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The Lived Experiences of Black Women in CES Doctoral Programs During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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2022

Abstract

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by

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MS, California State University Sacramento, 2009

BA, California State University, Hayward, 2004

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Black women in counselor education and supervision (CES) programs have historically been underrepresented in the scholarly literature, making it vital to understand how this group of women cope with the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to explore and understand Black women's lived experiences in CES doctoral programs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Husserl's phenomenological approach served as the conceptual framework for this research study. Semi structured interviews were conducted with nine Black women enrolled in CES doctoral programs having at least 6 months to 5 years of engagement in their program. The data were analyzed using the modified van Kaam 7-step method as outlined by Moustakas. Results indicated that while Black female CES doctoral students faced challenges and barriers in their programs during the pandemic, success and supportive factors continue to contribute to their efforts to be fully committed to their programs. The results may contribute to positive social change by providing higher educational institutions, counselor educators, and counseling professionals with information to consider fostering diverse and culturally specific resources, increase an understanding of historical factors affecting current challenges during the pandemic, and create ways to build relationships with Black students.

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Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation work to my family and friends. I had so many dark moments through this process, but never once did I feel alone. To my mother Carolyn Gardner and my father John Williams, thank you for life. I am forever grateful for the both of you. To my late aunt and uncle, Ruby and Colonial Royal, I wish the both of you were still living to share this moment with me. There is not a day that goes by that I do not think about the both of you and how you cared and supported me as if I was your biological child. Aunt Greta, thank you for having my back and supporting me. To my daughter Arielle Washington and my son Kristian Harris, the both of you are my rock and I want to thank you for being patient with me during this process. Thank you to all my family and friends who supported me, picked up the phone when I needed to vent, made sure I engaged in self-care, and provided me with encouragement. I am forever indebted. Finally, to each Black woman who participated in this study, know your voices are heard and treasured.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In March of 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2020) proclaimed a national emergency to battle the coronavirus disease 19 (COVID-19). Not only has COVID-19 affected millions of lives and organizations across the world (Marshall et al., 2020; Tirupathi et al., 2020; World Health Organization [WHO], 2020), but the pandemic has had a catastrophic effect on the higher education system (Blankenberger & Williams, 2020; United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], n.d.). UNESCO (n.d) reported that an estimated 1.5 billion students enrolled in higher education programs have been affected by the pandemic. While higher education institutions have been forced to adapt and change policies to address the challenges of navigating the virus, an estimated 75% of students at the graduate level reported that their mental well-being had worsened since the beginning of the pandemic (Padilla, 2020). More specifically, research has shown that doctoral students enrolled in Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) are not immune to the stressors associated with their programs but are now struggling to find alternative ways to cope with the turmoil of the pandemic (Bray, 2020).

Demertzis and Eyermen (2020) found that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have required students to remain at home and physically distance themselves from others and have caused an increase in mental health concerns including depression, anxiety, substance use, and suicide. Demertzis and Eyermen also highlighted that the pandemic has caused high death rates throughout the United States and have played a major role in

socioeconomic related factors of students. Bray (2020) reported that counseling doctoral students enrolled in CACREP programs are working to meet the high demands of their clients, while coping with ways to engage in their own personal self-care and making attempts to avoid compassion fatigue. Further, counselor education and supervision (CES) students are left with difficult choices, such as leaving their practicum sites to adjust to personal and professional challenges caused by the pandemic (Bray, 2020).

The CDC (2020) reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected the quality of students' well-being and health, including difficulty with concentration, changes in sleep quality, mental health disorders, and an increase in substance abuse. Blake et al. (2021) found that students of color with an existing mental health diagnosis have been faced with unmet needs such as inadequate access to healthcare, safe housing, and mental health services due to the current COVID-19 pandemic. Blankstein et al. (2020) argued that the pandemic has touched all racial-ethnic groups, but Black students reported having more concerns regarding their mental well-being and health than other racial-ethnic groups. Chandler et al. (2020) reported that Black individuals are likely to experience health disparities at a double the rate for Latino, Asian, and White individuals. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office (2018) released a report detailing how 8.7% of Black adults received mental health services compared to 18.6% of White adults, 6.2% of Black adults received prescription medication for mental health services compared to 15.3% White adults, and 3.8% of Black adults reported severe psychological distress. These results reflected that White adults received more mental health treatment than Black adults, but a recent CDC report indicated that Black adults

experienced mental health symptoms at a higher rate than Whites. Mental Health America (MHA, 2021) released a report highlighting that Black women suffer from depression at higher rates compared to White women and Black men but receive significantly lower rates of mental health treatment for depression. Researchers have found that there is a critical need for Black women to take advantage of mental health services during the COVID-19 pandemic but this population views mental health as a taboo due to historical experiences and cultural habits (Burger et al., 2021).

Black women have a long history of struggling silently in doctoral programs (Shavers et al., 2019), which has likely been exacerbated by their vulnerability to COVID-19 (Gur et al., 2020). Ward et al. (2009) noted that Black women are at higher risk of developing a mental illness compared to White women and Black and White men. However, mental health statistics and mental health diagnosis are underreported because Black women use outpatient mental health services at a lower rate than White women and Black men (Coker, 2003; Ward et al., 2009). The underreported mental health statistics of Black women may likely stem from the history of cultural mistrust of Whites due to past and present experiences with racism and oppression in the academic setting (Ward et al., 2009). Simien (2020) argued that before the COVID-19 pandemic, Black women experienced economic hardships, mental health barriers, chronic stressors, and multiple role responsibilities at a higher rate than men and White counterparts. Black women in the academic setting face an assortment of distinctive challenges that not only influence their college experience but in contrast to White students, Black women must contend with both gender and race-based oppressions (Jones & Sam, 2018). Bhat et al. (2012)

conducted a qualitative phenomenological study and found that Black female doctoral counseling students attending predominantly White institutions (PWI) reported that both race- and gender-based prejudices and discrimination contributed to challenges in their programs. The results of the study found that Black female students reported feeling singled out in their classrooms due to their race and gender, they expressed concerns of being misunderstood when cultural values were shared and reported having to work harder to be accepted by male and White counterparts (Bhat et al., 2012).

As the data continue to emerge regarding the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Black community, it is important to explore Black women's experiences in their accredited doctoral counseling programs as this population is underrepresented in the scholarly literature. The COVID-19 pandemic is not the first epidemic recorded in the counseling literature. Burger et al. (2021) noted that the 2009 swine influenza outbreak had a significant impact on Black women compared to men and White women. The results of the study found that Black women have been vaccinated at a lower rate than White females due to a mistrust in the system and poor healthcare (Burger et al., 2021), in which recent data of the COVID-19 reflect that Blacks are not provided with adequate information (Simien, 2020). Further, Hawkins (2005) reported that the AIDS epidemic affected Black women ages 18 to 59 at a higher rate than White women. Black women's infection rate was five times higher than that found in Whites in 1991, and the percentage rate increased by 2001 (Hawkins, 2005). It is important to understand how previous pandemics have created disadvantages in the Black community, which includes the lack of financial resources, distrust in medical professionals, and lack of tailored and

culturally appropriate education (Abuelgasim et al., 2020). The research literature proves that past epidemics and the new onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has been detrimental on the lives of Black women. This research study seeks to explore these detriments on Black women currently enrolled in accredited online and brick-and-mortar counseling doctoral programs during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

In this chapter, I examine background research identified by previous studies that have approached Black women's challenges in higher education accredited counseling doctoral programs due to limited research specifically on CES programs. There will also be an examination of other studies that address the challenges caused by the current COVID-19 pandemic, particularly looking at the effects on Black women. The conceptual framework will be briefly discussed with a more thorough review in Chapter 2. The nature of the study will be discussed in detail to understand the transcendental phenomenological philosophy and its suitability to pursue the problem, purpose, significance, and research question for this study. Further, the limitations, delimitations, assumptions, and definitions critical to the concepts identified in this study will be discussed.

Background

The phenomenon of Black women in accredited online and brick-and-mortar doctoral programs related to success factors, unique challenges, historic oppression and racism, the COVID-19 pandemic, and other significant factors that have influenced the doctoral experience have been explored through various theoretical approaches. For example, Haynes (2019) used Black feminist geography grounded in theory to study

Black women's mistreatment in their counseling doctoral programs due to race and gender. Additionally, Ward et al. (2009) used the commonsense model to examine Black women's mental health diagnosis history, ambivalence to seeking mental health treatment, and reasons for not believing in taking psychotropic medications. Further, Johnson et al. (2020) used a quantitative survey-based study to examine Black women's engagement, support, and challenges during the COVID-19 crisis. The most common conceptual lens found in the literature was the transcendental phenomenological as described in Husserl's (1931) and Moustakas's (1994) philosophical movement. However, there were no studies on Black women's experiences, specifically in accredited CES doctoral programs during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic through the lens of Husserl's (1931) phenomenological philosophy approach.

Problem Statement

COVID-19 has affected millions of lives worldwide (Tirupathi et al., 2020; WHO, 2020). Not only has the pandemic created the largest disruption of education systems in history (Gibson et al., 2020; Marshall et al., 2020; UNESCO, n.d.), CES doctoral students are faced with their own obstacles and uncertainties while concurrently providing services to the public (Bray, 2020). Due to the measures put in place by the CDC to protect individuals from the COVID-19 pandemic, students are spending an unusual amount of time with their families. Therefore, holding virtual sessions with clients may not guarantee confidentiality since most clients are in public and semiprivate surroundings (Pincus et al., 2020). Also, it poses the risk of revealing very personal or sensitive information that may be overheard by other individuals surrounding the client

and the student providing services (Pincus et al., 2020). Researchers have also reported that students' caseloads are increasing, leading to students experiencing psychological trauma (Boudreau, 2020). Psychological trauma is an occupational risk for most counselors, in which listening to people's problems can heighten counselors' chances of developing mental health problems, such as depression (Boudreau, 2020).

Researchers found that the current pandemic has taken a toll on all racial-ethnic groups pursuing their doctoral studies (Blankstein et al., 2020). However, Black students reported having more concerns regarding their mental well-being, compared to other racial-ethnic groups (Blankstein et al., 2020), which has also been exacerbated by socioeconomic and health disparities due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Chandler et al., 2020). The American Counseling Association (ACA, 2014) *Code of Ethics* emphasizes a student's ability to monitor signs of impairment and do no harm to clients, but Black female students scale back from confiding in their professors due to fear of being negatively stereotyped (Harper, 2017; Ross et al., 2016). Further, Williams et al. (2018) found that Black women in accredited doctoral counseling programs are afraid of asking for help because they do not want faculty or peers to have adverse perceptions about their gender and race.

Gabster et al. (2020) argued that increasing an understanding of the challenge's women of color face in academia is crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, Black women experienced structural inequities such as social isolation, racism, microaggressions, and financial restraints at higher rates than their White counterparts (Chandler et al., 2020; Davidson et al., 2014; Luna & MacMillan, 2015),

which have been profoundly affected by the pandemic (Chambers et al., 2020; Kantamneni, 2020; Simien, 2020). Studies have indicated that Black women in academia are more prone to mental illness, social isolation, and that they underutilize outpatient mental health services than White women and Black men (Breslau et al., 2005; Neufeld et al., 2000; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). Nelson et al. (2020) conducted an integrated conceptual framework based on intersectionality and social constructivism and found that Black women compared to White counterparts did not seek counseling services due to cultural mistrust, stigma, and spiritual practices. MHA (2020) reported that in 2015, 48% of Whites received mental health services, compared with 31% of Asians and Hispanics, and 22% of Blacks. Since the onset of the pandemic, it has been reported that depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation have increased amongst all students; however, Black students reported the highest percentage increase but failed to seek mental health support (MHA, 2020). Although research has proven that Black women have underutilized mental health services, Bhat (2012) argued that Black women are finding success in counseling doctoral programs but went on to suggest that their challenges compared to other ethnic and racial groups are unique. There has been a multitude of research examining the comparison of Black women to women of other races and Black and White men (Jones & Sam, 2018), but there is no literature on the negative effects that the current pandemic has had on Black women in CES doctoral programs. Therefore, future research has been indicated to specifically explore the lived experiences of Black women in CES programs (Bhat, 2012), not excluding the disproportionate toll of the COVID-19 pandemic (Chandler et al., 2020; Simien, 2020).

Understanding how to intervene and support Black women in accredited CES online and brick-and-mortar doctoral counseling programs, considering the pandemic, would provide higher education institutions, counselor educators, and counseling professionals information to consider fostering diverse and culturally specific resources, increase an understanding of historical factors affecting current challenges during the pandemic, and creating ways to build relationships with Black students. Much of the literature that exists related to Black women is intertwined with language about women of color. However, there is little research on the distinctiveness of Black women's experiences in CES doctoral programs, especially when considering success factors and unique stressors related to the current pandemic (Chandler et al., 2020). Therefore, this study is important to explore the lived experiences of Black women enrolled in online and brick-and-mortar accredited CES doctoral programs during the pandemic.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of Black women currently enrolled in accredited doctoral CES programs at online and brick-and-mortar, for profit and nonprofit institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic. There are over 800 accredited counseling doctoral programs throughout the United States (CACREP, 2016) in which counseling students are held to meet the highest academic and training standards. Researchers have found that Black women in higher education accredited counseling doctoral programs have been connected in their struggles to have a voice, be accepted, and be respected in academic institutions for decades (Collins, 2001). These struggles have evolved as data from the COVID-19 pandemic proves that Black

women are more likely to experience consequential effects from the current health crisis than other racial groups (Simien, 2020; WHO, 2020). In this study, a transcendental phenomenological philosophy approach (Husserl, 1931) was deemed appropriate because I sought to understand the meaning made from Black women's experiences in their CES doctoral programs during the current pandemic. Transcendental phenomenology, compared to hermeneutic phenomenology, was used due to my interest in focusing on the interpretation of the information received by the researcher (Van Manen, 2004). Focusing on Black women currently working on their doctoral degree in CES during the pandemic also fills a gap in the current literature by exploring the relevance of Husserl's philosophy as applied to this population. The findings from this study may provide information to guide social change by providing higher educational institutions, counselor educators, and counseling professionals with information to consider fostering diverse and culturally specific resources, increase an understanding of historical factors affecting current challenges during the pandemic, and creating ways to build relationships with Black students.

Research Question

The following question guides this study: What are the lived experiences of Black women in CES doctoral programs during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Conceptual Framework

This study involves transcendental phenomenology based on Edmund Husserl's (1931) ideas to look at the phenomena through the natural world. Exploring the beliefs and perspectives of the lived experiences of Black women in CES doctoral programs

during the pandemic through the phenomenological view will help provide rich descriptions of the individuals' experiences (Husserl, 1931). Phenomenology is transcendental because it holds to what can be learned through reflection on subjective acts and their objective correlates (Husserl, 1931). Husserl described phenomenology as the sustained attempt to explain experiences without abstract thoughts and subjects (metaphysical) or speculative knowledge or logical deductive thoughts (theoretical). Husserl suggested that temporarily bracketing away the natural attitude allows an individual's philosophical thoughts to become their own distinctive feature of science (Husserl, 1931). Taipale (2015) noted that Husserl's approach to understanding human experience is the main factor that led to the development of transcendental phenomenology. Husserl's philosophical underpinnings of transcendental phenomenology are grounded on the concept that preconceived ideas allow the phenomenon to present in its true form and allow the true meaning of the phenomenon to innately emerge within its own identity (Taipale, 2015). Transcendental phenomenology conveys an overall essence of the participants' lived experience, and the researcher can obtain rich descriptions and details systematically from the perspective of the participants' being studied (Taipale, 2015). The phenomenological view is described by Moustakas (1994) as the capability to investigate the phenomenon through the subjective eyes of the participants involved. Transcendental phenomenology merges all participants' lived experiences into a unified common description of the phenomenon of interest (Moustakas, 1994).

Transcendental phenomenology is a scientific study associated with the phenomenon just as we see them (Giorgi, 2010). The transcendental phenomenological method will assist in understanding the lived experiences of Black women enrolled in accredited CES doctoral counseling programs through the COVID-19 phenomenon. Attempting to understand the participant's perception of a phenomenon is complex, particularly in challenging experiences such as the pandemic (Chandler et al., 2020). However, the transcendental phenomenological qualitative method will help understand the lived experiences of the research participants by reflecting and setting aside biases. Through bracketing, data collection, and analysis, rich information will be obtained to understand the lived experiences of Black women enrolled in CES doctoral programs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this qualitative study was to use a transcendental phenomenological approach to elicit participants' lived experiences as Black women attending CES doctoral programs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Transcendental phenomenology seeks to understand the lived experience of a phenomenon and explores how one's experiences are perceived, described, explained, and ultimately transformed into consciousness (Moustakas, 1994; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The use of this method elicited participants' recommendations for further research on the study topic and illuminate the meaning, structure, and essence of Black female CES doctoral students and their lived experiences with managing challenges in their programs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Transcendental phenomenology is employed as a qualitative research design and supports

a natural form of inquiry of the participants' meanings of lived experiences (Husserl, 1931). Quantitative analysis was not an applicable research method for this study because quantitative methods are related to range and correlation (Harkiolakis, 2017).

The transcendental phenomenological approach of this study allowed for in-depth semi structured interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) of participants to collect rich information by asking open-ended questions to address the research question. The interview questions consisted of a pre-established series of inquires that incorporated detailed follow-up questions to probe deeper into the constructs (Hale & Bridges, 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I interviewed participants through the Zoom videoconferencing platform to observe mannerisms and the recording of the interviews was captured using a mobile device for transcription purposes. This transcendental phenomenological approach best addressed this study's purpose to investigate how the participants describe the phenomenon and how they experience the phenomenon through their senses (Husserl, 1931; Patton, 2015). A qualitative design helped gather descriptive and rich data, rather than numerical data as would be collected in a quantitative approach. To choose information-rich cases, Silverman (2013) suggested that the researcher should make every effort to identify diverse characteristics and criteria for constructing the study and highlighted that a small sample size could generate two findings: high-quality data and shared themes. For this study, I recruited a sample size of nine participants using a purposive, snowball sampling strategy. Guest et al. (2006) suggested that data saturation can be attained with a minimum of six interviews. Data saturation can be reached when there is sufficient information to replicate the study, no new information is attained, and

coding is no longer viable (Guest et al., 2006). The data analysis plan for this study incorporated Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kaam method, which is suggested for the analysis of phenomenological data. Many scholars prefer to use qualitative analysis software, but to avoid compromising the trustworthiness of the interview results (Rogers, 2018), I employed manual hand coding to analyze the data in this study.

Definitions

Barriers: A wide range of challenges shaped by social, cultural, economic, and political factors (K, 2020; Winkler, 2000).

Black woman: For this study, a Black woman is defined as a woman belonging to an ethnic group of Americans, including mixed ethnicity, who self-identify as Black.

Challenges: For this study, challenges were defined as factors impeding academic success and mental well-being (Mushonga & Henneberger, 2020).

Coronavirus disease: A type of viral pneumonia caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV2; Dousari et al., 2020).

Lived experience: Self-reported events that participants felt were important in their CES doctoral studies during the COVID-19 pandemic (Smith et al., 2009).

CES doctoral student: For this study, a CES doctoral student is defined as someone who is actively enrolled in an accredited online or brick-and-mortar CES doctoral program with opportunities for growth and specialized training to become a future counselor educator.

Assumptions

It was assumed that each of the participants identified as a Black woman and was currently enrolled in an accredited CACREP online or brick-and-mortar CES doctoral program during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was assumed that the participants were thriving in their doctoral programs pre-COVID with minimum challenges. The most basic assumption is that the participants were aware, could make meaning of, and were willing to express their experience in an unambiguous manner (Patton, 2002). It was believed that participants would answer the interview questions honestly based on lived experiences and perceived constructed meanings of challenges related to the pandemic. There was no way to accurately verify the participants' experiences but ensuring confidentiality of the interviews likely helped participants feel comfortable with being honest. Participants were informed that the interviews would be recorded using a secure mobile device and that their identity would not be disclosed in the research study. It was assumed that the sampled population for this study could express personal impressions, feelings, and experiences about being currently enrolled in a CES doctoral program during the pandemic. Further, it was assumed that the transcendental phenomenological approach would allow for rich responses about the participants' experiences.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study was limited to Black women enrolled in CACREP-accredited online and brick-and-mortar CES doctoral programs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Though there were studies that reported all doctoral students experience challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic while enrolled in their doctoral program, for

the sake of a more manageable study, it was limited to the exploration of experiences to a single ethnic identification consistent with the recommendations (Baker, 2015; Chandler et al., 2020; Haynes, 2019; Patterson-Stephens et al., 2017). With respect to delimitations, as only Black women participants were interviewed for the study to address a gap in the literature, the results were limited to this racial and gender group. Also, a qualitative methodology was used, leading to a small number of participants, and the findings were bound to these participants solely as opposed to a larger group of Black women. Due to the limited scope and delimitations, the transferability of the study was restricted to the implications that individual readers may take from the limited experiences explored in the study (Smith et al., 2009).

Limitations

There were some limitations to this study. This study was limited to a small sample size of nine participants, which may have decreased the generalizability of the results (Creswell, 2013) to all Black women enrolled in CES doctoral programs during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Another possible limitation pertained to the interview questions. Patton (2015) suggested that when the researcher creates interview questions, the researcher can unintentionally lead the participants to desired answers. Therefore, it was important to obtain feedback from peers regarding the questions before the study to assess for any bias and potential leading questions (Patton, 2015).Another potential limitation was the use of purposive sampling. It was possible for the participants to manipulate the data being collected (Marshall, 1996). Ravitch and Carl (2016) reported that when participants know that they have been selected for a project, it can initiate a

change in their behavior. Participants may choose to act in a way that allows researchers to reach the conclusions that they expect to see, or they may choose to lie to create an unwanted outcome because they have a bias of their own that they want to make public (Marshall, 1996). To minimize the likelihood of this happening, it was my responsibility to determine whether the participants were truthful. Further, I am a Black CES doctoral student, and my ethnicity and gender could have influenced how the participants responded to the research interview questions because they are fellow CES doctoral students who may have had a desire for me to succeed in the program.

Significance

This study is significant because it added to the limited information available concerning the unique challenges that Black women face, compared to other counterparts, in their CES doctoral studies during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study was designed to provide higher institutions, counselor educators, and counseling professionals with information that would help Black women through specific challenges in their doctoral studies while understanding the disproportionate toll of the current pandemic (Chandler et al., 2020). McCoy (2018) found that Black women tend to be isolated and marginalized at greater rates than their peers. Haskins et al. (2016) suggested that the marginalization of Black doctoral women is more significant than that of Black male students because of marginalization due to motherhood responsibilities. The COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences of schools and workplaces closing means that Black women are even more isolated, and the discomfort of asking for help leaves them significantly vulnerable to quitting their academic studies (Williams et al., 2018).

This study's implications for positive social change included creating a better understanding of the unique challenges that Black women face while being expected to counsel and provide services to the public as a part of their accredited counseling doctoral program. Additional potential implications for positive social change include providing positive information to Black female doctoral students who seek information regarding how other Black women cope with challenges in their CES doctoral programs during a pandemic. Findings from this research could also fill the gap by providing higher educational institutions, counselor educators, and counseling professionals with information to consider fostering diverse and culturally specific resources, increase an understanding of historical factors affecting current challenges during the pandemic, and create ways to build relationships with Black students.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided the initial premise for exploring the lived experiences of Black women enrolled in online and brick-and-mortar CES doctoral programs during the COVID-19 pandemic through the lens of Husserl's (1931) phenomenological philosophy. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has increased and triggered historic challenges experienced by Black women enrolled in higher education doctoral programs. A transcendental approach to their lived experiences can be valuable to the counseling literature and the academic world. The results of this study will not only address some of the potential challenges that Black women are enduring during the pandemic but will provide higher institutions, counselor educators, and counseling professionals with information that would be useful in supporting Black women in their CES doctoral

programs. In the next chapter, the existing literature critical to this study's concepts will be explored.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Black women enrolled in higher education accredited programs, both online and brick-and-mortar, are at greater risk of experiencing unique challenges during the current COVID-19 pandemic (Chaney, 2020; Horsford et al., 2019; Prier Jackson & Holland, 2020). As the pandemic continues to unsettle the foundations of the nation's economy, concerns about Black female doctoral counseling students are ongoing (Chaney, 2020). Crumb et al. (2020) conducted a study using a feminist thought and social class model and found that Black women have a history of resiliency and self-motivation, which has helped them overcome negative experiences in their doctoral programs. Horsford et al. (2019) added to the literature by noting that Black students who are engaged in the use of campus resources and are supported by their faculty are more likely to overcome challenges. Though academic success is important in the Black community, researchers found that Black women in the past have been historically challenged with social isolation, microaggressions, work–life imbalance, stereotypes, and gender-race oppressions, which is no comparison to men and other racial groups (Collins, 2004; Haskins et al., 2016; Haynes et al., 2019; Patterson et al., 2017; Sue et al., 2007). It has also been reported that Black women's mortality rates and health disparities are higher than their White counterparts during the current pandemic (Tirupathi et al., 2020; WHO, 2020). Chaney (2020) noted that the U.S Census Bureau (2019) stated that Blacks comprise 13.4% of the American population, and the "mortality rates for Blacks is 2.2 times higher than the rate for Latinos, 2.3 times higher than the rate for Asians and 2.6

higher than the rate for Whites" (Chaney, 2020, p. 255; APM Research Lab Staff, May 12, 2020).

In Chapter 2, I explore the current research related to the Black women enrolled in CES doctoral programs during the COVID-19 pandemic. There is little research on Black women enrolled in CES doctoral programs, so this literature review also includes an exploration of the lived experiences of Black women in higher education doctoral programs, in general. Following a description of the literature search strategy and a discussion of the conceptual framework for this study, this chapter's Review of the Literature section comprises seven major subsections. The first provides information on the function of CES doctoral programs. The second offers insight into how the current pandemic has affected the Black community, particularly Black women. The third subsection provides insight into the COVID-19 pandemic, including the history of the virus and the risk factors for Black women. The fourth gives a historical overview of Black women experiences with challenges in higher education doctoral programs, in general. The fifth addresses the unique challenges Black female students face compared to men and other ethnic/racial groups in doctoral programs. The sixth subsection is a review of the literature on culturally relevant interventions to assist Black women in their CES doctoral programs during and preceding the pandemic. The seventh subsection details the available support systems utilized by Black women in their doctoral studies to cope with unique challenges as reported in the literature. The chapter ends with a summary and conclusion, including discussion of the gaps in the current literature and related social change implications.

Literature Search Strategy

When searching for relevant literature, I used the following electronic research databases: Academic Search Complete, APA PsycNET, EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, MEDLINE, ProQuest, PsycARTICLES, PsycCRITIQUES, PsycEXTRA, PsycINFO, SocINDEX, and Thoreau through the Walden University Library system. The following keywords were used: *Black women, CES students, doctoral students, distance learning, minority women, women of color, barriers, higher learning institutions, higher education, COVID-19 pandemic, coping, stressors, isolation, academic performance, and counseling students, transcendental phenomenology, clinical programs, social change, neuroscience, supportive services,* and *mental health.* The exploration of literature identified 24 articles in the original search. Each of the peer-reviewed articles was thoroughly reviewed to confirm that the content was consistent with the context and significance of this study. The informational websites of the following organizations were also used: WHO, CDC, ACA, MHA, and CACREP.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this transcendental phenomenological study was based on the work of Husserl (1931/2018). Husserl described phenomenological philosophy to understand the meaning associated with an individual's factual experiences (Giorgi, 2010). Husserl discovered that the human consciousness is a basis for human knowledge, and the conscious experience will be obtained from the first-person's point of view (Husserl, 1931). Husserl's phenomenological philosophy is prided on the pure essence of the phenomenon, which allows for the phenomenon to emerge in its natural

form. Moustakas (1994) added that transcendental phenomenology allows for a detailed description of the phenomenon from the subjective lens of the participant. Phenomenology entails setting aside biases and being the "outlooker" who performs epoché, making attempts to eliminate everything representing a prejudgment (Husserl, 1931).

Phenomena are the basis for all knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). This framework provides a rich description of the phenomenon experienced by the participants in the study (Husserl, 1931). I used transcendental phenomenology, as opposed to hermeneutic phenomenology, in order not to focus on my interpretations as the researcher (van Manen, 2012). In this study, transcendental phenomenology allowed for an accurate description of the experiences, perceptions, and beliefs of Black female students who are currently enrolled in a CES program during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Importantly, transcendental phenomenology provided the framework for accurately examining Black female students' perceptions of unique challenges experienced in their doctoral programs during the current pandemic and their perceptions on how they can be supported in their academic programs during and preceding the pandemic.

Review of the Literature

CES Programs

CES programs were established in the late 1950s through the 1960s (West et al., 1995) due to the increased need for counselors and counseling educators. The Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) established standards for the functioning of counseling programs in the 1960s prior to the involvement of

CACREP in the 1980s (West et al., 1995). Today, the counseling profession is different from decades ago due to new standards written by CACREP for those seeking doctoral programs in CES (CACREP, 2009).

Student enrollment in CES online and brick-and-mortar doctoral programs increased to 44% in 2019 (CACREP, 2019b; Field et al., 2020). In 2016, there were a total of 2,668 students enrolled in CES doctoral programs of whom 20.24% were Black women, 4.86% were Black men, and 55.33% were White women and White men (CACREP, 2017). A 2017 graduate report from Walden University reported that 76.7% of graduate students were women, and over 35% of those graduate students identified as Black (see also Townsend, 2020). In 2014, it was reported that of the students enrolled in CACREP-accredited CES doctoral programs, 60% were Caucasian, 19% were Black, and 2% were Asian (Baggerly et al., 2017; CACREP, 2014), in which 82.52% were women (American Psychological Association [APA], 2014).

CES programs accredited by CACREP are devised to prepare individuals for a wide range of roles in areas such as clinical, research, advocacy, leadership, and teaching (Brown et al., 2020; Farmer et al., 2017). To prepare students to respond to the public's diverse needs, counseling programs are structured to assist counselors-in-training with the opportunity to practice, develop, and enhance their counseling skills. Researchers have found that universities throughout the United States remain segregated (Perez & Carney, 2018), although diversity in higher education counseling programs is expected (ACA, 2014; CACREP; 2016; Zeligman et al., 2015). The ACA (2014) and CACREP (2016) standards have an ethical requirement that all students of color receive quality

training in multicultural and social justice competencies. However, researchers have argued that minority women, particularly Black women, continue to experience a lack of belonging and inequities (Shavers & Moore, 2017), which have likely been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Chandler et al., 2020).

The Pandemic and the Helping Profession

The current COVID-19 pandemic has created challenges for all students pursuing their education (Blankstein et al., 2020; Chaney, 2020). Students' ability to safeguard their client's welfare relies on their trustworthiness to remain aware of signs of impairment (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2016; Harper, 2007; Ross et al., 2016). While counseling professionals are responsible for protecting their clients, it is also equally essential to protect and nourish their own lives (Boudreau, 2020; Knowles & Bryant, 2011). Boudreau (2020) found that counselors reported feeling a lack of direction and structure, in which they continued to work tirelessly through the pandemic to support their clients. Licensed trained professionals in the academic setting should be trained to support the emotional, mental, and academic well-being of counselors-in-training, perhaps best positioned to help grapple pandemic-related barriers in delivering the essential supports and services to students (Boudreau, 2020).

MHA (2021) found that Black screeners reported higher rates of anxiety and depression during the COVID-19 pandemic than other racial groups. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI, 2020) found that 80% of students in higher education reported experiencing some negative ramifications on their mental health due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, Black respondents reported increased substance use

more than their White counterparts (NAMI, 2020). Also, Black respondents (15.1%), compared to White respondents (7.9%), reported having seriously considered suicide, and 20% of Black respondents reported that their mental health had significantly worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic (NAMI, 2020). According to the CDC (2020), Blacks tend to have higher rates of mental health issues tied to the pandemic than Whites. Haskins et al. (2016) highlighted that Black mothers experience higher levels of stress and depression than White mothers, which was researched before the pandemic. These findings are essential to this study because it addresses the need to focus on Black female doctoral CES students during the pandemic. As with other racial groups, Black female students are expected to provide counseling services to the public as a part of their doctoral programs, making it essential to explore their needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19

Historical Overview

Tyrell and Bynoe, both scientists, first detected the human coronavirus in 1965 (Dousari et al., 2020). Coronavirus takes its name from its distinctive spikes and rounded tips, giving the virus a crown-like appearance (Dousari et al., 2020; WHO, 2020). Different known coronaviruses infect different species, but the first human coronavirus was discovered in the 1960s (Akhter, 2020). In the 1960s, several coronaviruses such as the B814, 229E, and OC43 were identified. The B814 virus was found in the United Kingdom at the Common Cold Research Unit from a boy who suffered a cold. During this time, the pathogen was described as unrelated to any other known virus of the human

tracheal organic cultures (Akhter, 2020). In 1966, the University of Chicago, through John Procknow and Dorothy Hamre, reported the 229E virus, which was isolated from a medical student with a common cold, and it was again found to be distinct from common tracheal viruses (Akhter, 2020).

Further, Pooman and Gill (2020) asserted that in 1967, virologists at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases reported similar methodologies used to culture the B814. This culture was later used to grow a different human virus, which showed a great sense of similarity in morphology and was called the OC43. These viruses cause typical common cold symptoms such as difficulty in breathing, sore throat, headaches, fever, sneezing, diarrhea, and cough (Dousari et al., 2020; WHO, 2020). In 1968, researchers wrote about the discoverers of B814, 229E, and OC43 viruses. They proposed that the three and other isolated human viruses belonged to a specific category of viruses characterized by a “fringe” of projections that were petal-shaped and rounded (Pooman & Gill, 2020).

According to Besli (2020), in the wake of 2003, coronavirus’s mild nature changed with the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak, which was more dangerous. Gudkova et al. (2020) suggested that in 2005, researchers at Hong Kong University also found another coronavirus known as HKU1 from samples of patients with pneumonia. In 2012, virologists identified another form of coronavirus named MERS-CoV from a man in Saudi Arabia with kidney failure and pneumonia (Dousari et al., 2020; Gudkova, 2020). It is currently believed that SARS emerged from Southern China from bats and spread across the world rapidly. Notably, due to the nature of limited

contact between bats and man, Scientists believe the virus's transmissibility to humans must have happened from a different animal species, which is likely to be handled by humans (Gudkova, 2020).

In 2019, the WHO introduced a virus that was causing an illness referred to as Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), which has affected millions of lives around the world (Dousari et al., 2020; WHO, 2020). The severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) is known to cause COVID-19 in human beings, which is a current global pandemic. It is assumed that the virus infected humans at an open market in Wuhan, where fresh fish and animals were killed. The SARS-CoV-2 was identified in 2019 to be the reason for the novel COVID-19. The start of the outbreak of COVID-19 is shown from all published genetic sequences of the SARS-CoV-2 from the single-point source of introduction into the human population when the virus was reported in Wuhan, China in 2019 (Greenberg, 2020).

As of January 2021, there were 92,506,811 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the United States, including 2,001,773 deaths (WHO, 2020). On December 11, 2020, the first Pfizer vaccine against the coronavirus was approved by the Food and Drug Administration in the United States, followed by the approval of Moderna on December 18, 2020 (CDC, 2020). According to the CDC, the first vaccine was administered to qualified individuals on December 13, 2021. As of November 18, 2021, the vaccine has now been administered to millions of people across the world.

Risk Factors of COVID-19 on Black Women

COVID-19 has affected millions of people in the United States (Tirupathi et al., 2020), and research found that Black women have been disproportionally affected (Abuelgasim et al., 2020; Chandler et al., 2020; Gur et al., 2020; Tirupathi et al., 2020). Black women have worse health outcomes across almost every health indicator than other racial groups (CDC, 2020a; Chandler et al., 2020; Gur et al., 2020; Poteat et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic burden has resulted in high mortality rates and infections amongst Black women compared to other racial groups (CDC, 2020a; Chandler et al., 2020), which is likely due to socioeconomic status (SES), age, sexual orientation, and geographic location (Semega et al, 2019). Chandler et al. (2020) noted that low SES among minority communities during the pandemic share characteristics such as low economic development, low educational attainment, and poor health conditions. The CDC (as cited in Belgrave & Abrams, 2016) highlighted that Black women bear a higher burden in "obesity, diabetes, and adverse birth outcomes" (p. 723), which has been exacerbated due to the pandemic (Chandler et al., 2020; Simien, 2020). Researchers also found that Black women lead in obesity, with four women out of five struggling with being overweight or obese (Tirupathi et al., 2020). Belgrave and Abrams (2016) added that 47.3% of Black women suffered from cardiovascular illnesses before the COVID-19 pandemic, which is the leading cause of death among Black females above the age of 20, compared to other ethnic groups. This information is important to this study because it provides information pertaining to the challenges that some Black women may face while engaged in their doctoral program during the current pandemic.

Health disparities and socioeconomic factors existed before the pandemic but have worsened since the outbreak (Chandler et al., 2020). Black women pursuing higher educational degrees have faced substantial disparities related to access to quality healthcare and are less likely to recover than their White counterparts (Simien, 2020). The difficulties may be a result of the location of health services, mistrust in the health system, inability to obtain information about the disease, transportation barriers, lack of health insurance, low quality of care, and ineffective communication with health providers (Chandler et al., 2020; Gur et al., 2020; Kantamneni, 2020). At the same time, Black women have been significantly unlikely to receive screening and treatment for chronic diseases. Tirupathi et al. (2020) found that Black women do not receive screening and treatment for chronic diseases due to not having access to a car, twice as likely than Caucasian women to be medically uninsured and having a negative view and mistrust of the health system. Another critical factor is the cultural mistrust that most Blacks harbor against the healthcare system (Simien, 2020). Consequently, Black women are more likely than other racial groups to avoid or delay seeking medical treatment (Simien, 2020).

Another element of the COVID-19 pandemic that explains the high morbidity and mortality among Black women is the inability to shelter at home and practice social distancing guidelines. Braithwaite and Warren (2020) found that COVID-19 from early on was observed to be killing more Blacks than White Americans. As of April 2020, Braithwaite and Warren found that out of the 12 deaths reported in St. Louis, all cases were Black. Further, the death rates of Blacks were 19.8%, compared to 10.2% of

Caucasians, and 8.4% of Asians. Due to Black women residing in densely overpopulated areas (Tirupathi et al., 2020), their ability to social distance is not always feasible. These women are also challenged with managing various responsibilities such as pursuing higher education, caring for children, supporting elderly family members, taking care of finances, and taking on responsibilities in the community (Simien, 2020). Black women are far more represented in low-income jobs, placing them at greater risk of contracting the virus. Braithwaite and Warren noted that the low rate of testing for the coronavirus undertaken in communities of color meant that asymptomatic transmission among Black men and women remained high.

Job security has also been affected within the Black community (Chandler et al., 2020; Cyrus et al., 2020). Before the pandemic, Black women lacked opportunities to earn high incomes, despite being employed at higher rates than women of other races (Belgrave & Abrams, 2016). Black women tend to be employed in occupations that entail high levels of public contact, which places them at risk of contracting the virus. Although economic marginalization and discrimination in employment exists, Black women are more likely to rely on job security to counteract their poor health outcomes (Tirupathi et al., 2020).

Gravlee (2020) reported that syndemic theory might clarify the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on Black women. Syndemic theory holds that communities that disproportionately suffer from epidemics are typically struggling with other factors that threaten their health and well-being. Mendenhall and Singer (2020) explained that syndemic theory entails understanding the concentration of the disease, which refers to

how multiple epidemics tend to co-occur or cluster because of widespread political, economic forces, and poor social conditions. Another aspect of syndemic theory is disease interaction, which relates to how co-occurring epidemics intensify health impacts because of poor social conditions or biological interactions (Mendenhall & Singer, 2020). Gravlee (2020) asserted that pandemics follow societal fault lines, shaped by the social determinants that influence population health. Thus, the high mortality rate among Blacks, which is double the death rate of other racialized groups from COVID-19, is not surprising (CDC, 2020b; Chandler et al., 2020; Simien, 2020). In fact, with age adjustment, Blacks are likely to pass away from COVID-19 compared to Whites (Tirupathi et al., 2020).

Black Women in Higher Education

Understanding the historical challenges Black female students have faced in academia will help understand the need to look at how these challenges may have been exacerbated by the current COVID-19 pandemic (Chaney, 2020), which will be thoroughly reviewed in later text. In 1954, the ruling of Brown v. Board of Education granted Black students the right to attend PWIs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels (Rasheem et al., 2018). Researchers have found that although the enrollment rates of Black women in higher education have increased, they continue to lag behind White, Latinx, and Asian-American women (Bartman, 2015; Farmer et al., 2017). Studies suggest that Black women's graduation rates from counseling programs are higher than their Black male counterparts (Greer & White, 2009). Although this may be true, Black women often experience the most discrimination compared to White women, Black men,

and White male counterparts (Baker & Moore, 2015; Ellis, 2001). Shavers and Moore (2019) found that Black women in higher education also experienced higher levels of isolation compared to their White and male counterparts. Bhat et al. (2012) argued that social isolation affects the educational journey and well-being of Black women because lack of support from peers and faculty can hamper academic persistence and sense of belonging.

Higher education is recognized as a public good because students' involvement benefits the student and the public (Harper et al., 2009). However, studies reflect that access to higher education has not always been possible for Black students, which can be attributed to racial segregation, unfair justice, and economic challenges (Haake, 2010; McCowan, 2007). According to Johnson-Bailey (2004), studies conducted in the United States indicated that Black women in higher education experienced education differently due to their race and gender. Furthermore, history reflects that Black women have been ignored in educational studies, mainly due to racial disparities (Horsford et al., 2019; Johnson-Bailey, 2004). Although education is perceived to be the best instrument to achieve equality among diverse social groups, Black students continue to be underrepresented in general at colleges and universities (Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy; Bhat et al., 2012), specifically at PWIs (Rasheem et al., 2018). Therefore, addressing these challenges in current and future studies will expand the current counseling literature.

The Unique Challenges of Black Women in Higher Education

Systemic Racism and Racial Microaggressions in Higher Education

Laster et al. (2021) conducted an intersectional analysis and found that the COVID-19 pandemic placed Black women and other women of color at a higher risk for systemic racism. The results revealed that gender and racial oppression mutually increased health burdens which forced Black women and other women of color to bear the burden of the negative health effects of COVID-19 pandemic. Cole (2020) defined systemic racism as an infrastructure of rulings and ordinances that have not only limited access to educational resources and political participation of people of color but is at the cornerstone of unjustly gained political-economic power of Whites. In contrast, such ordinances and statutes entitle one ethnic group certain rights and privileges while denying other groups in that society the same rights and privileges held by the entitled group (Cole, 2020). Riddle and Sinclair (2018) found that Black students in general higher education, compared to White students, were subjected to higher rates of disciplinary action in the academic setting. Further, biases were significantly high amongst Black students in areas where much of the population was White (Riddle & Sinclair, 2018). The study conducted by Riddler and Sinclair (2018) found that 9.6% of Black students will be suspended, compared to 3.3% of White students, and the percentage of suspensions increased to 9.8% when the population of students were majority White, in general education programs. Further, Walkington (2017) argued that Black women in higher education counseling programs are faced with unique challenges such as racial discrimination and harmful stereotypes.

There is a growing crisis concerning health disparities, mental health, depression, and anxiety arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, especially among Black women due to racism in higher learning institutions (Prime et al., 2020). There has also been a concern that Black women are being discriminated against in counseling centers offered within the academic setting (Prime et al., 2020), thus exposing them to stigmatization and racial trauma, which has resulted in more psychological stress related to discrimination than Black men and their White counterparts during the recent pandemic (Simien, 2020). Simien (2020) reported that 25% of Black women experience psychological stress, compared to 18% of Black men. Bhat et al. (2012) acknowledged that all counseling doctoral students experience challenges, but discrimination is unique for Black, female students. Rasheem et al. (2018) argued that racism continues to be a barrier for Black women pursuing their doctoral degrees. Horsford et al. (2019) added that racial disparities continue to be present in higher educational institutions for Black students than the majority group. The racial eroticism and the microaggressions that Black students continue to face compared to Black men and non-Blacks (Jones & Sam, 2018; Ross et al., 2016) is worth exploring within the context of the current pandemic.

Racial Microaggressions at a Closer Look

Louis et al. (2016) argued that racial microaggressions have historically affected the lives of Black students in higher education. Sue et al. (2007) defined microaggressions as a form of systemic racism that entails hostile and derogatory comments to historically marginalized groups and individuals of color. Sue et al. (2007) highlighted that there are three forms of microaggressions: micro-insult (verbal and non-

verbal offense through a verbal message), micro-invalidation (a verbal insult in a rude and insensitive harmless fashion), and micro-assault (causing psychological harm to others through verbal and non-verbal communication). Walkington (2017) argued that Black female doctoral students continue to face more microaggressions compared to their White and male counterparts in graduate programs, which puts them at risk of dropping out of their graduate programs. Walkington (2017) also noted that Black female graduate students often silence themselves when confronted with racially unsympathetic and racist statements from faculty and peers. Cokley et al. (2013) added that when Black students are subjected to overt and covert racial educational policies, cultural absurdity, unsympathetic instructors and bias curriculum, and interracial group tension increases their psychological distress.

Racial microaggressions in higher education are still common in the academic setting (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2019; Louis et al., 2016) and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic have increased Black women's risk of likely being more vulnerable to microaggressions (Chandler et al., 2020). Louis et al. (2016) argued that Black women are prone to experience microaggressions by White faculty and students who are unaware of their personal biases. A study conducted by MHA (2021) found that Black women experience microaggressions more than women of other ethnicities and races. Interestingly, 40% of Black women reported having to prove their competence, compared to 28% of White women and 14 % of men (MHA, 2021). Forms of microaggressions such as micro-invalidation and micro-assault has created challenges for women in the past (Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2014) that are well documented in non-pandemic times.

Howe-Walsh and Turnbull (2014) noted challenges related to microaggressions which included women being in male-dominated institutional cultures, having a lack of female mentors in their doctoral programs, competing family responsibilities due to gendered domestic labor, implicit biases in recruitment, and research allocation. Bonner's (2001) study of Black women enrolled in Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCUs) found that 45% of Black women reported being discriminated against based on their gender; 7.8% reported discrimination based on age; 7.9% reported ethnic discrimination; 3.9% claimed discrimination based on disability; and 5.9% noted that they had been discriminated against because of their sexual preference. This information provides a historical history of Black female students' experiences of microaggressions (micro-insult, micro-invalidation, micro-assault) and discriminatory challenges which explains the need to gain more knowledge from this unique group of women during the current pandemic.

Social Isolation

Researchers found that doctoral students have struggled with social isolation (Berry, 2017; Harley, 2007), even before the recent onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Harley (2007) conducted a study and found that Black female students, specifically at PWIs, experience underprivileged consequences compared to their White counterparts, which resulted in isolation due to not feeling included. Hughes and Howard-Hamilton (2003) added to the literature by suggesting that Black women in higher education programs felt invisible, leading to higher levels of stress and insecurities than White students. Some of this invisibility to students may stream from faculty being viewed as

overworked in their job descriptions. Walkington (2017) conducted a sociological research study and found that faculty are working in positions where they are stressed, overworked, and are left to cope with institutional and individual barriers. Bonner (2001) noted that Black women at HBCUs experienced similar forms of isolation due to reports of sexism as those at PWIs. Bonner concluded that isolation in comparison to HBCUs and PWIs included barriers in promotions, being excluded from curricula, and forms of sexual harassment. Bonner suggested that faculty and administrators can address these challenges through effective leadership, advocacy, and building healthy environments to address racism and sexism.

Bartman (2015) argued that Black women historically have no sense of community when attending academic institutions where the enrollment rates of Black students are low. Shavers et al. (2019) argued that feelings of isolation could alter the mental well-being and academic performance of Black students. Black women have historically faced isolation in their doctoral programs, but it is critical to note that the current COVID-19 pandemic has also exacerbated feelings of isolation throughout the Black community (Gur et al., 2020). This information is detrimental concerning the expectations placed upon Black female students to provide quality care to the public during their practicum and internship experiences amid the current pandemic.

Financial Restraints and Job Security

Davidson et al. (2020) conducted a single case study and found that not only have financial factors affected Black students but highlighted that there is a discrepancy in the financial burdens experienced between Black and White students in higher education.

Walkington (2017) found similar results and suggested that Black students have unequal access to financial support and take out more loans to pay for school than their White counterparts. Ross et al. (2016) also reported that Black students are likely to move back home with family due to financial barriers, lack of transportation, and social issues. This historical information is critical because Chambers et al. (2020) found that the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected Black women's jobs compared to their White counterparts, potentially increasing their already burdensome financial situations.

Simien (2020) reported that Black women are likely to face economic hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Black women must balance various role restraints and work in jobs where it may be challenging to practice social distancing (Simien, 2020). Gur et al. (2020) conducted a study on Black and White pregnant women and found that Black women were more likely to experience economic instability than their White counterparts due to a high rate of single motherhood. Prime et al. (2020) argued that Black women had suffered job losses and severe economic stress making it difficult to sustain their households during the current pandemic. Juan et al. (2016) stated that Black women, compared to other ethnic groups, are subjected to abject poverty, and may be discriminated against when applying for services. This information is vital to consider as Black women drop out of their doctoral programs due to being the sole income provider and caregiver for family members and children (Simien, 2020).

Motherhood

Balancing motherhood involves a unique set of sacrifices and challenges for women pursuing their doctoral degrees. A research study conducted by the Institute for

Women (2013c) analyzed survey data conducted by the U.S Department of Education and found that students of color were likely to struggle balancing parenting and college. The data results showed that among first-generation and low-income students, 37% of African American, 33% of Native American, and 25% of Latino women were raising children while attending their academic program (Institute for Women, 2013c). Unfortunately, there are no recent studies pertinent to Black women's struggle with balancing parenting, but Haskins et al. (2016) conducted a qualitative study on Black mothers in counselor education tenure positions. Haskins et al. (2016) found that Black counselor educators who were mothers reported being more vulnerable to racialized marginalization, professional strain, and professional neglect than other ethnic women.

Goulden et al. (2011) noted that women who were in the first five years of their graduate programs were 20%–24% less likely than their male counterparts to be successful, with 53% of parents versus 31% of nonparents having left with no graduate degree after six years. Luther and Ciciolla (2015) found that being a mother is challenging for even the most successful and invested woman. Female doctoral students starting their academic program are likely to be in their prime childbearing years and caring for dependents (Luther & Ciciolla, 2015). Baker et al. (2015) argued that single motherhood in the United States is a growing phenomenon, with approximately 40% of children born to unmarried women, in comparison to 16% of children born to single fathers. Alon et al. (2020) highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected single-parent households, in which there are more "than 8.5

million more single mothers than single fathers in the United States today (p. 12)", across all ethnicities.

Haskins et al. (2016) found that it is a high probability that Black mothers experience higher levels of stress and depression than White mothers due to time-management and work–life balance. Martin et al. (2015) reported that Black women have the highest rates of single motherhood, with 70% of births to unmarried women. A recent study conducted by Gur et al. (2020) found that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have increased depression and anxiety in pregnant Black women. The results of the study conducted by Gur et al. (2020) highlighted that Black women experienced higher rates of preterm birth and reported worrying more about their pregnancy than White women. The information presented shows a need for further investigation of how the current pandemic has affected Black women in CES doctoral programs who are mothers.

Mental Health

Prior to the pandemic, researchers have proven that doctoral students commonly experience stress, which often causes deleterious consequences on their well-being and academic performance (Cornwall et al., 2018). Levecque et al. (2017) reported that about 32% of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) students have a high risk for a psychiatric disorder, mainly anxiety and depression. Some of the personal stressors for Ph.D. students include time pressure, financial pressures, uncertainty about the doctoral process, and issues regarding their sense of belonging in the scholarly community (Cornwall et al., 2018). Cook et al. (2017) reported that psychological stress for Black Americans would often go untreated and argued that this is a disproportionate impact compared to White Americans.

The Well Being Trust (2018) released a report highlighting that 69% of Black adults received no mental health treatment in 2018, compared to other ethnic groups. In addition, MHA (2020) released a report suggesting that substance use has increased during the pandemic and drug-induced deaths among Native Americans, Blacks, Latinxs, and older adults may only get worse due to the pandemic.

One of the contributing factors to doctoral students' poor mental health is related to discrimination (Wyche, 2020). It is assumed that since Black students in online learning programs rarely have face-to-face interactions with their fellow students and faculty, there is no likelihood of discrimination against minority students in the programs (Berry, 2017). A qualitative study conducted by Wyche (2020) investigated the experiences of Black online doctoral students and found that student isolation could be affecting the mental health of Black doctoral students who study online. Findings from the interviews revealed that faculty and university staff discriminated against Black students, which led to increased stress, depression, and self-doubt (Wyche, 2020).

Researchers have found that the COVID-19 pandemic has been linked to high rates of anxiety and depression, with over 40% of adults being clinically diagnosed (Elmer et al.,2020; Rajkumar, 2020). In addition, adults are likely to experience psychosocial effects of the pandemic which have disrupted educational and occupational opportunities (Kujawa et al., 2020). As research on the current pandemic continue to emerge, researchers have focused on the disproportionate affect that the disease has had on the mental health of the Black community (CDC, 2020; Cyrus et al., 2020; Gur et al., 2020). Kujawa et al. (2020) conducted a longitudinal study utilizing the Pandemic Stress

Questionnaire (PSQ) and found that Black participants reported more severe depression and anxiety symptoms than other race groups. It could be inferred that historical acts of racial discrimination, oppression, and stigmatization, whether isolated or part of a bigger systemic pattern, have been connected to feelings of being unsafe with seeking mental health treatment.

Ward et al. (2009) found that Black women use outpatient mental health services at lesser rates than White women and Black men due to a mistrust in the system, lower income, poor health, multiple role strain, race, and gender. Watson and Hunter (2015) conducted a quantitative study on Black women's underutilization of mental health services and found that stigma was the leading barrier to the use of mental health services. Watson and Hunter (2015) also noted that Black women generally do not seek mental health services to manage psychological distress, compared to White women, due to other barriers such as SES and cultural factors. Baker and Moore (2015) conducted a qualitative study using critical race theory to explore why CES doctoral students did not complete their doctoral program. There were four males and eight females who agreed to participate in the study. The participants self-identified as Black, Hispanic, Jewish, Filipino, and Bi-racial. Baker and Moore (2015) concluded that mental health concerns related to depression and stress played contributing factors in these participants departing from their programs. Luna et al. (2015) suggested that due to the diversity of ethnicity among students, counselor educators and mental health professionals should have a clear understanding concerning the mental health challenges of Black students. This information is critical because members of the Black community are less likely to have

access to quality mental health services, distrust of health providers, and fear of being stigmatized (Simien, 2020).

Culturally Relevant Interventions

Mentoring/Coaching Programs

Mentoring is known to be used in a variety of professions and higher education institutions and Williams et al. (2016) noted the importance of Black women in graduate school finding protection in mentorship. CACREP (2016) emphasized the importance of doctoral counseling students being prepared to contribute to the growth of the helping profession and develop a realistic impression of the counseling field. Trepal and Stinchfield (2011) found that mentors in the academic setting should be equipped to provide support and creative ways to encourage women doctoral students in preparing to enter the profession as faculty members, while learning to balance stress, family dynamics, and professional responsibilities. Further, the ACA (2014) and CACREP (2016) standards holds counselors ethically responsible for engaging in self-care activities that promote well-being, while emphasizing mentoring relationships to serve as guidance and support.

Mentoring is a way to connect professionals who are knowledgeable in their perspective fields with new counselors-in-training to promote career identification, development, and growth (Healy & Welchert, 2016). Promoting professional development offers an opportunity to stimulate growth in Black students pursing their doctoral degrees (Gardner et al., 2016). Rasheem et al. (2018) suggested that mentoring and coaching programs can be a dynamic experience for doctoral students, particularly

for Black women, due to isolation, financial difficulties, and lack of similar ethnic-gender support systems. Batman (2015) found that Black women in doctoral programs could benefit from mentoring for engagement and support. Mentoring relationships between same-ethnic and same-gender relationships are reported to produce more emotional support than cross-race pairing (Cook & Williams, 2015). Cook and Williams (2015) found that Black women in doctoral programs are likely to engage in a mentoring relationship with a faculty member of the same race and who can meet their emotional needs. Brown and Grothaus (2019) conducted a phenomenological study and found that Black individuals have the highest rate of cultural mistrust than other ethnic minority groups. Due to the underrepresentation of counselor educators of color, higher education institutions must attempt to connect Black women with a mentor who could build a cross-racial trusting relationship (Brown & Grothaus, 2019; Cannon et al., 2019).

Diversity in Academic and Counseling Staff

Baggerly et al. (2017) found that the representation of faculty of color in CES programs have increased. However, most counselor educators are White (71.38%), compared to Black educators (14.52%) (Baggerly et al., 2017). In a training conducted at Walden University (2017) it was reported that faculty staff is made up of 68% female; 66% White; 18% Black (non-Hispanic); 9% other ethnicity; 4% Hispanic/Latino; and 3% Asian/Pacific Islander. CACREP (2015) has emphasized the criticalness of cultural competence, emphasizing that diversity amongst faculty members in counselor education programs as a key consideration. To bridge the gap between Black women doctoral students and faculty, Bartman (2015) suggested that academic institutions should actively

work to increase their numbers of Black faculty members. Researchers have found that the linking of Black students to faculty of color have not only improved graduation rates but provided Black students the opportunity to share similar conclusions regarding their isolation and disconnection from other ethnic groups in their programs (Brown & Grothaus, 2019; Rasheem et al., 2018).

Black students are connected to White faculty members more often in their doctoral programs due to the unbalanced and underrepresentation of Black faculty members in CES programs (Brown et al., 2020; Haizlip, 2012). Bhat (2012) argued that it is likely that Black student's experience social isolation during their doctoral programs and school administrators should consider the need for Black students to have access to faculty of color to tailor a sense of community. Webb (2015) explored racial diversity in CES doctoral programs and found that Whites continue to dominant the field of counseling. Webb (2015) also posited that it is essential for academic institutions to retain minority faculty representation to serve diverse student body populations. Robinson et al. (2009) found that Black and Hispanic students are the most underrepresented groups in CES programs and can benefit from working with culturally diverse faculty and counseling staff. Foxx et al. (2018) suggested that CES programs should make recruiting faculty from different backgrounds a top priority, and that faculty should be committed to diversity and building supportive relationships with students of color.

Sister-Friends Intervention

Jones and Sam (2018) found that it is important to explore culturally relevant interventions to assist Black women in their college experience because the challenges

they face are different than those of women of other races and Black men. Bradley and Sanders (2003) implemented a program called Sister-Friends to assist Black women to seek support from their family and friends while engaged in the counseling setting. The goal of the intervention is to provide specific cultural support to address the student's destructive thinking and behavioral patterns related to the challenges experienced in the academic setting. This intervention entailed that the student involved the support of an identified family member and friend in the counseling session (Bradley & Sanders, 2003). The role of the academic counselor is to identify the strengths of the client with the input of their identified family member and friend. There are three important characteristics related to the intervention which are (1) including a family and friend who are concerned with the student's well-being, (2) working with a student who is open to having a family and friend participate in the session, and (3) working with family and friends who respect the limitations of confidentiality.

Lewis et al. (2013) found that the Sister-Friends model helped to build the support system of most Black women who participated in the intervention. Providing a safe place for Black women doctoral students to cope with their challenges with the help of their family and friends provided them a sense of belonging and decreased social isolation. Further, the Sister-Friends intervention model was expanded to a group counseling environment, solely for Black women. The group was small in nature and provided Black women with the opportunity to support each other while attending predominantly White universities (Bradley & Sanders, 2003). These women were able to address challenges such as historical oppression and racism, cultural identity, and Black culture. Bradley and

Sanders (2003) also found that group counseling, compared to individual counseling, worked best for Black women in the academic setting. This intervention could essentially benefit Black women who are enrolled in CES programs during the current COVID-19 pandemic because it may give them a sense of belonging, attribute to increased graduation rates, and decrease social isolation.

Multicultural Groups

Black women enrolled in doctoral programs often lack a sense of belonging (Bartman, 2015; Ross et al., 2016) and to alleviate social isolation, researchers have found that involving them in multicultural forums can increase their college experience (Henfield et al., 2011; Ross et al., 2016). Ross et al. (2016) reported that college educators in postsecondary education programs can include Black and other minority women in open forums to address sensitive topics such as discrimination, racism, and professional development. Creating an open dialogue amongst different ethnic groups can aid in understanding, insightfulness, and acceptance of each other. Further, Henfield et al. (2011) recommended that encouraging Black women to join professional organizations can support their sense of belonging.

One multicultural organization is Chi Sigma Iota (CSI) which is an international honor society tailored to professional counseling students around the world. CSI was established in 1985 with the goal to honor and recognize professional counselors who strive to be leaders in the counseling profession. Storlie et al. (2018) emphasized the importance of promoting competency, advocacy, and empowerment of Black female college students as well as female and male students from other cultural backgrounds.

Through the participation of the CSI program, Black women, as well as other minority groups, will have the opportunity to relate to members from all over the world and enhance their ability to expand their careers and research opportunities. Providing Black women with the opportunity to be included in school activities, government associations, and the ability to work with faculty on research projects can lead to publishing and presentation opportunities.

Support Systems

Family and Friends

Support systems have been important factors for the success of Black women in online and brick-and-mortar doctoral programs (Davidson et al., 2004). Support systems include parents, friends, church members, teachers, and counselors (Davidson et al., 2004; Johnson-Bailey, 2004). Chaney (2020) recently found that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the lives of Black Americans and has brought families together to help cope with the "new normal" of the disease. Anderson et al. (2019) emphasized that families and friends are an important source for Black women in doctoral programs and the configurations of the family may differ. These configurations include fictive kin, which serves as the role of biological family. Martin (2018) found that the relationships established between Black women and their support systems create mental, emotional, and spiritual support.

Hayes et al. (2011) reported that students of color commonly experience higher rates of distress related to depression, family concerns, and academic issues than White students. There is a vast of literature highlighting the importance of support systems, but

Hayes et al. (2011) found that Black students often isolate themselves from family and friends. Social distancing measures as a result of the current COVID-19 pandemic have students isolating themselves even more due to fear of contracting the virus (Simien, 2020). The need for Black women to protect their families from the disease and safeguard their own emotional distress creates new obstacles for coping with academic expectations. Further, understanding the critical need of support systems can assist counselor educators in their work with Black CES doctoral students in both the online and brick-and-mortar settings during and after the pandemic.

Spirituality

The CDC reported that Black people are 1.2 times more likely to become infected with the COVID-19 disease and 2.4 times more likely to die from it than White people in the U.S. Due to a mistrust of the system (Simien, 2020), the Black community is turning to their church homes and pastors for support in understanding and coping with the pandemic. Researchers like Luna and MacMillan (2015) noted the importance of counselor educators being aware that spirituality is a critical part of Black culture and having the expertise to understand students' cultural beliefs can prevent mental health symptomatology. Researchers found that Black Americans regularly demonstrate higher rates of spiritual involvement than their White counterparts (Chatters et al., 2009; Taylor & Chatters, 2010). Taylor and Chatters (2010) reported that 93% of Black Americans reported being both spiritual and religious compared to 14.4% of Whites. This information is vital because Black churches have a long tradition of supporting the Black community in educational and health services (Taylor & Chatters, 2010).

Ward and Heidrich (2009) found that Black women and men preferred to utilize spiritual resources versus academic counseling services due to fear of being stigmatized in the academic setting. Sahgal and Smith (2009) conducted a U.S. Religious Landscape Survey and found that 59% of Blacks reported being affiliated with a church home that was led by a Black pastor. Jafari et al. (2010) argued that spirituality is a significant contribution to the mental health and well-being of Black students in their doctoral programs. Spirituality has been found to assist Black students in coping with adversity and providing a framework for their life experiences. Further, for counselor educators, counseling professionals, and higher education institutions to support Black women in their doctoral programs, it is imperative to understand the role of their spirituality during a crisis such as the pandemic.

Black Sororities

Chandler et al. (2020) found that Black women are turning to community and academic-based organizations due to the confusion about COVID-19. One community and academic-based organization is the Black Sorority. Greyerbielh and Mitchell (2014) described Black sororities as providing a level of support that might not be found in other cultural organizations. Greyerbielh and Mitchell (2014) found that Black women in the graduate college settings value their membership in the Black sorority, which serves as a support system and provides a sense of community and belonging. Harper (2007) conducted a qualitative study and found that membership in a sorority positively influenced their academic participation in their graduate level program and was used as a support system. Bartman (2015) noted that higher education institutions should take an

interest in supporting Black sororities on their campuses due to the overwhelming positives they generate for Black women students.

Summary and Conclusions

In this chapter, various potential interconnected factors that shape Black women's ability to be successful in their CES doctoral programs during the COVID-19 pandemic were explored. A common theme in the literature suggests that recognition, support, and the understanding of the effect that the current pandemic has had on the Black community, particular Black women, is imperative for counselor educators. This literature review mainly focused on Black women enrolled in doctoral programs, considering the current pandemic, as there was limited research specifically related to Black women in CES doctoral programs.

The review of the literature provided evidence that Black women have historically suffered in their doctoral programs, compared to other racial groups, prior to the pandemic (Chandler et al., 2020; Shavers & Moore, 2019; Simien, 2020). Studies (Bartman, 2015; Jones & Sam, 2018; Ross et al., 2016; Walkington, 2017) demonstrated that Black women are subjected to suffering from microaggressions, race-based oppressions, and discrimination in their doctoral programs at higher rates compared to men and White counterparts. Considering the important roles placed on Black women in CES doctoral programs during the current pandemic, it is imperative for counselor educators and professional counselors to understand the potential historical and present challenges that could affect academics.

The literature reinforces that the current pandemic has affected the Black community disproportionately (Gur et al., 2020; Tirupathi et al., 2020; WHO, 2020) and created unique challenges for Black women enrolled in doctoral programs (Prime et al., 2020). The literature provided insight into cultural interventions and supportive services that have been found to be effective in supporting Black women, but due to the underrepresentation of Black women compared to Black men and other race groups, their experiences are generally overlooked (Jones & Sam, 2018). Further, a gap exists in the literature because the information does not address the specific challenges that Black women face while enrolled in CES doctoral programs during the COVID-19 pandemic. The alarming affect that the pandemic has had on the Black community (CDC, 2020), justifies the critical need to look at the unique challenges that Black women may encounter in their doctoral programs during the current pandemic, which might better inform higher education institutions, counseling professionals, and counselor educators. The following chapter will explore methodology by which this researcher conducted the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore and gain an understanding of how Black women in CES CACREP-accredited doctoral programs described their lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. More focus is needed on the distinctive challenges that Black women in higher education academia face compared to men and other women racial groups since the onset of the pandemic (Abuelgasim et al., 2020; Chandler et al., 2020). The enrollment rate of Black women pursuing degrees in CES doctoral programs is increasing (Bartman, 2015; Rasheem et al., 2018; Ross et al., 2016), making it critical to look at the disproportionally affect that the pandemic has had on the Black community (CDC, 2020; Chandler et al., 2020; Gur et al., 2020; WHO, 2020). There is an insufficient understanding of how the onset of the pandemic may have influenced the academic success of Black women, and little is known about the lived experiences of Black females in CES doctoral programs during the pandemic.

I chose Husserl's (1931/2018) transcendental phenomenology model as it aligns as a research method to capture experiences and descriptions, not explanations or analysis. Phenomenology is a description of the subjective experiences and facilitates the discovery of the participants' meanings of the lived phenomenon. Gupta (1998) noted that transcendental phenomenology is based on maintaining a natural attitude of the phenomenon and establishing a reflective ego through bracketing as for the first time. This chapter introduces detailed information about the research method and rationale for performing a transcendental phenomenology study and the central research question

guiding this experiential investigation. Further, a foundational rationale for the participant selection strategy will be presented, followed by data collection strategies, role of the researcher, ethical considerations, and a summary of the essential points of the research method. The goal in conducting this research study was to gain a detailed understanding of how the COVID-19 pandemic have influenced the lives of Black women enrolled in CES doctoral programs.

Research Design and Rationale

The selection of a suitable methodology for this research study was propelled by the purpose and the research question. Qualitative research focuses on examining how individuals make meaning of, define, and construct their experiences related to the phenomenon (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Merriam and Grenier (2019) reported that the primary goal of a qualitative researcher is to concentrate on the events that emerge and on the detailed outcomes of those events from the point of view of the participants. Merriam and Grenier reported that qualitative researchers study participants in their natural setting and the environment in which the participant experience the phenomenon. Qualitative research requires intricate explanations of how participants experience certain challenges and offers information about behaviors, feelings, opinions, viewpoints, and affiliations of the research participants (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). This methodology aligns with the research question for this study: What are the lived experiences of Black women in CES doctoral programs during the COVID-19 pandemic?

There are different research methods to be considered, and each method has a different manner to collect and analyze empirical evidence (Yin, 2013). Researchers

employ the quantitative research method to examine numerical data to describe and explain a phenomenon (Alase, 2017). The primary objective of quantitative research is to determine the relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable, while the researcher builds a space in between them and the participants (Quick & Hall, 2015). Quantitative researchers are not interested in focusing on theory, instead, they collect numerical data which is based on mathematics (Quick & Hall, 2015). Therefore, quantitative analysis was not suitable for this study. In contrast, the qualitative method was suitable for this study based on the goal to make meaning of the participant's lived experiences (Husserl, 1931; Moustakas, 1994). The main goals of qualitative research are to recognize gaps, discover patterns or themes, determine new outcomes, and use theory to describe a person's behavior.

Mixed-methods research is an integration of quantitative and qualitative data within a single investigation (Yu, 2008). Yu (2008) stated that quantitative results are supported in more detail using qualitative data. For example, outcomes from instrument data about expenses can be investigated further with qualitative focus groups to better comprehend how the personal experiences of individuals match up to the instrument results. A key principle of mixed methods is to identify the reason for mixing quantitative and qualitative methods within the study (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Combining methods is challenging and should only be undertaken when there is a specific reason to do so. However, using mixed methods in a relatively small study, such as this qualitative one, may be difficult and require greater resources.

There are various qualitative methods, such as grounded theory, case study, ethnography, and phenomenology. Grounded theory is concerned with the generation of theory, which is grounded in data that has been systematically collected and analyzed (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Case studies provide an in-depth look at one test subject and the primary goal is to provide an analysis of the context and process the theoretical issues under investigation (Yin, 2003). The case study gives the story behind the result by capturing what happened and can be a good opportunity to bring attention to a particular challenge. Ethnography involves input and observation over a period of time (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The goal of ethnography is to give an analytical description of other cultures and an exploration of a particular phenomenon, rather than the testing of a hypothesis. However, these qualitative methods were not appropriate for this study. The appropriate research design for this study is transcendental phenomenology because it is used to understand participants' lived experiences. Through phenomenological research methodology, I strived to describe, understand, and translate the significance of lived experiences of Black women enrolled in CES doctoral programs during the pandemic.

In qualitative research, it is essential to implement the epoché process to set aside judgment, biases, preconceived ideas and concepts, and rebate past experiences to distinctly understand the phenomena (Husserl, 1931). In accordance with Husserl (1931), the epoché process, known as bracketing, ensures that any given object of consciousness is recorded exactly as experienced, which entails not merely setting aside beliefs, but reflecting on one's biases. The object of consciousness implies that one must disregard everything but the experience, and not rely upon any preexisting assumptions concerning

the object (Husserl, 1931). Transcendental phenomenologists are involved in exploring the lived experiences of research participants and being the "onlooker" who is engaged in the epoché process (Husserl, 1931). A qualitative researcher uses phenomenological reduction to explore the essence of the meanings, values, or structures at the core of a phenomenon as it is detected and experienced in the present (Moustakas, 1994). This study involved conducting semi structured interviews of nine Black women who were enrolled in a CACREP-accredited CES doctoral program during the pandemic. Using a transcendental phenomenological research design, I was able to focus on the lived experiences of the participants and employed phenomenological reduction to uncover the true essence of the meanings at the center of the phenomenon.

Role of the Researcher

In this phenomenological study, the role of the researcher was the observer. The role of the observer is to create a new way of thinking about the evidence and to not focus solely on collecting the data from the research participants (Morse, 2003a). The researcher as an observer interrogates the data while delivering informed analysis and acts as the research instrument (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). Entering the research site, being aware of ethical issues, and suspending naïve conceptions of both world and self are also the role of the researcher (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Giorgi, 2009; Husserl, 1931). Creswell and Creswell (2018) defined the role of the researcher as being able to identify assumptions, values, and biases outside of the research study. Baker and Pifer (2014) termed positionality as the reflexivity and attitude of the researcher in making decisions assertively and being aware of social

factors that influences the researcher's view of the world. Further, researchers are responsible for ensuring confidentiality of the participants, providing informed consent, having a clear understanding of the nature of the study, the requirements, providing interpretive results comprehensible to consumers, and understanding the overall purpose of the study (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Due to lack of previous research on Black women lived experiences in CES doctoral programs during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was imperative to study the lived experiences of this group of women using qualitative phenomenological research. This method allowed for rich descriptions and illuminating meaning, unlike quantitative research, which relies on numerical data (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

As the sole researcher of this study, I did not have any affiliation with the research participants and did not select participants whom I knew, had interacted with, or had entered into a relationship with. I am, however, a Black woman who is currently enrolled in a CES program during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important that I was careful about recognizing the role of my own experience through bracketing my personal beliefs before conducting the interviews with participants (Smith et al., 2009). Bracketing was used as a preventive measure to reduce researcher bias and a way to sustain objectivity due to my role as a current CES doctoral student during the COVID-19 pandemic. Bracketing consists of acknowledging one's past experience, mindset, and beliefs, but being capable to set them aside for the length of the study to see the phenomena under investigation in a different way (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Creswell (2015) concluded that the process of bracketing helps to prevent pre-research bias, which limits conclusions

to the data collected from the participants. Toma (2006) reported that having a knowledge and awareness of the phenomenon being investigated supports credibility of the researcher as an instrument. Further, it is important that I conducted myself in a professional manner and managed power issues as they arise. Although I did not foresee any power dynamics, it was my role as the researcher to select the interview questions and check for meaning clarification. It was the power of the participants to withdraw themselves from the study at any time.

Methodology

Methodology in phenomenological research refers to a systematic approach that the researcher takes to provide steps to move the study into action (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological methods are significantly different from other qualitative approaches and require organization for the study to be replicated (Peoples, 2020). In this section, I discuss the participation selection logic, instrumentation for the research study, recruitment procedures, participation, data collection, and the data analysis plan.

Participant Selection Logic

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how Black women enrolled in CES programs described their lived experiences with managing challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. I recruited a sample size of nine participants using a purposive, snowballing sampling strategy, as Guest et al. (2006) suggested that data saturation can be attained with a minimum of six interviews. Data saturation was reached when there was sufficient information to replicate the study, when no new information was attained, when themes began to repeat, and coding was no longer viable

(Guest et al., 2006). I used purposeful sampling, which was an appropriate tool for phenomenological studies to select participants who met the specific qualifications (Patton, 2015; Giorgi, 2009) and incorporated snowball sampling by requesting a small number of participants to refer other potential participants who met the sampling criteria (Merriam & Grenier, 2009). Burns and Grove (1997) described the snowball sampling method to mean that once a few participants who met the inclusion criteria were recruited, they would refer other participants with similar characteristics. These methods were appropriate in ensuring that the data collected would be from participants who had a direct experience of the phenomena under study.

Population

The population for this study was Black women living in the United States who were currently or recently enrolled in a CACREP-accredited online or brick-and-mortar CES program during the COVID-19 pandemic. The CACREP (2016) reported that over 70% of students enrolled in CES doctoral programs are women, of whom 20% are Black, which meant that participants were not hard to locate for this study. Bartman (2015) observed that while college graduation rates of a historically marginalized groups such as Black women has increased, they still lag behind compared to White, Latina, and Asian American counterparts. In 2012, for instance, the population of African American women averaged 12.7%; however, the percentage that earned doctoral degrees were only 2% (Bartman, 2015).

Sampling Criteria

When ascertaining a sample population, qualitative researchers normally make sampling selections that allow them to achieve a deep understanding of the phenomenon that is being studied (Neuman, 2007). For the purposes of this transcendental phenomenological study, purposeful participant selection and snowball sampling strategy was used to meet the applicable criterion (Peoples, 2020; van Manen, 2016). The sampling selection utilized is a vital element of the overall sampling strategy and is both important in qualitative and quantitative inquiries.

Participant inclusion criteria for selection consisted of the following: (a) must identify as a Black female, (b) must be currently or recently enrolled in a CACREP-accredited CES doctoral program in the United States, (c) and must be 18 years or older. In addition to meeting the criteria, it was important to select participants who were willing to take part in an extensive recorded interview, had an interest in the phenomenon being studied, was willing to grant permission for the research to be published in a dissertation (Moustakas, 1994), and other presentations and publications. Once I selected the participants for the study, I applied the snowball technique associated with purposive sampling by asking the selected participants to recommend additional participants who met the qualifying criteria (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Snowball sampling is a well-known method for identifying participants in purposive sampling and is accomplished by requesting a small number of participants to refer other potential participants who meet the sample criteria (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Jorgensen and Brown-Rice (2018) found

that identifying a specific population can be challenging using other sampling techniques that do not target a specific population group.

Sampling Strategy

Smaller sample sizes are common in qualitative phenomenological studies (Gerring, 2015), focusing on extensive descriptions from each research participant. The goal of qualitative research is to gain an in-depth understanding of the issue being explored and depends heavily on participants who can provide rich accounts of their experiences (Guest et al., 2006). Polkinghorne (1989) recommended interviewing 5–25 participants who have all experienced the same phenomenon in order to have a better understanding of the shared experience. Qualitative researchers are interested in sampling for meaning, rather than frequency, which is why smaller sample sizes work best. This research study targeted nine participants which was in line with recent phenomenological studies (Brown & Grothaus, 2019; Foxx et al., 2018). Targeting a sample size of 6–10 participants for this transcendental phenomenological study increased the likelihood of reaching data saturation (Mason, 2010).

Once approval was received from the Walden University Institutional Review Board, I began to recruit participants. Participants for this study was recruited via social media sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn (Stokes et al., 2019), and Academic Twitter. Once I identified social media groups and chatrooms associated with Black women in CES doctoral programs, I posted the recruitment flyer to identify qualified participants. The link to the informed consent and demographic questionnaire (via Qualtrics), was included on the recruitment flyer. Once the participants selected “I consent” in the

Qualtrics platform, I emailed participants to introduce myself, described the purpose of the research, reviewed the informed consent, and scheduled a time to conduct the confidential semi structured interview via Zoom. The informed consent included a discussion regarding confidentiality, risk, the length of the interview, interview format, and researcher contact information. These social media sites were an effective means to recruit professional participants for a research study and helped to facilitate the snowball effect to identify additional participants (Stokes et al., 2019).

Instrumentation

Qualitative researchers can use a variety of instruments such as documents, interviews, artifacts, observations, interviews, and focus groups (Chenail, 2011). Moustakas (1994) noted that instrumentation should be based on the landscape of the phenomenological design in order to understand the phenomenon from the lens of the participants' subjective data. This study's instrumentation consisted of semi structured interviews. Specifically, semi structured interviews, along with a demographic questionnaire and member-checking, were utilized to capture the participants' subjective experiences in their CES doctoral programs.

Semi structured Interviews

Semi structured interviews were an effective means to collect data because they allowed for a natural narrative flow which helped enable participants to share relevant aspects of their experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2015). A benefit of transcendental phenomenology is the limited number of interviews necessary to reach saturation and profound results (Smith et al., 2009). The transcendental phenomenological approach of

this study allowed for in-depth semi structured interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) of participants to collect rich information through asking open-ended questions to address the research question. The semi structured interview consisted of a preestablished series of questions which helped incorporate detailed follow-up questions to probe deeper into the constructs (Hale & Bridges, 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The interview protocol I utilized can be found in Appendix A.

I began to conduct the interviews by using the Zoom videoconferencing on-line platform with the permission of the participants. The interviews were audio-recorded using a mobile device to protect the confidentiality of the participants and was used for later transcription using the Rev program (https://www.rev.com/). The data collected were anonymous and confidential. Participants were given a number in place of their real name to protect their identity. Follow-up interviews, member checking, and a review of the transcripts was conducted when clarification was needed to fill in any gaps in data such as missing or unclear information after the initial interview had been completed. To manage content validity and not detract from the interview, I avoided notetaking and participants were allowed to express themselves freely.

Nine Black women were interviewed for this study, and all agreed to take part in a semi structured interview, which ranged from 33 to 46 minutes. Before the start of the interview, research participants were read an opening script describing the interview process. Participants were reminded that the interview recordings and their identities would be kept confidential, and they were encouraged to speak freely. Participants were informed that there was no right or wrong way to answer the interview questions and they

were encouraged to ask for clarification, when needed. I utilized the approved interview protocol and bracketed my knowledge and experience regarding the phenomenon under investigation to gain a clear understanding of Black female doctoral students' experiences in their CES doctoral programs during the pandemic.

During the interviews, I tracked nonverbal communication and observations by taking brief notes, ensuring not to interrupt the interview. All nine participants seemed to freely share their experiences and did not show any outward signs of distress. Participants were debriefed after the conclusion of their interview and provided an opportunity to ask questions. The purpose of the study was reviewed, and the member-checking process was explained.

Debriefing

Participants were debriefed after the conclusion of the interview, and the debriefing process ranged from 10-15 minutes for each participant. The purpose of the study, member checking, and confidentiality was reiterated. Participants were reminded that the risk of participating in the study was minimum but informed that resources were listed in the informed consent for their use. Participants were allowed the opportunity to ask questions regarding the process, were provided additional information regarding how the study's results could contribute to the counseling literature, and how the results of the study would be distributed. Participants were reminded that the transcripts would be stored using a program called Nvivo and that both the transcript and audio-recording would be saved on a password-protected external drive in the researcher's home for five years. Confidentiality was managed as described in Chapter 3.

Member Checking

Once themes were identified through reviewing the interview transcripts verbatim, member checking was employed as a quality control procedure. I formed a summary of each transcript and emailed the respective participant a copy for their review. Member checking is a way to ensure the accuracy and validity of the data collected (Peoples, 2020). Member checking ensured that I accurately captured the participants' responses to the interview questions. Peoples (2020) defined member checking as a way for participants to view the transcripts to ensure accuracy and agree that the transcripts are indeed credible. In addition, Peoples (2020) reiterated that although participants may not agree with the results of the study, the goal of member checking is for participants to review the interpretations of their experience. Once participants were sent the summary of their transcripts, they were given 7 days to respond with any edits or additional context. All, but two participants, confirmed that the data in the transcripts were accurate. The requested minor modifications were made and verified with the two participants. Data collection concluded on July 23, 2021, after the member checking process was complete. The verbatim transcripts were used for coding and data analysis.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I began recruiting participants for this research study on July 10, 2021, after obtaining approval from the Walden University's Institutional Review Board (Approval number 07-09-21-0237467). Participants for this research study were recruited by posting a recruitment flyer in public social media platforms which included Facebook, LinkedIn, and Academic Twitter. The recruitment flyer identified the criteria for the study with a

link to the informed consent and Qualtrics demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B). I reviewed the demographic questionnaire completed by the participants who expressed interest in the study to identify qualified participants. A total of 14 individuals responded and selected "I consent," which was required before completing the demographic questionnaire in the Qualtrics platform.

I initially contacted seven participants via email who met the inclusion criteria (after reviewing the demographic questionnaire), thanked them for agreeing to participate, and arranged a time to conduct the Zoom interview. The interviews occurred with no interruptions and ranged from 33 to 46 minutes. I was in a private location in my home in order to ensure the confidentiality of my participants' interviews and asked them to do the same in their homes. To the best of my knowledge, they all complied with my request to be in a secure, private location within their homes while we conducted the interview.

Upon completion of the first seven interviews, common themes began to emerge as there was evidence of data saturation, with no new themes emerging from the participants' responses. However, to ensure that I had, indeed reached, data saturation, I decided to interview two more participants to be confident in my assessment of the data to that point. Data saturation was validated upon reviewing the information collected from the nine participants and I confirmed that no new themes or knowledge emerged from the participants' responses (Guest, 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The remaining five participants were no longer needed for the study as data saturation was attained from the first nine participants. I sent a thank you email to the remaining five participants and

informed them that the necessary number of participants had been reached. The data collection process concluded on July 23, 2021.

Data Analysis Plan

The goal of phenomenological research is to understand a phenomenon as a whole (Peoples, 2020) and the data analysis plan is a thought-out process to collect data in order to apply meaning to the phenomenon for the purposes of sharing information to others (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Data analysis was employed using Moustakas' (1994) modified 7-step van Kaam method (see Figure 2). The transcripts were reviewed several times to ensure accuracy, gain an understanding of the content, and used to manually hand-code the data. The modified van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994) has been used in past phenomenological research studies. This method is a reliable method for isolating key words (invariant constituents) and themes from textural data that was collected during the interviews. An invariant constituent, according to Moustakas (1994), is defined as a critical element of the phenomenon under investigation. The elimination process entails reducing the data of experiences to what is deemed essential to the participant. In addition, Moustakas's modified van Kaam method requires that the researcher use bracketing and imaginative variation to uniquely analyze the data. Imaginative variation is the process of finding a possible meaning of the phenomenon and solely depends on the researchers' imagination rather than empirical data (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher creates structural themes through the imagination variation process and transforms them into structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994).

Epoché

The process of data analysis began with epoché. Husserl (2012) defined this concept as the researcher's ability to set aside current thoughts, beliefs, and judgments related to the phenomenon. Patton (2002) noted that epoché is the premeditated attempt that the researcher takes in being aware of prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions. In order to address epoché, I reflected on my biases and how these biases might affect my interpretation of the participants' lived experiences. It was important for me to acknowledge that I am a Black female and currently enrolled in a CES doctoral program during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was critical for me to point out that this may influence my objectivity when reviewing and analyzing the data. The main premise of bracketing (phenomenological reduction) was to remain aware of my own preconceptions and examine the data in its pure form. Through the epoché process, I replicated the modified 7-step van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994) utilizing the transcriptions of each participant to develop common themes. Moustakas' modified van Kaam method entails the following seven steps:

Horizontalization and Coding

Listing and preliminary grouping, known as horizonalization, is the initial step in the modified van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994). The data collected from the participants' lived experiences provided detailed and rich data regarding the phenomenon under investigation. Horizonalization was utilized to evaluate every expression relevant to the participants' experience, assisted in evaluating the phenomenon, and allowed for the data to be treated equally. Moustakas (1994) highlighted that the horizons involve the

textural meanings of the phenomenon, which is described as the invariant constituents. In coding the data, I carefully identified the participants' statements from the transcripts that was relevant to the research question and removed all repetitive statements to incorporate the textural meanings of the phenomenon. Each interview from the verbatim transcript were coded and summarized for themes using the invariant constituents.

Reduction and Elimination

Reduction and elimination are the second step in the modified van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994) which entails recognizing and eliminating the invariant constituents resulting from the horizon identified in the first step. In this process, the researcher is responsible for evaluating the invariant constituents, peeling back the layers of the text, and identifying overlapping and repetitive expressions. Moustakas (1994) identified two requirements to test each expression to determine invariant constituents which includes: (a) Does the text obtained from the data contain information to understand the phenomenon under investigation? and (b) Is it possible to abstract and label it? If the two requirements were met, it was considered a horizon and if it did not meet the requirements, it was eliminated and listed as a discrepant case. Discrepant cases were analyzed and discussed thoroughly to understand the overall findings of the study. The horizons that were left after the reduction and elimination process comprised the invariant constituents of the participants' experiences. Each coded invariant constituent was re-assessed in terms of relevance to the research question and phenomenon under investigation.

Clustering and Thematizing of the Invariant Constituents

The third step in in the modified van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994) is clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents to represent common themes from the data after the reduction and elimination process. The process of theme development began by listening to the verbatim transcripts from the nine participants' responses of their lived experience and grouping them into themes. To comprehend the intricacy of the meanings, I chose not to focus on the frequency of the participants' responses but on the meanings in the data. Sundler et al. (2019) noted that the data analysis process begins with the textural data that assist to organize the data into patterns to understand the phenomenon under investigation. Once the themes began to form, I validated the themes against the verbatim transcripts to ensure accuracy of the participants' experience.

Final Identification of Invariant Constituents and Themes: Validation

The fourth step of Moustakas' (1994) modified van Kaam method in the data analysis process is validation. In this step, the researcher verified the invariant constituents and the thematic categories against the verbatim transcripts. According to Moustakas (1994), the invariant constituents were valid if they were proven to be explicitly expressed or compatible in the complete transcription. Compatible constituents, as described by Moustakas (1994), are defined as responses that clearly represent a reference to an explicit invariant constituent. If the responses were not explicit or compatible (Moustakas, 1994) they were not relevant to the phenomenon under investigation and was therefore deleted. Following the validation of the invariant constituents and themes, individual textural descriptions of the participants' experiences

were generated and led to the fifth step in the modified van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994).

Individual Textural Description

Moustakas's (1994) identified the fifth step in the modified van Kaam method as the individual textural description of the participants' experience. Moustakas (1994) noted that the textural description is in reference to what the participants' experienced and explains their perceptions regarding the phenomenon using excerpts from the verbatim transcripts. Each participants' experience was described using relevant descriptions of the phenomenon and through the delimited horizons (validated invariant constituents), and themes. This step also consisted of uncovering the true essence of the participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994) and provided insight into the meaning of being a Black female doctoral student in CES during the pandemic which included imaginative variation and verbatim examples.

Individual Structural Description

In the sixth step, imaginative variation was employed for each description in order to express the relevant experiences of the participants more clearly. I verified the creation of the individual structural descriptions, based on the individual textural descriptions, as described by Moustakas (1994). I then developed the individual structural description that aided to identify pure essences of the lived experiences of Black women enrolled in CES doctoral programs during the current pandemic. I completed this process by organizing the data collected in a Microsoft Word document which aided me to carefully review the

responses for resemblances and commonalities. This process permitted me to confirm the key themes to understand the underlying aspects of the participants' experiences.

Synthesis of Individual Textural-Structural Descriptions

The final step in the modified van Kaam 7-step process involved the development of composite textural structural descriptions. These composite textural-structural descriptions served to present the experiences of the participants as a whole and therefore represented the conclusions of the data analysis process. The textural-structured descriptions were then used to answer the study's research question and assisted in integrating the noema (the what) and the noesis (the how) of the phenomenon. In this step, the merging of the structural and textural descriptions provided an extensive understanding about the phenomenon from the lens of the participants. After eliminating and reducing the data, themes were formed, and the invariant constituents were created and provided the true experience of the participants in the research study.

Software

Due to the nature of this being a phenomenological study, I want to stay as close to the participant's as possible (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) and therefore software was not used to code data for this research study. However, NVivo software was used to manage and organize data storage. NVivo provided the opportunity for data to be easily viewed on the computer screen at any given time and was a great way to organize data files into folders (Maher et al., 2018). For this study, I manually hand-coded the data collected as recommended by Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kaam data analysis method. Coding qualitative data by hand enables for a more flexible approach to identify common themes

compared to qualitative software programs that might not adequately capture the true essence of participants' experiences (Stuckey, 2015).

Coding

Coding is vital when analyzing data in qualitative research. Ravitch and Carl (2016) noted that there is no right or wrong way to code data, but coding does include reading for occurring phrases, themes, and patterns. Rubin and Rubin (2012) acknowledged the importance of recognizing important concepts, themes, events, and examples, while coding them in a way that gives the researcher a better understanding of the research problem. I manually coded the data for this research study utilizing Moustakas' (1994) modified 7-step method and maintained an excel spreadsheet for organization and trustworthiness of the data (Rogers, 2018). Peoples (2020) noted that hand-coding requires less work than using software and recommended manually coding in a phenomenological dissertation.

Discrepant Cases

During the data analysis process, it was critical to locate invalidating evidence which consisted of searching for potentially disconfirming data (Morrow, 2005). While identifying discrepant findings or disconfirming evidence, it is important to reduce confirmatory bias and prevent an exceedingly simplistic interpretation of the data (Morrow, 2005). The discrepant or deviant cases that were not aligned with the popular findings was categorized and listed as alternate findings. A discrepant case can lead the researcher to potential flaws and is an exception in the data that cannot be grouped into themes (Suter, 2012).

My role as the sole researcher in this study was to increase credibility by ensuring accuracy in data collection, data analysis, and the interpretation of results. As suggested by Moustakas (1994), it was important to engage in epoché with the goal of suspending bias throughout the research process and making accurate connections between the participants lived experiences. Further, by identifying discrepant cases allowed me as the researcher to establish themes from the data collected and helped to describe the true essence of how Black women enrolled in CES doctoral programs are managing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Qualitative research includes different evaluation criteria to ensure the rigor of the inquiry due to different philosophical and methodology assumptions that guide each approach. Shenton (2004) noted that trustworthiness is ensuring that credibility is established in the study and suggested that responding directly to the issues of validity and reliability can also pose issues of trustworthiness. Further, Morrow (2005) described trustworthiness as considering the internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity of the research study. The researcher should be cognizant of the reliability of coding and pattern analyses, correspondence of findings to reality, generalizability, strength of evidence supporting causal hypotheses, and the contributions to theory (Morrow, 2005). In the following subheadings, I will address trustworthiness in the form of credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical procedures as these concepts are critical to this research study.

Credibility

Credibility is defined as the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002). Ways to incorporate credibility in qualitative research is establishing whether the research findings represent plausible information drawn from the participants' initial data and is a correct interpretation of the participants' original views. Strauss and Corbin (1990) noted that credibility can be maintained by paying attention to time sampling, reflexivity, triangulation, member checking, peer examination, interview technique, structural coherence, and ensuring that the study measures what it is intended to measure. Credibility can also be achieved by prolonged engagement with participants, the use of peer debriefers, and discrepant case analysis (Patton, 2002). To assure that research findings were credible, and the interview transcripts correctly captured the participant's responses, I used member checking and prolonged engagement (Peoples, 2020) to check and confirm the results. Member checking aided in reducing researcher bias by allowing participants to confirm the results and ensure that their lived experiences were accurately captured.

Transferability

Transferability is the extent to which the reader can generalize the findings of a study to his or her own context and addresses the core issue of how far a researcher may make claims for a general population (Gasson, 2004). Transferability of a study is established once the researcher considers information about the research context, the setting, processes, participants, and their experiences prior to generalizing any findings (Gasson, 2004; Peoples, 2020). Transferability entails elements of a study that can be

applied widely across participants, settings, and groups. The themes and general summary about the phenomenon may offer insights for future Black women CES doctoral students, higher education institutions, counseling professionals, and counselor educators. Providing rich descriptions and theoretical examples of Black women enrolled in CES doctoral programs during the COVID-19 pandemic can allow future researchers to mimic their research after this study and achieve comparable results.

Dependability

Dependability, according to Gasson (2004) refers to the core issue of the way in which a study is conducted and should be consistent across time. It is the process through which findings are derived, explicit, and replicable. Dependability is accomplished through carefully tracking the emerging research design and through keeping an audit trail, that is, a detailed chronology of research activities and processes, influences on the data collection and analysis, emerging themes, and categories (Gasson, 2004). Peoples (2020) noted that the content of a research study should yield comparable findings in future research studies within a similar context. I provided a detailed audit trail to replicate the study in Chapter 3 and will follow each step as described (Peoples, 2020).

Confirmability

Confirmability is based on the acknowledgment that the research is never objective. Confirmability relates to the core issue that findings should represent, the situation being researched rather than the beliefs, and can be verified by other researchers (Gasson, 2004). To protect the research from personal bias (Peoples, 2020), I supported this area of trustworthiness by applying triangulation and epoché. Triangulation is the

ability to look at the holistic picture from several ways and provides the opportunity to approach the same phenomenon in order to confirm the data collected. I concentrated on the lived experiences of participants throughout the constant emergence of distractions and biases (Peoples, 2020), and the use of triangulation reduced the potential of research bias. This allowed me as the researcher to capture the true descriptions of the participants lived experiences with the phenomenon.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical issues are important in all types of research (Willis, 2005). Regardless of the type of research, the researcher should take into consideration both general research principles and those that are more specific to the type of research being conducted (Willis, 2005). The researcher faces ethical challenges in all stages of the study, from designing to reporting. These ethical issues include anonymity, confidentiality, informed consent, and the potential impact on the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Willis, 2005). Privacy is the right of the participants to limit access by others in aspects of their personal information that can include thoughts and identifying information. Ravitch and Carl (2016) noted that protecting the privacy of participants includes both confidentiality and anonymity. The researcher is responsible for protecting data, limiting the access of information collected, informing the participant of their rights to the data, and noting that there is risk to the technology that is used to store and process data. Following are the ethical procedures that I followed for this research study:

- The International Review Board (IRB) is an administrative body created to protect the rights and welfare of human research subjects recruited to

participate in research activities (Antes et al., 2018). I followed the proper protocol for submitting and obtaining approval from the IRB to conduct this study and followed research standards.

- The participants participating in this study was informed of the purpose of the research study. All participants were provided and required to sign a consent form prior to participating in the study. The consent form provided a thorough description of the research study, expectations for participation, and notification of their rights. Participants were given the right to decline participation and terminate the interview without pressure. If this had occurred, I would have recruited new participants using purposive and snowball sampling strategies as outlined by the sampling criteria.
- I did not foresee harm being inflicted on the selected participants for this study. However, if a participant had been triggered anytime during the study, I would have terminated the interview and provided supportive resources. Further, participants were also asked to participate in member checking and given the opportunity to engage in dialogue about the results.
- Data collected during this research study was electronically stored in Nvivo and on a physical recording device utilized to record the interviews. The data collected for this research was anonymous and confidential. The privacy of the research participants was honored, and each participant was given a number in place of their real name to protect their identity. Reports of this study did not reveal identities of participants.

- The results of this research study will be published in the form of a student dissertation, article, and for presentation purposes. Participants was made aware of publications during the informed consent process.
- Participants was informed that I was the sole researcher, and that I am a Black female currently enrolled in a CES doctoral program during the COVID-19 pandemic. I did not see a conflict of interest, as I revealed this information upfront and applied epoché as suggested by Moustakas (1994). Applying epoché supported suspending bias, prejudice, and preconceived ideas in order to approach this research study as if for the first time (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness of this transcendental phenomenological study was implemented by applying credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Ethical procedures were put in place to protect the rights of the participants and I as the researcher. Rubin and Rubin (2012) noted that researchers should avoid causing harm to participants by not exploiting them and by not publishing material that would cause them harm. In addition, the researcher worked with the IRB to ensure that all ethical guidelines are followed. Researchers are to provide enough information so that an informed voluntary decision can be made which is done through the informed consent process. Making participants aware of potential harm prior to the beginning of the study and putting appropriate arrangements in place should something go wrong is critical (Schutt, 2006). Following the key concepts identified in this chapter assisted in creating a safe and nurturing environment for participants to explore their lived experiences.

Summary

A transcendental phenomenological design was selected to address the research question of what are the lived experiences of Black women in CES doctoral programs during the COVID-19 pandemic? This qualitative research method allowed for the discovery of rich descriptions of the phenomenon by engaging participants in lengthy semi structured interviews. Purposive sampling and the snowball strategy technique assisted in recruiting nine participants until data saturation was reached. Recruitment took place via the Facebook, LinkedIn, and Academic Twitter social network. Participant criteria included self-identification as a Black woman, currently or recently enrolled in a CACREP-accredited CES doctoral program in the United States, and over the age of 18.

Interviews were conducted using the Zoom teleconferencing platform and was audio-recorded only using a separate mobile device. Phone calls were made available as an option to increase participation and to manage technical issues but did not have to be employed. I employed epoché in order to suspend all bias. Moustakas (1994) 7-step modified Van Kaam method was utilized to analyze the data and capture rich descriptions of the participants lived experiences of the phenomenon. Trustworthiness and ethical procedures, including approval from the IRB, was followed to protect the rights of the participants. Chapter 4 will outline and provide discussions regarding the results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

The central problem for this study was that the pandemic places Black women in a unique position to face their fears and overcome challenges while seeking a sense of belonging in CES doctoral programs than Whites and males. In Chapter 4, I present the research findings and connect the findings of the study with transcendental phenomenological philosophy. I explored the experiences of nine Black women who are CES doctoral students to answer the main research question: What are the lived experiences of Black women in CES doctoral programs during the COVID-19 pandemic? I discuss the process of data collection and analysis. In addition, I explain the historical challenges of Black women enrolled in doctoral counseling programs (Abuelgasim et al., 2020; Bhat et al., 2009; Ward et al., 2012) and the academic success factors used to overcome these challenges. Their willingness to share their stories allowed me to obtain vital insight into their overall personal experiences, challenges, and coping strategies as Black CES doctoral students during the pandemic.

Research Setting

Data for this transcendental phenomenological study were collected by conducting virtual semi structured Zoom interviews with nine Black female CES doctoral students. The Zoom platform was a cost-effective, easy-to-use, and secure way to collect data for this study (Archibald et al., 2019). The study participants were given the flexibility of choosing the day, secure location, and time appropriate for their virtual Zoom interview. Preceding the interview, I emailed the selected participants an invitation with a link to participate in the private Zoom interview, protected by a passcode.

Participants were reminded that the interviews would be recorded using a mobile device and that they had the right to end the interview and terminate participation in the research study at any time without penalty. Participants appeared relaxed during the interviews, showed no signs of distress, and openly shared their lived experiences. I engaged in epoché to bracket and mitigate my personal bias, prejudices, and preconceived notions as I am a Black woman enrolled in a CES doctoral program. This bracketing process aided me in approaching the phenomenon from an open standpoint (Moustakas, 1994).

Demographics

The participants in this study were chosen via purposeful and snowball sampling. Participants were acquired through public professional networks such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Academic Twitter. The selected participants met the inclusion criteria of self-identifying as a Black woman, currently enrolled or recently graduated from a CACREP-accredited CES doctoral program, and over the age of 18. Participants were asked 10 demographic questions (see Appendix B), which provided additional information into their lived experiences. These questions included the location state of the CES doctoral program, length of time in the CES doctoral program, age, ethnicity, marital status, employment status, household income, number of children under the age of 18, and exposure to COVID-19. The location of the participants programs varied. Six participants attended CACREP-accredited brick-and mortar programs and three participants attended virtually. The length in program times varied as well as participants ages. All nine participants self-identified as Black women. Four participants reported being married, three were never married, and two were divorced. Participants' household

income and number of children under the age of 18 also varied. Most of the participants denied being exposed to COVID-19; two reported having been exposed to COVID, and one participant was unsure. Table 1 provides a clear outline of the demographic details for the participants in this research study. Each participant, as stated in the informed consent, was given a unique alphanumeric participant identification number to maintain confidentiality. The first participant was identified as P001, and each participant thereafter was assigned the letter "P" and a number in chronological sequence (i.e., P002–P009).

Table 1

Participant's Demographic Data

Participant	Location/ Length in Program	Age	Ethnicity	Martial Status	Employment Status	Income	Children and No.	Covid-19 Exposure
P001	Louisiana (V) 0-1 year	35-44	Black	Married	Full-time	$150,000	Yes-2	No
P002	Texas (B) 1-2 years	25-44	Black	Married	Full-time	$80,000-$89,000	No	No
P003	Minnesota (V) 2-5 years	35-44	Black	N. Married	Full-time	$80,000-$89,000	No	No
P004	Illinois (B) 2-5 years	55-64	Black	Married	Full-time	$100,000-$149,000	Yes-1	No

(table continues)

P005	Minnesota (V) 2-5 years	35-44	Black	Divorced	Part-time	$50,000- $59,999	Yes-1	Yes
P006	N. Carolina (B) 1-2 years	25-44	Black	N. Married	Part-time	$40,000- $49,999	No	No
P007	Georgia (B) 0-1 year	55-64	Black	Married	Full-time	$60,000- $69,999	Yes-1	Not Sure
P008	Idaho (B) 1-2 years	25-34	Black	Divorced	Full-time	$60,000- $69,000	No	Yes
P009	N. Carolina (B) 0-1 year	25-34	Black	N. Married	Full-time	$50,000- $59,999	No	No

Data Collection

Nine participants were chosen to participate in this qualitative research study. The interviews were all conducted using the Zoom platform and recorded using a separate mobile device for privacy and transcription purposes only. The interviews ranged from 33 to 45 minutes in length. To the best of my knowledge, all participants complied with my request to be in a secure, private location within their homes while we conducted the interview. All nine participants selected “I consent,” which was required before completing the demographic questionnaire in the Qualtrics platform. There were no unusual circumstances that arose during the data collection process and no variations made to the data collection plan.

Data Analysis

For this phenomenological study, I analyzed the data using Moustakas's (1994) modification of the Van Kaam method of data analysis (see Figure 3). In the transcendental phenomenological approach, according to Moustakas, the researcher follows the process of treating the data equally, listening to the transcripts verbatim to create meaning via reduction, clustering and arranging invariant elements into themes, checking the themes against the transcript, using verbatim examples from the transcribed interviews, developing a structure of the participant's experiences about the phenomenon (giving insight into the meaning of their experience), and combining textural and structural descriptions to create a collaborative understanding of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Creswell (2015) defined clusters of meaning as units such as, words, phrases, and patterns that are substantial to the research topic. In this study, I used clusters of meaning to identify the invariant constituents (Moustakas, 1994). The invariant constituents were clustered into four general themes: academic success factors, supportive networks and coping, academic challenges, and personal challenges. The 16 subthemes were (a) supportive professors and leniency; (b) self-determination and academic enjoyment; (c) ownership of professional development; (d) campus resources; (e) family and friends; (f) spirituality and mental health support; (g) cohort, sorority, and professional groups; (h) extracurricular activities; (i) technology issues and course interruption; (j) race challenges and lack of respect; (k) lack of mentorship and culturally specific resources; (l) professor overload and lack of academic support; (m) mental health concerns and distrust in

systems; (n) work–life balance; (o) direct and indirect effects of COVID-19; and (p) feelings of loneliness and lack of confidence. Moustakas (1994) noted that the invariant constituents should reflect imaginative variation and phenomenological reflection to validate the participant's experiences. The four themes and 16 subthemes that emerged from the research question supported Black women's experiences in their CES doctoral programs during the COVID-19 pandemic (see Table 2).

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes Among Participants

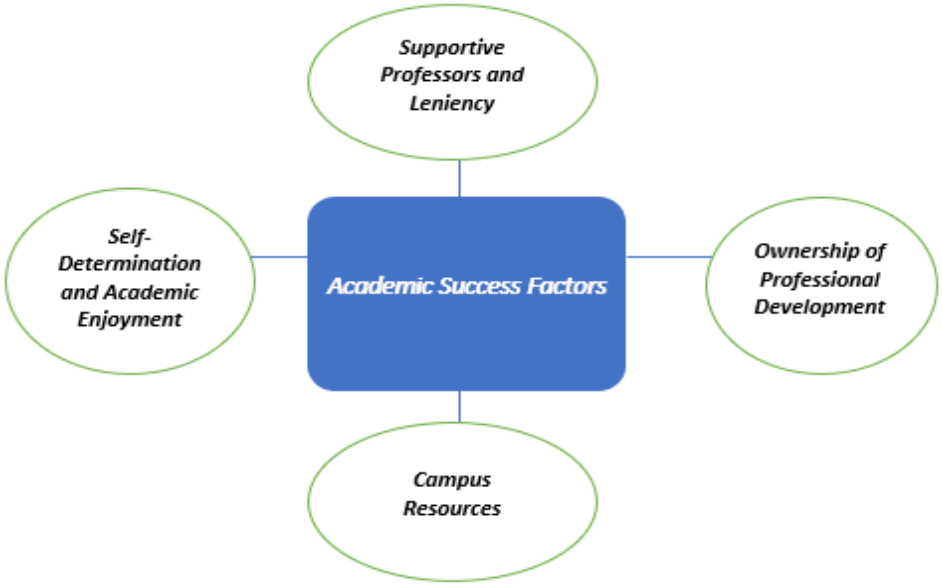
Participant	P001	P002	P003	P004	P005	P006	P007	P008	P009
Academic Success Factors									
Supportive Professors & Leniency	X	X		X				X	X
Self-Determination & Academic Enjoyment	X	X		X	X			X	
Ownership of Professional Development		X	X			X	X		
Campus Resources	X	X		X					X
Supportive Networks and Coping									
Family & Friends	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Spirituality & Mental Health Support	X	X	X	X	X			X	
Cohort, Sorority, & Professional Groups	X			X	X	X			X
Extracurricular Activities	X				X	X		X	
Academic Challenges									
Technical Issues & Course Interruption	X		X		X	X	X	X	X
Race Challenges & Lack of Respect		X	X		X	X	X	X	
Lack of Mentorship & Culturally Specific Resources		X	X		X	X	X	X	
Professor Overload & Lack of Academic Support		X	X			X	X	X	
Personal Challenges									
Mental Health Concerns & Distrust in Systems	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Work-Life Balance			X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Direct/Indirect Effects of COVID-19		X			X	X	X	X	
Feelings of Loneliness & Lack of Confidence		X	X			X			

Results

In this study, I strived to present the voices of Black women as they disclosed their experiences in their CES doctoral programs during the COVID-19 pandemic. I identified four main themes: academic success factors, supportive networks and coping, academic challenges, and personal challenges. I describe and give examples to each theme and the sub-themes.

Figure 1

Theme 1: Academic Success Factors



Theme 1: Academic Success Factors

Academic success is vital in educational institutions and is used as a system of measurement for the institution's performance (Alyahyan & Düstegör, 2020). Even during COVID-19, participants shared factors pertaining to their motivation behind obtaining their doctoral degrees. Five of the participants made direct reference to the

amount of support that they received from their professors and called attention to the fact that challenges in their CES doctoral program were lightened due to the constellation of support.

Supportive Professors and Leniency

A significant theme in this study was supportive professors who offered leniency. Five participants valued the leadership and support received from their professors in their CES doctoral program during the onset of COVID-19. Being given leniency to submit assignments, discussions, and dissertation chapters were common themes in the responses. This leniency provided them with the opportunity to reach program milestones. Jones and Sam (2018) highlighted the importance of having supportive professors to assist in mitigating challenges during the doctoral process. This level of support was described by several participants. For example, P001 stated,

> The professors are knowledgeable. You're able to talk to them, it's an open-door policy, and they're very understanding. Let's say something happened and you need to turn in your assignment late, they're very understanding as long as you communicate. I feel comfortable with expressing to them what it was and asking for an extension or asking for support. The majority of my professors are Caucasian, but they're very supportive of the African American population.

P002 said, "I needed time to catch up [on] some coursework because a family member was hospitalized due to COVID, and my professors were lenient and gave me extra time … I did not have to withdraw from my courses." P004 reported, "The professors are really good about having you included…you get a chance to collaborate with professors.

They would be available when [she] called them." P008 mentioned being "given leniency to turn in a few assignments because [she] was diagnosed with COVID in May." P009 recounted, "I was able to rely on my professors for support when I needed extra time to complete my coursework…my program ensured that we all had leniency in completing our coursework." All five of these participants noted at least some level of relief with having professors that offered support while managing unforeseen challenges caused by the pandemic. This level of support, as identified by the participants, created a sense of hopefulness and continuous motivation to proceed in their programs.

Self-Determination and Academic Enjoyment

Five of the women noted that self-determination and academic enjoyment were key elements of their experiences. There was a strong sense that these women were taking responsibility for their educational endeavors even with faced with personal and academic challenges. P001 noted, "My coping mechanism…just remembering my overall goal of why I'm obtaining this degree, what my overall goal, mission, passion is …that's what keeps me going." One participant, P002, reported that academic enjoyment influenced her ability to keep her "eyes on the prize," meaning that she was self-determined to keep up with other racial counterparts. Moreover, P002 stated, "It is about two other Black women in my courses, mostly White women, and I am determined to not be singled out…or get behind." P004 said, I was determined…it was for my own enrichment," whereas P005 summed up the most common theme in this area, "I am a self-motivator, taught to be independent by my parents, so I depend on myself to be self-determined to overcome challenges."

Ownership of Professional Development

Promoting professional development is an effective way to stimulate growth in Black students pursuing their doctoral degrees (Gardner et al., 2016). Researchers found that when Black doctoral students are validated and provided opportunities to support their professional development in counselor education programs, they are likely to feel accepted (Gardner et al., 2016; Haizlip, 2012). Four participants stated that they felt in control of their academic endeavors and shared their experiences regarding professional development. For example, P002 stated,

> Although I feel isolated at times due to being the only Black women in most of my classes…my professional development is the key to my success. My academic advisor is my "go to" person because [she] pushes me to believe in myself. That feeling of being accepted helps in my professional development…especially during the pressure caused by the pandemic.

P003 said, "I still utilize a mentor, which I think is so helpful for me as far as my professional development. And [she] understands my experience…I can say this, and she'll be like, "absolutely." P006 recounted, "Pursuing other departments really helped me find more money, which helped the financial piece, more opportunities, I published more, I mean immediately, I got put on grants, writing opportunities, and communication was better…this promoted professional development." The four women who described taking ownership of their professional development deemed experiences as positive

which ranged from receiving academic support, professional opportunities, and feelings of acceptance.

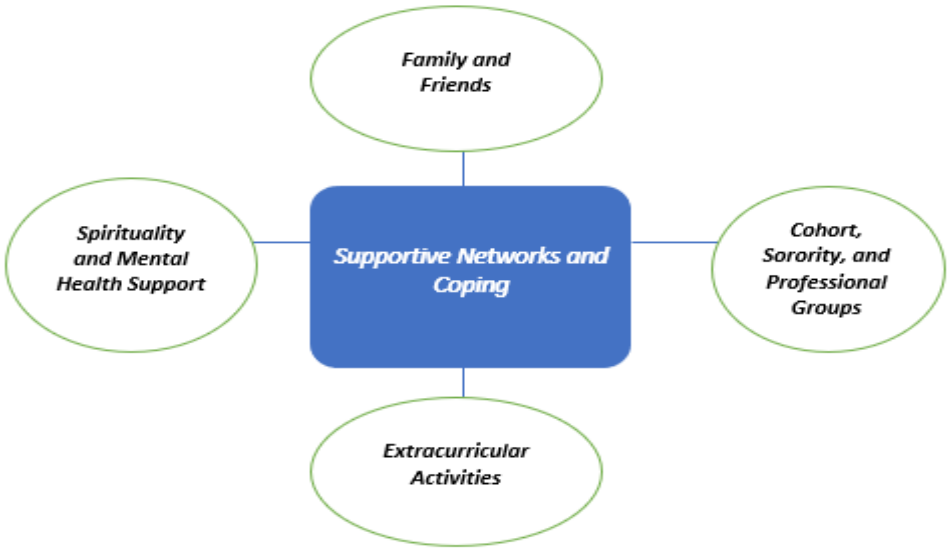
Campus Resources

There were only three participants who reported campus resources to be helpful, which was the least common theme in this area. The most critical utilized resource was the writing center. Participants who experienced campus resources as beneficial also reported utilizing other resources to support their academic success. The benefits of campus resources were described by a number of participants. One participant, P002 stated, “My program offers counseling and academic resources…I have visited the writing center and the library…the writing center and the librarian have been very helpful in toning my writing skills and finding articles for my assignments.” P004 noted, “It was during COVID…but it was also before COVID, that I utilized disability services…I had also used the writing center at the beginning”. Moreover, P007 stated,

> I mostly used the writing center and talked to my academic advisor. I was able to schedule an appointment with the writing center to look over my assignments and was provided input regarding APA 7…my academic advisor was supportive and provided me with encouragement and links to other useful resources.

Figure 2

Theme2: Supportive Networks and Coping



Theme 2: Supportive Networks and Coping

Black women often depend on supportive systems and coping methods to overcome stress while pursuing their doctoral degrees (Chaney, 2020). Support systems have been important factors for the success of Black women in online and brick-and-mortar doctoral programs (Davidson et al., 2004). The participants spoke about the importance of having a strong support system to cope with the stressors of their CES doctoral programs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Family and Friends

All nine participants were synchronous in their lived experiences pertaining to leaning on family and friends for support in their academic studies, particularly during the pandemic. In the time of emotional need, all participants depended on family and friends to help them to maintain balance. This was the most common theme in this area

and was described by many of the participants. For instance, P001 stated, “I talked to my classmate…we’re in the same program…we’re very aligned.” P001 also expressed that her family, including her husband, is supportive. P005 said,

> I generally just confide in my family and friends. My family, especially my mother, is the person that I really talk to because she reminds me of the importance of using my coping skills to manage stressful life situations, which has increased (stress) since the pandemic. My best friend is seeking a doctoral degree in a different program, and we support each other by meeting up regularly.

P006 stated, “I call my mother all the time…[she] is a huge support system for me.” P009 mentioned, “I talk to my siblings all the time because they are able to help me cope and ground myself when I am under stress. My parents are also supportive, and they always offer a listening ear. I also have a strong friend support network…we get together often.

All participants stated the importance of having a relationship with their family members and friends, particularly while maneuvering through personal and academic challenges related to the pandemic. The women in this study spoke highly regarding the support and the positive role that their family and friends played in their academic experiences.

Spirituality and Mental Health Support

Counseling professionals and educators must be aware that spirituality might be a critical component part of their students’ lives, and that addressing it, while accounting for age, gender, and ethnic differences, may help prevent mental health symptomatology among ethnically diverse college students (Luna & MacMillan, 2015). Six of the

participants shared their experiences pertaining to how spirituality and mental health support assisted them in coping with challenges during the pandemic in their CES doctoral program. P001 noted, “I see a therapist and if you’re a therapist, you definitely need a therapist because you have to be able to unload.” P002 stated that she prays every day and attend church services. P002 added, “Prayer has helped me cope during this pandemic…instead of isolating and feeling overwhelmed by my coursework, I pray.” Moreover, P003, stated, “Really my spirituality…but the Lord really blessed me to do well in my classes and my therapist has really helped me just be able to sit in my truth. P003 added, “I had a therapist prior to COVID…it was a Black woman who was actually also in a CES doc program. P005 mentioned, “My coping strategy outside of family is attending church and I recently started seeing a therapist…I was embarrassed at first, but I feel that it is important to experience counseling…I mean, how can I expect my clients to trust me if I don’t experience it firsthand.” Most of the women in this study noted that their spirituality and drive to seek mental health support was a critical piece of their identity, which supported their success in their academic program, particularly during the pandemic.

Cohort, Sorority, and Professional Groups

This theme was supported by five of the participants. Participants spoke about their ability to confide in various groups for support, guidance, and encouragement. Group support contributes to the development of skills, connecting with others who share similar qualities, a source for information sharing, and creates a sense of belonging (Montgomery, 2017). Participants expressed their lived experiences regarding how group

support assisted them in their programs during COVID-19. This level of support was described by several participants. For example, P001 noted, “I talk to my classmate because we’re in the same program and we’re very similar, we’re moms, we’re LPCs, we’re in the same Sorority…just everything.” P004 appreciated the diversity in her cohort group. P004 stated,

> The cohort group really helped me…it was six of us, one from Uganda, one Cuban American, three African American females, and one White male…it was different then what I’m used to…I am involved in a lot of professional organizations…there are doctoral groups [on] Facebook that I am in, and I was the president of a professional organization.

P005 stated, “I did join a cohort group via text, and we often check in with each other and bounce of support and ideas.” P006 noted,

> I’m a SGRO, and so I always call my Sorority mother…[She] is a huge support system for me. I call her more often than not and [she] is there if I ever need anything. I am also a part of some Facebook groups, and these groups has helped me to get through the program. My cohort members are also supportive.

P009 also noted the level of support within her Sorority and cohort group.

> I stay involved in my Sorority, interact with my cohort group, and I am also an active participant in Facebook support groups for Black doctoral women. These support groups have really helped me interact with others like me who are experiencing barriers related to the pandemic and just overall being a “Black woman” in society.

The five participants who shared their experiences in this area felt more connected to same-like peers when embedded in supportive networks such as professional, cohort groups, and Black Sororities. These women found it beneficial to have a safe place to cope, vent, and share cultural experiences amongst their peers.

Extracurricular Activities

Three of the participants reported that their engagement in extracurricular activities assisted to decrease stress and kept them connected with others during the pandemic. Most importantly, participants reported that these activities provided them with an outlet to practice self-care and cope with academic requirements during the pandemic. This was the least common theme in this area and described by three participants. For example, P001 stated, "Self-care is important to me in general, because I like to take care of myself…pedicure, manicure, but I also shop and just relax. P005 mentioned,

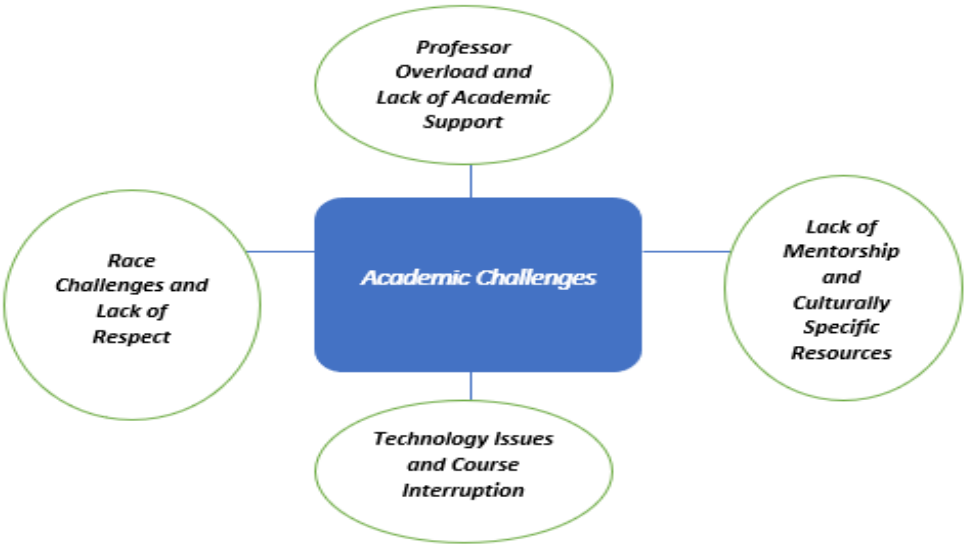
> I exercise when I can because exercising helps me cope with various stressors related to my academics and the pandemic. I often feel isolated in my program and have to participate in extracurricular activities to stay connected to the world…it's hard to travel due to COVID, but I take small trips when I can.

P006 mentioned, "A lot of self-care activities, like I'll go get my nails done, I'll get my hair braided…that helps me detach. I watch a lot of TV, a lot of lighthearted shows, comedy, to detach myself…I can go 45 minutes and unplug."P008 mentioned, "I cope with stress by travelling when I can, watch movies, and get my nails done…the pandemic

has taken a toll on my mental health and engaging in activities helps me keep my sanity." Four of the women noted that their self-care was a key element of their experience. There was a strong connection in the ability to take responsibility for their mental wellbeing while coping with stressors related to the unique challenges experienced in their CES doctoral programs amid the pandemic.

Figure 3

Theme 3: Academic Challenges



Theme 3: Academic Challenges

An existing body of literature found that Black women often encounter a variety of challenges while pursuing their doctoral degrees, not segregating between brick-and-mortar and online programs (Dortch, 2016; Walkington, 2017). Blankstein et al. (2020) reported that the COVID-19 has taken a toll on all students, but Bhat (2012) argued that Black women challenges compared to other ethnic and racial groups are unique.

Technology Issues and Course Interruption

A considerable subtheme in this study was the number of technical issues experienced by participants who relied on the virtual platform to continue their academic studies amid the pandemic. Several participants expressed having to withdraw from courses due to unforeseen circumstances related to COVID-19. Kujawa et al. (2020) found that adults are likely to experience psychosocial effects of the pandemic which have been the source of disrupted educational opportunities. P001 noted, “Occasional internet and technological issues that everybody has…sometimes my internet will cut off and it’ll reboot…the simple fact of being on this virtual platform." P003 stated, “I live in a very rural area…and we do not have a lot of spaces where I could do my clinical portion of the work. I had to delay it a couple of semesters, which really frustrated me as a student.” P005 disclosed being diagnosed with COVID in March and sought leniency to complete coursework. P005 stated, “I eventually had to withdraw from my courses because I was dealing with symptoms related to the disease and was having technical difficulties.” P006 said, “I went through comps during COVID…the professors didn’t care about that…and they failed me [on] one of the papers because it didn’t have an intro, and then they gave me no score, no nothing, and I had to go and figure it out...my academics were interrupted. P007 recounted,

> Technical issues with submitting assignments and logging into Zoom have been rough. It is time consuming and interrupts the flow of things. I think I had COVID…I was really sick and had to withdraw from one of the courses. This set me back, but my mental wellbeing is more important.

Moreover, P008 stated, “I had to withdraw from a course due to being diagnosed with COVID.” Seven of the participants shared that they experienced technical issues, which was a massive challenge for those participants who were enrolled in brick-and-mortar programs and had to immediately familiarize themselves with online learning as a result of the pandemic.

Race Challenges and Lack of Respect

Dortch (2016) reported that Black women pursuing their education are likely to experience difficulties with gaining respect from their professors and peers, are prone to discrimination, microaggressions, and oppression. Six participants reported that they experienced race challenges and dealt with issues pertaining to lack of respect. For example, P002 stated,

> I do not have a sense of connection with my peers who are mostly White women because when I attempt to share my beliefs regarding the Black culture, they make it into a race issue. I also feel singled out in my classroom when the topic of race comes up because I am the only Black woman in most of my classes. Most of my professors are White and I do not trust that they would understand my personal struggles. I know this probably sounds harsh, especially since I want to work in the counseling field, but I have a fear of being judged by Whites in general.

P003 noted,

> I did not have the greatest dissertation experience…I thought that it was a condescending process and that was really discouraging for me. When I would

> reach out for help, I think I was told that my disposition was kind of harsh. A lot of the leadership does not look like us (Black leadership). And for me not to be able to connect with a Black woman, it was just, it was awful. I was frustrated…and then when I expressed it, to be vilified the way that I was, and to not be acknowledged…for somebody to look at me and say, "your disposition is just so disrespectful." And it was just very much from a White privilege space…unfortunately I'm left with trauma as it relates to my relationship with White women, I struggled to trust them. This past year, during this pandemic, I really saw people's true colors and it was, it was hurtful. The faculty don't make themselves accessible and then when they do, there's a power imbalance and I had to bring that to their attention. So, I learned during this year that the faculty unfortunately did not offer a safe space for us (Black women) to be unhappy. I just felt like there was just nothing that said, this is a safe space for you to talk about what's going [on] and I'm willing to hear you without consequence, without retaliating. There was always retaliation. There was always consequence. I just felt that the comments were very micro-aggressive…how do you think that sounds coming out of your mouth, a White woman to a Black woman.

P005 noted,

> I've experienced microaggression in my program and often times felt disrespected by my peers, especially when race topics arise in the class discussion. The recent killings of Black men and police brutality have been a topic of discussion and I my White classmates always use the privilege card. My program can

> definitely spend more time teaching multiculturalism. Historically, Blacks have been oppressed for so long…I have to stick up for my community.

P006 recounted,

> I expect being discriminated against in a PWI but experienced more discrimination at a HBCU. One of my advisors who I swapped now, told me that my hair was too long, and my nails were too long…a Black woman. Telling me my worth…you're telling me I'm only worth $52,000 a year and I should quit. My own people…I've never heard this not one time at my PWI. In a way, you're guiding us (Black students) like parents to help us be out in the world of the field, and you're doing a poor job as gatekeepers if you all have different mindsets of how things should look and how things should be in the program. Value me as a person… they push us to advocate but when it's against them (faculty), they don't like it. I don't need to come in here like I'm black. We all are black. I don't have to come in here highlighting my accomplishments like I do with White people.

P008 stated,

> During a class Zoom meeting, the topic of race came up and I had a disagreement with a classmate who was a Hispanic male. My professor did not understand what was going on regarding crime against the Black community. I was feeling attacked, and the professor did not seem to want to intervene. I feel that people are so unaware of what is going [on] in the Black community and it troubles me because they will not be prepared to counsel Black clients. There needs to me more courses on multiculturalism. I reached out to my professor via email about

> my concerns regarding not feeling supported as a Black student. I felt that my professor did not really have a response and kind of just said, "he'll be more aware." My professor is a White male and I think he just may be ambivalent or do not have time to deal with such concerns.

The six participants shared similar frustrations when discussing the topic of race and feelings of not being respected by their professors and peers. Although none of the six participants referenced gender, the mention of race was a common denominator.

Lack of Mentorship and Culturally Specific Resources

The majority of the participants reported a lack of mentorship in their programs, prior to the pandemic, and during. Baker et al. (2014) suggested that Black women should be associated with mentors throughout their doctoral programs as mentorship is a critical component to doctoral success. What started to emerge from the data, however, was that Black women missed the opportunity to relate to a mentor, preferably, a Black mentor, and had little to no access to culturally specific resources as captured in participant responses. For example, P002 stated,

> There are not a lot of resources in my program tailored to my culture, I mean as a Black woman. There are really no specific services for the minority community and if there is, I do not know of any. I would likely feel comfortable talking to a professor of similar race but there are so few Black faculty. I feel that my program should match us with a mentor of similar race, but I know there is not a lot of Black professors. I think it would be helpful to add more culturally specific

resources.

P003 reported,

> It wasn't organized (the program)…they could have done a better job linking us with resources. There was nothing for women of color, there was nothing for people of color. There was just nothing. Link us (Black women) with supportive resources and give us time to engage in the supportive resources. My program did not link me with a mentor…I had to find one myself. My CES program was not designed with the lived experiences of Black women in mind. So, there's work that needs to be done. There's work that needs to be done related to how we assess, evaluate, how we mentor, how we educate, and how we supervise.

Moreover, P005 noted, "It is helpful to have Black mentors and clear communication pertaining to what culturally specific services are offered in the program for women of color." P006, stated, "I have never been to a HBCU before…you know I felt as if it was going to be the type of program that was going to offer me cultural support, which now I am finding out that it is more of an independent type of program. P008 noted, "Another challenge is not having the opportunity to connect with other Black women in my program…there should be more programs to support Black students, especially due to the pandemic." P006 also noted, "I also feel that having a connection with Black faculty would bridge the gap regarding appropriate mentorship."

Professor Overload and Lack of Academic Support

Five, out of nine participants, reported that their professors appeared overworked due to changes related to the pandemic and all five participants reported having a lack of

academic support in their CES doctoral program. This was the least common subtheme in this area but played a significant piece in these women's experiences. Their lived experiences related to professor overload and lack of academic support were described by the participants. For example, P002 noted,

> The school went into a panic and did not really have the necessary resources to provide students. I tried to reach out to one of my professors regarding help maneuvering through resources to get some work done but felt like she just brushed me off…so I just worked it out by myself. Professors are overworked or just do not know how to communicate with a student from a different background.

P003 said,

> Towards my third year that they were quite overworked (dissertation committee). And so, as a result, I paid a lot of that price for that, for them (professors) being overworked, which was very annoying because my program…is very expensive. This is when I saw firsthand that the staff was very overworked, very overworked, because I was at the bottom of the totem pole. My institution did not quite think that process through (internship placement) about how to support students in rural areas. It's highly understaffed (academic institution)…they had too many adjunct faculty, not enough core faculty…they were stretched way too thin. As a result of COVID the university didn't really do anything to assist during that time. I mean, their communication was very sparse. The institution went into panic mode, and I could tell, as a student.

P006 stated,

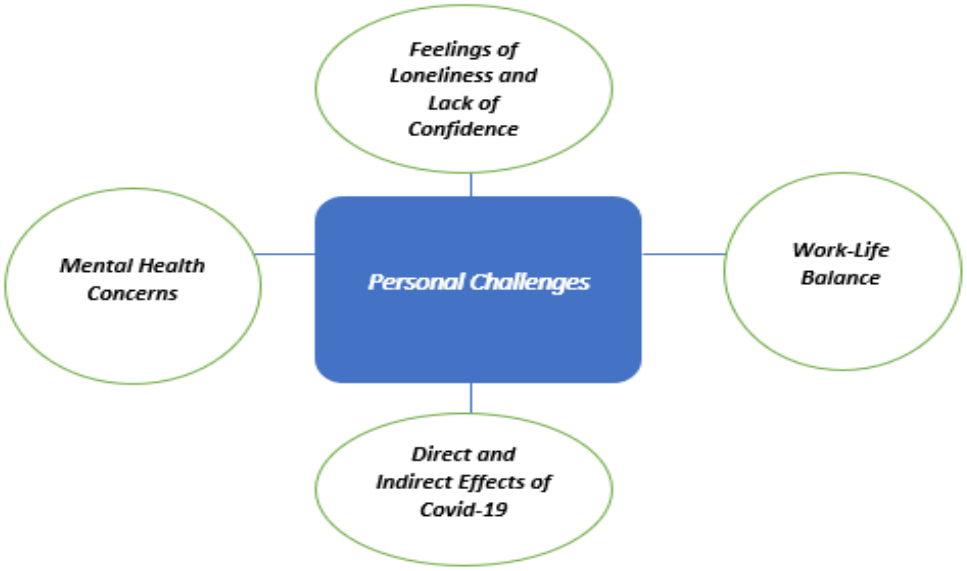
> This was my first experience at a HBCU…and I didn't feel as supported as I thought I would. Just overall communication has been a big barrier for me in the program. They (academic institution) promised us a lot of things that they didn't really fall through with…so I scrambled around a lot. And, when I would go to my faculty members, it was like, oh well you'll get through it, it will be okay. They don't communicate with one another (faculty). And so, I saw morphism when something from the top where the boss is all bad, and then it rolls down to the workers. And so, we're at the bottom of the food chain pretty much, we're the students. They don't tell you what your experience is going to be like in a doc program, you don't know until you're in it.

P007 said, "There have been times in which I would email my professors and did not get a response until way after the fact…some of my professors appear overworked, especially since COVID." Moreover, P008 noted, "Professors are overworked or do not have the support they need from the institution. Since the pandemic, my professors are slow to return email and I do not have the academic support of my program."

While women and men of all ethnic groups may at some point feel a lack of academic support on college campuses in general, the Black women in this study reported experiencing additional challenges due to feelings of being overlooked and unnoticed. Although four women did not directly express experiencing challenges pertaining to professor overload and lack of academic support, every woman in this study reported being impacted by challenges in their CES program, regardless of being enrolled in the online or brick-and-mortar setting.

Figure 4

Theme 4: Personal Challenges



Theme 4: Personal Challenges

All of the participants shared that they experienced personal challenges in their CES doctoral program as a result of the pandemic. As the data of this study started to emerge, all but one participant reported experiencing mental health challenges, while some shared having a distrust in the medical and educational system. Among these personal challenges also included feelings of loneliness, lack of confidence, work–life balance, and direct and indirect effects of COVID-19.

Mental Health Concerns

Mental health challenges were the most common theme in this area. Eight out of the nine participants reported that their mental wellbeing had worsened since the pandemic. Research has shown that the Black community utilizes mental health services at a lower rate than Whites, particularly Black women (Cook et al., 2017; MHA, 2020).

Contrary to existing literature, there were several participants who reported seeking mental health support from therapists and accessing psychiatric support outside of their academic setting. Some of the participants' lived experiences regarding the theme of mental health concerns was described by the participants. For example, P001 noted, "COVID-19 has brought on a sense of anxiety for all of us…anxiety and stress of the unknown." P001 added, "COVID has brought a lot of anxiety…and a lot of sickness in my body physically… I do go to a therapist." P002 said,

> I started having panic attacks due to all the stress…a friend recommended counseling, but I do not think that I am up for that. I did experience panic attacks and anxiety since COVID. I went to see my primary physician, but [she] just recommended medication. In my culture, taking psychotropic medications is frowned upon and I just do not trust the medical system. The medical profession is always trying to make money and spends less time providing education about certain things, such as COVID.

P003 mentioned, I spent this year mad…which of course you know, really increases

> anxiety levels. I had so many aches…I was having so many panic attacks. A lot of the research is suggesting that we do not as Black women seek out counseling and therapy…I have a therapist…so my therapist really has helped me. P004 noted, "You either get vaccinated and take that chance, or COVID…my son has allergies, I am dealing with my own health, and we both have ADHD…I didn't really have a choice…but that was stressful." Moreover,

P005 stated,

> I have always battled with depression (undiagnosed) but started to feel really depressed once the pandemic hit. I have to motivate myself to get out the bed at time. I have felt restless and less motivated at times. I don't talk about my depression to anyone because they would not understand. My family does not believe in the mental health system and I'm afraid to talk to my professors because I have trust issues. I might feel comfortable reaching out if I had a Black professor. I plan to seek counseling though.

P006 mentioned,

> Last year in March, right when COVID first hit, I had very bad depression. Burnout is one thing, but depression is a whole totally different beast. When I get into a state of depression, I really struggle to get out of bed in the mornings. I had a therapist at first at the school…once COVID happened, it really didn't work out. I deal with stress poorly…my skin was breaking out; I was losing my hair. I was at the brink of being hospitalized. I had a strain in my neck, and I couldn't walk for three days. I have really bad insomnia…hair's falling out…that's happening now…and fungus growing on my skin. I went to the doctor and was put on meds. I was on antidepressants, and I was on anxiety medication, and that was for six months because of the stress from my program, the stress of COVID, and the stress of seeing clients. I felt just low, very depressed, lack of motivation, insomnia, and anxious.

P007 said, "Mental health is frowned upon in my community and culture. One time I felt

depressed, I think, but I did not share this with anyone. I don't really trust doctors, never have." P008 stated,

> I was diagnosed with depression as a teenager and continue to take psychotropic medications. I have difficulty getting out of bed at times, but I force myself too. It appeared to be under control but when COVID surfaced, it became apparent that I was depressed. I was so scared of the unknown and the government was not really educating us on really what COVID was at the time. I was really sick. I do not really trust the health system due to personal reasons, but I had to go to the doctor because I was so sick.

Some participants expressed their concerns regarding how past historical factors played a role in their distrust in the medical and academic system and emphasized the importance of their cultural beliefs regarding mental health support.

Work–Life Balance

Seven of the nine participants shared similar experiences in their responses in reference to work–life responsibilities. Haskins et al. (2016) found that it is a high probability that Black mothers experience higher levels of stress and depression than White mothers due to time-management and work–life balance. Four participants reported having at least one child under the age of 18 living in the home. As the data continued to emerge in this study, participants joined in expressing their challenges and barriers related to balancing work–life responsibilities in their doctoral programs during the pandemic. For example, P003 noted,

> COVID was interesting because I was in the middle of writing the dissertation. I also got offered a faculty position and it put me 900 miles away from where I was living…so I also moved during that time. My committee person got sick and just kind of didn't hear from her…as a result of COVID the university didn't really do anything to assist during that time. I felt so guilty for taking that job… I have never really lived more than two hours away from them (parents). I needed to take this job…my dad had just recovered from cancer, my mom had just had a stroke, and here I am leaving.

P004 stated,

> My husband was working from home…so that was interesting that we were all here, but we all had different places to be. The living room is now my office…I have two card tables. Trying to navigate that experience just because so many things were remote. I started getting groceries delivered, and we had a system. I have a 15-year-old who was working remotely, who was not loving school…and so, all of that was very stressful. Trying to get the dissertation done…it was a lot of stress. Trying to manage my son's school and work, and then still do schoolwork, and other stuff that I'm involved in…it was a lot. P005 said,
>
> I had to work around caring for my child due to being home from school. I am used to being at home alone during the day. It really (the pandemic) messed up my study schedule. I am not married so everything falls on me.

P007 noted, "I had to make changes due to being forced to work from home and take care of my child due to my husband spending most of his time at work…daycare facilities

were closed, and I had to scramble to get help with childcare when I had to go to appointments." P009 recounted,

> I had to start working from home during COVID to help care for a relative and I was also having transportation issues. This was challenging because I had to decrease my work hours and had to find a quiet place to do my coursework. I had to get my mind right to participate in the online platform, due to our campus closing. It was scary during everything from home, but I had to find some balance.

Balancing work, motherhood, school, and caring for family members before and amid the pandemic has limited the amount of time that these seven women have to engage in personal and academic time. A couple of women noted that finding a quiet place to commit time to their academic studies assisted them from feeling disconnected from their programs.

Direct and Indirect Effects of COVID-19

Five participants reported that they were either directly or indirectly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic while striving to achieve success in their CES doctoral program. Some participants shared that they did not feel supported in their programs due to lack of COVID related resources and had to find alternative ways to thrive and self-educate themselves regarding the disease. For instance, P002 stated,

> This was a dark time for me because there was not a lot of education regarding the virus. I had a family member who was hospitalized after being diagnosed with COVID. The school went into a panic and did not really have the necessary

resources to provide students about the disease.

P005 mentioned,

> I was diagnosed with COVID but did not have to be hospitalized. I am not used to not being able to go out with my friends and travel. My socialization opportunities have diminished, and it does not help now that I am working from home, trying to balance being a single parent, and taking care of financial responsibilities.

P006 noted,

> I experienced loss, sickness, and I ended up having to take care of a few people who had COVID… I was directly impacted by COVID. I do believe that COVID did impact my program in a very significant way… just overall negative.

P007 mentioned, “I think I had COVID in the beginning of the year but was not sure…I was sick but able to engage in the classroom.” P007 stated that she had an upper respiratory infection but was able to complete coursework.” P008 recounted, "COVID slowed down a lot of things for me. I was diagnosed with COVID in May and had to quarantine at home…I had to withdraw from a course and take some time off of work.

Feelings of Loneliness and Lack of Confidence

Researchers found that Black doctoral students have struggled with social isolation (Berry, 2017; Harley, 2007) and the desire to have their voices heard. Three participants in this study described their lived experiences in their CES doctoral program during the pandemic as lonely, in which some questioned their lack of confidence. P002 noted,

> The program is lonely sometimes when you are the minority. I do not always feel a sense of connection with my peers who are mostly white women. I go to class and then I leave. Although, I feel singled out at times due to being the minority in my program…I am making it work. Once COVID hit, I really felt like a loner and loss my sense of confidence because I felt as if everyone, including my professors, were in a panic. No one was prepared.

P003 mentioned,

> I did the dissertation process…and it was during that time when I would just say, "I think I'm going to quit"…I'm not cut out for this…I can't be a doctor. I don't know how to do what they're asking me to do (faculty). I was not prepared to this. Nobody taught me how to write dissertation…I just couldn't. I was very discouraged during the entire time of the pandemic. I just started to lose belief in the fact that I was worth the degree. A lot of insecurity was happening during that time…and then you're isolated with just your thoughts.

P006 mentioned,

> Counseling programs in general is a lot of introspection, a lot of self-introspection, you always have to look at yourself, your flaws, and your insecurities as a Black woman…the feelings of loneliness…interfering with confidence. I've been unstable really throughout this HBCU program.

The three participants shared common experiences, noting their insecurities and feelings of isolation in their programs. One participant expressed her disbelief in the lack of belonginess she felt, especially since she attended a HBCU. Race also presented in this

area as some participants lacked confidence in being a Black woman due to not feeling appreciated in their academic programs.

Synthesis of Individual Textural-Structural Description: Summary

The desperate need to achieve academic success during the COVID-19 pandemic as described by some of the participants not only meant relying on the support of professors but being self-determined and persistent in taking ownership of their professional development. Some participants described being the only Black woman in their class, and to avoid feelings of isolation and getting behind in their coursework, they utilized campus resources. Three participants spoke highly about the effectiveness of the writing center, the library, and the counseling center. Some participants praised the support they received from their professors, mentors, and academic advisor. Although this was not the lived experience of every participant in this study, other participants prided on academic enjoyment, taking control of their education, and being responsible for their professional wellbeing. Many of the participants expressed the challenges associated with the pandemic and the immediate demand to transition from in-class learning to the virtual platform. To overcome what some of the participants described as internal and external challenges, being open to support helped minimize the disruption caused by the pandemic.

Black women have conquered various challenges and barriers through utilizing supportive networks and developing a pattern of coping strategies to assist them in their doctoral programs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although some of these help-seeking behaviors were utilized prior to the pandemic, some participants noted that depending on

supportive systems during their doctoral programs have enabled them to thrive through situational stressors. It was synchronous amongst all participants in this study, that family and friends were the primary sources of support. One participant described the “listening ear” as a support person who is willing to listen, absent of judgment, and full of sentimental words. Supportive networks are critical in that Black women are historically known to be the most displeased and isolated students on campus. Five participants spoke highly on the opportunity to be a part of a cohort group and others found joy in participating in professional groups such as sororities and Facebook chat platforms. Being given the opportunity to participate in such groups is essential to the lived experiences of Black women. Black women, as shared by the participants in this study, are using culturally based supportive services to overcome challenges and achieve academic success despite the negative effects of the pandemic, race-based incidents, and high levels of stress.

Finding creative ways to overcome academic challenges added additional pressures on the majority of Black women who participated in this study. They dealt with the burdens of having to fight for the attention of professors who appeared overworked from the stressors of the pandemic and had to maneuver through challenges on their own due to not having the academic support that they paid for. Historical challenges of oppression, discrimination, and lack of respect from their White counterparts and professors are still present in the higher education platform and left some participants questioning their self-dignity and self-worth. More than half of the participants indicated the absence of being connected to a Black mentor in their program which is a critical

piece for these women to succeed in their programs. Others reported not having a platform to be amongst other Black students or the ability to connect with culturally specific resources, especially during trying times such as the pandemic. Interestingly, one participant experienced discrimination and lack of respect amongst her own kind while enrolled in a HBCU. In addition, some of the participants had to withdraw from their courses due to health concerns and other factors related to COVID-19. Further, technology issues were also reported to have a negative effect, especially on the participants who were forced to transition from traditional classroom to the online platform due to the pandemic.

Maintaining academic success, as described by the lived experiences of the participants in this study, has not been an easy road due to various personal challenges. Three participants, two enrolled in PWIs and one enrolled at a HBCU, reported feeling lonely due to not having a sense of connection with professors and peers. The stressors of not belonging exacerbated the personal lives of these participants as they started to question their self-worth and mental well-being. Eight, out of the nine participants, reported that the stress of their program and the changes associated with the pandemic either increased existing mental health symptoms or brought upon new mental health symptoms. Interestingly, more than half of the participants reported seeking mental health treatment. Some participants reported having a distrust in the medical and educational system, which was due to factors such as conflicting cultural values and negative past experiences. The second biggest personal challenge reported by seven participants was difficulty balancing work–life responsibilities due to the pandemic. This

entailed working from home, attending classes from home, taking care of family and children, managing self-care, and taking care of additional household responsibilities. Further, two participants were diagnosed with COVID-19 and one participant reported that it was likely that she had the disease. Three participants shared that they were indirectly affected by COVID-19 which required them to take care of loved ones who were fighting the disease. Some of the participants reported having to withdraw from courses and seek leniency on coursework submissions due to direct or indirect effects of COVID-19.

Connecting to the Conceptual Framework

I used a transcendental phenomenological method to understand the success factors and challenges that Black women experienced in CES, online and brick-and-mortar, doctoral programs amid the pandemic. Transcendental phenomenology permitted me to obtain new knowledge directly from the participant's perception while suspending my biases from the data through bracketing (Husserl, 1931). I utilized bracketing when analyzing the data by being aware of my personal perceptions and discussed all concerns with my dissertation committee. The participants' direct quotes were used to refrain from inserting my own biases and ideas into the study findings.

The purpose of my research was to understand the experience as it was lived by Black women who were engaged in academic studies amid the COVID-19 pandemic, in which I suspended all judgments and preconceived notions and focused on their level of awareness (Giorgi, 2012). I was able to be present for the participants' experiences and viewed their experiences through their unique perspectives (Peoples, 2020). As one

person, I do not know all, and receiving knowledge on the lived experiences of the participants' provided understandings that had not previously existed. I identified participants' intentionality in their reporting of information by understanding that their perception of the phenomenon is caused by their personal viewpoints and how they perceived the phenomenon in that moment. For example, two participants reported having arguments with their dissertation Chair the same week of the scheduled interview. I recognized that due to dealing with frustrations and stress related to the outcome of their conversations with their Chairs, their viewpoints on this topic might have been affected. I felt a sense of emotional connection with two of the participants as they shared their experiences, and I was unable to bracket these feelings while in the present moment. During the debriefing phase, I provided the participants the opportunity to reflect on their feelings regarding the phenomena. Further, I consulted with my Chair about the feelings I experienced while in the present moment.

Through the transcendental phenomenological lens, it was critical that I remained aware that the participants were the experts, and my role of the researcher was to receive their information as objectively as possible. Throughout the process, four general themes emerged in the research on Black women's experiences in CES doctoral programs during the COVID-19 pandemic: (a) academic success factors, (b) supportive networks and coping, (c) academic challenges, and (d) personal challenges. These general themes generated 16 subthemes. These general themes and subthemes originated from the participant's horizon and how they viewed their perceptions of their CES doctoral programs during the pandemic in the immediate moment of the interview.

Several of the participants viewed their CES doctoral programs as rewarding, while other participants noted having complex and unique challenges, which impacted their academics before and during the pandemic. The experiences reported by the participants highlighted the importance of having academic support ,the need for counselor educators and counseling professionals to have continuous training in multiculturalism, and mental health awareness. Many participants had the horizon of difficulty and frustration due to the overlap of historical challenges and the pandemic, noting that there continued to be race challenges, a lack of culturally specific resources, and the desire to fit in.

Discrepancies

Participants' lived experiences in their CES doctoral programs varied but their stories were consistent pertaining to experiencing mental health challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The only discrepancy occurred with one participant who did not experience any mental health challenges. However, the participant described having to care for a relative who was experiencing mental health symptoms due to being financially and emotionally affected by the pandemic. The participant shared that this relative was dear to her heart and conveyed the ability to empathize with others who suffer from mental health issues.

General Summary of the Phenomenon

Black women enrolled in CES programs during the COVID-19 pandemic experience a multitude of barriers and have many perceptions of what has worked and not worked during their academic endeavors. The desire to cope with ramifications in their

CES programs during the pandemic often relies on the ability to build healthy relationships with professors and peers, communicate effectively, and have strong connections to supportive networks and mentorships (Rasheem et al. 2018). The ability for Black women to have access to strong connections has helped them to succeed in their academic endeavors and overcome barriers.

In comparison to other ethnic and racial groups, the lived experiences of Black women are embedded in historical challenges that have played a major role in certain unique challenges, such as racism, the yearning to belong, and distrust in systems. Incidence of microaggressions and racism are not new in the Black community, in which Black women continue to witness and directly experience such incidents in their CES programs. Race and racism have historically affected the lives of women of color (Baker & Moore, 2015) and the term White privilege continues to disseminate institutional racism and discrimination. Although the need to belong is likely hidden behind various forms of institutional racism and historical challenges, researchers have found that Black women can press through these barriers and find a sense of belonging with the support of faculty, administrators, and counseling professionals who are aware of their sense of isolation (Bhat et al. 2012; Patterson-Stephens et al. 2017). Black women have felt isolated and unheard in so many platforms such as their communities, law enforcement, medical systems, and educational institutions due to oppression, racism, and discrimination. This has unfortunately caused these women to have a distrust in these systems, in which the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the ability for these women

to find comfort in their educational strides compared to other ethnic groups (Simien, 2020).

The desire to exist outside the category of race and gender was captured in common themes throughout this study. Black women in CES continue to prove their ability to belong and are finding creative ways to cope with unique challenges imposed by the pandemic and within their personal lives. The desire to be heard, recognized, and accepted in both PWIs and HBCUs continue to be on the forefront, particularly during trying times such as the pandemic.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility is defined as the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002). Ways to incorporate credibility in qualitative research is establishing whether the research findings represent plausible information drawn from the participants' original data and is a correct interpretation of the participants' original views. Moustakas (1994) modified van Kaam 7-step method of data analysis was utilized in this qualitative phenomenological study to explore the lived experiences of Black women enrolled in CES doctoral programs during the pandemic. This methodology has been used in past qualitative phenomenological studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) and is proven to be a reliable and essential method for qualitative data analysis. Member checking was employed to ascertain credibility. Research participants were informed of confidentiality, the research process, and the purpose of the study through the informed consent. Participants were debriefed and sent a copy of their

verbatim transcript summary for review and to confirm accuracy. All participants verified their transcript summary and did not respond with any discrepancies. The data analysis process began after completing the member checking process of all nine participants.

Transferability

Transferability ensures that the results can be applied to other Black female CES doctoral students, not just the participants who were chosen for this study. Patton (2015) defined transferability to make certain that the findings of the study can be generalized or transferred to other settings. To ensure transferability, I interviewed participants until data saturation was reached, which means no new information emerged, as I continued the interviews (Patton. 2015). I followed the data analysis plan according to Moustakas's modified van Kaam data analysis plan and used verbatim descriptions of the participants' experiences. This process will enable future researchers to assess if whether the findings are transferable to their research study using similar content and criterion. In addition, purposeful sampling techniques were utilized to foster transferability (Forero et al., 2018).

Dependability

Dependability ensures that the study will produce similar results if replicated (Suter, 2012). To ensure dependability, I followed the interview protocol and provided participants with the opportunity to verify the accuracy of the transcripts to ensure quality of the data (Korjsten & Moser, 2018). Moustakas (1994) modified van Kaam 7-step data analysis method was followed to support transferability and replication. Future

researchers can conduct a similar study with different participants utilizing similar selection criteria.

Confirmability

Confirmability relates to the core issue that findings should represent, the situation being researched rather than the beliefs, and can be verified by other researchers (Gasson, 2004). Korjsten and Moser (2018) noted that confirmability is a form of transparency in which the research results can support future researchers who wishes to conduct studies utilizing the same path. The research results are grounded in the data collected from the participants and not based on the researchers' feelings, biases, or personal feelings regarding the phenomenon. To protect the research from personal bias (Peoples, 2020), I supported this area of trustworthiness by applying triangulation and epoché. Triangulation is the ability to look at the holistic picture from several ways and provides the opportunity to approach the same phenomenon in order to confirm the data collected. I concentrated on the lived experiences of participants throughout the constant emergence of distractions and biases (Peoples, 2020), and the use of triangulation reduced the potential of research bias. This allowed me as the researcher to capture the true descriptions of the participants lived experiences of the phenomenon under investigation.

Summary

Data collection for this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was developed using the following research question: What are the lived experiences of Black women in CES doctoral programs during the COVID-19 pandemic? I used the modified

7-step van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994) to support the analysis of data collected from the participants interviews. The data analysis generated thematic categories, individual textural and structural descriptions, which exemplified the study participants' lived experiences to address the research question and purpose of the study. I identified four themes and 16 subthemes as described and outlines in the results section of this chapter. Black women enrolled or recently graduated from CES programs during the pandemic identified both personal and academic challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of these women used outside support systems to cope with the ramifications of the pandemic and some reported fear of asking for help due to past historical challenges. A synthesis of individual textural-structural analysis was presented for themes regarding the phenomenon under investigation. This study uncovered several discoveries as a result of the data analysis process. Chapter 5 will provide a discussion on the interpretation of the study findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, implications for positive social change, and the final conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Black women enrolled in CES programs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given that Black women in CES programs have historically been underrepresented in the scholarly literature (Bhat et al., 2012; Ward et al., 2009), it is vital to understand how this group of women cope with the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. While trying to ensure that their mental well-being and the mental well-being of their families and clients are intact, participants described the factors that continue to contribute to and impede their efforts to be fully committed to their programs. Henry et al. (2020) noted that job loss, health concerns, role responsibilities, and situational stressors are at the forefront because the pandemic has affected the Black community. As data continue to emerge regarding the adverse effects of the pandemic, the voices of Black women in CES programs must be heard. I conducted this study using Husserl's (1931) phenomenological philosophy to address gaps in the research, including information on how Black women are coping with personal and academic challenges during the pandemic. The main findings in this study are as follows: Black female students find success in their programs through supportive services and networks while continuing to be challenged with cultural and historical issues amid the pandemic.

I chose a qualitative phenomenological approach because it permitted me to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation by expressing, in the participants' own words, their experiences in their CES doctoral programs during difficult times, such as the pandemic. I compared the study results to findings identified

in the literature review in Chapter 2 to determine whether this study added new knowledge and information about the phenomenon under investigation. The findings of this study did support previous research explored in the literature review. Black women continue to be daunted by historical racism, respond better when supported by professors, rely on external academic support systems for guidance, and battle with distrust in the medical and academic systems. This study also contradicted previous research studies in that Black women are less likely to seek mental health supportive services than other ethnic groups. In Chapter 5, I discuss the research findings, limitations, recommendations, implications for social change, and conclusions.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings were interpreted using a transcendental phenomenological approach, and I diligently compared and contrasted the themes and information received from all nine participants to the current literature found in Chapter 2. I used transcendental phenomenology to confirm that the interpretation did not go beyond the data, findings, and extent of this study. In this section, I will compare and contrast some previous research on Black women doctoral students, including research on the pandemic, with my current results.

Haynes (2019) conducted a qualitative research study grounded in Black feminist geographic theory to explore the success factors of Black female doctoral students attending PWIs. Haynes noted that Black women prided themselves on their intellectual achievements, despite race factors and challenges, and found that this group of women relied on self-determination and academic enjoyment to reap academic success. However,

Haynes found that these women did not receive adequate academic support compared to White peers and males.

My results confirm and contradicts some of the aspects of Haynes's (2019) study. Every single participant in this study expressed at least one experience regarding their continued motivation to strive for academic success amid the pandemic. The success factors guiding these motivations included being free to engage in autonomy and having a passion for the goals of their program. Two participants expressed that a combination of self-determination and academic enjoyment influenced their ability to achieve academic success while taking courses during the pandemic. One participant expressed that she was one of three Black students in her class and was determined to keep up with her White counterparts. Several participants expressed a level of resiliency and were eager not to let the adverse effects of the pandemic impede their academic success. The results of this study contradicted Haynes's findings in that five participants reported having positive experiences with professors, mostly while attending PWIs, and noted that these professors were supportive and open to offering leniency to complete coursework when faced with challenges.

Chaney (2020) conducted a study based on the ABC-X Model and found that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought Black families together and noted that these relationships have helped to provide mental, emotional, and spiritual support. In similar findings, Simien (2020) articulated that Black women are turning to spiritual and family support due to historical challenges that has led to mistrust in various systems.

My research confirmed this information as the support of family and friends was a consistent subtheme across all nine participants' experiences. Participants described their relationship with family and friends as supportive, encouraging, and understanding. Two participants shared that their family and friends were there to help them cope with stressors related to their academics and one participant described her family as the "listening ear." Some of the participants shared challenges related to the pandemic and reported sticking together to support each other. Six participants expressed that they relied on their spirituality to cope with stressors in their personal lives and academics due to distrust in the medical and academic systems. Luna and MacMillan (2015) argued the importance of counselor educators being aware that spirituality is a critical component of the Black culture and that students' cultural beliefs can prevent mental health symptomatology.

Cook et al. (2017) used a systematic view of data from a national sample collected from three racial-ethnic groups and found that minimum progress was made in reducing disparities in access to mental health care for Blacks. The Well Being Trust (2018) released a report the following year and concluded that 69% of Black adults received no mental health treatment compared to other ethnic groups. Watson and Hunter (2015) conducted a quantitative study on Black women's underutilization of mental health services and found that, due to cultural expectations, Black women generally do not seek mental health services as often as White women do. Further, Elmer et al. (2020) conducted a qualitative study and found that the COVID-19 pandemic has been linked to high rates of anxiety and depression in Black women.

My study confirms and contradicts some of the aspects of the studies by Cook et al. (2017), Well Being Trust (2015), and Elmer et al. (2020). Eight participants reported that their mental health had worsened since the onset of the pandemic and expressed that they experienced an increase in anxiety and depression. Several participants expressed distrust in the medical and education system due to cultural and historical factors and reported that mental health is frowned upon in their community. One participant stated, "I feel like COVID has brought a lot of anxiety … and a lot of sickness in my body." Another participant stated, "I started having a lot of panic attacks due to all the stress, but in my culture, taking psychiatric medications is frowned upon, and I just do not trust the medical system." On the contrary, this study contradicts the abovementioned studies as six participants reported receiving mental health support from a therapist, primary care physician, or psychiatrist and expressed that mental health support was a supportive factor.

Walkington (2017) conducted a sociological research study and found that faculty are working in positions where they are stressed, overworked, and left to cope with institutional and individual barriers. Walkington noted that Black female doctoral students often feel the need to silence themselves when confronted with racially unsympathetic and racist statements from faculty and peers. Walkington concluded that Black female graduate students in higher education continue to face multiple oppressions at the intersections of race, gender, and class.

My research confirmed this information from Walkington (2017) as five participants reported feeling that their professors appeared overworked and unavailable to

provide adequate academic and emotional support. Some noted having this experience even before the pandemic. One participant stated, “I feel like the professors are overworked or just do not know how to communicate with a student from a different background.” Several participants expressed that the school panicked due to the pandemic and felt they were on the bottom of the “totem pole” as Black students.

Six participants expressed that they experienced race challenges and a lack of respect from their White counterparts and professors. The participants in this study spoke freely about their experiences regarding race challenges and lack of respect in a setting where they should feel safe. One participant reported that she attempted to share her beliefs regarding the Black culture and, in return, felt disrespected by her White classmates. Another participant shared that her dissertation chair responded to her comments from a “privileged space” where she immediately observed the “power balance.” Two participants expressed that they did not trust “White people” due to past traumatic experiences related to race and oppression. Further, one participant expressed that she felt disrespected by her peers, whereas another participant who attends an HBCU reported being discriminated against by her academic advisor.

Rasheem et al. (2018) used a Black Feminist framework to explore mentoring relationships among Black women in doctoral programs. Rasheem et al. (2018) concluded that Black women, although enrolled in various doctoral programs, collectively experienced mentorship significant in their professional and personal lives. The participants all noted that having a mentor who shared similar characteristics, such as physical attributes and values, increased academic success.

My research results confirmed the information in this study as six of the participants reported that having a connection with a Black mentor and equal access to culturally specific resources was a significant concern. Four participants' experiences were similar; all felt that their programs failed to provide them with resources tailored to women of color, particularly resources about the pandemic. One participant stated that it was a struggle not to connect with other Black women in her program. Another participant expressed that she expected "culture support," especially attending a HBCU. Three participants who were matched with a Black faculty mentor and had access to culturally specific resources felt a sense of belonging and emotional support, especially during the pandemic.

Johnson et al. (2020) used a quantitative survey-based study to examine Black women's engagement, support, and challenges during the COVID-19 crisis. Johnson et al. concluded that Black women experienced higher stress levels, health disparities, and insecurities than White students. This is consistent with Simien's (2020) findings that Black women have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic than other race groups and are challenged with managing various role responsibilities. These responsibilities entailed managing academic requirements, caring for children, supporting family members, and taking care of finances as head of the household (Simien, 2020).

The results of Johnson et al.'s (2020) and Simien's (2020) studies confirm the information in this study as seven participants expressed that they experienced personal challenges during the pandemic in their CES doctoral program due to managing work–life responsibilities. Two participants shared that they had to work around caring for their

children due to daycare facilities closing during the pandemic. Other participants expressed difficulty with working from home, caring for family members, and the stress of having to alter various schedules to meet academic standards. One participant stated, "Trying to manage my son's school, my work, still do homework, and other stuff I'm involved in … it was a lot." Another participant stated, "I had to start working from home during COVID to help care for a relative and had to decrease my work schedule."

Five participants reported experiencing personal challenges in their CES doctoral program due to being directly or indirectly affected by COVID-19. Two participants shared that they were diagnosed with the disease, which led to one of these participants having to withdraw from her courses. One participant stated, "This was a dark time for me because there was not a lot of information regarding the virus…I felt like the school went into a panic and did not have the necessary resources to provide students about the disease." Two participants reported having to take care of family and friends diagnosed with the disease, which indirectly affected their academic studies.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations factored into this qualitative phenomenological study. The first limitation is generalizability. The sample size was small and limited to Black women enrolled in CES doctoral programs. Therefore, results from this qualitative study may not be transferable to the general population because the sample population does not represent women and men from other racial or ethnic groups. However, 20% of CES doctoral students are Black women (CACREP, 2016). Therefore, higher institutions,

counselor educators, and counseling professionals may find these results applicable to Black female doctoral students.

The second limitation was the role of the researcher. As the sole researcher of this study, I am both a Black woman and a current CES doctoral student. I employed the epoché process to reduce researcher bias (Husserl, 1931), which supported trustworthiness and confirmability as addressed throughout this study. The transcendental phenomenology method entails that the researcher suspends preexisting knowledge, prejudgments, and beliefs of the phenomenon under investigation (Husserl, 1931; Moustakas, 1994). Throughout this study, I remained aware of my beliefs, thoughts, and knowledge about being a Black woman and my experience as a current CES doctoral student during the COVID-19 pandemic. To view the phenomenon for the first time (Moustakas, 1994), I bracketed my beliefs, thoughts, and knowledge throughout the process. To lessen researcher bias, I completed a process called member checking, which provided all participants the opportunity to verify the accuracy of information received from the verbatim transcripts. Further, I remained aware of participant bias because they know that I am a CES doctoral student with similar cultural characteristics. Participants may have felt the need to answer the interview questions based on what they thought I wanted to hear instead of providing their accurate perceptions of the phenomenon under investigation. The primary attitude I maintained throughout the data analysis process was one of inquisitiveness. Any biases presented about this population, especially since I am a Black female CES doctoral student, were set aside and bracketed (Peoples, 2020). I asked

the participants about my assumptions as the researcher, careful not to assume anything (Peoples, 2020).

The final limitation was the use of purposive sampling. It was possible for the participants to manipulate the data being collected (Marshall, 1996). Ravitch and Carl (2016) reported that when participants know that they have been selected for a project, it can initiate a change in their behavior. Participants may choose to act in a way that allows researchers to reach the conclusions that they expect to see, or they may choose to lie to create an unwanted outcome because they have a bias of their own that they want to take public (Marshall, 1996). To minimize the likelihood of this happening, it was my responsibility to determine if the participants were truthful.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are considerable opportunities for future research regarding the adverse effects of the pandemic on students, in general. This study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, more research is needed about how doctoral students in counseling and other programs are coping with the aftermath. Replicating this study once the pandemic has flattened with a diverse group of participants would be valuable in that a similar study can validate this study's findings, add to the qualitative data accessible to other researchers, and reveal new understandings. Research addressing the implications of the pandemic on higher education students can include cultural factors, ethnicity, specific geographic locations, and gender differences. These factors could provide researchers with an abundance of information on the effects of the pandemic within the higher education system.

Many of the women in this study had challenges with feeling isolated from their peers and professors. Gur et al. (2020) noted that Black women have historically faced isolation in their doctoral programs, which the pandemic has likely exacerbated. Higher education institutions can establish cohort networks and attempt to hire more diverse faculty members to support students during difficult times such as the pandemic. Universities can provide culturally responsive resources and help facilitate a community of diversity between students and professors. It would be beneficial to collect data from participants to determine if culturally specific resources, same-race mentors, and cohort networks improve outcomes for Black students to enhance richness of the findings of this study.

Several Black women in this study indicated that they experienced a form of racism in their doctoral program. Not everything could have been realized by me, the researcher, and the emotional experience of the participants could have been missed at the time of the interview and while analyzing the data. However, future research should focus on the history and ongoing concerns of racism in the educational system, both during and after the pandemic, to determine what services and supports can be put into place to ensure that all students are treated fairly.

Implications for Positive Social Change

The results of this research study can bring positive social change on various levels. This study is significant because it highlights that Black women are strong and have overcome challenges to remain successful in their CES doctoral programs during the pandemic. The lived experiences of Black women doctoral students in this study

revealed that their overall experience in their CES doctoral program has not been easy. The adverse effects of the pandemic have forced them to face historical challenges while implementing supportive ways to help cope with ramifications of the pandemic. The stories shared by the participants may also enable other Black female doctoral students' ways to prepare for future pandemics while pursuing their educational journeys. Having information on what other Black women have experienced, both positive and negative, may provide the knowledge necessary for individuals so that their educational journey is not faced with challenges. The importance of Black academic mentorship, access to supportive services, sympathetic and knowledgeable leaders, and self-determination were key factors for consideration.

This study may have an impact on positive social change at the organizational level. Black women in this study sought supportive services to deal with mental health challenges and concerns related to the pandemic from external support systems outside of the academic setting due to fear of being stereotyped and simply having no knowledge of resources on their campuses. This information may help higher education institutions update and change policies and practices that foster diverse and cultural counseling resources and services. Moreover, the stories shared by the participants may be instrumental in illuminating the negative perceptions commonly associated with Black women and help to fill a gap in the counseling literature. The results of this study may highlight the need for cultural competency training for counselor educators and counseling professionals. Therefore, this study would include sharing the results with

higher education institutions, counseling educators, counseling professionals, and other Black women CES doctoral programs.

Further, this study may have implications for positive social change at the society level. The goal is to publish the results of this study, make them available to the research participants, and the public so that everyone is aware of the experiences of Black women CES doctoral students during the current pandemic. To provide additional recognition of the findings, the plan is to share the results at local and national leadership conferences. Sharing these findings may have significant implications on understanding how Black women cope with challenges, mental health needs, and health disparities while pursuing their degrees during the pandemic.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this research study allowed for Black women in CES doctoral programs the opportunity to have a voice and share their overall experience in their academic programs during the current COVID-19 pandemic. When the voices are heard from those who have overcome historical challenges, fought through mental health concerns, and survived the negative ramifications of the pandemic can motivate and help others overcome similar experiences. The findings of this study reveal a continuous need to address the ramifications of the pandemic for doctoral students in all academic programs, as there is underrepresentation in the scholarly literature (Bhat et al., 2012; Simien, 2020). This study is one of the first to address Black women in CES doctoral programs during the COVID-19 pandemic, but further research is needed as the pandemic has had a significant impact on educational institutions worldwide. This study

has also proven that historical racism still exists in the educational system, both at PWIs and HBCUs. The nine phenomenal Black women who participated in this study faced their fears and imparted themes that revealed that their academic journey during the pandemic was not easy and filled with challenges. Nevertheless, some participants found comfort in supportive services to stay on course in their programs.

This study validated strategies cited in the literature that included outside supportive services, mentoring, ways to overcome historical challenges, and coping mechanisms to deal with the negative ramifications of the pandemic. By providing a safe place for each participant to share their stories, higher educational institutions, counseling educators, counseling professionals, and other Black female CES students may better understand how Black women are finding success in the programs during the pandemic. The results of this study may contribute to positive social change by providing higher educational institutions, counselor educators, and counseling professionals with information to consider fostering diverse and culturally specific resources, increase an understanding of historical factors affecting current challenges during the pandemic, and create ways to build relationships with Black students.

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Appendix A: Data Collection Interview Protocol and Questions

Interview Protocol

Hello, my name is Cynthia Williams and I want to thank you for taking the time to participate in this research study. I am currently a doctoral student at Walden University enrolled in the Counselor Education and Supervision Program (CES). My dissertation focuses on the lived experience of Black women in CACREP-accredited CES doctoral programs during the COVID-19 Pandemic. I want to reiterate that you can terminate your involvement in this interview at any time and also want to remind you that this interview is being recorded on a separate device. The interview is planned to run about an hour, and I would like to follow-up with you once I have had the opportunity to analyze and process our conversation for further clarification. My goal is to make this conversation comfortable, but I do have some prepared questions to guide the conversation. Do you have any questions before we get started? Are you ready to start?

Interview Questions/Guide

Overall CES Experience

1. Describe for me your overall experience in your CES doctoral program.
2. Describe for me, if any, challenges, or problems you have experienced in your CES doctoral program.
3. Tell me about your experiences related to what has helped overcome these challenges in your CES doctoral program.

CES Experience related to COVID-19

4. Tell me about your experience in your CES program during COVID-19.

5. Describe for me your experience of how you were affected or not affected by COVID-19.

6. How did your experiences change as a result of COVID-19?

Challenges, Supportive Services, and Coping Strategies

7. Describe your experience with how you are coping in your counseling program during this time?

8. Describe for me your experience of how you are dealing with stress during COVID-19.

9. Tell me about your experiences with mental health symptoms related to COVID-19. Describe to me what those symptoms are?

10. Tell me about your experience working with client's or completing coursework during COVID-19.

11. Tell me about your experience with talking to faculty about barriers or challenges in your counseling program during COVID-19.

12. Describe for me your experience pertaining to the use of any supportive services from the university during this time. Describe to me what those services were.

13. Tell me about your experiences using supportive services outside of the program or university.

14. How can your experience in your counseling program be improved during COVID-19? What has or has not been helpful?

15. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix B: Qualtrics Demographic Questionnaire

The following demographic questions were included with the informed consent form:

What is your first name and email address?

What state is your CES doctoral program located in?

Length of time in your CES program?
- 0-1 year
- 1-2 years
- 2-5 years

What is your age?
- Under 18
- 18 - 24
- 25 - 34
- 35 - 44
- 45 - 54
- 55 - 64
- 65 - 74
- 75 - 84
- 85 or older

Ethnicity
- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Other

What is your marital status?
- Married
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Separated
- Never married

Employment Status

- Employed full time
- Employed part time
- Unemployed looking for work
- Unemployed not looking for work
- Retired
- Student
- Disabled

Household Income

- Less than $10,000
- $10,000 - $19,999
- $20,000 - $29,999
- $30,000 - $39,999
- $40,000 - $49,999
- $50,000 - $59,999
- $60,000 - $69,999
- $70,000 - $79,999
- $80,000 - $89,999
- $90,000 - $99,999
- $100,000 - $149,999
- More than $150,000

How many children do you have under the age of 18?

- 1
- 2
- 3 or more

Were you exposed or diagnosed with COVID-19?

- yes
- no
- Not sure