The participants shared similar stories related to their mentorship experience or the lack thereof. Many of the participants were able to pinpoint exactly who introduced them into the profession and it came from someone that decided to assist and support them along the way. Nathaniel shared his thoughts about being able to see someone who looks like him serving in positions in the counseling profession:

> I think mentorship is very important! Specifically, an African-American male has
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> someone in the program, or a counselor educator, or someone that they can see like them.
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> I think that mentorship helps a lot in your personal development, and just in the
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> profession, in general, because you see men that look just like you [who are] professors,
>
> or owning practices, or counselors which make it easy for you.

Vertner stated, "Without mentorship, there's no way that Black men would be able to survive. There's just no way." Vertner shared how he was introduced into the profession by a student he met in his class:

I was in summer school and this one army vet was sitting in front of me and he turned

around and asked, "Hey, have you heard about the graduate program in counseling?" And

I was like, "Well no, what's counseling?" He gave a brief description of what it was. And

I was like, "Oh, that actually fits for what I wanna do." And I looked into it and the rest is

history.

Theme 2: The Negative Stigma Related to Counseling Still Serves as a Barrier

The second theme that emerged in the study was the prevalence of stigma related to

counseling and mental health inherent in participants' experiences. The participants shared their

views about what they were told in their youth and in adulthood. They discussed insight on how

counseling and the counseling profession was perceived within the African American

community. Charles reflected on his experience with the stigma:

The stigmas about the profession would vary, that only crazy people go to counseling, so

If you went to counseling, it was a representation of how you couldn't handle your

business, you couldn't handle your life, you weren't good enough, you didn't cut it, and

you needed outside help.

Eugene said very similar experiences growing up within the African American community:

Growing up, we didn't talk about people going to counseling. That wasn't something that

we talked about in my community. Everybody has issues. You got some problems or

your kid is acting up, so you need to get 'em on some Ritalin. That was what we talked

about. I don't think I ever heard of a single black person going to counseling growing up.

Even more so, I don't think I knew the word depression or anxiety, not within at least a

cultural context.

Theme 3: The Lack of the Representation of the Black Man in the Profession

The third theme found in this study was the participants shared concerns about the lack of seeing others who looked like them in their journey in the counseling profession. The participants were very candid about how they struggled with no representation, the perceptions that others had about Black men, isolation, and imposter syndrome. The lack of visibility was the most common concern and Henry and Vertner explained their views about representation within the counseling profession. Henry described:

> There was something about not seeing myself represented in the profession at the time. There was also something about not seeing a lot of people across the profession, masters, doctoral, or faculty who looked like me.

Vertner explained his surprise and frustration with the reality of not seeing anyone who looked like him:

> So one of the initial challenges that I experienced was that there's no representation. Oh, shit, there's no Black people. There's just none. There's nobody that looks like me. I'm Black and none of my professors were Black. I've never had a Black professor ever. Throughout undergrad all the way up to my doc program. I've never had one. I wouldn't even know what a Black professor looks like.

Theme 4: The Lack of Diversity, Inclusion, and Value of the Black Man in the Profession

The fourth theme that emerged from this study was the participants report of the lack of diversity and inclusion as well as the absence of the value of Black men in the profession. The researcher noticed that many of the participants may not have ever had the opportunity to express their frustrations and concerns about diversity and inclusion without the possibility of being reprimanded for their responses. Vertner discussed what he noticed throughout his experience of everything being "all White":

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It was just all White. There's no color. There is not even somebody of Asian descent. It's

nobody. It was just all White people and the African people that I met during the

interview, they weren't even a part of my program. They had just recruited them so I

could see people of color. The program was all White. The master's students were all

White. The cohort members that I had were all White. The cohort above me was all

White. The cohort below me was all White. The cohort that graduated that year was all

White. The year after that was all White. It was just all White!

Jalen spoke about his experience with racism and difficulties due to being a Black male from

when he was in his Masters program:

I didn't have a great experience when I got my Masters. I experienced some racial stuff

I'd never experienced before. I felt a little beat down. I definitely felt alone and felt like

the only voice at the table sometimes. You kinda feel like you're speaking for a whole

race of people, calling out the cultural insensitivity in the classroom and everything, and

feeling like you may feel some repercussions for it.

Theme 5: The Importance of Recruitment and Retention of Black Men in the Profession

The fifth theme that emerged was the importance of recruitment and retention of Black

men in the counseling profession. All of the participants in this study shared strategies and

stories related to how recruitment and retention of African American men could reduce several

barriers and challenges for African American men as clients, counseling students, and counselor

education faculty. Charles shared his frustration about how, in the year 2018, there are still Black

men being represented as the first to accomplish certain tasks, such as being the first Black male

to graduate from a CACREP doctoral programs within the United States:

I think the thing that gets tiring is being the first. We're still in an age when we're having firsts. So to my knowledge I'm still the only Black man who's graduated with a PhD from the program I went through which was over 18years ago. I think that impacts how young men and women who are coming up in our profession who are Black and people of color seeing themselves as wanting to be involved and they have to see this environment as being welcoming to you and for you. And I think that's just harder to see when you don't see yourself. Also a huge part of it is that Black people want to live and work in a community that's representative of them and who they are. exist which could serve as a deterrence to men and women of color.

Charles further elaborated his views on how counseling programs are not living up to the standards provided to them in regards of diversity and recruitment:

To ask people willing to buy the product they are selling is the first step. I'm only speaking for accredited programs, sorry if that's bias. Our accreditation standards say to recruit and retain diverse group of students and diverse group of faculty and we don't do that. "So I think the first reality is we need to look at our commitment to the reality of those words. If we're really committed to those words, take action! Take action across programs, gender lines, and race.

Discussion

The five essential themes derived from this study were the following: (a) the value of mentorship, (b) the negative stigma related to counseling still serves as a barrier, (c) the lack of the representation of the Black Man in the profession, (d) the lack of diversity, inclusion, and the value of the Black Man in the profession, (e) the importance of recruitment and retention of

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Black Men in the profession. The results of the lived experiences of the twelve African American men in this study correlate with many concerns discussed in the literature review.

The Value of Mentorship

As reflected in the literature and in this study, one of the most valuable assets to assist African American male graduate students with pursuing professorship upon completion of graduate studies is the benefit of mentorship (Haizlip, 2012). According to Butler, Evans, Brooks, Williams, and Bailey (2013), Mentoring has been defined as a developmental partnership that one person provides knowledge, experience and information to someone else to aid in their growth and development (Butler et al., 2013). The researcher noticed several trends within the interviews. Many of the participants not only had similar stories from their mentorship experience, but many of the mentors discussed were influential African American men in the profession. Some of the same names repeated themselves throughout the study.

The Negative Stigma Related to Counseling Still Serves as a Barrier

Despite all of the efforts that has taken place to promote counseling and mental health this study displays how there is still a negative stigma about counseling within the African American community. An interesting finding that correlates with the literature that men have underutilized counseling services for years due to beliefs, traditional gender roles, and concerns of masculinity (Evans et al., 2013). Several of the participants in this study shared that they did not participate in counseling themselves until they were in college or in their Masters program and were encouraged or required to participate.

Concerns of Masculinity and Gender Roles

The participants reported their concerns of masculinity and how they may be perceived when seeking help. The participants mutually agreed that the concerns of masculinity and

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gender roles were based on cultural customs and their upbringing that Black men are expected to handle problems on their own or seek help from the clergy. The participants shared that men are viewed differently if they decide to seek outside support or counseling services instead of handling their problems on their own.

Cultural and Systemic Barriers to Counseling

The participants in this study discussed very similar lived experiences of the cultural and systematic barriers to counseling. Several reasons contribute to the negative stigma of counseling and mental health within the African American community including the lack of knowledge about counseling, religious beliefs, and financial concerns (Thompson & Bazile, 2004).

The Lack of the Representation of the Black Man in the Profession

As stated in the literature review the African American community has been underserved and underrepresented in the counseling profession for many years. More specifically, African American men are underrepresented as clients, counselors, and counselor educators (Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy, 2002). The participants shared how difficult and isolating their experience was by not having access to someone who looks like them until attending conferences, which took place once or twice per year. The participants all agreed with the value and importance of mentorship having the ability to possibly changing the outcome of representation of African American male counselors involved in the profession.

The Importance of Recruitment and Retention of Black Men in the Profession

The participants in this study shared their frustration with being the only one in their programs, classrooms and departments. The participants expressed how the lack of African

American men in the profession increases the workload for them to support and assist other men of color. The participants shared several ideas of how to assist in the recruitment and retention of Black men within the counseling profession. According to Michel, Hall, Hays, and Runyan, (2013), fewer men are seeking are seeking opportunities in higher education and women outnumber men within the counseling profession two to one in master's degree programs. Despite this finding from their study there is a lack of research dedicated to the recruitment and retention of African American men in CACREP programs.

The participants provided similar responses to efforts needed to aid in the recruitment and retention of African American males within the counseling profession. The researcher compiled a list of the responses provided by the participants on their thoughts of how programs can assist in recruitment efforts

Implications of Findings for Counseling Practice and Counselor Education

The finding from this study displays that there is still a lot of work to be done within the counseling profession to aid in the increase of diversity an inclusion for people of color, specifically, African American men. The participants shared a total of four strategies to aid in recruitment and retention efforts which are the following: (a) meet them (Black Men) where they are (b) Create a program to recruit students of color, (c) Provide advocacy and support for African American men, (d) Improve efforts of Mentorship.

Meet Black Men Where They Are

Several of the participants shared how they did not become aware or exposed to the counseling profession until they met someone in their program who gave them information about considering a career in the field of counseling and mental health. The participants stated that suggested places were career fairs, local high schools and during their undergraduate studies.

Create a Program to Recruit Students of Color

The participants shared that counseling programs can benefit from creating a system to aid in recruiting efforts that runs itself over time. The participants explained that if there was a system in place similar to pre-med or pre-law that provided undergraduate students with a system that sets them up to transition from undergraduate studies to a graduate and possibly doctoral program.

Provide Advocacy and Support for African American Men

The participants mentioned that they lacked the support and resources needed to become successful in their journey in the profession. The participants shared similar stories of how programs can offer more assistance to students such as financial assistance, sponsorship, assistance with research, conference attendance, and presentations

Improve Efforts of Mentorship

Several of the participants agreed that mentorship is the cornerstone of African American men surviving in the profession. Having a trusted advisor serves multiple roles to aid in student learning and success. The participants shared that developing mentoring programs to assist students in their journey would be another influence on changing the current trends in recruitment and retention efforts.

The challenges and successes shared in the essence of these participants' lived experiences displays how there are still concerns that serve as barriers for African American men in the counseling profession. The researcher also discovered four key terms that were repeatedly expressed by each participant in their responses to the research interview. Those key terms were, (a) exposure, (b) education, (c) engagement, (d) mentorship.

Exposure

All of the participants in this study shared accounts of how they were exposed to the counseling profession. They all shared a variety of stories that lead them to the counseling profession and the common factor that played a role in their exposure was a person who introduced them to the counseling profession. The exposure to the profession was the first step that all of the men agreed upon that helped them to make the decision to even consider any engagement within the counseling profession. Even though they gained some exposure to know that the profession existed they report the lack of knowledge and awareness about the profession as a whole.

The researcher found that the participants were willing to challenge their own cultural beliefs about counseling and mental health to not only pursue a career in the counseling profession, but to overcome the barriers to participate in counseling as clients. The existence of cultural beliefs serves as a barrier to African Americans seeking mental health services (Thompson & Bazile, 2004). Many of the participants shared that counseling and mental health was not a positive topic of conversation in their community so they were not aware of the benefits of counseling and was especially not exposed to a career as a counselor or counselor educator. The researcher found that the participants shared the same behavior and attitude of being willing to try counseling for themselves, which did not reflect what they believed or were taught growing up. The participants overcame their former beliefs and ideas about counseling in order to engage in something different and uncomfortable.

Education

The men in this study also shared their lack of knowledge and understanding of the profession prior to their involvement and exposure within the counseling profession. In a study of African American perceptions of psychotherapy (2004) Thompson and Bazile investigated

that the participants of their study that the lack of information about counseling lead them to consult with the clergy for resources and referrals which correlates with the researcher's findings reported earlier in this study (Thompson & Bazile, 2004).

The participants all agreed that the more knowledge and information they learned about the profession the more they belief and behavior changed about pursuing a career in the counseling profession. The researcher found that the participants were able to gain access to the facts about counseling instead of relying on the beliefs about counseling that was provided to them in their community and upbringing. Many of the participants who now participate in counseling and are advocates for the profession shared that they have close family and friends who still refuse to participate in counseling services.

Engagement

The majority of the men in this study shared that they engaged in the profession as a student or client prior to getting involved in the profession. They participated in counseling services during at certain stages in their lives as children, teens, young adults or adult which made an impact on their decision to get involved in the profession themselves.

The participants shared how participating in counseling exposed them to aspects about counseling that they were not aware of. Many of the participants shared how they assumed what took place in a counseling session prior to experiencing it for themselves. The participants were encouraged and required to participate in counseling services as clients due to their program requirements. According to an article of Africentric and cultural values Wallace and Constantine (2005) report that there are several factors that lead African Americans to consider participating in counseling voluntarily including perceived levels of distress, knowledge and access to

resources and the perception and attitude towards counselors and the counseling process (Wallace and Constantine, 2005).

Mentorship

All of the participants in this study expressed the value and importance of mentorship due to their experience or lack thereof for mentorship in their journey into the counseling profession. Many of the participants in this study were able to identify a person or persons who played an instrumental role in their journey that served as a trusted advisor who influenced their decision to get involved in the counseling profession. The mentor described was someone who directly or indirectly made an impact on them in some way in order to promote their interest and awareness of the counseling profession. The participants spoke very highly about the importance of visibility of the African American man in the profession.

Mentorship played a huge role in the outcome of the participants journey within the profession. The researcher found that many of the participants who had mentors later became mentors themselves. According to an article on mentoring African American min during their postsecondary graduate experiences (2013) the authors report that African American men have unique cultural needs that can be address by other African American men to aid in the mentorship process (Butler et al., 2013). The participants of this study expressed that although any form of mentorship is beneficial in the journey, having mentorship from someone who looks like them makes a larger impact on the person being mentored. All of the participants in this study were advocates of mentoring rather they served as an active mentor or not currently mentoring anyone.

Overall these key terms derived from this study could provide some assistance to the counseling profession when intentionally utilized to aid in the recruitment and retention of African American men within the counseling profession. The essential themes and key terms emerged from this study could serve as a resource to aid meeting and exceeding the CACREP standards for diversity and inclusion for accredited programs.

The participants in this study provided four suggestions on how to increase recruitment and retention efforts. Their assessment and suggestions match with current findings listed in previous research about recruitment and retention efforts. In the article of addressing the underrepresentation of African Americans in counseling and psychology programs (2012) the author provides an assessment of systems that are currently in place to aid in recruitment and retention efforts. The author shares programs that are already in existence to overcome racial disparity including the Holmes Scholarship Network as well as The Compact for Faculty Diversity organization (Haizlip, 2012). The author also reports that graduate and doctoral students of color have a greater chance of success and the completion of programs when faculty go beyond the traditional academic roles to invest in students by creating more more meaningful and intentional professional relationships with students (Haizlip, 2012).

Limitations of the study

One of the limitations of this study was that the majority of the participants were Doctoral level counselor educators. The researcher was interested in getting a balanced perspective of participants who were Masters level counselors and Doctoral level counselor educators. This limitation could provide skewed results in this study due to the Masters level counselors having less than five years of experience in the profession as well as the age difference. The age difference and years in the field is a factor to consider in the outcome of this

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study. Hearing the lived experiences from a balanced group of participants could provide a different outcome in the results of this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

The current study focused on the lived experiences of twelve African American men on their journey into and within the counseling profession. This study provided insight about the experiences as well as possible resources to aid in increasing participation in the profession. The researcher has an increased interest in conducting a similar study with African American female counselors and counselor's educators to gain insight on their lived experiences to see any differences or similarities within that study.

There is currently a lack of research dedicated to the recruitment and retention of African American men in CACREP programs. The researcher would highly recommend more studies to investigate the lived experiences of African American males within the counseling profession. More specifically, interesting area to investigate in a future study is the participants reports from the research interviews displayed that there some conflict between African American men within the counseling profession. In general and not relating to the findings of this study another area to investigate the negative experiences more deeply including competition among African Americans, territorialism, and the lack of lack of support and assistance from other African American men in their journey into the profession.

Conclusion

This study provided the lived experiences of twelve African American male counselors and counselor educators from all over the United States. The stories and experiences expressed throughout this study provides some insight to the shared lived experiences of what some African American men may have experienced in their journey into the counseling profession.

The researcher found five essential themes from the data analysis of this study. The first theme was the importance of mentorship. The second was the stigma remains as a barrier within the counseling profession. The third was the lack of representation of the Black man in the counseling profession. The fourth was the lack of diversity and inclusion in the counseling profession. The fifth theme was the need for recruitment and retention of Black men in the counseling profession. The findings of this study reveal that there is still more work to be done to provide assistance, resources, and strategies to increase the participation, recruitment, and retention of African American males within the counseling profession. The limitations of this study as well as the lack of research available in the area of African American men as counselors and counselor educators indicate that further research is needed to address the concerns and needs of African American men in their relation to serving as counselors and counselor educators. Further research and engagement within in these areas could also create more opportunities to aid in the recruitment and retention of African American men which could change the beliefs about counseling and mental health within the African American community. The overall outcome in this study suggests if there is an increase of African American men that are able to engage in this profession could determine a different outcome to the perspectives and beliefs about counseling and mental health within the African American community.

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Appendix A

AUBURN
UNIVERSITY

NOTE: DO NOT SIGN THIS DOCUMENT UNLESS AN IRB APPROVAL STAMP WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN APPLIED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

Informed Consent
for a Research Study entitled
"The Lived Experiences of African American Males in becoming Counselors and Counselor Educators"

You are being invited to participate in a research study to share your experience as an African American male counselor or counselor educator. The study is being conducted by Jason Branch, Principal Investigator, under the direction of Dr. Melanie Iarussi, Committee Chair in the Auburn University Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation and Counseling. You were selected as a possible participant because you are an African American male age 19 or older and you reported being currently employed as a professional counselor or counselor educator for at least one or more years.

What will be involved if you participate? If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to share your thoughts and experiences related to overcoming barriers to pursue a career in the counseling profession. The participants will be asked to participate in 2 interviews via web based technology, audio/video recording, or over the phone. Your total time commitment will be approximately 2 hours.

Are there any risks or discomforts? This study presents minimal risks including possible discomfort in sharing your experiences. In addition, there is a risk of breach of confidentiality due to utilizing audio recordings of the interviews; however, all efforts will be made to secure confidentiality. Transcribed interviews will not include your identifying information, and pseudonyms will be used.

Are there any benefits to yourself or others? If you participate in this study, you can expect to share your experiences and possibly assist other African American men who are unaware of the opportunities offered to African American male counselors and counselor educators. I cannot promise you that you will receive any or all of the benefits described.

Will you receive compensation for participating? There will be no compensation for your participation in this study.

Are there any costs? If you decide to participate, there will be no cost to you.

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time during the study. Your participation is completely voluntary. IF you choose to withdraw, your data can be withdrawn as long as it is identifiable. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University or The Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation and Counseling.

Your privacy will be protected. Any information obtained in connection with this study will remain *confidential*. Information obtained through your participation will be used to complete a dissertation study, published in a professional journal, and presented at a professional meeting. Pseudonyms will be used in place of participant's identifying information when disseminating the findings of this study.

If you have questions about this study, *please contact* Jason Branch at cjb0079@auburn.edu or (205) 792-4620. A copy of this document will be given to you to keep.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334) 844-5966 or email at IRBadmin@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE.

_____   _____
Participant's signature   Date   Investigator obtaining consent   Date

_____   _____
Printed Name   Printed Name

_____
Co-Investigator   Date

_____
Printed Name

Appendix B

Participant Demographic Questionnaire

1. What is your age?
    _____

2. Marital Status?
    a. Single
    b. Married
    c. Divorced
    d. Widowed
    e. Partnered but not legally married

3. What is your religious preference?
    _____

4. Where are you located? (State)   Where were you born? (State)

    _____   _____

5. Highest level of education completed?
    a. Bachelors
    b. Masters
    c. Doctorate

6. Years in the counseling profession?
    a. 1-3
    b. 3-5
    c. 5-7
    d. 7-10
    e. 10-15
    f. 15 and above

7. Are you currently licensed?
    a. Yes, Type_____
    b. No, Explain? _____

8. Your current work setting?
    a. Private Practice
    b. Non-Profit
    c. Psychiatric Facility/Hospital
    d. Community Mental Health Center
    e. College/University
    f. Rehabilitation
    g. School Counseling
    h. Other setting/specialty: _____

9. Current position/title in the profession?

   _____

10. If you are a counselor educator/faculty which best describes your position?
    a. Pre-Tenure in a Tenure-track position
    b. Tenured in a tenure track position
    c. Clinical faculty
    d. Adjunct

11. If you are a Counselor Educator in a university setting are/were you tenured?
    a. Yes
    b. No, Explain? _____

Appendix C

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Are you counselor, counselor educator or both?

2. Can you tell me about your experience in the journey of becoming a counselor/counselor educator?

3. Do you remember when and how you were exposed to the counseling profession?

4. Who did you know that was involved in the counseling profession?

5. What made you decide to pursue a career as a counselor/counselor educator?

6. Have you ever participated in counseling yourself before being a counseling student? Have you participated since being a student, counselor or counselor educator?

7. What challenges did you experience, if any, in becoming a counselor/counselor educator?

    Sub question: What challenges did you experience that you think was unique or specific to being an African American man?

8. Do you remember any negative stigmas, stereotypes about counseling and mental health that served as barriers in your experience of becoming a counselor/counselor educator?

9. How did people respond to your career choice, such as family, friends and others?

10.Tell me about your experience with mentorship in your journey into the counseling profession?

11. What are your thoughts about mentorship?

    Sub question: Does it matter if the mentor if a person of color? Are you currently mentoring anyone in counseling profession? Are you currently being mentored?

12. In your experience and opinion what contributes to the barriers faced by African American men in regards to getting involved in the counseling profession?

13. How do you think counseling programs can assist in the recruitment and retention of African American males?

14. How do you get African American males to participate in counseling as clients?

15. How do you get African American males to pursue a career in the counseling profession?

Appendix D

Recruitment Email

The lived experiences of African American males in becoming Counselors and Counselor Educators.

I am a doctoral student in the Counselor Education and Supervision program at Auburn University. I would like to invite you to participate in my dissertation research study if you are an African American male professional counselor and/or counselor educator.

As a participant, you will be asked to asked to share your experiences as an African American male to become a practicing counselor or counselor educator. Participation will require completing two interviews via web based technology or over the phone, and interview will be audio/video recorded. Your total time commitment will be approximately 2 hours. Inclusion criterion include (a) identifying as an African American man, (b) currently holding a full time position for at least one or more years as a professional counselor or counselor educator, and (c) consenting to participating in two in-depth interviews and having the interviews recorded for data collection.

If you would like to participate in this research study contact Jason Branch at cjb0079@auburn.edu. or (205) 792-4620. If you have questions please feel free to contact me or my dissertation chair, Dr. Melanie Iarussi, at miarussi@nova.edu.

Thank you or your consideration,

Jason Branch, MA, LPC-S, NCC