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Exploring the Experiences of Black Male School Counselors in US Public Schools

Torrenzo Moore
Walden University

Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Health

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Torrenzo Moore

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Review Committee
Dr. Leann Morgan, Committee Chairperson, Counselor Education and Supervision
Faculty
Dr. Tylon Crook, Committee Member, Counselor Education and Supervision Faculty
Dr. Kenard Sanders, University Reviewer, Counselor Education and Supervision Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Counselor Education and Supervision

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Abstract

The problem associated with this research inquiry is that Black males are underrepresented in school counselor positions in K-12 schools. Although studies exist in the literature that highlight their importance in the education arena, the impact of Black males working in the school counseling profession has not been well-researched. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive, phenomenological study was to understand the unique experiences of Black male school counselors regarding their underrepresentation in the school counseling profession. The conceptual framework guiding this study is Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological psychological method and social constructivist theory was the theoretical framework. Procedural processes associated with the descriptive phenomenological psychological approach was implemented to collect and analyze data. Results indicated that while Black male school counselors faced personal and professional challenges, supportive services and networks contributed to their success as school counselors in K-12 public schools. The findings from this study will impact positive social change by bringing awareness to counselor education graduate programs and potentially boost recruitment and retention efforts as well as influence school district stakeholders to improve upon their efforts to increase diversity within their campuses' school counseling programs.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated my family and friends. I had so many challenges throughout this process, but my faith in completing this doctorate never wavered. To my wife and the love of my life, Niccole, thank you for your love, encouragement, and patience throughout this journey. I am deeply appreciative of your support. To my twin daughters Addison and Harper, you both are my "why" for completing this journey and to show you that anything is possible with hard work, dedication, and determination. I love you both dearly. To my mother Wanda Wright and my father Walter Hammonds, thank you for life and for shaping me to be the person that I am today. I am eternally grateful for the both of you. To my late aunt and grandmother, Annie Mae Peeples and Clorana Hammonds, I wish you both were still here 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 all encouraged and supported me throughout my life. Finally, thank you to all my family and friends who provided me with encouragement, support and checked in on me when I need you the most. I am forever thankful.

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Table of Contents

iii

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The United States (US) has seen a sweeping racial and ethnic demographic shift over the past 50 years (Goings & Bianco, 2016). Colby and Ortman (2014) asserted that people of color will become the majority of the US population by the year 2040. Based on this demographic shift, K-12 public schools in the US have also become more racially and ethnically diverse, especially with Black and Hispanic students. Washington (2015) stated that schools should be inviting for all students to achieve academically, and social/emotionally, "despite their racial or ethnic identification or socioeconomic status" (p. 2). Not many Black males experience education in this manner. For instance, Grace (2020) noted that Black males are denied access to quality teaching, resources, and rigorous curriculum. Instead, Black male students are subjected to being taught by unqualified or low performing teachers, inappropriately labeled, and placed in special education programs, and are underrepresented in Advanced Placement (AP) or college-level courses (Vivian, 2017; Sacks, 2019).

Consequently, such discrepancies tend to lead to disproportionately harsh discipline practices that have historically impacted Black male students. An example of unreasonable discipline practices is that Black males are suspended three times more than White males and other peers for discretionary infractions such as disrespect and disruptive behavior (Grace, 2020; Toldson et al., 2015). When students are removed from the classroom, it leads to less instructional time, which increases gaps in academic achievement (Grace, 2020). Additionally, the spread of COVID-19 to the United States initiated a surge in school closures that displaced millions of students from their

traditional learning environments, forcing students to discontinue in-person instruction for the rest of the academic year and relying on virtual learning (Education Week, 2020). With the persistent achievement gaps across income levels and between White students and students of color, school shutdowns could not only cause disproportionate learning losses for marginalized students, but also lead more of them to drop out (Dorn et al., 2020).

The U.S. Department of Education reported a U.S. graduation rate of over 84% during the 2015-16 school year (Balingit, 2017). National graduation rates for Black and Hispanic students were 76% and 79% respectively (Balingit, 2017). Although Black students experienced an increase in graduation rates, Balingit (2017) noted that school districts used questionable methods to get students across the finish line such as implementing relaxed grading scales and credit recovery programs that allowed students to take truncated versions of courses to make up failing grades. Consequently, these desperate measures have provided a great disservice to Black students as far as their preparation for the workforce or obtaining effective higher education. Goings and Bianco (2016) revealed that low expectations, racial stereotypes, and microaggressions contributed to negative school experiences for Black male students. These negative experiences have led some Black males to become disinterested in school, increasing their risk of dropping out. Diversifying K-12 public schools by increasing Black male educators is a solution for addressing the underachievement among Black students (Lewis & Toldson, 2013).

Black males can be influential in promoting culturally inclusive and productive campus settings that lead to favorable academic and behavioral outcomes for all students by serving as professional school counselors (Dollarhide et al., 2013). In Gershenson et al. (2018), the researchers examined the long-term impacts of exposure to a Black teacher for both Black and White students. Their findings concluded that Black students randomly assigned to at least one Black teacher in grades K-3 were 13% more likely to graduate from high school and 19% more likely to enroll in college than their peers who did not encounter a Black teacher (Gershenson et al., 2018). Evans and Leonard (2013) asserted that increasing the diversity of the K-12 public education workforce is essential so that all students can experience the passion and plurality that educators of different backgrounds bring to the profession (p.12). Addressing multicultural and social justice issues through school counselor leadership can serve as a valuable resource by creating a culture of acceptance that allows all students who are marginalized to thrive and reach their potential in school (Holcomb-McCoy & Chen-Hayes, 2011; Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018).

Professional school counselors are charged with promoting an inclusive educational environment and using culturally appropriate counseling techniques that create productive relationships with Black male students (Washington, 2015). Black students can benefit from having a Black male in an educator role (ex. teachers, administrators, and school counselors) since they are more likely to be familiar with the cultural characteristics and language of Black students as well as have the skills and ability to motivate them to learn (Underwood et al., 2019). According to Lewis and

Toldson (2013), the lack of Black male educators contributes to systemic issues in schools, such as cultural bias and stereotype threat, which directly or indirectly impact the academic performance of Black students. Considering the gap in the numbers between Black students and Black educators, Black male educators are more likely to be familiar with the cultural needs of Black students, which can create the potential for positive academic success (Underwood et al., 2019). Gershenson et al. (2018) stated that male students from marginalized communities are less likely to drop out of school if they have an opportunity to be taught and mentored by one Black male educator during elementary school. Such a connection would lead to lower dropout rates, fewer disciplinary issues, more positive views of school, and better test scores for Black male students.

Although studies exist in the literature that highlight their importance in the education arena, the impact of Black males working in the school counseling profession has not been well documented in the literature. The findings from this study may impact positive social change by bringing awareness to counselor graduate programs to boost recruitment and retention efforts as well as influence school district stakeholders to improve upon their efforts to increase Black male representation within school counseling programs. In this chapter, I discussed the background, problem, purpose of the study, research question, framework, and nature of the study. Also, operational definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and the significance of this study, as well as the implications for social change will be explored.

Background of the Study

Many researchers have contributed studies to the counseling literature that discuss the importance of increasing diversity in counselor education programs as well as K-12 public schools. For this study, I referenced several studies relating to the experiences of Black males regarding their contributions to the counseling profession, reasons for the underrepresentation in the profession, and potential recruitment and retention efforts to increase this population. Wines et al. (2015) examined the experiences of 10 Black school counselors who work in predominantly White-culture (PWC) school districts. In this study, PWC school districts are defined as one of the 78 suburban school districts located in a state in the southwestern part of the United States. Those school districts comprised of predominantly White administrators, counselors, teachers, and support staff. PWC school districts are described as enabling a culture that infused a privileged disposition among stakeholders and have pervasive and institutionalized ways of excluding others through a lack of cultural competence, sensitivity, and understanding (Wines et al., 2015). Participants for the study were selected based on the following criteria: (a) identified as a Black man or woman, (b) were currently or formerly employed as a school counselor, (c) had at least 1 year of school counseling experience, and (d) were working or previously worked in a PWC school district in the southwest United States. The researchers used Giorgi's data collection and analysis process to explore the phenomenology of Black school counselors in predominantly White-culture school districts.

The results of this study revealed the following six themes: (a) privileged and hegemonic mind-set, (b) pervasive evaluation, (c) cultural encapsulation, (d) workplace resistance, (e) self-help preservation, and (f) acceptance of Blacks. Reflecting on the first theme, participants in Wines et al. (2015) reflected on how challenging it was to work with counselors, teachers, administration, and parents with privileged and hegemonic mind-sets as they experienced racism and forced assimilation. The participants believed that due to their race, they were subjected to high levels of scrutiny as they were constantly evaluated by administration, counselors, teachers, and parents. For the third theme, the participants believed they were culturally encapsulated or felt culturally isolated from the dominant culture because of the lack of knowledge and understanding of relationships with persons of other cultures. The participants reported that they experienced workplace resistance from faculty and staff who demonstrated oppositional and blatant disrespect toward the Black school counselors (Wines et al., 2015). The fifth theme that emerged was that the participants believed it was essential for Black school counselors to implement self-help preservation skills or physical and mental coping mechanisms to soothe themselves in stressful and challenging school environments. Finally, the sixth theme that emerged from this study was that Black school counselors engage in multicultural activities on their campuses to help the dominant culture develop greater awareness and become accepting of members from marginalized communities. A limitation of the study was the small number of Black male school counselor participants, which reflects the lack of gender and cultural diversity within the school counseling

profession. This study provides a baseline to further explore the experiences of Black males serving in school counselor positions.

Wines (2013) conducted an autophenomenography to discuss multicultural leadership in school counseling from her personal perspective as a female Black school counselor who served as a lead counselor and researcher, while working in a PWC school district. An autophenomenography is a qualitative research method that "utilizes data about self, and its context to gain an understanding of the connectivity between self and others within the same context" (Ngunjiri et al., 2010 as cited in Wines, 2013, p. 44). The theoretical framework used in Wines's study was critical race theory (CRT). According to Wines (2013), CRT refers to "the new analytic rubric for considering difference and inequity using multiple methodologies such as stories, voices, metaphors, analogies, critical social science, feminism, and postmodernism" for social change, reverse marginalization, and eradication of oppressive practices (p. 42).

As in the previous study, Giorgi's data collection and analysis process was used to explore the phenomenology of Black school counselors in predominantly White-culture school districts. The results of this study reflected Wines's successes and challenges in multicultural leadership as a Black lead counselor and researcher. For instance, several themes that reflected the author's successes where the ability to serve as a liaison between the campus and district, the desire to maintain personal intrinsic or internal awareness, and demystify the rose-colored glasses, which implies that stakeholders in school districts and universities are not able to see the phenomena related to the experiences of Black school counselors (Wines, 2013). Several themes that reflected the

author's challenges were interdepartmental resistance from other counselors and paraprofessional staff, assumptions that others made about the author's interpretation of self, and the challenge of extrinsic or external influences. The findings from this study supports the need for specificity and expansion of multicultural leadership in school counseling. In other words, stakeholders for K-12 school districts must begin advocating and having meaningful discussions about the placement and hiring practices of Black school counselors in school counseling programs. Wines's autophenomenography study contributed to the lack of literature regarding Black school counselors and their multicultural leadership experiences.

Mental health is a vital component of overall physical health and satisfaction (Vance, 2019). According to Vance (2019), the Black community suffers from an increased level of mental health difficulties such as anxiety and depression. The increased prevalence of mental health concerns in Black communities is a result of a lack of access to appropriate and culturally responsive mental health care, prejudice and racism experienced in the daily environment of Black individuals, and historical trauma enacted on the Black community by the medical field (Smith, 2015; Vance, 2019). To address the disparity of mental health services, Smith (2015) asserted that racial-ethnic matching of therapists and clients could help to overcome the mistrust and stigma that often prevents Black Americans from seeking mental health care. In support of Smith's assertion, Cabral and Smith (2011) conducted a quantitative study that revealed that Black Americans strongly preferred to be matched with Black therapists. There are small number of

therapists of color in the mental health care profession, which makes it less likely that a Black client can request or be assigned a Black clinician.

Based on workforce data from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA, 2019), approximately 55.8% of mental/behavioral health professionals were non-Hispanic/White and 27.9% were Black/African American. If the trajectory of minorities becoming the majority of the US population by 2040 (Colby & Ortman, 2014), the aforementioned percentages are inadequate, which indicate a more diverse workforce will be needed to meet the needs of marginalized communities. The inclusion of Black counselors will provide the counseling profession with an additional resource to address the mental health problems and concerns within the Black community.

Knowing the factors that contribute to Black school counselors' job satisfaction and experiences would help in the recruitment of Black counselors and Black male school counselors into the profession and help retain those already employed in the field (Jones et al., 2009; Dollarhide et al., 2013). Jones et al. (2009) used a quantitative approach to investigate the job satisfaction of 182 Black counseling professionals who serve in counselor roles and determined variables that influence their approval with the profession. A modified version of the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) and a Data Information Form (DIF) were distributed to participants, and the results showed that 87% of the participants were satisfied or very satisfied with their current job and 13% indicated they were dissatisfied (Jones et al., 2009). For instance, Black counseling professionals were satisfied with the social service facet (being able to do things for

others), which fell within the very satisfied category. Other factors where Black counseling professionals reported feeling satisfied were moral values, achievement, activity, and independence. Jones et al. (2009) noted that the advancement component (the opportunity to achieve a higher position) was the only aspect where Black counseling professionals indicated that they were dissatisfied with their opportunity to attain an advanced position. This study contributes to the existing literature by addressing the work experiences of Black counselors. The results of this inquiry can serve as a recruiting method for Black males into the counseling profession, especially much-needed professional school counselor roles.

Dollarhide et al. (2013) explored the positive and negative experiences of racially and ethnically diverse school counselors on their campuses. A grounded-theory qualitative study was used to interview 19 school counselors of color. The results of this study revealed that the school environment significantly impacts the participants' experiences in terms of supportive colleagues, administration, and programming. However, only one participant in this study identified as a minority male, which indicates more research is needed to explore how the school environment impacts Black male school counselors' experiences.

Using a mixed methods approach, Michel et al. (2013) examined the perceptions of 217 counselor educators and 10 counseling graduate students who identified as a male, belonging to any race or ethnic group. The purpose of the study was to understand the lived experiences of being a male student or counselor educator in a counseling graduate program and explored how they were recruited into their respective programs. The

authors conducted individual semi-structured interviews with five master's level and 5 doctoral level students. For the second sample, the authors used the Male Recruitment Survey–Counselor Version (MRS-C) with the 217 male counselor educators to examine perceived male presence and recruitment into the counseling profession. Findings from the study revealed the following themes: (a) the voice of male students were lacking, (b) the number of male counselors affected client options, and (c) how counselors-in-training and counselor educators perceived efforts to recruit men into counseling graduate programs. The authors encouraged counselor education programs to develop stronger and more sophisticated marketing and recruitment strategies to increase male enrollment.

Cross-Lee (2014) conducted a qualitative study that provided insight into the career paths of eleven Black male professional counselors that provide mental health services within Black communities. The researcher implemented Cross's (1971) nigrescence model on racial identity, and Krumboltz's (1996) social cognitive career theory (SCCT) as the framework to examine the impact racial identity attitudes had on the research participants career development constructs. The nigrescence model is based on a psychological process of becoming Black through a series of transformative, pathological, life experiences consisting of five racial identity developmental stages that begin in late adolescence and continue throughout adulthood. The tenets of the model include the pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment phases (Cross, 1971; Cross-Lee, 2014).

There are factors that contribute to career satisfaction. In this study, Cross-Lee (2014) utilized SCCT to explore how the backgrounds of Black male counselors affected

their learning experiences and career interests (Wright et al., 2013). A semistructured interview was used to obtain data about the educational and work experiences of Black male participants who provided mental health services in their communities. Findings from the study were consistent with the current literature in that the counseling profession needs to work on building diversity amongst its counselor educators, students, and professionals by establishing a strong multicultural identity throughout the mental health community. The participants in this study reported being highly satisfied with their career choice since they can inspire and give back to the Black community as well as collaborate with colleagues to address mental health concerns across ethnic groups. The passion that these Black male counselors exhibited in this study presents a case for increasing diversity in the counseling profession.

To increase opportunities for Black males to work and contribute to the counseling profession, counselor education programs must commit to enhancing their recruiting and retention practices. Awareness about the lack of Black male representation within mental health counseling programs has been increased through research documenting the efficacy of Black males as counselors working in their communities (Brooks & Steen 2010; Chandler, 2010; Spurgeon & Myers, 2010). Chandler (2010) conducted a qualitative study with 44 Black students and three Black faculty members from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). The purpose of this qualitative study was to offer strategies for recruiting and retaining Black students and faculty in psychology graduate programs. Participants consisted of 39 female students, five male students and three female faculty members. Grounded theory constant

comparative analysis was used (Rennie, 1994 as cited in Chandler, 2010) to analyze data gathered from students and faculty.

The results in this study produced five emerging themes:

(a) a desire and responsibility to uplift the Black community through their work,

(b) the need for a community atmosphere, (c) the need to establish connections between psychology fields and Black community issues, (d) the need for early exposure to and increased awareness of psychology fields, and (e) the need for programs to offer prospective students firsthand experience with psychological work. (p. 109)

Based on the participant demographics for this study, the psychology field appears to be experiencing similar challenges as the counseling profession as far as recruiting and retaining Black males. Findings of this study offer insight into potential recruitment and retention efforts of Black males into the profession of school counseling.

Counseling graduate programs need to develop effective programs that foster positive relationship development for Black male students, especially at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI). Spurgeon and Myers (2010) stated their quantitative study sought to identify unique strengths of successful Black male students. Participants for this study included 103 Black males from HBCUs and 100 Black males from PWIs students. The research question for this study focused on whether there is a correlation between racial identity, wellness and the type of college attended in the life experiences of Black college men. The results of this study produced critical factors that may assist in the development of Black males in colleges and K-12 schools. For instance, counselor

education programs and K-12 school districts can develop effective programs that promote positive relationship development and greater physical wellness to enhance social networking and stress management for Black male graduate students and school counselors (Spurgeon & Myers, 2010). School counselor education programs can help enhance both student development and counseling services for Black male students by hiring and mentoring Black male school counselors so they can act as role models and mentors to students of color within their care.

Brooks and Steen (2010) examined the insights of 12 Black male counselor educators regarding their underrepresentation as faculty members in counselor education programs. Semistructured interviews were conducted with each participant and produced the following themes: (a) academic life is flexible, yet unfulfilling, (b) opportunities to do meaningful work, and (c) concerns for recruitment and retention of Black male counselor educators (Brooks & Steen, 2010). The researchers noted that further studies are needed to advocate for a profession that is racially and ethnically reflective of its clients. The shortage of Black males provides a limited view of the Black community, which negatively impacts their contribution to the counseling profession (Brooks & Steen, 2010). Findings from the study highlighted a need for effective recruitment and mentoring of Black male counselor educators who are pursuing tenured faculty positions in counselor education programs. The same can be applied for increasing Black male representation in professional school counseling.

Finally, there are few studies that offered Black male students' perception of their school counselors and the quality of services they received (Owens et al., 2011;

Washington, 2015). Owens et al. (2011) conducted a phenomenology study that explored urban Black male students' perception of their school counselors and methods of improving school counseling services. A total of 10 students ranging from the ages of 14 to 17, provided signed parental consent to participate in the study. The findings yielded three key themes: (a) "positive experiences and regard toward school counselors; (b) academic support needed to navigate the educational process; and (c) suggestions for improving school counseling services" (p. 170). The results revealed that several of the participants preferred the presence of male professional school counselors on campus, which supports a need for culturally relevant school counseling that promotes the academic, personal, and social achievement of Black males.

In another phenomenological study, Washington (2015) interviewed five Black male middle school students to discuss the characteristics of their professional school counselors and how they felt supported and nurtured by them. The findings from this study consisted of the following themes: (a) the school counselor's knowledge of the students and being there for them, (b) instilling confidence, (c) positive and friendly demeanor, and (d) trust and faith (Washington, 2015). Based on the data from the interviews, several of the participants referred to their counselor as "he," which inferred that their school counselors were male. Although the demographics of the school counselors were not revealed, the results of this study may provide some evidence that Black male professional school counselors can be compassionate and make themselves available to all students, as well as work to strengthen relationships with Black male students.

Problem Statement

The problem associated with this research inquiry is that Black males are underrepresented in school counselor positions in K-12 schools. Professional school counselors are trained and positioned to be leaders, advocates, collaborative consultants, and to promote systemic change within their schools and communities served (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012). In these roles, school counselors demonstrate that all students can learn by advocating for an education system that provides the best possible learning environments for their students, especially students from marginalized communities. Henfield (2013) stated that professional school counselors are uniquely positioned as the only educators on school campuses that are trained to provide personal, social, academic, and career services to meet the needs of all students. As part of the leadership support team, school counselors provide critical social-emotional and academic supports by implementing a comprehensive school counseling program that promotes success and achievement for all students as well as placing them on a pathway to postsecondary success (ASCA, 2019). To implement an effective comprehensive school counseling program, lowering student-to-school counselor ratios is essential to ensuring ALL students have access to adequate services. According to ASCA (2019), schools that maintained a ratio of 250 students per school counselor and allowed school counselors to spend at least 80 percent of their time working directly with or indirectly for students had better learning and behavioral outcomes. However, the average student-to-school-counselor ratio across all American schools is 464 to 1, which represents nearly 1 in 5 students or 8 million children that do not have access to a single

counselor in their school (ASCA, 2019). A negative impact of these large student-to-school counselor ratios is that students of color and students from low-income families are even more likely to not have adequate access to counseling services. For instance, the high school counselor plays an essential role within a school to support student postsecondary aspirations and enrollment (Deslonde & Becerra, 2018). Students of color and low socioeconomic students do not always have access to college-related information and usually depend on the school counselor to help them navigate the difficulties of the college-going process (Brown et al., 2016).

Parzych et al. (2019) noted that the schools serving the most students of color or the most students from low-income families have been shortchanged when it comes to receiving services from their school counselors. In other words, school districts do not have enough counselors to meet the academic, social/emotional, and career counseling needs of their students. To improve these conditions, Black male counselors can be influential in promoting a culturally inclusive and productive campus setting that lead to favorable academic and behavioral outcomes for all students (Dollarhide et al., 2013). There are few studies that discuss the positive influences that Black males have on clients in mental health counseling or school counseling roles. ASCA (DATE) reported that 85% of its members are overwhelmingly female while 15% of its members identify as male. Among all ASCA members, only 10% identify as Black. Consequently, Black males are significantly underrepresented in the school counseling profession. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2014), Black males represents 2% of all educators in public schools in comparison to 15.2% of Black students that are served in

public education settings. Since the United States is slowly becoming a majority minority

nation, more school and community racial minority counselors are needed because

diverse representation matters. Grapin et al. (2016) stated that increasing diversity in the

counseling profession may also increase the likelihood that traditionally underrepresented

populations will have their needs appropriately recognized and addressed. It may be that

Black male school counselors are capable of leading efforts in decreasing minority

underachievement and underrepresentation in schools with their expertise, lived

experiences, training, and skillset (Henfield, 2013).

Although studies exist in the literature that highlight their importance in the

education arena, the impact of Black males working in the school counseling profession

have not been well-researched. To promote culturally relevant school counseling that

supports the academic, social/emotional, career development of all students, Black males

that serve in professional school counselor roles warrants further inquiry (Owens et al.,

2011; Wines et al., 2015). To address the shortage of Black males in school counseling,

more attention is needed on their career experiences pertaining to their development as

professional school counselors and their motivation for pursuing the profession.

Many studies have emerged in hopes of promoting positive social change by

placing an emphasis on the recruitment and retention of Black male students into

counseling graduate programs. For instance, an important barrier as to why Black men

are underrepresented in the counseling and psychology profession is their lack of

awareness regarding connections to educational and career opportunities (Chandler,

2010; Haizlip, 2012). Counselor education programs have a responsibility to the

profession to promote diversity and should not take an idle position in recruiting and retaining minority students (Haizlip, 2012). It is encouraged that the decision-makers within counselor training programs expand upon their marketing and recruiting strategies to inspire Black men to consider careers in the counseling profession (Michel et al., 2013). Additionally, school district stakeholders must improve upon their efforts to increase diversity within administrative staff and school counseling programs. School personnel serving on hiring/interview committees have the capability of diversifying their counseling teams and welcoming the knowledge and experiences that culturally diverse school counselors bring to the school environment (Wines et al., 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive, phenomenological study was to understand the unique experiences of Black male school counselors regarding their underrepresentation in the school counseling profession. This study adds to the body of knowledge by giving voice to the worldviews of Black male school counselors. The hope was to obtain a rich account of their motivation to enter the school counseling profession, factors related to shortage of Black men in school counseling, how their career experiences shape their development as professional school counselors, and thoughts on recruiting and retention efforts. To guide this inquiry, I used Giorgi's (1970) descriptive phenomenological method to focus on the worldviews of Black men in school counseling roles by obtaining a rich account of their work experiences. Descriptive phenomenology allows for a rich frame of reference for studying human experiential and behavioral phenomena that is both rigorous and nonreductionistic (Giorgi, 2012).

Research Question

To better understand the professional experiences and perceptions of Black males serving in professional school counselor roles, semistructured interviews and a demographic questionnaire were used. The following research question guided this study:

How do Black male school counselors in US public schools describe and make meaning of their professional experiences?

Data collected in this study provided information needed (a) to determine the motivation of Black men that enter the professional school counseling profession, (b) the reason for the shortage of Black men in the school counseling profession, and (c) to determine solutions and strategies for the recruitment and retention of Black male professional school counselors.

Theoretical Foundation/Conceptual Framework

Phenomenological research allowed me to identify the essence of human experiences about a problem through the worldview of the participants (Creswell, 2009). A descriptive phenomenological psychological method was selected to guide this research inquiry. Developed by Giorgi, the descriptive phenomenological psychological method is a frame of reference for studying human experiential and behavioral phenomena that would be both rigorous and non-reductionistic (Giorgi, 2012). Giorgi (2012) asserted that researchers must assume the correct attitude if they are to employ the descriptive phenomenological psychological method in their studies. He defined the correct attitude as putting aside knowledge coming from an attitude other than the phenomenological one and rendering it non-functional. Researchers can obtain a correct

attitude by engaging in phenomenological reduction or bracketing to separate their personal assumptions pertaining to the phenomenon in question from the participants whose experiences are studied (Giorgi, 2012). Because I have personal experience with the phenomenon in this case, a social constructivist lens was implemented to rely as much as possible on the participants' views being studied. Once the correct attitude is established, Giorgi recommended the following steps for implementing the descriptive phenomenological method: (a) read the data (epoche), (b) divide the data into parts (eidetic reduction), (c) organize and express the data from a disciplinary perspective (imaginative variation), and (d4) synthesize and summarize the data for the scholarly community (essential essences).

Additionally, I incorporated social constructivism as the theoretical framework to focus on the perceptions of Black males, describing their experiences in their roles as professional school counselors in K-12 schools. Social constructivism is a suggestive framework used with individuals seeking to understand their world and develop their own meanings that relate to their experience (Creswell, 2013). It allows for the qualitative researcher to focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants (Creswell, 2009; Martinez et al., 2017).

Using open-ended questions, I encouraged the research participants in this study to describe their own experiences fully and freely. Applying a social constructivist lens, my role is to listen carefully to the participants' views and interpret the findings based on their environment and experiences (Creswell, 2013). Applying the social constructionism

framework is the most useful approach in gaining access to the views and attributes that influence Black males to pursue careers and work as professional school counselors in K-12 schools. Social constructivism provided a lens for data analysis while the descriptive phenomenological psychological approach served as the framework and both support the phenomenological design (Creswell, 2013). The relevance of the framework for this study is explained further in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

For this inquiry, I used qualitative methodology as it was the most appropriate approach for understanding the lived experiences of Black male school counselors since they have direct, immediate experience in the role. Qualitative research allows researchers to explore and understand how individuals or groups define social and human problems (Creswell, 2009). The purpose of qualitative methodology is to understand, describe, discover meaning, or generate theory based on a phenomenon or problem (Laureate Education, 2010).

Within the context of this qualitative study, I served as the primary instrument for collecting data (Laureate Education, 2010; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), the qualitative researcher obtains data by conducting interviews, focus groups, observations of real-life settings, and existing documents. For this dissertation, I used focused, semistructured interviews to gain insight into each Black male's lived experience in relation to their school counselor roles. Interviews are the "mainstay of qualitative data collection" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 146) since they provide "deep, rich,

individualized and contextualized data" that is essential to this methodology (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 146).

Operational Definitions

Black: According to the United States Census Bureau, Black or African American is a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). For this study, Black refers to those of American or African descent.

K-12 Public School: An elementary or secondary school that services all children within their geographical area free of charge (Fedynich & Garza, 2016).

Professional School Counselor: A certified or licensed educator that has unique qualifications and skills to address academic, personal/social and college and career development needs of all students (ASCA, 2017).

Education: The knowledge and skills obtained in a particular area of study in an academic setting. In this study, participants must have a master's degree or higher in counseling and meet their state certification/licensure standards for becoming a school counselor (Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, 2022).

Assumptions

For this inquiry, I explored Black males work experiences as professional school counselors and assumed that the individuals interviewed provided truthful depictions of their individual experiences. The main assumption of this study was that there is a need for more Black male school counselors to service students in public education. I assumed that Black male school counselors can help lower the underachievement of Black male students. I assumed that counselor education programs and school district stakeholders

are not doing enough to enhance Black male representation in counseling programs and in a school counselor role, respectively. These assumptions were necessary to help fulfill the purpose of the study, which was to understand the unique experiences of Black male school counselors regarding their underrepresentation in the school counseling profession. These assumptions were also necessary to add the voices of individuals from this specific population, who have had lived experiences working as professional school counselors, to provide further insight on their impact with students in K-12 public schools.

Scope and Delimitations

To add to the school counseling knowledge base, the experiences of Black men in professional school counselor positions must be explored to identify and facilitate conditions that are connected to their unique roles (Dollarhide et al., 2013). While there are studies in the literature that highlight the successes of Black males in the education, more information is needed regarding their accomplishments as professional school counselors. Delimitations for this inquiry were that participants must identify as a Black male, have a master's degree or higher in counseling, certified or licensed as a school counselor, and currently work or previously worked in a K-12 public school in the United States.

Limitations

This study limited its research endeavors to explore the educational and work experiences of Black male school counselors. Because Black male school counselors were the primary target for this study, results cannot be generalized to other Black male

counselors because of the small sample size. Data analysis is susceptible to researcher bias since I serve as the primary instrument for data collection and the fact that I served as a Black male professional school counselor. Using Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method, the researcher must be able to bracket their assumptions and biases throughout the data analysis process. Pure bracketing may be difficult to achieve if biases and assumptions are not controlled.

Significance of the Study

The American Counseling Association (ACA) code of ethics (2014) states that counselor educator programs should vigorously recruit and retain culturally diverse students into their programs. Through this qualitative descriptive, phenomenological study, I uncovered the unique experiences of Black male professional school counselors in public schools. Black male educators' experiences are quite complexed and should not be clustered into a single category (Pabon, 2016). By discovering the motivation of Black males who enter the school counseling profession, exploring the career experiences of Black males, the reason for the shortage of Black men in the profession, and recruiting more minorities, counselor training programs can implement plans and policies to hopefully increase and retain Black males in the field. A potential impact of having more Black men serving as school counselors is that they can be positive influences for minority students by way of mentoring.

Black male students are disproportionately placed in special education and remedial reading courses, have higher rates of suspensions and expulsions than males of other races, and are underrepresented in gifted or advanced placement courses (Owens et

al., 2011). Black male school counselors can play a critical role in the academic and social development of minority students by helping to close the achievement gap as well as encourage their representation in school activities (Henfield, 2013; Pabon, 2016). The findings from this study can also impact positive social change by influencing school district stakeholders to improve upon their efforts to increase diversity within their campuses' school counseling programs.

Implications for Social Change

Walden University (2015) established a commitment to provide a curriculum that challenges students to apply new skills, expand their networks, gain deeper knowledge, and consider a variety of perspectives to address everyday problems at an individual level as well as within organizations, communities, and society. This doctoral journey has shaped my perspective regarding social change by stressing the importance that the education I am receiving will have a lasting impact on my role as a social change agent. There is a phrase that is used in public education that states, "It takes a village to raise a child." It may take an individual to lead the cause for social action, but it will take a village to create the change. The findings from my dissertation may impact positive social change by bringing awareness to counselor education graduate programs to boost recruitment and retention efforts to increase Black male students and faculty. My overall aim for this "trailblazing" study is to influence counselor education leaders and school district stakeholders to improve upon their efforts to increase diversity within their counselor education and campuses school counseling programs, respectively.

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the need for this study to occur. I provided research that supports the need for recruiting and retaining Black male professional school counselors in K-12 schools. This chapter included the problem statement, and discussions of the purpose of the study and the research question that directed this study. I also provided in-depth explanations of the framework and operational definitions to the audience understand key terms in this study. Finally, I explained how the results from this study will help counselor education programs and K-12 school district personnel see the need for adaptations to their recruitment and retention practices as well as the need for the school counseling profession to demonstrate multicultural and social justice leadership by increasing Black male representation in school counselor roles. This study will provide an opportunity for the voices of Black male professional school counselors to be heard.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The shortage of Black male educators has reached crisis percentages. Underwood et al. (2019) noted that students of color currently make up over 50% of public-school populations. Male educators comprise only 23% of the public-school workforce and less than 2% of these men identify as Black (Underwood et al., 2019). The disparity between the number of students of color and Black male educators in K-12 schools are disconcerting. Especially if people of color are predicted to be the majority of the US population by the year 2043 (Colby & Ortman, 2014; Underwood et al., 2019). The call for an increase in people of color to join the education profession has led to the study of exploring the impact of Black males who serve in professional school counselor roles.

The current study merged the conversation centered on multicultural and social justice school counseling and links it to the recruitment and retention among a specific population, which has not been well-researched in the literature: Black male school counselors currently working or who have previously worked in K-12 public school settings. The underlying issues of educational inequality for students of marginalized communities are related to problems of race, social justice, and diversity (Jost et al., 2005). According to Kohli (2008), educational institutions have been used as a tool of oppression to teach people of color that their culture is inferior to the dominant, White culture. It is encouraged that educational institutions embrace more diversity by recruiting and retaining educators of color to show students of color the opportunities that are possible. The voices of educators of color are often overlooked in the educational

discussion, therefore, this study will add another element, Black male professional school counselors who serve in K-12 schools.

In this chapter, I described my literature search strategy, which includes the research databases and search engines used. I reviewed research on the social constructivist approach, the theoretical framework used in the study, and the descriptive phenomenological psychological design for data analysis. I then offer an exhaustive literature review of current studies on Black males and their impact in education and recommendations some scholars offer counselor graduate programs and K-12 school districts on how to best address recruitment and retention strategies for this marginalized population. Finally, I provide a summary of the chapter and give a rationale for the study.

Literature Search Strategy

To conduct a complete literature review on the experiences of Black males that serve as professional school counselors in K-12 schools, I used two primary research engines: Walden Library system and Google Scholar. However, Walden's Library was my main source for peer-reviewed research articles because I mostly found the same articles on Google Scholar. Because I am a student, I had free access to full-text articles in Walden's Library system. Within Walden's Library, I found the Thoreau multidatabase search engine, which provide searches across many library databases. I also searched PsychINFO, PsychARTICLES, Education Source, Dissertation Global, and Academic Search Complete. Academic Search Complete is a multidiscipline database. I also used citation chaining, where I found relevant studies and reviewed each reference list to determine if any of the articles used would support my research.

The single search terms I used in these databases and search engines were, *African American* or *Black males* and *professional school counselor*. I combined *African Americans/Black Americans/Blacks, men/male/man,* and *school counselors/school counselor; school counselors* and *diverse/multicultural; school counselors* or *student counselors* and *diverse or multicultural; recruitment* or *retention, school counselors, m*en or *male* or *man,* and *African Americans/Black Americans* or *Blacks; recruitment* or *retention, counselors, men* or *male* or *man,* and *African Americans/Black Americans* or *Blacks;* and *recruitment* or *retention, counselors* or *therapists* or *psychologists* or *psychotherapists, men* or *male* or *man,* and *African Americans/Black Americans* or *Blacks.* Most of these search terms gave the best results, and I tried to focus on articles written within the past 5 years. When I did not find many studies within that timeframe, I opened my search for relevant studies within the past 7 years except for some articles that provided background information on framework and the data analysis process used for this study. The search terms that did not produce any results included the words, *Black male professional school counselors.*

Theoretical Framework-Social Constructivist Approach

Developed by Vygotski, social constructivism focuses on the complexity of meaning-making grounded in cultural, historical, and social norms of how individuals live and see the world (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Roth & Lee, 2007). This approach emphasizes the environment to appreciate how an individual understands and constructs his or her world and subjective experience via social interactions (Andrews, 2012; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Social constructivism allows for the qualitative researcher

to focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants (Creswell, 2009). The central idea of social constructivism is that human learning is constructed and that learners build new knowledge upon the foundation of previous learning (Martinez et al., 2017). Martinez et al. (2017) asserted that individuals bring their own cultural norms and past experiences into a relationship, but the willingness to learn from each other with an open and respectful attitude could bridge some of the distance that diminishes effectiveness. Constructing meaning within everyday discussions about gender, culture, feelings, emotions, the self, and all other aspects of individuals' social worlds creates perspective (Martinez et al., 2017).

The social constructivist theoretical framework is a good fit for examining the meaning-making process that occurs between school counselors and students within K-12 school settings. For this study, I used social constructivism to centralize the stories of Black male professional school counselors to construct their realities and knowledge about their experiences in the school counseling profession (Martinez et al., 2017). Since I have personal experience with the phenomenon in this case, a social constructivist lens was implemented to rely as much as possible on the participants' views being studied.

Research Design-Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Inquiry

This is a descriptive phenomenological qualitative study. Developed by Giorgi, the descriptive phenomenological psychological method is a frame of reference for studying human experiential and behavioral phenomena that would be both rigorous and non-reductionistic (Giorgi, 2012). The descriptive phenomenological method is a

rigorous approach to qualitative research that is rooted in the philosophical phenomenology of Edmund Husserl (Applebaum, 2011; Giorgi, 2012). Giorgi asserted that researchers must assume the correct attitude if they are to employ the descriptive phenomenological psychological method in their studies. He defined the correct attitude as putting aside knowledge coming from an attitude other than the phenomenological one and rendering it non-functional. Researchers can obtain a correct attitude by engaging in phenomenological reduction or bracketing to separate their personal assumptions pertaining to the phenomenon in question from the participants whose experiences are studied (Giorgi, 2012). A phenomenological attitude is taken by the researcher to minimize the researcher's assumptions, expectations, and interpretations regarding the participants' data (descriptions of their experience). By doing so, the participant's experience can be differentiated from the researcher's and reliably used as data that can be accurately understood.

The descriptive phenomenological psychological method was the most appropriate choice for this study since I identify as a Black male who worked as a professional school counselor in K-12 schools. To avoid instances of personal bias or assumptions that would interfere with the collection and analyzing of data, I relied as much as possible on each participant's experiences of how view their role as a school counselor. Also, I used appropriate bracketing to focus my attention on the stories of the participants, versus my own experiences. By doing so, I learned new information from other Black male school counselors of their motivation for entering the profession, perceptions regarding the job, and their thoughts on recruitment and retention efforts.

Many researchers have followed Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological psychological approach for their studies. Broome (2013) used the descriptive phenomenological psychological method to explore police officers' lived experiences during police vehicle pursuits. Likewise, Zapien (2016) used the descriptive phenomenological psychological approach to examine the beginnings of what led married individuals to an extra-marital affair. According to Zapien (2016), descriptive phenomenological method was used in her study for two reasons: (a) it offered a clear means to maintain trustworthiness to the participant's experiences, which is an essential structure of a phenomenon; and (b) it utilized a psychological lens for analysis to inform psychotherapeutic benefits.

Using Giorgi's approach, Wines (2013) conducted an autophenomenography to examine multicultural leadership from her personal perspective as a female Black school counselor who served as a lead counselor, researcher, and participant in her own study reflecting on her experience working in a predominantly White school district. Wines et al. (2015) used descriptive phenomenological psychological methodology in another study to examine the experiences of Black school counselors who work in predominantly White-culture school districts. In both studies, Wines was able to analyze the data by using Giorgi's (1997) four-step process: epoche, eidetic reduction, imaginative variation, and essential essences.

Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of Black male professional school counselors regarding

their underrepresentation in the profession. The research adds to the existing literature an understanding of the motivations of Black males to enter the school counseling profession, factors related to shortage of Black male school counselors, career and educational experiences that shaped their identity as Black male school counselors, and thoughts on minority recruitment and retention in the profession. The significance of the study is the findings inform leaders of counselor education programs and public-school districts information on how to recruit and retain more Black males into the school counseling profession.

I explored reasons related to the underrepresentation of Black males that serve as professional school counselors in K-12 schools. Chapter 2 contains literature that that support the purpose of the study and is relative to the experiences of Black male professional school counselors in K-12 education. The chapter also contains the following topics (a) Black males in K-12 public education, (b) role of the professional school counselor, (c) counselor student relationships (d) multicultural school counseling, (e) Black males as school counselors, (f) men in the counseling profession, (g) recruitment and retention of Black males in the counseling profession, (h) Black males in counselor education programs, and (i) COVID-19 pandemic impact on school counseling. The chapter ends with literature addressing the justification on the study as well as conclusions based on information presented in the chapter.

Black Males Serving in K-12 Public Education

Although the education profession has become marginally more diverse in recent years, Black male educators remain in high demand within K-12 public schools, which

are historically and currently dominated by White women (Underwood et al., 2019).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2014), Black males represents

2% of all educators in public schools in comparison to 15.2% of Black students that are

served in public education settings. Based on these data, it is more likely that most

children in today's public schools may never have a Black male educator (Goings &

Bianco, 2016). Because the United States is slowly becoming a majority minority nation,

more school and community racial minority counselors are needed because diverse

representation matters. Most researchers and other observers agree that the deficiency of

Black male educators contributes to systemic issues of minority students in schools, such

as cultural bias and stereotype threat, which directly or indirectly diminish the

performance.

Lewis and Toldson (2013) noted the following reasons for the dearth of Black

male educators: (a) Black males are less likely to graduate from college, (b) Black males

are less likely to major in education, and (c) Black males who graduate with a degree in

education are less likely to become a teacher. Lewis and Toldson also noted that Black

men are more likely than any other race gender group to become educational

administrators. For instance, 7% of Black males with a degree in education go into

education administration, compared to 5% for Black females and White males, and about

3% for White females (Lewis & Toldson, 2013).

Brockenbrough (2015) stated that calls for the recruitment and retention of more

Black male educators have evolved amid popular depictions of Black men as male-

controlled disciplinarians. Despite a growing body of educational scholarship, which

challenges the traditional role and expectations of Black male teachers as saviors for Black boys, Black male educators are still subjected to roles that require them to secure, administer, and govern unruly Black males in K-12 public schools (Bryan & Williams, 2017). El-Mekki (2018) noted that these expectations are considered so-called *invisible taxes* that Black male educators pay to enter the education profession. As a result, Black male educators encounter internal and external stressors due to racialized stereotypes, lack of support, and being frequently questioned about their intellectual ability and job performance (Boyd & Mitchell, 2018).

Brockenbrough (2015) conducted qualitive study that investigated how 11 Black male teachers were situated as disciplinary agents in a predominantly Black urban school district on the eastern region of the United States. As they described the discipline-related expectations they encountered in their jobs, study participants critiqued and complicated prevailing perceptions of Black male teachers as authoritarian disciplinarians for Black students. The findings from this study revealed two themes from the study participants' narratives: their struggles to adopt the authoritarian disciplinary personas that others expected of them as Black male teachers, and their critiques of the disproportionate assignment of disciplinary responsibilities to Black male teachers. Recommendations from Brockenbrough offered new insights into how Black male educators can negotiate their roles as disciplinarians and raised several questions that could drive future efforts to understand and support Black male educators' disciplinary practices in K-12 schools.

Pabon (2016) conducted a qualitative study to examine the life histories of four African American male teachers in urban schools. Pabon noted that hearing, listening to,

and sharing out the stories of Black men in the educational system was essential to shifting the discourse away from Black men being seen as supermen in K-12 schools. The findings in Pabon's study revealed two themes: (a) being under-prepared in teacher education programs, and (b) being pressured to standardize curriculum and teaching. Pabon noted that as teacher education students and practitioners, the four participants were devalued as intellectuals and marginalized in school spaces. Recommendations from this study suggest that mentorship around the intersectionality of race, gender, racism, and patriarchy would be beneficial prior to the induction stage to support Black male educators who are likely to face stereotypical expectations to become Black supermen (saviors) in their assigned schools.

Boyd and Mitchell (2018), El-Mekki (2018), and Irvine (2019) emphasized how Black males thrived and persevered in their academics as well as in the education profession despite dealing with stereotypes, role ambiguity, and disciplinarian duties assigned to them. Boyd and Mitchell sought to break the deficit narrative surrounding Black males in college by highlighting the stories of six participants and how they persevered despite facing stereotypes. The goal of Boyd and Mitchell's inquiry was to explore how Black males expressed their experiences with stereotypes, how they dealt with those experiences, how the experiences shaped future endeavors, and strategies used to dispel stereotypes and persist through unpleasant experiences. The findings from Boyd and Mitchell revealed four themes: (a) internalization, (b) stereotypes, (c) persistence, and (d) advice. The results from this study indicated that focused mentorships could have significant effects on Black male collegiate persistence in the face of stereotypes.

In a similar study, Irvine (2019) explored the lived experiences and motivating factors for the academic success of 10 Black male students attending HBCUs. Irvine suggested resilience perceived by the participants as they discussed taking advantage of opportunities to discover strategies, tools, and approaches for being academically successful. The participants indicated that social support such as family, positive influence of professors, mentors, and peers was essential to their academic success.

Role of the Professional School Counselor

Professional school counselors are trained and positioned to be leaders, advocates, collaborative consultants, and promote systemic change within their schools and school districts (ASCA, 2012). Henfield (2013) stated that professional school counselors are uniquely positioned as the only educators on school campuses that are trained to provide personal, social, academic, and career services to meet the needs of all students. As part of the leadership support team, school counselors provide critical social-emotional and academic supports by implementing a comprehensive school counseling program that promotes success and achievement for all students as well as placing them on a pathway to postsecondary success (ASCA, 2019). To implement an effective comprehensive school counseling program, lowering student-to-school counselor ratios is essential to ensuring ALL students have access to adequate services. According to ASCA (2019), schools that maintained a ratio of 250 students per school counselor and allowed school counselors to spend at least 80 percent of their time working directly with or indirectly for students had better learning and behavioral outcomes. However, the average student-to-school-counselor ratio across all American schools is 464 to 1, which represents nearly

one in five students or 8 million children that do not have access to a single counselor in their school (ASCA, 2019). A negative impact of these large student-to-school counselor ratios is that students of color and students from low-income families are even more likely to not have adequate access to counseling services.

Goodman (2015) conducted a quantitative study to examine school counselors' perceptions of the effectiveness of their counselor training preparation to perform actual work-related practices. The participants (N = 1,052) in this study were a national sample of school counselors who were ASCA members, completed a master's degree in school counseling, and graduated between 2002 and 2012. The School Counselor Activity Rating Scale was used to measure school counselors' process data in relation to their actual and preferred job activities (Goodman, 2015). The findings of Goodman's study showed that there was a significant difference between the participants' academic preparedness and actual job activities. School counselors will be better able to meet their students' academic, career, and personal/social needs with academic preparation that places emphasis on actual job activities.

Counselor Student Relationships

One of the essential roles of professional school counselors is to be an advocate for all students. Professional school counselors serve many roles such as college counseling, course planning, scheduling, facilitating communication between students and school stakeholders, and providing mental health services (Holland, 2015). Due to their higher caseload demands and serving many roles in K-12 schools, professional school counselors are finding it difficult to develop trusting relationships with their

students. The American School Counselor Association (2019) stated that schools that maintained a 250-to-1 students to school counselor ratio and allowed their school counselors to spend at least 80 percent of their time working directly with or indirectly for students had better learning and behavioral outcomes. However, the national average for students to school counselor ratio is a 430-to-1 ratio (American School Counselor Association, 2019). Given the extremely high counselor-to-student ratios currently experienced in many states, professional school counselors are finding it challenging to create lasting trusting relationships with their students. Consequently, students of color and students from low-income families are not receiving adequate access to school counseling services.

Holland (2015), Cholewa et al. (2015), and Lapan et al. (2012) suggested that minority students were more likely than their White peers to access their school counselor regarding their postsecondary educational choices. Holland (2015) added that many minority, first-generation, and low-income students aspire to attend college, but cannot always rely on their parents for college information. Therefore, these students turn to their school counselor to help them gain access and guide them through the college-going process. In Deslonde and Becerra (2018), the authors noted that school counselors attributed the ability of guiding minority and low socioeconomic students toward postsecondary success to building positive and trusting relationships. In another study by Sackett et al. (2018), students described not having a trusting relationship with their counselor. Due to having large caseloads and other duties as assigned, students only looked to the school counselor for information they needed, but never developed a

personal connection. The large student to counselor ratio suggests that school districts do not have enough counselors to meet the academic, social/emotional, and career counseling needs of their students which mean that minority and low socioeconomic students will continue to be underserved. To connect and build trusting relationships with students, school counselors must establish open communication, provide ongoing encouragement, stay responsive to students' questions, or needs, and remaining nonjudgmental (Deslonde & Becerra, 2018). For many minority students, it is hard to develop trusting relationships when they do not see their culture, values, and identity represented in key educator roles (Goings & Bianco, 2016). Therefore, addressing the shortage of Black male professional school counselors can help develop trusting relationships to address the academic, social/emotional, and college and career counseling needs of all students.

Multicultural School Counseling

Professional school counselors aim to develop school counseling programs that remove barriers impeding the academic, social/emotional, and career development of all students (American School Counselor Association, 2012). Given the increasing diversity of school populations, it is important that school counseling programs promote multicultural competence to create a more inclusive school environment (ASCA Ethical Standards, B.2.m, 2012, n.p.). According to Ratts and Greenleaf (2018), there is an essential need for a multicultural and social justice leadership approach in school counseling programs considering the current political climate that threatens the academic, career, and personal potential of students who are marginalized in K-12 public schools.

Multicultural competence enables counselors to possess awareness and knowledge of their own culture as well as their clients so that they can skillfully adapt counseling interventions to align with clients' cultural background (Sue et al., 1992). Social justice competence implores counselors to "explore client problems within the context of an oppressive society and to intervene more contextually and systemically" (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018, p. 2). Sue and Sue (2013) noted that facilitating healthy relationships with culturally diverse students is very pertinent to school counseling. School leaders and other stakeholders cannot expect marginalized students to reach their potential if they feel unsafe or lack resources to be successful. These threats emphasize the importance for school counselors to be more proactive leaders in promoting multicultural and social justice on their campus. When professional school counselors combine the multicultural and social justice viewpoints, they will be competent in attending to issues of culture, power, privilege, and oppression that are prevalent in K–12 schools (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018).

Incorporating multiculturalism and social justice into school counseling leadership is the expectation for professional school counselors and not an exception (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). As K-12 public schools become more racially and ethnically diverse, K-12 professional school counselors continue to be overwhelming represented by Caucasian Americans (Washington, 2015). School counselors who have strong conservative social, political, or religious beliefs will need to be conscious of biases they may potentially harbor toward oppressed populations such as Black males. Such beliefs may lead to unintended harm. For instance, Washington (2015) noted that Black males

are perceived as barriers and threats to schools' not achieving the campus goals, making

them feel alienated within schools, leading some to disengage and dropping out of

school. Dollarhide et al. (2013) asserted that minority school counselors can be strong

advocates for racially/ethnically diverse students, colleagues, and families within their

schools which would help fulfill a critical need for multiculturalism and social justice

leadership. Minority school counselors who imbue multiculturalism and social justice

leadership in their programs are aware of how their status as a member of a marginalized

racial group can help build connections with students of color (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018).

Such a connection could potentially lead minority students to identify the school

counselor as an ally. Therefore, it is vital that professional school counselors implement

strategies to develop relationships with diverse students, especially with students like

Black males who have traditionally marginalized in public education. By developing

comprehensive culturally appropriate school counseling programs, professional school

counselors can provide inclusive guidance and counseling services (classroom guidance,

individual and group counseling) that marginalized students are more likely to access.

Black Males as School Counselors

The literature provides very little evidence of the impact Black male professional

school counselors have on the students and school stakeholders they serve in K-12 public

schools. Through email correspondence (July 13, 2020) with Angie Hickman, Director of

Research and Marketing for the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), I

requested a demographic breakdown of ASCA members by percentage. ASCA reported

that 85% of its members are overwhelmingly female, while 15% of its members identify

as male. Among all ASCA members, only 10% identify as Black. Dollarhide et al. (2013), Wines (2013), and Wines et al. (2015) contributed to the school counselor literature with studies that explored the work experiences of minority professional school counselors. The authors noted that a limitation to their studies were the underrepresentation of Black male professional school counselors that participated in the research. This reflects the lack of gender and cultural diversity in the field of school counseling, which mean that the experiences and findings of these studies may not be an accurate representation of all Black school counselors in K-12 public schools.

Despite the lack of research addressing Black male professional school counselors, there are several studies that focus on Black males as students and faculty members in counselor education programs (Brooks & Steen, 2010; Brown & Grothaus, 2019; Dollarhide et al., 2018; Henfield et al., 2011). Wines (2013), and Hannon et al. (2019) conducted phenomenological studies using CRT to enrich the voice of marginalized or silenced individuals and groups. CRT seeks to critically examine the experiences of people of color through a social and historical perspective, challenge existing systems that minimize and/or inaccurately explain their experiences, and promote social justice (Hannon et al., 2019; Howard & Navarro, 2016). Using CRT, Hannon et al. (2019) sought to amplify the voices of tenured Black male faculty in counselor education programs and to underscore the importance of race in their experiences while Wines (2013) used CRT to capture the voice of a Black female school counselor, who served in a multicultural leadership capacity combined in various ways. Despite that this study focused more on the experiences of Black male professional

school counselors, researchers can draw on the conclusions that Black males in counselor education programs and working as faculty in higher education settings are going through similar experiences as those providing school counseling services in K-12 public schools.

Men in the Counseling Profession

Hannon et al. (2019) used a phenomenological approach to examine interviews with 8 Black males and learn what contributed to their work experiences as counselor educators. Specifically, the authors wanted to understand what factors contributed to Black male counselor educators successfully earning tenure. The themes that came from this study were that the participants needed requisite personal dispositions and institutional support for them to achieve tenure in their programs. These two themes describe specific contributing factors for earning tenure. The authors recommended that facilitating programmatic sociocultural awareness, assessing faculty experiences, and coordinating mentoring opportunities were essential to the success of Black male counselor educators.

Brooks and Steen (2010) explored the experiences of 12 Black male counselor educators. The primary focus of their study was to investigate the perceptions of Black male counselor educators regarding the shortage of Black male faculty members in counselor education. In general, this same shortage of Black male counselor professionals is noticeable in K-12 public schools. The results of this study recommended that there is a need for effective recruitment and mentoring of Black male counselor educators who are pursuing tenure and non-tenured faculty positions in counselor

education programs. The same can be said for Black males wanting to pursue professional school counselor positions in K-12 public schools.

Cross-Lee (2014) conducted a generic qualitative research study to explore the educational and work experiences of Black male counselors who provided community-based mental health services to Black clientele in the State of Georgia. Cross-Lee conducted semi-structured interviews with 11 Black male professional counselors and explored their (a) education and contextual supports, (b) work experiences, (c) racial identity development and racial identity attitudes, (d) self-efficacy practices, (e) career interests and goals, (f) perceived career support and barriers, and (g) career outcome expectations. The results from Cross-Lee's study revealed some rationale for the underrepresentation of Black males in mental health counseling roles as well as possible solutions to expand their presence in the profession overall.

Recruitment and Retention of Black Males in the Counseling Profession

The underrepresentation of Black males in the counseling profession undermines the vision, mission, and aspirations of counseling programs to recruit and retain diverse students, faculty, and professional counselors. According to Jones et al. (2009), a solution that is essential in meeting the mental health needs of diverse populations is the recruitment and retention of minorities into the counseling professions. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) vision for counseling programs aligns with the ACA Code of Ethics (American Counseling Association, 2014) as they challenge program stakeholders to engage in "continuous and systematic efforts to recruit, employ, and retain a diverse faculty to create and support an

inclusive learning and work community" (CACREP, 2016). Recruiting and retaining

minorities in the counseling profession can be a valuable resource to address ethnicity

and cultural issues in the mental health setting (Jones et al., 2009). Therefore, the

presence of Black male professional school counselors can provide K-12 school

campuses with an additional resource to address academic, social /emotional, and

college/career counseling concerns evident within marginalized student populations.

Several studies have emerged in bringing awareness and stating the importance of

recruiting and retaining Black males in the counseling profession (Chandler, 2010;

Haizlip, 2012; Michel et al., 2013). However, counseling education programs have a

responsibility to promoting diversity and should not take a quiet position in recruiting and

retaining minority students (Haizlip, 2012).

Michel et al. (2013) investigated 217 counselor educators' and 10 counseling

graduate students' perceptions of the presence and recruitment of men in the counseling

profession and explored how they were recruited into their respective counseling

programs. The results of this study indicated that the gender gap suppresses the voice of

male counseling students, minimize client options, and influences the identity of the

counseling profession. The gender gap in the counseling profession has created a female-

dominated environment, which leads to male marginalization and feelings of not having a

voice or place within the counseling field (Michel et al., 2013). The authors suggested

that the decision makers in counseling programs need to enhance their marketing and

recruiting strategies to inspire Black men to consider careers in the counseling profession.

In addition to marketing and recruiting, Chandler (2010) also added that finances, location, awareness, and connections to Black communities are significant factors for poor representation of Black males in the mental health profession. Respondents in this study reported that finances and location were the most essential factors for them to consider entry into psychology graduate programs. Scholarships/financial aid is important as many minorities have great ambitions with a lack of finances to support their dreams (Chandler, 2010). Therefore, many Black students do not give much thought to attending graduate school. Location was another important factor for respondents in this study as they preference larger cities with warmer weather and adequate Black populations to attend graduate school. However, Chandler (2010) noted that if Black students have access to funding for the graduate education, the location would not be much of a factor. Sufficient funding, career relevance, program duration, program location, and reputation are essential factors to recruiting and retaining Black students in psychology graduate programs. While the results of this study address recruitment and retention in the field of psychology, the same strategy can be beneficial to counselor education profession as they seek to increase Black male representation in their programs.

Black Males Students in Counselor Education Programs

Black students' perspectives and experiences in CACREP graduate counselor education programs are documented in the literature (Haskins et al., 2013; Henfield et al., 2011, Henfield et al., 2017; Ward, 2017; Brown & Grothaus, 2019). However, there is marginal literature that focus specifically on Black males in counselor education graduate programs. According to the CACREP Vital Statistics Report (2018), there are 871

CACREP-accredited counselor education programs across 396 institutions of higher education. Giving the enrollment numbers of 43,428 at the master's program level and 2,561 at the Doctoral program level, there are 2.97% of Black males enrolled in the CACREP master level of counselor education programs as compared to 10.56% White males, and 15.42% of Black females (CACREP, 2018). At the CACREP counselor education doctoral-level program, there are 4.86% of Black males, compared to 13.87% of White males and to 20.24% of Black females. As for master's level programs, the Clinical Mental Health Counseling specialty area has the largest number of enrolled students with 29,307 followed by School Counseling with 12,170 students (CACREP, 2018). The data did not provide specific demographics of students in enrolled in counseling specialty areas. Based on the percentage of Black males enrolled in CACREP master level counselor programs (2.97%), this population is well underrepresented in school counseling graduate programs.

One significant phenomenological study that addressed the underrepresentation of Black males in counselor education programs was conducted by Ward (2017). The purpose of Ward's (2017) study was to explore the lived experiences of Black males enrolled in a CACREP-accredited graduate counselor education programs and provide a first-hand contextual understanding of the academic rigor, challenges, social relationships, and support that they experience in these programs. The author used semi-structured interviews with 12 Black males enrolled in counselor graduate programs to give voice to their stories to advocate for the presence of minority graduate students, specifically Black males, in counselor education programs. Ward (2017) stated that of the

12 participants, only 8 completed the demographic survey resulting in 5 participants identifying as doctoral students and 3 in master's level programs. Based on the criteria for this study, it is assumed that the other 4 participants were at least enrolled in a master's level counseling program. The results of Ward's study produced the following six themes: (a) Institutional Climate and Capacity to Adapt, (b) Elements of the Authentic Self, (c) Academic Politics and Barriers to Change, (d) Mentorship, (e) Faith and Learning, and (f) Family Matters (p. 71). The findings from this study can be used as a resource in identifying the status of Black males in CACREP-accredited graduate counselor education programs as well as serve as a catalyst for further research to promote diversity, multiculturalism, and advocacy in the counseling profession.

Some studies in the literature emphasized that counselor education programs could optimize their efforts to retain and recruit Black male students if they conduct a critical examination of program policies and practices that have been found to be supportive in enhancing the educational experiences of Black graduate students (Henfield et al., 2011& Haskins et al., 2013). In a phenomenological study, Henfield et al. (2011) explored 11 Black doctoral students' perceptions of challenging experiences in counselor education programs. Using Critical Race Theory (CRT) to guide their inquiry, the researchers identified the following themes in their findings: 1) feelings of isolation, 2) peer disconnection, and 3) faculty misunderstandings and disrespect. Based on the findings, participants in the Henfield et al. (2011) study perceived a lack of respect from faculty members. Therefore, the researchers noted that counselor educator programs have a responsibility to provide an atmosphere of inclusion and acceptance of all its students.

In other words, counselor educator programs need to institute proactive changes to incorporate, develop, and graduate students who are psychologically and academically sound as opposed to focusing on what students need to do to resolve their challenges, and in doing so provide an atmosphere of inclusion and acceptance.

In another phenomenological study by Haskins et al. (2013), the researchers investigated the experiences of eight Black students that were enrolled in master's level predominantly White counseling programs. Seven of the eight Black students were reported to be female. The study results yielded the following themes that included: (a) isolation as a Black student; (b) tokenization as a Black student; (c) lack of inclusion of Black counselor perspectives within course work; (d) differences between support received by faculty of color and support received by White faculty; and (e) access to support from people of color and White peers. The findings in this study, to some extent, were consistent with previous findings associated with Black students' experiences in counselor education graduate programs. Counselor educators must examine practices, standards, and policies in their programs to ensure equity for all students as well as serve as leaders and advocates to increase racial diversity within the counseling profession. Participants of this study consistently acknowledged how their graduate counselor education programs failed to address their needs as Black students. Therefore, this study emphasized the need for systematic change in counseling education programs to ensure Black students feel valued and their perspectives are epitomized in the curriculum.

COVID-19 Pandemic Impact on School Counseling

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a contagious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (WHO, 2020a). The first known case was identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019 and has since spread worldwide, leading to an ongoing pandemic. One of the most significant precautions taken in this regard was the interruption of education in schools to prevent students from becoming infected (Ali and Alharbi, 2020). The spread of COVID-19 to the United States initiated a surge in school closures that displaced millions of students from their traditional learning environments. Consequently, students discontinued in-person instruction for the rest of the 2019–2020 academic year, leaving them to rely on virtual learning (Education Week, 2020). Studies by Karaman et al. (2021), Savitz-Romer et al. (2021), and Strear et al. (2021) investigated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on school counseling and how school counselors have tried to adjust so that they can adequately address the academic, social, personal, and college/career needs of students. This information is essential to this study because it provides information pertaining to the challenges that all school counselors face in providing academic, social/emotional, and career counseling needs of students during the current pandemic.

The purpose of Karaman et al.'s (2021) study was to investigate the effects of COVID-19 on high school students' psychological symptoms and to understand how prepared school counselors are to meet their needs. Karaman et al.'s (2021) study was designed under two different studies: (a) Study 1: Effects of COVID-19 pandemic on students' psychological symptoms and (b) Study 2: Views and expectations of students

and school counselors about school counseling services. The first study was a quantitative study and included 549 high school students (398 female, 151 male). The second study was a qualitative design and consisted of five school counselors and five students from different schools. The results from the first study showed an increase in anxiety, depression, negative self-concept, somatization, and hostility symptoms among students. The results in the first study also concluded that female students had significantly higher levels of anxiety, depression, negative self-concept, somatization, and hostility symptoms than male students. The results Karaman et al.'s (2021) second study indicated that the students expressed the difficulties they experienced at the onset of COVID-19 as educational, cognitive, emotional, physiological, relational, and technological difficulties and those related to routines. School counselors described the difficulties that their students experienced at the onset of COVID-19 as family relations, personal–social, emotional, and academic ones. The authors concluded that it was important that counselors restructure school counseling services and shape service models and processes for students to cope with more intense difficulties resulting from COVID-19.

Savitz-Romer et al. (2021) conducted a mixed methods study to explore school counselors' professional experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. For the quantitative section of the study, 1,060 school counselors and educators in adjacent roles (e.g., college counselors, adjustment counselors, counseling directors) in 48 states and Puerto Rico completed the survey while 47 participated in the focus group portion of the research. The findings in Savitz-Romer et al.'s (2021) study revealed that school

counselors faced obstacles in carrying out their responsibilities, changes in how they spent their time, and adaptations to new work challenges due to COVID-19. The findings of this study further suggested that there should be a collaborative effort to reduce the role ambiguity and conflict in counselors' responsibilities, so they are better able to meet the increased needs of their students.

Strear et al. (2021) interviewed 13 participants from California and Wisconsin to understand how school counselors responded when schools were closed due to COVID-19, as well as the preparation for schools to open for virtual, hybrid, and in-person instruction in the fall of 2020. The findings from Strear et al. (2021) revealed several themes among the participants in how they navigated the impact of the pandemic in their role as a school counselor. Like other school educators, the participants in Strear et al. (2021) reported that they initially responded to the COVID-19 pandemic with confusion and uncertainty, which was followed by collaboration and innovation to ensure that schools continued to meet the complex needs of students, families, and staff. Such collaborative efforts took multiple forms at various levels of leadership, but all participants prioritized student outreach, stakeholder collaboration, and comprehensive service delivery. The authors in Strear et al. (2021) suggested that school and district leaders should honor the unique professional knowledge and expertise that school counselors bring to their work. Along with their expertise in education, mental health, and college/career exploration, school counselors are well positioned to meet the diverse needs of students even during a global pandemic.

Although Karaman et al. (2021), Savitz-Romer et al. (2021), and Strear et al. (2021) studies highlight the challenges and resiliency of school counselors, the impact of the COVID -19 pandemic may have implications on the retention of Black male school counselors in K-12 schools. Due to the ongoing pandemic, K-12 school districts across the nation have witnessed a shortage in staff as educators have departed the profession. As school districts tend to focus on the recruitment efforts of Black male educators, they rarely give attention to what is needed to retain them. The best recruitment strategy is also a strong retention strategy (El-Mekki, 2021). Due to increased duties and lack of support in K-12 schools, the COVID-19 pandemic has eroded the mental well-being of all educators, especially Black educators. According to El-Mekki (2021), school stakeholders need to be mindful of what Black male educators need not just to maintain their mental health and well-being, but to become high-caliber advocates for the students they serve.

Study Justification

This literature review revealed positive influences Black males can have on students from marginalized populations serving in professional school counselor roles, despite the challenges they faced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The literature review also supported a need for counselor educator programs and K-12 school districts to be more intentional with their recruiting and retention efforts to increase Black male representation in the counseling profession. As a Black male who served as a professional school counselor for 12 years and left my position during the pandemic, I experienced success providing personal, social, academic, and career services to meet the needs for all

students on my campus. I worked to help students from marginalized communities achieve milestones such as becoming the first in their family to graduate from high school, guiding them through the college-going process, and being a mentor to Black males who struggled academically and behaviorally. By exploring the unique experiences of Black male professional school counselors in K-12 public schools, I hope the results of this study serves as a trailblazer for other researchers to advocate and continue the conversation about the impact that Black males can make not only as school counselors, but in the counseling profession altogether.

Summary and Conclusion

An extensive review of the literature indicated the critical need for Black male educators' presence in the educational profession and the importance of recruiting and retaining this population to provide the best cultural practices for students of color. This review has included an examination of the literature surrounding Black males in K-12 public education, the role of the professional school counselor, counselor-student relationships, multicultural school counseling, Black males as school counselors, men in the counseling profession, recruitment and retention of Black males in the counseling profession, and Black males in counselor education programs. The information gathered from the review will be used to inform the direction of this study. The review also revealed a noticeable void in the literature on the lived experiences of Black male school counselors serving or have served in K-12 public schools. Therefore, this proposed study will examine the lived experiences of Black male professional school counselors serving

in K-12 schools and determine the effect their presence has on their decisions to stay or

leave the profession.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive, phenomenological study was to understand the unique experiences of Black male school counselors regarding their underrepresentation in the school counseling profession. This study added to the body of knowledge by giving voice to the worldviews of Black male school counselors. The hope was to obtain a rich account of their motivation to enter the school counseling profession, factors related to the shortage of Black men in school counseling, how their career experiences shaped their development as professional school counselors, and thoughts on recruiting and retention efforts. To guide this inquiry, I used Giorgi's (1970) Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological method to focus on the worldviews of Black men in school counseling roles by obtaining a rich account of their work experiences. Descriptive phenomenology allows for a rich frame of reference for studying human experiential and behavioral phenomena that is both rigorous and non-reductionistic (Giorgi, 2012).

Research Design and Rationale

Research Question

How do Black male professional school counselors in US public schools describe and make meaning of their professional experiences?

Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Inquiry

This is a descriptive phenomenological qualitative study. Developed by Giorgi, the Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological method is a frame of reference for

studying human experiential and behavioral phenomena that would be both rigorous and non-reductionistic (Giorgi, 2012). In other words, the Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological method is a rigorous approach to qualitative research that is rooted in the philosophical phenomenology of Husserl (Applebaum, 2011; Giorgi 2012). Giorgi asserted that researchers must assume the correct attitude if they are to employ the descriptive phenomenological psychological method in their studies. He defined the correct attitude as putting aside knowledge coming from an attitude other than the phenomenological one and rendering it non-functional. Researchers can obtain a correct attitude by engaging in phenomenological reduction or bracketing to separate their personal assumptions pertaining to the phenomenon in question from the participants whose experiences are studied (Giorgi, 2012). A phenomenological attitude is taken by the researcher to minimize the researcher's assumptions, expectations, and interpretations regarding the participants' data (descriptions of their experience). By doing so, the participant's experience can be differentiated from the researcher's and reliably used as data that can be accurately understood.

The Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological method was the most appropriate choice for this study because I identify as a Black male who worked as a professional school counselor in K-12 schools. To avoid instances of personal bias or assumptions that would interfere with the collection and analyzing of data, I can rely as much as possible on each participant's experiences of how view their role as a school counselor. By doing so, I can learn new information from other Black male school

counselors of their motivation for entering the profession, perceptions regarding the job, and their thoughts on recruitment and retention efforts.

Many researchers have followed Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological psychological approach for their studies. Broome (2013) used the Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological method to explore police officers' lived experiences during police vehicle pursuits. Likewise, Zapien (2016) used the Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological approach to examine the beginnings of what led married individuals to an extra-marital affair. According to Zapien, descriptive phenomenological method was used in her study for two reasons: (a) it offered a clear means to maintain trustworthiness to the participant's experiences, which is an essential structure of a phenomenon; (b) it utilizes a psychological lens for analysis to inform psychotherapeutic benefits.

Using Giorgi's approach, Wines (2013) conducted an autophenomenography to examine multicultural leadership from her personal perspective as a female Black school counselor who served as a lead counselor, researcher, and participant in her own study reflecting on her experience working in a predominantly White school district. Wines et al. (2015) used descriptive phenomenological psychological methodology in another study to examine the experiences of Black school counselors who work in predominantly White-culture school districts. In both studies, Wines was able to analyze the data by using Giorgi's (1997) four-step process: epoche, eidetic reduction, imaginative variation, and essential essences.

Research Rationale

For this study, I chose the phenomenological qualitative approach to focus on the worldview of each Black male participant by allowing them to give a rich account of their work experiences. Phenomenology inquiry is best for understanding the school counseling profession through lens of Black male counselors since they have a direct, immediate experience in the role (Creswell, 2009). "Phenomenological research is when the researcher explores the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants" (Creswell, 2009, p. 13). Phenomenological researchers spend extensive amounts of time in the field interviewing participants, coding data, creating clusters or themes, and analyzing data, to write a description of participants lived experiences. This study included interviews that capture the academic and work experiences of Black males who have served or were currently serving as professional school counselors.

Role of the Researcher

Like most qualitative inquiries, I served as the primary instrument for data collection which can be susceptible to researcher bias (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I am a Black male professional school counselor who worked in a public high school in the southwestern part of the United States. There may be instances where bias or assumptions interfere with the data collection and analyzing process. To ensure that the data I extract relied as much as possible on the participant's experiences, I bracketed my personal biases and assumptions by journaling, note-taking, and member checking.

Methodology

Procedures for Participant Selection, Recruitment, and Data Collection

The sampling method of choice for this study was purposeful selection. According to Creswell (2009), purposeful sampling of participants is ideal for any qualitative study because they can best help me understand the phenomenon as well as answer the research question. As I investigated the career and educational experiences of Black males in school counselor roles, a purposeful sampling method was best because I was looking to obtain detailed accounts from a specific population (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I also used snowball sampling to recruit a chain of other Black males through the referral of participants already committed to the study as well as using social media outlets and personal and professional networks to encourage participation in this study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

For phenomenological studies, Morse (1994) suggested a sample size of at least six participants. Creswell (1998) added that a sample size between five and 25 participants is recommended for phenomenology research. Percy and Kostere (2008), suggested that qualitative studies require a sample size to be a minimum of 10 participants to generate an adequate amount of data to analyze. Based on previous studies regarding qualitative sampling sizes, an appropriate goal for this study was to secure between six to 12 participants through purposive sampling and use snowball sampling to gain access to additional Black males in school counseling roles (Creswell, 2009; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

For this study, research participants were selected from a population of Black males who have a master's degree in counseling and provide or have provided counseling services to students at the elementary and secondary school levels in multiple regions of the United States. I reached out to the K-12 directors of guidance and counseling programs in various regional school districts and asked them to share the study information with any Black males employed full-time in professional school counselor roles within their districts. Inclusion criteria for this study dictated that participants identified as a Black, nonbinary or Black male, have a master's degree in counseling, are licensed as a school counselor in their state, and have served as a full-time school counselor in a public elementary/intermediate, middle/junior high, or a high school for at least one school year. Exclusion criteria for this study were individuals who do not identify as Black or Black male, does not have a master's degree in counseling, are not licensed as a full-time school counselor, and have not worked as a full-time school counselor in a US public elementary/intermediate, middle/junior high or high school.

For data collection, I developed a scripted interview guide to be used to conduct one hour, semistructured, interviews with participants. My preference would have been to conduct all interviews in person. Because this study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, I conducted all interviews based on the participants' choice of videoconferencing (Zoom) or telephone. Since videoconferencing and telephone interviews are just as effective as face-to face meetings, I was confident that rich, in-depth data would be produced from my proposed interview guide (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Zhang et al., 2017). The interview guide consisted of three sections: demographic

questionnaire, 10 open-ended questions that targets the participants educational and work experiences, and three debrief questions that allowed the participants to share their experiences in this study (See Appendix A).

Interviews in qualitative research may involve exploration of sensitive topics. I provided each participant an informed consent form that included a description of the study, confidentiality, and risk and benefits. According to Billups (2021), written informed consent to participate in a research study must address the potential for risk and include a participant's right to refuse to answer a question, stop the interview at any time and reschedule, or withdraw from the study without consequence. For instance, if a participant is not comfortable disclosing negative racial events, I must give them the opportunity to pass on the question, stop the interview and reconvene at later time or request to be removed from the study altogether. I treated each interview as a casual conversion and use interviewing skills such as trust and rapport building, nonverbal attending, and asked warm-up questions to help each participant feel comfortable about sharing their lived experiences regarding their role as professional school counselors (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Once informed consent was obtained, I had each participant provide several dates and timeframes that worked with their availability so that I could schedule a 1-hour interview. Each interview was audiotaped using a digital recorder and stored on my password-protected laptop. At the conclusion, I had each interview transcribed verbatim using a transcription service (Rev). In addition, I listened to each audio-recorded interview and made journal notes. Halcomb and Davidson (2006) noted that the process

of transcription tends to produce a range of errors. For instance, in audio-recorded transcripts, the transcriber uses the term *inaudible* at times when they cannot make out what is said. By reviewing the audio and making notes, I carefully examined the inaudible parts of the interview for possible codes and themes. In a study conducted by Greenwood et al. (2017), the authors discovered that using a summative approach for data collection strengthens trustworthiness and credibility in a qualitative study. The process of transcription and listening to the audio allowed me to gain more depth into seeing the patterns and categories to develop themes as well as get closer to the participants' lived experiences as a Black male professional school counselor.

Instrumentation

Influenced by Wines et al. (2015) and Cross-Lee (2014), my interview guide consisted of a demographic questionnaire, 10 questions to examine the educational and work experiences of Black males the serve in professional school counselor roles, and three debrief questions to allow each participant to share their experience in this study (See Appendix A). The interview questions were developed based on my research question and designed to gain the perspectives that other Black male school counselors may offer to directors of guidance and counseling departments, and university counselor educators regarding methods to support the professional success of Black male school counselors (Wines, 2013). Concepts that were explored included, educational and work experiences, racial and/or gender-discrimination, counseling outcomes, resiliency, and relationships with school stakeholders. While these questions are phenomenological, qualitative, and humanistic in nature, establishing rapport was essential for understanding

the individual experience of the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Wines et al., 2015). Efforts to ensure credibility and rigor consisted of implementing feedback I received from my dissertation committee members and making revisions where necessary. Other data sources used in support of the interviews were journaling notes to highlight important phrases and to make note of my feelings and bracketing them.

Data Analysis Plan

Once the data were collected, I prepared a transcript of each participant interview conducted. I used Giorgi's (2009) Descriptive Phenomenology Psychological Method to analyze each transcript. The Descriptive Phenomenology Psychological Method involves the following five-steps: (a) adopt a phenomenological attitude, (b) read the entire written account for a sense of the whole, (c) delineate meaning units, (d) transform the meaning units into psychologically sensitive statements of participant lived-meanings, and (e) synthesize a general psychological structure of the experience base on the constituents of the experience. Once the transcripts were finalized, the participants were sent a copy for review (member-checking) and to make revisions if necessary. The credibility of the data was established when all transcripts are considered accurate by both me and the research participants.

Data were sorted, coded, and gathered in a systematic and meaningful way to note recurring themes, patterns, or concepts (Patton, 2015). To achieve this step, I used both a hands-on approach and a Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) software. QDA software assists qualitative researchers with tasks such as sorting, structuring, and analyzing of large amounts of text or other data and facilitate the management of the resulting

interpretations and evaluations (Patton, 2015). I used NVivo as it was considered a top

choice that researchers use to support qualitative research. Patton (2015) noted that a

QDA is both a data management and qualitative analysis tool that researchers are still in

control of. In other words, researchers are responsible for conducting a hands-on analysis

and using software programs to management data process. Once the transcripts were

approved, I consulted with my committee members to analyze the data and review

emergent themes (Creswell, 2009). Once my committee and I agreed on the themes, I

wrote a summary of the findings and developed a table to explain the data's thematic

meanings (Saldaña, 2016).

Issues with Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in a research study is important to ensure reliability and validity

in qualitative research (Billups, 2021; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To address issues of

trustworthiness in this study, I performed a thorough literature review of research that

will supported as well as challenge my findings to demonstrate research credibility

(Patton, 2015). To show credibility and dependability, I developed inclusion and

exclusion criteria to make my sample purposeful and consistent as well as utilize

triangulation and member-checking (Patton, 2015). I also used inquiry audits to provide

an in-depth analysis of data collect from each interview (Billups, 2021; Lincoln & Guba,

1985; Patton, 2015). Once the interview transcripts were summarized, I implemented

member checking to ensure that I accurately captured the participants' experiences before

analyzing the data which shows dependability in data analysis. To demonstrate

transferability, I used thick description, in which I provide a robust and detailed account

of my experiences during data collection. I made explicit connections to the cultural and social contexts that surround data collection (Billups, 2021; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2015). To show confirmability, I used reflexivity by stating my connection to the study that may contribute to bias. Several interventions I used consists of journaling, bracketing, and establishing open dialogue with my committee members throughout data analysis (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015).

Ethical Procedures

The participants in this study were current and/or former professional school counselors who will be free to determine if they would like to participate. Each participant was informed of their rights pertaining to the research by completing an informed consent form. If the participants experience any emotional distress during the participation of this study, they could withdraw from the interview and decline further involvement in the research. I offered proper referral for counseling services if any participant needed to take advantage of them. To ensure confidentiality of the participants, each person was assigned a pseudonym. The purpose of this process was to ensure that participant information was protected in case of backlash from colleagues and job security issues resulting in their participation in this study. Furthermore, I am the only person with access to files, audio recordings, and transcripts which will be stored in a locked cabinet in my home office, or a password protected laptop. Data collection for this study began once I obtained approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Limitations, Challenges, and/or Barriers

This study limits its research endeavors to explore the lived experiences of Black male school counselors. Since Black male school counselors were the primary target for this study, results cannot be generalized to other minority male counselors because of the small sample size and the specific experiences collected from the participants of this study. Also, data analysis is susceptible to researcher bias since I was the primary instrument for data collection and the fact the I served as a Black male professional school counselor for many years. Using Giorgi's Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method, researchers must be able to bracket their assumptions and biases throughout the data analysis process. Therefore, pure bracketing may be difficult to achieve if biases and assumptions are not controlled.

Summary

The current research study to explore the experiences of Black male professional school counselors regarding their underrepresentation utilized the qualitative method and phenomenological design. Studying the perceptions of Black male school counselors in K-12 public schools is essential for addressing their lack of representation in the profession and to give voice to their experiences as it relates to the phenomenon. An understanding of this problem can inspire school district stakeholders and counselor education graduate programs to take the necessary steps to improve retention and recruitment efforts of Black males. It is my best hope that the personal stories told in this study not only benefit those experiencing the phenomenon but begin a much-needed

dialogue about increasing representation of Black male school counselors in K-12 public school districts.

In this chapter, I introduced the research problem and the reasons a Descriptive Phenomenology Psychological qualitative study is most appropriate for this inquiry. I described my role and bias as a researcher as well as the targeted population, recruitment strategies, interview protocol, participation, and ethical implications. I also discussed ways I will ensure data trustworthy throughout the study. In Chapter 4, I further elaborate on my data collection approach, the demographics of the participants, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and the results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive, phenomenological study was to understand the educational and career experiences of Black males who serve as professional school counselors in K-12 public schools. The main research question in the study was:

How do Black male professional school counselors in US public schools describe and make meaning of their professional experiences?

In this chapter, I described the setting for data collection, provided the demographic information of the participants, as well as specifics of data collection. I also discussed data analysis which includes the emergent themes and categories, results, and measures I used to ensure trustworthiness throughout study.

Setting

I conducted each interview via Zoom or phone call, based on each participant's communication modality of choice. I conducted the interviews in my home or private practice counseling office based on my schedule and the requested times of the participants. Prior to the interviews, I reviewed with each participant about the voluntary nature of the study, limits of confidentiality, that the interview would be audio-recorded only, and their right to discontinue their participation in the research study at any time without explanation or penalty. There were no personal or organizational conditions that I knew of that may have influenced the interview experience of the participants. However, during four of the interviews, the participants had to stop and answer calls but returned

quickly to finish the process. Considering that most of the participants were at work, these brief interruptions did not negatively affect data collection.

Demographics

Prior to the interviews, I sent each participant an invitation to the study via email for review. If the participants understood the study and wish to volunteer, they were instructed to click on the link at the bottom of their invitation to give their consent for participation and complete a brief demographic survey in Qualtrics. Participants provided their gender, age, state(s) where they are licensed or certified as a school counselor, years of experience, and if they are current or former professional school counselors. Once the demographic surveys were completed and inclusion criteria were verified, the participants were emailed the informed consent form for their records.

All 11participants identified as Black males, certified as a school counselor in their state, and were currently working as school counselors in K-12 public schools. There were two participants that identified that they were licensed as school counselors in multiple states. The age range of the participants was 28-52 years old. The participants' years of service as school counselors ranged from 2-23.5 years. Although the location of the participants varied, most of them lived and worked in the Southeast and Southwest regions of the US. There was one participant who worked and lived in the Mountain West region. Table 1 provides demographic data for the participants in this research study. To ensure confidentiality, I assigned each participant a pseudonym in which I used when referring to them in the study.

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Data

Participant	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Years Served	Certified/licensed school counselor/ state	Current/former school counselor
Jack	49	Male	Black	10	Yes/South Carolina	Current
Marshall	52	Male	Black	23.5	Yes/Texas	Current
Jamison	38	Male	Black	5	Yes/Texas	Current
Jordan	37	Male	Black	2	Yes/Texas	Current
Dayton	36	Male	Black	6	Yes/Texas	Current
Jamal	28	Male	Black	3	Yes/Florida	Current
Clyde	47	Male	Black	17	Yes/Georgia and Tennessee	Current
Eli	39	Male	Black	5	Yes/Florida and Georgia	Current
Graham	42	Male	Black	10	Yes/Texas	Current
Sterling	37	Male	Black	2	Yes/Colorado	Current
Jayden	29	Male	Black	3	Yes/Georgia	Current

Data Collection

I used purposeful and snowball sampling methods to identify Black male professional school counselors for this study. I emailed my IRB approved invitation to potential participants through professional circles as well as academic social media (ex. Facebook, Twitter) to identify possible participants to recruit for this study. I also used snowball sampling to recruit additional Black males through the referral of participants that already committed to the study. From these recruiting efforts, 15 potential participants responded and completed the demographic survey. However, four of the potential participants did not respond to my request for dates and times to complete the interview, making them ineligible for the research study.

There were 11 participants in this study. Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, I conducted all interviews via Zoom or phone. Each participant was interviewed once with

a planned time of one hour; the actual interviews ranged from 38 minutes to one hour and seven minutes. I audio recorded the interviews using a Yemenren digital voice recorder. Upon the completion of each interview, I uploaded and sent them to the transcription service, Rev to have them transcribed verbatim. After each interview, I took time to journal my thoughts, feelings, and beliefs so that I could remain objective in obtaining and reporting my results. Once they were returned, I printed and read each transcript while listening to the audio recordings so that I could compare for accuracy. In addition to listening to each audio recorded interview, I made journal notes to analyze the inaudible parts of each interview transcript for possible codes. The overall process for the transcription of interviews and checking them for accuracy took approximately 3 weeks for completion. Once they were verified for accuracy, I sent the transcripts to each participant via email for member-checking. Outside of a few transcript corrections pointed out by the participants, I did not encounter any unusual circumstances during data collection.

Data Analysis

I used the Descriptive Phenomenology Psychological Method as the conceptual framework for this study. The following five-steps provided by Giorgi (2009) were used to analyze my research data: (a) adopt a phenomenological attitude, (b) read the entire written account for a sense of the whole, (c) delineate meaning units, (d) transform the meaning units into psychologically sensitive statements of participant lived-meanings, and (e) synthesize a general psychological structure of the experience base on the constituents of the experience. First, I adopted the phenomenological attitude by

bracketing my presumptions and experiences and took a fresh look at the transcripts

without compromising their validity or existence. Second, I read the transcripts in their

entirety to get a sense of the whole experiences for each participant. This process allowed

me to analyze the account of each participant in how they made meaning of their

everyday experience without critical reflection.

Third, I used eidetic reduction so that the data could be dealt with in manageable

portions (Giorgi, 2009). During this step, I re-read the data (transcripts) with the purpose

of determining where places of meaning shifted within them. Using the NVivo software,

I identified words or phrases used by the participants and labeled them with codes.

Fourth, I transformed the meaning units created from the data into phenomenological

psychological sensitive expressions (Broome, 2013). To elaborate, I located and

interpreted the psychological meanings contained in the data and then begin developing

and categorizing preliminary domains in the order they emerged to create the primary

themes for this study.

Finally, I produced over-arching essential essence statements based on the

summation of the participants' accounts. These essential essence statements produced

five main themes: a call to serve, professional challenges, academic/personal challenges,

supported networks, and being intentional. The 17 subthemes were: (a) career trajectory,

(b) making a positive impact/rapport building, (c) advocate/role model for marginalized

students, (d) strengthen professional identity, (e) impact of COVID-19, (f) pride and

prejudice, (g) the unicorn effect, (h) noncounseling duties, (i) feeling of unpreparedness,

(j) coping mechanisms, (k) demonstrating resilience, (l) college/universities connections,

(m) active mentorship, (n) professional development, (o) finding your voice, (p) get serious about recruitment and retention, (q) increase diversity and resources in school counseling. The five themes and 17 subthemes that emerged from the data analysis supported how Black males make meaning of their professional experiences as school counselors (Table 2).

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in a research study is important to ensure reliability and validity in qualitative research (Billups, 2021; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Because instruments with established metrics about validity and reliability are not used in qualitative research, it is essential for qualitative researchers to take steps in providing evidence of trustworthiness in their studies. These steps include research credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

The purpose of establishing credibility is for researchers to demonstrate the measures they take to expand on the current literature as well as theories they use to support their work (Patton, 2015). Giorgi's (2009) five-step method of data analysis was utilized in this qualitative phenomenological study to explore the lived experiences of Black male professional school counselors that serve in K-12 public schools. This methodology has been successfully implemented in past qualitative phenomenological studies (Wines, 2013; Wines et al., 2015) and has been proven to be a trustworthy and an effective approach for qualitative data analysis. Research participants were also provided informed consent in advance so that they were informed of their limits of confidentiality,

the research process, and the purpose of the study. I also developed inclusion and exclusion criteria to make my sample purposeful and consistent as well as used inquiry audits (member checks) to provide an in-depth analysis of data collect from each interview transcript (Billups, 2021; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2015). Once the interview transcripts were analyzed, I sent them to each participant for member checking to ensure that I accurately captured their lived experiences.

Transferability

Transferability is established when the researcher provides readers with evidence that the research study's findings could be applicable to other contexts, situations, times, and populations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability in qualitative research is synonymous with generalizability in quantitative research. In this study, I implemented transferability by using the Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method as my conceptual framework for data analysis, which allowed me to give a thick description, in which I provided a robust and detailed account of my experiences during data collection. In other words, I made explicit connections to the cultural and social contexts that surround the data collection process (Billups, 2021; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2015). I also confirmed the accuracy of the data via member checking. However, five of the eleven participants did not respond to my request for member checking via email, so I relied on the information they presented during their interviews for data analysis.

Dependability

Dependability is essential to establishing trustworthiness since it establishes the research study's findings as consistent and repeatable (Patton, 2015). Dependability

allows researchers to explain the steps they took in a qualitative study so that others can substantiate and follow based on the research method used (Patton, 2015). To ensure dependability in this study, I developed inclusion and exclusion criteria to make my participant group purposeful and consistent. I also utilized the same interview protocol with each participant which included the same demographic, interview, and debrief questions. The interview transcripts were verified and sent to each participant for member checking to ensure that I accurately captured the participants' experiences before analyzing the data.

Confirmability

Confirmability ensures a level of confidence that the findings in a research study are based on the participants' accounts and words without being subjected to researcher bias. Creswell (2013) noted that researchers are mindful about the importance of understanding and overcoming their bias in a research study. Several interventions I used to ensure confirmability without contributing to researcher bias consisted of journaling, bracketing, member-checking, and establishing open dialogue with my committee members throughout data analysis (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Examples of how I used bracketing during the interviews were to clarify questions, summarize the participants' statements and positions, and ask follow-up questions to ensure that their viewpoints were accurately represented. Engaging in these bracketing interventions prevented me from imposing my personal values and beliefs about the topic on to the participants. In addition, I engaged in reflective journaling during the data collection process to manage my thoughts, opinions, and feelings since I had a personal connection

to the research topic. Also, interview transcripts were sent to each participant for member-checking to ensure accurate representation of their accounts.

Results

The main research question I set out to answer by conducting this study was: How do Black male professional school counselors in US public schools describe and make meaning of their professional experiences?

I answered the research question with excerpts from the transcripts about what the participants shared regarding their professional experiences as school counselors, what led them into the profession, and how they cope with personal and professional challenges in their role. The participants' answers to these questions resulted in the distillation of five themes: (a) a call to serve, (b) professional challenges, (c) academic/personal challenges, (d) supported networks, and (e) being intentional. I provided examples of each theme and subtheme.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes Among Participants

Participants	Jack	Marshall	Jamison	Jordan	Dayton	Jamal	Clyde	Eli	Graham	Sterling	Jayden
A Call to Serve											
Career Trajectory	X		X	X	X		X		X	X	
Making a Positive Impact/Rapport Building	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Advocate/Role Model for Marginalized Students	X	X			X	X	X	X			X
Strengthen Professional Identity			X		X	X			X	X	X
Professional Challenges											
Impact of COVID-19	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Pride and Prejudice	X		X	X	X				X		X
The Unicorn Effect	X			X	X	X		X		X	X
Non-Counseling Duties	X			X	X	X		X	X		X
Academic/Personal Challenges											
Feelings of Unpreparedness			X	X	X			X	X		
Coping Mechanisms	X	X	X			X	X	X			X
Demonstrating Resilience					X			X	X	X	X
Supported Networks											
College/Universities Connections	X					X	X	X		X	
Active Mentorship		X	X		X	X			X	X	X
Professional Development		X	X	X						X	
Being Intentional											
Finding Your Voice		X		X	X		X		X		X
Get Serious about Recruitment and Retention	X			X	X	X			X		X
Increase Diversity and Resources in School Counseling	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X

Theme 1: A Call to Serve

All participants shared experiences within the first theme, a call to serve which had the following subthemes: career trajectory, making a positive impact and building rapport with students, advocate/role model for marginalized students, and promoting a professional identity. All participants shared a unique perspective on what led them into the school counseling profession and how they impact the school community they serve.

Career trajectory. Seven participants discussed how their experiences in other careers led them to become school counselors. In the following example, Jack provided factors that led him into the school counseling profession:

The economic decline in 2008. In 2008, I lost everything. I lost my business, personal life. Uh, everything crumbled, and I had to reinvent myself. I held a master's in rehabilitation counseling therapy for eight, nine years, then I had my own Subway franchise like f- for five years. So, when the economy crashed in '08, I went into education being a secure economical factor at that time. So, I went back and got a second master's, and that's the main reason why I went into it for, uh, retirement financial security. Enable to, for me in, and which will enable me to take care of myself and my family. Once I got into it then I developed a love and a passion for helping others, helping schooling, shaping minds, shaping our future. So, I got into it for financial stability in '08, and now I'm, I'm in it now for the retirement, number one, and the goal it gets to give back to everyone, to Black males and to kids in a home.

In another example, Jamison discussed how his previous career as a classroom teacher inspired him to become a school counselor:

> I actually began teaching. So, I started teaching middle school and, uh, middle school Spanish, and I realized that a lot of times that I was in the classroom teaching, I spent a lot of time, like, dealing with... helping students process, like, uh, neighborhood community problems, and violence, different issues within each other conflict. A lot of times in- in the classroom... like, and I enjoyed it, I realized that I actually enjoy helping students problem solve and helping them figure out their own way of life and navi-... helping them navigate their way through it. And so I spent so much time doing that that it- it really made me interested in going and seeking a masters in school counseling. Which is something I never would have pursued beforehand, but I just realized that it was a really good fit for me. I figured that it would allow a lot of flexibility, as opposed to being in a classroom with, um, you know, the same group of kids all day. So it was- it was just, like, "Okay, this is gonna be something that's interesting." I'm gonna go to school, and I really enjoyed the process, I enjoyed every part of the internship and all of that. And I was like, "This was actually made for me."

Graham provided another example of how his experience as a special education teacher influenced him to pursue a career in school counseling:

> Well, my background is special education. I wanted to go into education, I just did not know ... I was not passionate about teaching and so someone mentioned special education. And I liked the- the individualized, uh, aspect of that type of

education. Uh, and I'd been at a, gaining appropriate performance, which was like

the behavior unit, uh, for seven years. And that experience in seeing how, uh ...

The district at the time had a special ed counselor who worked with students. I

taught the social skills and she counseled them. And seeing the way in which she

worked with those students, you know, where I was kind of a more punitive

because of my role. Uh, I really was inspired by how, what I saw her doing with

students. Uh, and at that time I was on the fence whether or not I was gonna get

my Master's in administration or counseling. And so that kind of solidified that

for me. Um, I said I want to do more work like what she's doing. Um, and so, uh,

I went ahead and got my Master's in counseling. Um, and so that- that right there

just opened a door for me.

Jordan gave an example that highlighted several career paths he took before becoming a

school counselor:

So, never imagined myself, uh, in education. Never imagined myself as a

counselor. Uh, uh, you know, I- I grew up with a business mindset, you know? I

was a musician. Um, I wanted to go to Juilliard. Mom said, "Nope, go to business

school." So, um, I ended up, you know, um, coming out and doing a, uh,

management training program for the Citigroup in New York, and, uh, long story

short, uh, was a branch manager for several years, uh, between Citibank and- and

Capital One, and, um, realized it wasn't my passion. Got out. Short pause in

between professions, and, uh, a mentor of mine approached me and was like,

"Hey, I think you'd make a really great fit to, um, step into this admissions role,"

for the school he worked at the time in New York. And, um, trusted him, went for

the interview. Still felt like I was an imposter, you know? What am I doing here?

I have no qualifications for admissions, education, none of this. Not what I went

to school for. And it just fit like a glove. Um, had students coming to my desk,

wanting to chat with me all the time, opening up their lives to me. Um, again,

back to that awesome responsibility that I felt, students wanted to follow me and

wanted to be in my presence, and I knew that, um, I had to treat that with a level

of care and trust. Um, and so I decided, I actually consulted, um, my

administration and they- they were all for me going for a master's. Um, and after

carefully consulting, or, um, thinking about it, I went for a master's in school

counseling. Um, and again, fit like a glove. I mean, uh, just loved taking in the

knowledge and the conversations and, you know, the field experiences and

everything. So it just, it was just such a natural fit, and I... It was a godsend

honestly. I would have never in a million years walked into that by myself.

Dayton shared challenges he faced to earn his degree in finance and experiences that led

him to becoming a school counselor. In his example, Dayton discussed his feelings about

his career in finance and how his spouse encouraged him to consider the school

counseling profession:

I was kind of encouraged by my wife. Man, my wife, she has a counseling degree.

She has a master's in clinical mental health. And my bachelor's was in finance.

And I graduated during the quote, unquote "recession", the mortgage, subprime

mortgage crisis. So, um, being a black man, I kind of partied a lot, Uh, in my

bachelor's. So coming out, I had a poor GPA, and it was extremely hard to, uh, to get a job in finance. However, once I did, I hated it, man. It took years for me to get the job, and when I finally got it, I hated it. However, just working with my, um, my wife, you know, doing things for her over at her job, and she realized how, how strangers would approach me and just share their whole life story with me. She's like, "Babe, you know them?" Like, "Uh, I don't know them, babe." So after, after seeing this and being a part of this so many times, she's like, "Babe, you would be an awesome counselor. You'd be an awesome counselor."

Clyde shared how his work in assessment and appeals for a school district caught the attention of an executive director, who encouraged him to pursue a career as a school counselor in the following example:

Actually, believe it or not, I kind of fell into it. I was doing a, a, I was doing an internship at getting my Bachelor's. And that internship was at the, uh, where the district that I was working for that time, it was at their assessment and appeals, where students came and had hearings for expulsions. And one day I was sitting there talking to a young boy who was waiting on his hearing time. And unbeknownst to me, the executive director overheard our conversation. So, afterwards she was like, "Well, you know, have you ever thought about being a school counselor?" 'Cause at the time I was attempting to get my certification to teach. And she was like, "Well, have you ever thought about becoming a school counselor?" Which I had not, and I told her so. So, after giving it a little thought, you know, I decided to, while I was teaching to go ahead and get that, uh,

counseling degree and certification. So, I kind of fell into it at a little nudging

from someone else.

Sterling provided an example of how his career in the United States military led to his

calling into the school counseling profession:

I ended up going into the military, um, and then I experienced a lot of experiences

there. I did that for three years, um, and then it ... just a light bulb hit while I was

here, stationed at xxxxxx, xx and just, just this light bulb came up and say, "I

wanna be a school counselor." 'Cause it's ... I just felt like there was a need and I

was interacting with younger, uh, with, uh, with, you know, all the soldiers that

are younger than me and I feel like what they were saying about how their

experiences, how they get, you know, they just handled directions and no one

really reached out to them. And I was like, and I was like that's something that

maybe I can be for a kid at high school... or maybe ... I, I didn't know what,

which level I wanted to be, but I knew I wanted to do something for the schools.

Positive impact/rapport building. Ten participants shared that making a positive

impact and building relationships with students were influential in their decision to

become school counselors. Jack reflected on how his students give him praise for the

impact he made on their lives from his school counselor role:

It's always good when a student comes up to you and remembers you, remember

what impact that you played on them, what impression, what imprint that, that

you, that you made in their life. And we always hope that we have always been a

positive influence in, in someone's life. So that's always so rewarding and you can

pat yourself on, on, on the back. So yeah, so when you receive those praises, oh, well, yeah, it, it, it mean, means a lot. Because there're, there're few and far less.

Marshall shared:

I was, uh, just eager, uh, just love at first sight, if you will. Just ha- happy to have the opportunity to work and reach students-especially ninth graders, um, you know, very impressionable. It was just a great experience. I think just having this platform period. I mean, whether, regardless of what race you are. Um, but especially being an African-American male. Um, being able to have the privilege and the honor and the ch- being trusted to be able to speak into the lives of vulnerable individuals. Home, um, they trust you, their parents trust you, the district trusts you. Um, it's, it's an honor. I, I truly, I'm so grateful and yet humbled even after being in education, uh, over 25 years. But to speak from the counseling perspective, I really value that and I'm thankful and grateful and I feel blessed to be able to, um, have such a great opportunity.

Dayton provided the following examples of how he builds rapport with the students he serves:

Just getting the looks from my students because they were in awe. They was in ... They were in awe. And I, oftentimes, get that question, "Ah, what? What, what, what class do you teach? "Or, "What principal are you?" So it, it's pretty cool to be like, "Oh, no, I'm the school counselor," you know. So I, I, I think that was really cool. I feel like I serve a dual role, like, now, I if I only school have a school counselor that's gonna discuss your credits and your graduation requires,

but again, I'm also ... I'm not trying to brag this is, man, like, but I'm like, a lot of

my student, I'm the most positive black man that they know. So it becomes ... It

becomes more about I g- I really, uh ... Well, of course, we gonna address the

academic domain, but I love to talk about the career aspect and the socio-

emotional aspect of being a school counselor. Being a black man, it, it, it, it goes

beyond just counseling or even education. I think that's why I have a great rapport

with my students, because I'm always talking about just life, man, sharing with

them my stories.

Jamison noted:

I will say that a lot of times when I introduce myself as the counselor, from the

standpoint of the students, I see the joy and the excitement kinda light up in their

eyes when they see someone who looks like them. So that part really means a lot,

like, I've literally seen, like, the excitement in their face and in their eyes when-

when I show them that I'm... tell them that I'm their counselor. And that means a

lot to me, because I'm there for a greater purpose, not just to do the part of the

counseling, but also just to give them some hope and representation.

Jordan stated:

I'll share this one example that just touches me. So this is from last year, and this-

this is replicated across the board in places I've been, but I had a student,

transgender student. Um, all reports told me coming in that this student was

incredibly suicidal. I mean, ran into the middle of a highway the year before I got

here. Um, didn't take medication purposefully. Uh, just huge ruckus. And funny

thing was, you know, uh, unconditional positive regard is anything in my heart.

And I actually, it just, it just happened organically, started taking a student in

under my wings and became my college intern. So was an intern here in the

office. Became the most responsible student I saw. I could not tell you how many

folks would tell me day in and day out, "This is not the same student. You don't

know what you did to this student. This is just different, night and day." And I'm

just like, "What, just building a relationship and giving them the autonomy to

actually do something?" She became a mentor in my TNT Peer Mentorship

Program I created last year. Was the top mentor in that program. Her... In fact,

that student's mentor, or mentee, doesn't want to be mentored by anybody else,

'cause she just does not want the possibility of having a bad relationship.

Clyde noted:

When I first began, uh, as a counselor I began in elementary school. It was, it was

a Title 1 School and there was, put it like this, I could tell with my interaction

especially through a lot of the, the young boys that there had never, ever been, let

alone a male counselor, but a black male counselor. So, coming in I felt them kind

of gravitating towards me. You know, it was not a school that had a lot of

behavioral problems. But there were a lot of academic problems, where students

were, were not performing well at all. So, coming in and having to try to help

address that in talking to those students, like, "Look, you can do better than what

you're doing. Here I am. You look in the mirror. I look in the mirror. I see you,

who I used to be. And you look in the mirror you can see me, who you can be."

So, that helped a, a lot.

Jamal stated:

I never saw a black male school counselor in my entirety of my experience

through, uh, through school. Um, so I think it's useful in the sense that it'll... for a

lot of students, they... it's their first time seeing a black in a role like this. Um, I

think, a lot of times, when you think of, like, the more, um, like, student services

side of things, so social workers, school psychologists, school counselors, they're

usually white... and female usually. So, being able to see a black male, I think, is

really... it's really useful for... it's fantastic for students to be able to kind of have

that experience and get that other perspective.

Eli noted:

I was in middle school, which I did not want any parts of, um, at all. And I started

off my first years as a seventh-grade school counselor. Um, it really was not that

complicated. I think, you know, you have the technical aspect of learning systems

that the school uses and, you know, pretty much how the district operates and

that's something that you can learn along quick, but I think what made the, uh,

transition easy for me and, you know, it was just the relationship building that I

had with the students. Building the trust, you know, of the students and so, it, it

made it very simple when, you know, pretty much they see, you know, someone

who was, um, you know, I'm pretty much the same skin color as them and you

know, kinda understand the language and, you know, the culture that they have.

So, you know, my experience was at a Title 1 school and, you know, pretty much where 90, I would say 98% of the students were eligible for free and reduced lunch. So, you know, the experience was not, it was, it was a very experience. It didn't take much to get acclimated. I know my assistant principal at the time, you know, after the first couple of months, she thought I was in the education system for like, almost 10 years. I was like, no, "this is my first year" and she was just like, "wow, okay. You're doing very good, you know, you transition very well. You're working like a veteran.". But it's just because of the relation-, relationship building piece.

Sterling noted:

The first thing is, you know, in school is that I bring a different perspective into a meeting like, like with my colleagues or sometimes I don't even have to say anything. But just my presence sometimes would ... The students see me as, you know, someone who is positioned that, you know, that's ... makes ... it makes, uh, you know, the school seem like it's being responsive to the needs of all, all different types of students.

Jayden shared:

I like to tell myself that, um, "What I'm doing matters," and I do believe that it matters, but I think just the nature of this role, we don't always know the impact of our efforts immediately. We don't get immediate gratification, um, like other professions do, like we hoping too, um, but I think, I just find comfort in those small wins, in those small victories when kids either explicitly tell me things, or I

can observe things. I'm like, "Okay, I'm making some kind of impact." Like today, I brought a kid in to talk about sexual harassment, because he was accused of touching, you know, a girl inappropriately, and, you know, towards the ends of this meeting that started off very uncomfortable for him, and he has never had any contact, um, with a black school counselor before, and he was just like, "I like you a lot, can I come back here more often?" And I was like, "Absolutely, do you know how to fill out a counsel referral?" Like, "No, I don't." "Let me show you." So he knows like, since my mom was like battling, and I when my relationship with kids blossom into something, that's where I find meaning in the work that I'm doing, because I'm just like, regardless if I'm advocating for this person at the steps of Barack Obama's house himself, or if I'm, you know, fighting for somebody in this classroom to put his child in, and give to, and give him a chance, whatever the thing is, none of that matters if you don't have a relationship with the children, and the people you working with. And if I don't know anything else, I know how to build relationships with kids-... and with my colleagues, and, you know, I hope that the work I'm doing is impactful, but even if it's not, the kids believe that I care, and that's all that matters.

In this subtheme, positive impact/rapport building, the participants described how they presence as school counselors provided a positive impact on the students and the school community they serve. The overall message from their experiences is that building positive relationships with students and school stakeholders were essential to their success as professional school counselors.

Advocate/role model for marginalized students. Seven participants reported that advocating and serving as a role model for students of marginalized communities were influential in their decision to pursue a career as a school counselor. Marshall provided an example of having an absent father and the lack of Black male in school counselors led him to the profession:

I've never met my father; I've never seen him once. I thank God for my grandfather who was like my father, um, his, his, you know, commitment to hard work. Um, his, um, commitment to us as a family, um, was very touching to me. And of course seeing a lack of African American males in the counseling role. And then just with the, my, my background, my, my heart, um, for the underdog. Um, especially, when I say that I'm saying, uh, minority children. Um, I have a heart for them or just for the underdog period. But in this perspective, in this vanish point, it is, uh, you know, minority students. And so my heart was to, um, and my passion was to let them know by looking at me that someone like myself cares about them, believes in them, uh, that they can do this as well. I mean, they can get their education, they can be someone, uh, whatever they wanna be if they set goals and work toward those goals then, you know, the sky is the limit.

Jack noted:

My first ex- experience was warm, welcoming, wonderful because, um, when I first started, I was at an alternative school where the population was about 90% African American, but 99% of these kids who got kicked out of traditional school,

so I had more of an impact on their lives. So, I'm able to do more, and that was so, um, worthwhile and rewarding.

Dayton stated:

Whenever I had the opportunity to have a young black man in my office, I'm loving the, the opportunity to let them know that, uh, just this is there is gonna be challenges. There's gonna be challenges. So it gives me an opportunity, not only to just talk about counseling, or again, or graduation requirements, but life. And especially when I have my young black men with me, it gives me the opportunity to discuss the future, man. Like ...what are you gonna do once you graduate? Like what are your goals? What do you love? And then, explain to them how, I mean, to be honest, well, and sir, and again, it depends on the student, but ... might have a lot of obstacles in your way, you know, with this diploma.

In a couple of my schools, I've implementing, um, Tie Tuesdays or Fresh Fridays, encouraging my young men, t- 'cause you know that they'll be more aware of their grooming and just their, uh, their dress, their dress attire. So, and because of that, I, I wear a tie, like, really, majority of the week, now, Fridays, you know, with jeans, I wear, uh, throw on some jeans. And that's a great opportunity for me to maybe, you know, throw on some Air Max or Jordans just to show the kids, hey, I'm, I know about that, you know. But any other day, I'm wearing a tie.

Jamal stated:

I was in a research lab, and they were... one of the doc students was reviewing data, and they were looking at, um, tests, test, uh, score, test data from all around

the state. Um, and it was broken down, of course, into demographics, and across the board, um, Black students from lower SES backgrounds scored lower on all their standardized tests, um, across the state than their counterparts, and that kinda shook me. And everyone... and no one else really seemed to... not... I not gonna say they didn't care, but they were like, kinda like, "Yeah, that is kinda weird," and I'm like, "Yeah, it's much more than weird. That's a problem." Um, and so, from there, I kind of was thinking. I just tried to branch and find different ways of how I can kind of put myself in, um, wherever, like, wherever the gap was, so I can kinda, like, stand in the gap, try to, like, help, um, help kids navigate their education system and give them the support they will... they... they'll... they do need with the more so-... with the social and emotional stuff, um, but kinda be that support that I don't think really exists always, especially with students of color in, uh, lower income areas in school.

Clyde asserted:

I have to go beyond talking the talk. I actually have to walk it. So, I have to make sure that my students know, I don't have the attitude of I got mine. You have to get yours now. It's more or less, we have to get it. So, I always approach situations with the students as we. You're not by yourself. Granted, most of the responsibilities lies with you. But I'm here to support. So, always it's, it's a we factor that I use, that I like to use. Instead of just you.

Eli added:

I would say the main factor was having the ability to work with, uh, primarily

wanting to work with the teenagers. I was pretty much not the most astute student

coming up in high school. I wasn't necessarily, uh, what you would... what society

may label as at-risk, uh, at least to myself, I didn't think but if you looked at my

grades and maybe my behaviors, you know, coming up in high school. I may have

been labeled at-risk but, uh, it was mainly just to kinda serve as a vessel for young

black males and young, black woman to, um, let them know and be an example

of, you know, there are other ways that you can have a, a decent quality of life

without having to, you know, resort to playing sports or, you know, rapping or,

you know, those two, those are the two primary things that many of our young,

black males, you know, seemed is the only way to make a decent, you know, a

living. So just basically trying to be a reflection and be a light of inspiration to see

that, hey, this is a, this is a male right here. Well, you know, yeah, I played sports,

I... you know, pretty much had, you know, played at the college level and things

like that but there's still to see that, hey this guy here is still able to stay in a

decent quality of life and do things that, you know, most people would enjoy

doing without having to resort to just depending on sports and rapping.

Jayden noted,

"I owe myself that, I own that to other black and brown kids out here," to see that

they can do something else. I'm like, "Sports are cool," but we don't... I don't want

us to keep limiting our black kids, especially our black boys, thinking they have to

be athletes or music artists to make it out. And then it, the reality is that'll happen

to you with knowing.

All seven of these participants noted the importance of their work with students

from marginalized communities. Their eagerness to serve as role models and advocates

for minority students created a sense of hope and motivation for continuing their work as

school counselors.

Strengthen professional identity. Six participants discussed the importance of

strengthening the professional identity of school counseling and how it influenced their

purpose for serving in the profession. Jamal provided the following example about the

stigma of being labeled a guidance counselor:

I think, overall, my... I feel like the position of a school counselor was, was

respected, but also was still kind of like, a developing thing, so I think there's

been like this slow shift... It's supposed to be you would think it'd be a faster shift

at this point, but it's not. The shift from quote, unquote guidance counseling to

school counseling, that's still an active thing that's going on.

Dayton added:

With school counseling, people still call you a guidance counselor. There are a lot

of people that don't know that you're not a guidance counselor. You're a school

counselor. And that, and that was a shock, coming in my first year. Like, having

that, having to correct them.

Jayden provided an example of how the underrepresentation of Black male school

counselors motivated him to pursue school counseling as a profession:

"I love people," and I can be around people. I know whatever it is I'm doing; it has to involve working with people directly. Um, and I was about to graduate my bachelors, I didn't know what my plan was after undergrad, but I knew I needed to do something, and a friend of mine reached out, and she was like, "Well, you're so passionate in class about these issues, and those issues," she was like, "You should checkout this grant program," and I was like, "Girl, I never heard anything about no grant program, I'm just barely trying to get by with this bachelors." Um, long story short, I went, um, and the presenter of this program was another black man, a professor, Dr. xxxx xxxxx, and I was just like, "There're black men that are counselors out here?" I'm just like, "I knew there're black men that's teachers and principals out here, but as, you know, in education, you don't see that all the time, at least I didn't anyway. Um, all the black men in education I knew, if they weren't a teacher or a principal, they were a custodian, or, um, they did something with discipline, or they did something with sports specifically. I'm just like, "There are counselors out here that are men?" And I was just like, "Wow," he was just so passionate about the- the work, and he was so unapologetic about how he presented himself. He wa- he, there were definitely people uncomfortable in that room, I was not, but I was just, honestly just kind of in awe. I was like, "Wow," like I saw myself in him, I was like, "This is where I'm supposed to be. I'm supposed to be doing this work." I'm like, "I didn't ever even consider being a school counselor," but I knew in that moment, "This is what I'm supposed to be doing."

Jamison noted:

> Even with the families that I serve and the teachers too, it's- it's always, like, this
> is a female driven, profession for the most part, but it's also, you know, from
> another demographic that's highly, you know, represented in this profession.
> There's not a whole lot of black males.

Sterling noted:

> I know in our building, um, there's ... we do have some security guards who are
> African American. Some, uh, do athletics. Um, and a couple other employees but
> there, uh, I, I believe there are no teachers, um, that are African American. Um
> and, um, no administrators that are African American. Um, so those ... so when it
> comes to those things, I feel like my voice is very important.

Graham stated how the individuality of a school counselor is essential to the identity of
the profession:

> I think being able to recognize and celebrate the individuality of the role of the
> counselor because you really cannot box anyone in. I understand that we learn
> theories, but you can't box in the way that we do our work. And many times, the
> way that it's presented, it is presented in a way that, you know, can kind of box
> you in.

Theme 2: Professional Challenges

The role of a school counselor provides great opportunities to meet the personal,
social emotional, college and career, and academic needs of all students. However, school
systems present tremendous challenges that often impede the quality of services school

counselors provide to students as well as impacts their overall job satisfaction. All 11 participants identified with the second theme, professional challenges, which consisted of four subthemes: effects of COVID-19, pride and prejudice, unicorn effect, and non-counseling duties.

Effects of COVID-19. The disproportionate impact of the pandemic was a clear challenge described by participants (Strear et al., 2021). All participants shared how the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on their role and job satisfaction as a school counselor. Some participants shared that they were ineffective in their effort to provide adequate personal, social emotional, college and career, and academic services to their students due to social distancing and schools moving to a virtual platform. For instance, Jack stated:

It affected my role with everything being virtual. Uh, there was no one-on-one connection, therefore it's hard to have a rapport with the student via a video link. So you always still need that s- face-to-face for social, emotional growth. So it, it definitely was a stressor on having a connection with the student because they didn't reach out to, to you. At least by being here they can come by my office whenever they needed to. Having the, the, the virtual, uh, sessions, you know, you ain't hardly have anyone to tune in or sign in if they needed help or wanted help.

Marshall added:

Using the technology to interact with students. It's a nice feature but it's nothing like being in-person and seeing one another. Um, of course it'd be nice if we didn't have to have the mask where you could actually see the, um, eye language, the

non-verbal. Of course, being a counselor that lets you know, um, what a person is thinking, how they're feeling. Um, but COVID has impacted us. Um, as I said, you know, having to use technology to interact with students a lot last year, um, it just wasn't the same as being in-person.

Jamison noted:

It's definitely impacted me, because I'm a very, like, I like shaking my students hands, I like giving them, you know, hugs and things like that. Those are the things that I miss, and not even just that, just looking at it from a deeper angle. The masks, the... even though they protect us and I'm very appreciative of them, it blocks us from being able to see their facial expressions and seeing the true joy that's going on. On top of not being able to hear them. Some of them I... These masks at times have made students kind of retreat a little bit, like, socially. They don't speak up very loud any more, and so it's really hard to hear them at times. And so, it- it's really... this pandemic has really just shifted the way that we communicate with each other and with the way that I communicate with my students, because I can't give them that personal, you know, hands on touch that they enjoy. And- and because sometimes they don't get that at home. They don't get handshakes and h-... uh, high fives and pats on the back, and it's- it's really hard having to say, "Look, you know..." Sometimes they'll put out their arm and they'll, like, try to do a high five and I can give them a elbow bump or something, but that's not the same. You know, with social distancing, you can't do as much for families, you can't have large groups presentations or- or, like, you know,

invite families to come in and- and view the school and talk to them about your

program. It makes things a little bit more difficult. I mean, Zooming is

convenient, yes, but we didn't get the turnout, we didn't the, uh, attendance on

Zoom that we would have got if we invited families in person.

Jordan stated:

I was having a lot more conversations virtually, which as we know is not ideal

when trying to reach the student, and then half the time they didn't want to turn

their cameras on, so even then, it's like all I'm getting is a voice.

Dayton added:

So, my prior school, last year, I only worked there one year and it's interesting,

last year, that school system, they were not virtual. They gave the students options

to be virtual, however, we were in person. So, uh, each and every day, we were

wearing masks. And I just recently received the yearbook from last year. And it

was just amazing, like to see my students. And there were some students, man, I

never saw without their mask. So even though we developed a great rapport, there

were some students I never saw without their mask.

Jamal stated:

I would say that last year, specifically, it greatly diminished the satisfaction I had

in my role, um, because once again, I go to high school, so wi-... so the one thing

I was able to do was, even if I did end up spending the majority of my days doing

what I consider clerical work, um, I was able to kinda, like, walk the halls, go see

students, go... if I... If there was a kid who, like, kinda heard about through the

grapevine, I can go make that connection. Um, and last year with them being

digital, it made... f-... or the majority of them being digital, it kinda made it harder

to do that, and so, um, that's something that was a definite shift and made my

overall urge to actually go to work some days, like, non-existent. Um, and then, I

also think it kinda made it more difficult to do... to be able to find ways to feel

effective because you don't... uh, you didn't have all the kids there, so don't really

know if what you're doing is being... is beneficial. Um, so overall, I think it

definitely took a toll on everybody, uh, definitely me and my satisfaction in my

role.

Clyde added:

It has wreaked havoc. It has totally wreaked havoc. Um, over the past year and

some months I found that my students are definitely less responsive. Uh, I cannot

tell you the number of times that I try to communicate with them via email to

begin with. Uh, no response. We're not, not checking email. Even went as far as

to set up a counseling Google classroom for them. Nothing. Nothing. So, I found

that my students have become much more less responsible. Uh, I feel like they

feel that all, that we're in this pandemic, so things are going to be given to them or

made a lot easier for them to get. So, there's definitely a lack of work ethic,

adequate work ethic, if you ask me. Another thing that this pandemic has really

brought to the table is the lack of what I call the home to school and back

communication. Uh, communication, getting parents to communicate with and get

in, and even get in touch with them is very slim to none, which is frustrating.

'Cause if we, if we can't work together as parents and the school, I mean, what do we have for these children? What do we have?

Eli noted:

It impacted it a lot because a lot of time it was primarily from the communication pieces. Um, having to rely and depend on email, um, and, you know, c-communicating with students who may have, you know, pretty much had experiences with, uh, academic problems and not being on track to graduate and you know, while physically they're here, you just go running straight to the classroom and grab them and talk to them but, you know, virtually, you know, they're not, they're not here. So it's like you have to go a little bit above and beyond to do some of the most, the most basic, you know, responsibilities and tasks that, uh, you normally could do with, you know, pretty much with no ease. Now that has become, you know, an obstacle within itself. So-... it's just... It was the mainly the communication piece also in addition to that, you know, the mental health aspect of It as well man. Many students, they really, you know, suffered mentally, um, with, you know, kinda getting accustomed to what at that time was their new norm. And then, uh, you know, we had many students who may have been middle of the road, you know, students, now becoming like, you know, you know, failing classes that they normally would have not failed. And there really wasn't anything that we can do. We could, you know, at, at that point and time. We couldn't offer them services because nobody could be, you know, within six

feet of each other, you know? So, it presented a tremendous amount of challenges during that timeframe.

Graham added:

It just, it makes it real hard because you, you know ... with wearing these masks. And that makes it- it- it makes your, you know, your presence, uh, to be more guarded. Uh, and so when you have a student that is in crisis, you know, you're having to, you know, do the distancing. You know, um, and you, uh, you know, are having to take all the precautions. But then and, you know, at the same time, it makes it a little difficult. Because how do you tell a sobbing student, you know, "Can you put your mask on while you cry?" You know, I'm not, I'm just not gonna do that. You know? Um, so, uh, uh, it- it has had, you know ... I've had to heighten, you know, maybe, you know, to be more open with my eyes. And to put my hands together. And, you know, shake my own hands that I really do understand you're doing a really great job, you know. And to kind of do, you know, virtual hugs or whatever they call them. You know, it's- it's, that's been something that has been, um, uh, things that I've had to do. Because you don't do the shaking of hands. You don't know everybody's ... Do you want your hand shaken? Do you want a high five? You know. It's all of those, you know, different rules now that, um, you kind of just have to play by ear and try to figure out. So it's- it's made it a little tricky. And, you know, having to, you know, use other-other means to ensure that, you know, the student that you work with, uh, that may be in crisis or going through, uh, an issue is, understands that you care.

Sterling provided the following example of how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted his first year as a school counselor:

> Right when COVID had started so I did come into the building and work with my colleagues and just do some planning and, uh ... But it was kinda like it was hard doing that, because it was like we didn't know what the next few weeks and ... or months would be like. Um, and then when the school ... when school first started we, everyone was online so um, I, I didn't get that first, initial, um ... I mean, I did get the welcome through Zoom but, uh, um, I did, you know ... It's ... That was a lot different than what I, I guess, was expecting. It affected, uh, relationships not only just with students, but with parents. Uh, not put- having a face to a name and, um, maybe, uh, uh ... I don't know. I can't really read ... I can't read minds on how they perceive me as.

Jayden stated:

> My role changed completely, because when the whole world went on lockdown, and we were quarantining, my immediate thought was, "Okay, how do I access these kids, because I worked in an area where we're a 100 percent free and reduced lunch, and I know first-hand that all of my kids don't have, uh, um, reliable technology in their, like we got kids who, you know, they're sleeping in shelters, they're doubled-up with two or three other families, you know, for some of my kids, if they don't come to school, they don't eat. You know, so I know the-the- the systemic, uh, barriers and challenges my kids are dealing with, so when we first went on lockdown, I was like, "How do I reach my kids, because how do

I know we're having a virtual school, Zoom this, Zoom that." Zoom don't work if you ain't got internet and we got families calling us saying, "They let their internet bill go, because they need to be able to buy food or pay for electricity, so I'm just like, "Ain't nobody thinking about Zoom," so, you know, it was really hard to one, just get in contact with kids for a long time, just because it's a global pandemic, nobody in this current lifetime ha- has experienced a global pandemic before, um, so we're all just trying to figure out how to navigate it, and- and, you know, be, help out where we can. So I was able to reach a lot of my kids, and then the kids I was able to reach, the quality of counseling changed drastically, because now I can no longer guarantee, you know, the privacy and confidentiality that I could, you know, in, uh, in my office, because, you know, I got kids that are reaching out to me, and you know, they stop talking, or they won't say as much as they want to, because someone's probably sitting in the same room or in the next room, so, you know, kids weren't as comfortable, they weren't as forthcoming with telling me things, as they were pre-COVID, um, because now they're not in my safe space of an office, they're in their own homes, you know? So that was hard.

Pride and prejudice. Black male educators often encounter internal and external stressors due to racialized stereotypes and being frequently questioned about their intellectual ability and job performance (Boyd & Mitchell, 2018). Consequently, these factors impede the true intellectual ability and potential that Black males have to offer in the education profession. The subtheme, pride and prejudice, was generated based on the participants' accounts of what being a Black male in the US meant to them. Based on the

participants' responses, there was a sense of pride that comes with being a Black male, especially in their role as school counselor. However, many of the participants shared that this pride came with stressors resulting in the prejudice and stereotypes they faced not only in their role as school counselors, but in society as well. For instance, Jack stated:

> What it means to me to be a Black male, it means, um, heritage. It means, um, coming from a long, long line of struggle. It means being at the bottom at one point, now to hopefully rise to, to the top. It means, um, a legacy that I need to make sure that I leave for my family. Uh, being Black in America means being able to handle the stress and pressures of sy- systemic racism. Being able to survive in a culture that sometimes don't believe in you, and misuse you. Being Black in America today is a, a stress barrier, a burden that we have to live with, so it's a lot being a Black man in America today versus 57 years ago.

Jamison stated:

> In America, being a black male is you having certain privileges over certain black communities, but still not having the full privileges, the feel... full experience of being a part of America. So we're- we're- we live here, we- we try to thrive, we go to work, do the best we can, but there's so many barriers that are blocking and hindering us from being... to being equal to another community or another, uh, another group of people. So it's always a navigation process, a way of having to sometimes quiet yourself or limit yours-... like, put yourself down a little bit so that you can thrive in a community. And at times, that can be... it can weigh heavy on your self esteem, it can weigh heavy on your male state of mind. So it's always

a constant state of, "I have to be a little smaller than I normally am so that I can make sure that I go home, and make sure that I'm taking care of, you know, myself to be the best of my abilities." So it's a lot, it's a lot to juggle.

Jordan noted:

There is clearly a power and a majesty in being a Black male. Um, and- and my own personal experiences and just culturally being in America, seeing what I see every day, people would not hate us as much, would not work as hard to demean, demoralize, devalue, if there were not inherent, real value and power in who we are. Um, you walk into a space, every space I've ever walked into, people respond, um, a- and that response says a lot. And I think for me, it- it just shows the responsibility that I have in conducting and carrying myself in a manner worthy, um, of that majesty and that honor.

Jayden stated,

Being a black male is power. It's powerful, its untamed power, is what it is, but it's also dangerous. Um, I think being a black male makes you very susceptible to a lot of hate, stereotypes, unrealistic expectations, it- it endangers your very life, you- you know, depending on where in this world you live, but I also know that black men are powerful creatures, and honestly, I think, that's why some people are intimidated and fear us, because they see that power and I don't always know that we see that same thing in ourselves.

Dayton added,

The first thing that comes to mind is there's so many stereotypes about the black

man.

And, uh, I show my students, my young African American male students that it is

up to us to change the narrative and to debunk these myths, these stereotypes. So

every day, uh, it's a privilege, man. It's a privilege. I know my worth. I know how

special I am. I also know how I'm considered a threat in various environments.

Graham noted,

I think as a male period, I understand that, you know, counseling is a female-

dominated, uh, profession. But, I always understood the importance of my

presence in any state, in any community. Especially, you know, within the urban

school districts that I worked in. Uh, you have a lot of men that are not present as

far as percentage-wise. Um, and so I understood that it was very important work

that I was doing because I wasn't punitive.

The unicorn effect. The term, Unicorn, refers to something unusual, rare, or

unique (Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, 2022). The subtheme, "unicorn effect," is used to

reference Black males that serve as school counselors, which is rare and unique. Seven

participants shared similar experiences about challenges they encounter being the only

Black male serving as a school counselor in their school/district or during their counselor

graduate training program. For example, Jordan stated,

Aside from being one of probably four males in my cohort, um, I was the only

Black student, or at least the only one that identified as Black. Um, I felt, uh,

oftentimes, you know, the, on one hand, the weight and responsibility of being the

one to have to speak on behalf of the race, if you will. Um, which I feel is a

symptom of a lot of different things that we can go into. But, um, and then there

was, and if I'm being honest, the- the white fragility, uh, that I had to navigate.

Dayton added,

The biggest obstacle or whatever you would like to call it would be that feeling of

isolation. I was the only black man in the program, like not just in rehab, clinical,

mental health. I was the only black man in the entire counseling program. So

sometimes, I was feeling misunderstood. Now, I will say my faculty was very

supportive, though. I don't want to take that away from them. They were very

supportive. However, just as far as my cohort, with the members in my cohort,

oftentimes just feeling alone and misunderstood.

Jack noted,

Right now, I am just a counselor behind, behind the desk so, uh, again, I, I am a

Black male counselor. It's not many of us in the building who looks like me. We

have a staff, I believe, 100 so, and so you can count on your hands how many

Black teachers we, uh, we have. I'm the only Black male counselor, we have two

other female Black counselors here.

Jamal added,

There aren't too many black school counselors, and I straight up had, uh, one

principal last year before I transitioned to elementary school, like, telling me,

she's like, "You cannot leave. You cannot leave education or anything at all

because..." She's like, "I can't think of another black male school counselor. Like,

you're kind of the first one, so the first one that I've had experience with," so,

like... Um, so that was kind of like, "Oh, that's not great." I'm the lone person.

Eli stated,

We are rare as far as like, black male school counselors so I think that anytime,

you know, there... an opportunity pre- presents itself, you know, people are

jumping at the opportunity to get a black male counselor in, in their school

because of the lack of black male counselors that are there. This is, uh, a field that

is predominantly, you know, made up of, you know, women, you know, whether

it's Hispanic, white, black women. It is, it is a female dominated profession that

requires more, um, more of us in it.

Sterling noted,

I'm the only black male school counselor among the high schools. I'm not too

much sure about the, the lower grades. There might be some counselors, but

they're ... I think they're Black females. But far as I know, I'm the only black male

school counselor in ... among the high schools.

Jayden added,

I think, because a Black man, especially a Black man as a school counselor,

you're gonna be a unicorn in that space, which means you probably gonna be the

only one that looks like you in many places. So, you know, people may not be

able to understand, um, your experience or how you present, maybe they, um,

they con- how you present is- is they interpret it differently, you know?

Non-counseling duties. School counselors frequently experience role ambiguity, where various school stakeholders have conflicting ideas about the school counseling role (Holman et al., 2019). As a result, school counselors are often assigned non-counseling duties and support tasks that detract them from time that could be spent on counseling duties. Seven of the participants shared examples of how being assigned non-counseling duties negatively impacted their job satisfaction and efficacy. For instance, Jordan stated,

> So, I do obviously the college counseling and I do the regular counseling, and then I do all of the inappropriate stuff counselors shouldn't be doing. Um, you know? Um, so, I'm trying to push a lot of that off. Uh, it's a slow and agonizing process, but, um, this year I feel like I'm able to build more partnerships and whatnot.

Jamal added,

> After I left the temp position in xxxxx coming here that... where I was in a high school, I think that has been more reflective of, I think, um, my experience so far, which w-... which is kind of, um, still positive, still, still getting a chance to impact students, but it is a lot more of the quote, unquote guidance counseling type stuff where it's mainly, like, scheduling, um, scheduling and stuff, and a lot of paperwork, and never really getting a chance to really have a lot of hands-on time with the students outside of that.

Graham stated,

> You know, you would see a lot of administrators within the school district that ... you know, Black males. But they're punitive. And my, so my role was not a punitive

role. So one of the challenges of that I found that I had to watch was like, you know, if a fight breaks out in the hallway. Well, it's really not my role to jump in there and break that up and do all of it. I need to allow the administrators to do their job. I'm 6'8", so a lot of times, you know, it could appear and, uh, administration would want to put me in that type of role. But I had to, um, you know, speak up and let them know that, you know, that's not something that I would be doing. Uh, because, you know, that- that right there defeats, uh, the purpose in my role. But I learned early on to kind of be, to kind of be mindful, uh, about putting myself in situations like that.

Jayden noted,

My role as a counselor pivoted a bit during the pandemic because not, because I'm not necessarily seeing kids as much as I could in the building, so now my role has switched over to now I'm just doing a bunch of data tracking that doesn't actually mean anything. Like, "Did this kid show up to class, are you monitoring when they showed up?" Well, if we already know that a family doesn't have internet, why do we think that the kid is in class, like I just feel like a lot of, I was getting asked to do a lot of useless tasks, um, do things that we an- and asking questions to, asking questions that we already have answers to. I just feel like, er, we doing a lot of redundant work, a lot of meaningless work. In many spaces, the school counselor is the expert on mental health services, and SEL (Social Emotional Learning) in their buildings, and just because they're the expert, it don't mean that the admin understands their role, it don't mean that they're gonna have the capacity to do the

job, you know, when they have all these non-counselor duties attached to their day-to-day life.

Jack stated,

So my role here is primarily just to do accommodations. Just to do recommendation letters. Just to send transcripts. I tell them to send their own transcript through Parchment, so right now I'm just pushing paper. But, again the population I'm in right now, they don't need... Well, I take that back because we do have a, a small, I say small, we have a minority group who need male counseling, male shadowing, but that's not the focus at this school. So, you always gonna need somebody to push the paperwork to get the kids in the colleges that they wanna get into because that's what they have to do and what not. But still such a greater need of, unmet need at this particular school to identify that these males who need mentorship, need a shadow who needs the extra help to get them over the hump. That's still needed but it's, it's not being pushed.

Eli noted,

Depending on the district that you're in, the school that you're at, you can be the cafeteria monitor, you can be considered the extra security guard, you can be, you know, considered the pool sub who covers classes just because we don't have enough, you know, subs available when teachers call out. You know, it's a variety of different roles that you fill in as the, the school counselor. You know, at this particular, and all schools when, you know, people at the front desk don't know anything, they just dump it to the school counselor.

Dayton provided an example of how role ambiguity contributed to him being utilized as an administrator,

> My first school, it was elementary and there wasn't any of these kinds of schools here, in xxxxx. It was an hour away. It was a small district, so they did things differently. Now, they took out corporal punishment in xxxxx County Schools, maybe, like in 2000... a while back. However, at this, my first school, they still did corporal punishment and they considered me an administrator. So, with that being said, that was kind of...it was unique. To be honest, I'm going to be honest, I was very reluctant to do so. However, in that specific school, it was predominantly Black and I saw a lot of my young, primarily my young boys, and they lacked self-control. They lacked respect for the teacher. And, um, I became torn because I didn't want to compromise my role as a counselor. However, me being a black man and me being in this position, it was special, man and they lacked that. So, to be honest, I stepped into that role.

The seven participants shared similar experiences relating to being assigned non-counseling duties. However, a couple of the participants experienced a role conflict as they were expected to assume administrator duties such as assigning discipline and breaking up physical altercations among students, causing them to be seen by students in a separate (non-counseling, non-supportive) role.

Theme 3: Academic/Personal Challenges

All participants in this study shared examples of academic and personal challenges they encountered in their counselor graduate program and in their school

counselor role. The theme, academic/personal challenges, lead to the following

subthemes: feelings of unpreparedness, coping mechanisms, and demonstrating

resilience.

Feelings of unpreparedness. School counselors are trained in academic

preparation programs for future job activities (Goodman, 2015). However, job

expectations taught in counseling training programs can differ from actual school

counseling duties. The subtheme, feeling of unpreparedness, was generated based on the

participants' reflections about the ways in which their counselor training programs

prepared them to work in K-12 public schools. Five of the eleven participants shared

experiences of how their respective counselor training programs did not adequately

prepare them for the actual role of a school counselor. For example, Eli stated,

> I think the whole book aspect of it, it really doesn't prepare someone for the
>
> counseling field because the book aspect is giving off the, uh, the impression that
>
> we are just school counselors, we offer, you know, counseling services, we do
>
> academic services, we do, you know, social emotional learning service and things
>
> like that.

Graham added,

> It gave me the philosophy and the understanding of counseling. It- it, I ... maybe
>
> the human growth. The learning about the stages of the growth and development of
>
> humans that did as well. And I would even say abnormal psychology. Taking, you
>
> know, understanding the diagnosis, uh, that certain students could have and what
>
> those entail. So in that respect, I would say, yes that it prepared me. But for the

actual job? No. But I say, I don't want to say the actual job. But for the day-to-day things and the differences that, you know, it was from the program to the actual what you do, is very different.

Jamison noted,

I mean, we learned the basics, we learned theories. So, I was actually just talking about this not long ago. Those programs are great, because they teach you, like, theory and how things are supposed to be. But, I feel like a lot of the stuff that I learned in grad school, like, when I actually got into the role of being a school counselor, none of that really applied. It was more so on the job experience, it was more so thinking on your feet, being able to adjust and adapt. And being able to, like, take things that were made, like as far as NCO (New Counselor Orientation) programs. Taking those NCO programs and making them adaptable for our students. So, they didn't teach you any of those things in grad school. I mean, like I said, I appreciate the experience of learning how to, you know, do, like, theory, as far as, like, cognitive things. But it just didn't really... it didn't really prepare me for actually being on the job.

Dayton stated,

When it comes to just the duties, or the lack thereof, uh, how administration, even, really don't understand the work of a counselor, I feel I was really unprepared and kind of taken back by that. So, I guess, again, they gave me research about the things that I was a little, little bit aware of already. However, I, I don't think they

prepared me when it comes to the whole idea of the entire school, administrators, teachers not truly understanding the work of the counselor.

Jordan noted,

I cannot say explicitly it prepared me. Um, I think that some of the experiences I had left me, um, less than satisfied, and so that forced me to take on, you know, looking things up myself, seeking out people. Uh, one of my capstone projects actually was to create a program for Black males, funny enough, uh, in public schools, uh, sort of a Black male initiative program, uh, and, uh, you know, just, almost I felt like I, the professor didn't even know what to do with me. He was just like, "Okay. Great project," you know? Check-ins were very brief. Um, not a lot of depth or input. Um, you know, so, you know, I- I really had to kind of adapt unfortunately, you know, being in this setting. I mean, I had no experience with elementary, very little with middle school. Um, you know, I'm- I'm calling on resources and folks that I know have gone through respective places that were in my cohort, so, and the, uh, Counselor Associations to really get the resources I need. I would say, so I guess in- in the positive way of saying this, it forced me to have to do that on my own. Because I wasn't as satisfied nearly with just walking away without feeling some basis of preparedness. I loved the theories course, but it just for me, it was like, I wanna like, actually dig into this more. Um, and I guess the approach, which was more of a buffet style. We're not really gonna go in-depth. You're not really walking away certified in any of these styles, right? It's not our job as school counselors anyway to do that kind of modality.

Coping mechanisms. This subtheme was supported by seven of the participants. The participants discussed how they cope with challenges relating to their counselor training programs and certain aspects of their school counseling roles. For example, Jack stated,

> One of the challenges getting into the program, from when I entered the program, I ran my old business, worked 40 hours and had to go through a, uh, committee, and one person on the committee asked me, she voted for me not to be accepted into the program because she said I had too much on my plate. And like I had to explain to her, my plate is not empty, and I don't have anything for my livelihood, so I need this to, so I could sustain myself and my family. So it wasn't that my plate was full, I had to make room for this because this is my only outlet now.

Jamison added,

> I will say the biggest thing was it was a big-time commitment, because the way that the program was set up, it was an accelerated program, it was a year and a half, but it was on the weekends, Saturday and Sunday, from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM. So, for about a year and a half, I pretty much gave up my weekend in order to pursue my goals and get my degree. I- I wouldn't say it was a challenge though, because it was actually…it was really interesting, it was fun. It was a time commitment, of course, but I will say that throughout that process, I learned quite a bit, but there was so many things that grad school doesn't prepare you for.

Clyde noted,

I would say towards the end of my program, uh, we had to do an internship. So, at that time I was wondering, "Well, how in the world am I going to do an internship and work full time as a teacher," as I was doing? Um, after a lot of in, inquiries to the higher ups I was finally afforded an opportunity to do an internship after work hours, and it just so happened to be with some of the same children that I taught during the day. So, I ended up having to do an internship at an alcohol services center. And with some of the kids that I taught actually went there. So, the challenge was now, okay, I have to differentiate now working with them as a counselor intern versus being there their teacher during the day. So, how do we create that, that division there?

Eli stated,

A challenge that I had; I would say was when I originally expressed my interest in getting into school counseling. I really didn't know the route to take, where to even begin so, I pretty much knew that I needed a Masters but I didn't know what I needed a Masters in. So, my first Masters was in Psychology at The University of xxxxx. I was misadvised, ended up, you know, learning that degree would not qualify me to become a school counselor. So, pretty much I had to either accept the fact that I just wasted years, two years and a whole bunch of money getting the degree that was useless or determine if I really want to become this school counselor. That was just this one obstacle that I had to overcome then there's gonna be many more. So I did,\ that was the only challenge that I had, was getting a degree that, I don't want to say it was useless because I learned a lot of information. It does

look very well on my resume and makes me a better qualified candidate but that was my only challenge that I would say I encountered. Being in my other programs with the University of xxxxxxxx School Counseling Program was very accommodating to the working adult and it was a very, very, very smooth streamline process with that program.

Marshall noted,

Sometimes I can be naive. I've had to have colleagues point things out to me. But I guess I try to give people the benefit of the doubt when things happen. I don't always think about color that it may have something to do with that. But, I have had experiences where I wasn't treated with the same level of respect as others. And so, um, I, I still, even with that happening, I still wanna remain professional, I still want to as it said to love my enemies and do good to them, they hate me, to bless them, they curse me. Still be professional, still keep that unconditional positive regard as Carl Rogers, you know, the theorist. Um, his philosophy is still be to not go below the belt. Still keep that level of being an example of how we should be even if you're not treated as you should.

Jayden added,

I feel like white people in that program at the time, they got a lot of passes and a lot of coddling done, and I felt like they got a different kind of education than I got as a person of color, because I felt like especially when we were talking about race as it relates to systemic issues, or how we interact with people socially, I have to continuously revictimize myself, to tell my story, just so you as a white person can

understand the skin that I'm in, and that, it is what it is, but if that's what I have to do and what I'm expected to do to learn, I'm also expecting you to open your mouth and share with me your experience, but instead of you opening your mouth, I get your white tears that I don't even care about right now. So, I feel like I'm putting in a lot more work to get the same degree that you're getting, and you're not putting in half the effort, but on the slight, and we think this is equitable? So, I had an issue with that, because I feel like I was robbed of learning opportunities, because we were not holding white people accountable in those spaces.

Jamal noted,

An issue that I continue to experience even into the professional world, which is being a black man and having certain people once again, going back to the stereotypes and expectations having there kind of having there be like the assumption that, if I am being assertive about something, or if I am passionate about something, that it's automatically viewed as aggression. I had another, um, classmate who was also black, who had very similar experiences. We had to always make sure we were kind of tempering our reactions or our opinions on things because we didn't want to be viewed as the angry ones. So, and that's something I just continue to be... uh, something that I had to deal with even out into the professional world.

Demonstrating resilience. Throughout history, Black males have demonstrated great resilience. Resiliency is a factor that assists many Black males in countering racism and cultural, personal, and societal obstacles in their life (Irvine, 2019). Five participants

shared examples where they demonstrated resilience during their counselor training program and /or school counselor role. For instance, Sterling stated,

> When I started the program I guess I was a little bit older. I was like in my early 30s and also, I was the only African American male in the program, well, in my cohort. There was another one. He was ... He was mixed race but I was just different when you know, being African American. And then also, I guess, because I'm originally from the South so those ... my cultural references and things Like I say some things and they didn't get it.

Graham added,

> I have had to just become comfortable with that is the way everybody else does it. And they're excited one way. And I show my excitement another way. So , that's not to say that I'm some kind of way behind and not doing something. But you can often feel like that you're kind of on an island by yourself when you're looking at the mass majority. How they may embrace the profession as opposed to how you embrace the profession. I think understanding that the way you embrace the profession is absolutely fine. I mean as long as you're passionate about what you're doing and you feel like you're operating in purpose. Then I think being able to celebrate your own individuality and speak up when people want to put you in a box.

Jayden stated,

> I was hired at my current job, like two weeks after I finished my masters program. I only applied because I knew, the school counselor who was there, also a person

of color. So, I knew she was there and I applied because I was like, "I know there's things that I still don't know," but I'm just like, "She's going to be a great resource for me." I get there and I find out, "Nope, you're actually replacing her," so I'm just like, "Okay, did you all make a mistake," because at the time, she was the only counselor for 850 something kids. So, you're telling me, "Me coming in fresh out of a master's program, I'm expected to be able to do exactly what she was doing, if not better?" You know, because that's the expectation, she sat the pace of what a school counselor looks like in this building, you all ain't never seen another way of doing it, so, you know, already I'm coming in feeling like I have to, you know, one, replicate what she was doing, but two, also be my own person in a school that is made up primarily of all white staff.

Eli noted,

I had the state assessments that you had to pass. I did that in my state in xxxxxx with passing the, the counseling exam and I thought that was all that I was needing but, you still had to take the exams that regular teachers needed to take to be able to teach in the class. But that was a huge obstacle. I would say the most, the greatest obstacle that I encountered because it prevented me from becoming fully certified and it took a lot of money to keep retaking those assessments and tests that was very easy. But, just was a subjective scoring system when it came to the writing that pretty much almost prevented me with not becoming certified and losing the certification. So, you know, through the grace of God, I was able to overcome that obstacle as well in my journey of becoming a school counselor.

Dayton demonstrated resiliency in how he handled his administrative role of assigning corporal punishment to students and being a school counselor by stating the following:

> I did it in a very nurturing way, to even when I would give them a paddling. I will hug them, you know, this was, this was pre-COVID. I will hug them and whisper in their ear telling them something like, "Now you know, man, you're a young king, man. You can't be doing stuff like that and, I ain't doing this to hurt you, man, but I do want you to do better". You know, just encouraging them and letting them know I'm not doing this maliciously, at all, but you do have to act like a school is an institution, just like church. They consider church an institution. School is an institution. However, in the South, oftentimes, in these towns, it's ran by a Caucasian and that's how the school was. So, I was thinking, in my head, "Hey, instead of this white lady, or this white man paddling him, why not receive it from me, somebody that can relate to them, and that's still gonna show them love, before and after."

Theme 4: Supported Networks

Support systems have always been vital factors for the academic and career success of Black males (Irvine, 2019). Without such support, the success of Black males would be hindered immensely. The participants spoke about the importance of having strong support networks to cope with the stressors of being a Black male school counselor. The theme, supported networks, produced the subthemes of college/university connections, active mentorship, and professional development opportunities.

College/university connections. This subtheme was developed from the participants' thoughts on how counselor education training programs can support the professional success of Black male school counselors. Five participants shared examples of how their graduate counselor training programs prepared them for their school counselor roles. For instance, Sterling shared,

> I went to, uh, the University of xxxxxx at xxxxxxxxx. That program is really hands-on and once I got to doing my internship and some practicum, I actually did internship and practicum at all three levels, elementary, middle school, and high school. We did a lot. It was a lot of supervision, and a lot of my professors had a lot of experience, and it was very helpful insights on how to navigate those experiences.

Several participants shared Sterling's sentiments about the value of the internship/practicum experience in the counselor training programs. For instance, Jack noted, "The program helped me through my internship, with my practicum. It allowed me firsthand training before I received my degree, so I knew exactly if I was suited for it and what grade level." Eli added, "I would say the internship experience is what gives you the most real experience in the counseling profession."

Clyde stated,

> When it comes time to do those practicums, those internships, I would, try to develop a system that puts the counselor in as many different settings as possible. So, I don't want just the socioeconomical settings. But, just as many where you might have your Title I versus your non-Title I Schools.

Jamal added,

> In my practicum and internship experience, it was really helpful being able to, like, be in my internship and then go back when we would have our class time and actually talk about the experience and try to process, "Okay, how could I... How do I perceive this? Is this something that I would want to do when I'm the counselor at a school?" Having the space to talk about that sort of stuff was super useful.

Several of the participants spoke highly of their internship/practicum experience in their counselor training programs as it gave them the most authentic practice and preparation for their school counseling job. The participants' responses in this subtheme indicated how important graduate counselor training programs are to the success of Black males pursuing a career in school counseling.

Active mentorship. Active mentorship can be a benefit to the academic and professional success of Black males in the counseling profession (Hannon et al., 2019). Seven participants shared similar examples of having mentors in place for support as well as navigate concerns that come with being a Black male school counselor. For example, Marshall recalled the mentorship he received when he began his career as a school counselor,

> I was under the leadership of the principal was an African American female and the lead counselor was an African American female. I was able to feel like I had two mothers. So, the lead counselor, she was really like a mother to me. I no longer work with her, but just seeing her work ethic, her professionalism, her commitment to excellence, her character, her faith. Seeing her live those things out,

it was just phenomenal. She really is a brilliant person and I'm blessed to have worked under her.

Jamison added,

The campus already had a counselor who was there, who was the previous elementary school counselor. We shared an office, and I learned a lot about counseling with her. So, I was really lucky and blessed to have someone there who's actually had been a counselor for ten years previously, who was there to help me, like, give me tips and help me find my way in, um, in this profession. A lot of people do it on their own and- and kind of, like, trial and- trial and error their first year. But I had some people there who actually knew the community, who knew counseling, and actually poured into me. So, I had a pretty positive experience.

Graham noted,

So, for me, I would be stuck on a lot of things, and I couldn't go any further. I didn't understand all of the pressure that the lead counselor could be under with certain things. I would ask as so many questions, and I would just be like, I can't go forward without fully understanding and that would, could be a little frustrating. But eventually, I caught on to things. The overall experience was great because you always had somebody there that could support you with a lot of the things that we were required to do.

Sterling added,

Build a good relationship with your colleagues and build a good relationship with your administrators. That's been really big for me because I know when I did my

interview for this job, I did mention those type of things about social justice things and how navigating those things with helping students maybe if those topics come up in school and how to navigate those things.

Several of the participants encouraged Black males who are entering the school counseling profession to seek mentorship. Jayden stated,

Definitely have your support network established both inside and outside the school, and that's going to look different for everybody, but the work of a counselor in general can't be done without a support system, but I think as a black man in this role, it can be very lonely sometimes I would imagine.

Dayton added,

Creating programs to where it may be just through Zoom, what we're doing, to where you can link up your black male counselors to other black male counseling students, or professors, so they, so they won't have that feeling of isolation that I had.

Jamal also noted,

Reach out and find other like-minded people because you're going to run into instances where you start to second-guess whether you made a right decision and being able to kind of have somebody who's a sounding board and can kind of call you out, or support you, or whatever, that is super, super, super helpful.

Jamal also emphasized,

Mentorship and connections I mean, even just having another person, even if they may not be somebody from a similar background but just another person who kind of gets it.

Jamison added,

I would definitely say to get a mentor. So, make sure that you network. LinkedIn, Facebook groups, Twitter, these are all powerful sources, because even though there may not be very many Black male school counselors, you can always find someone online. That's the big thing is finding the mentor and making sure that you check in with them regularly.

Professional development opportunities. School counselors are expected to engage in professional development and personal growth throughout their careers (American School Counselor Association, 2012). Professional development includes attending state and national conferences and reading journal articles relating to the school counseling profession. Four participants shared the importance of attending professional development, trainings, and orientations related to their school counselor roles. For instance, Jordan provided the following example of how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced him to acquire additional training,

I've had to call the crisis line on a suicidal student. One of my young kids reports of being molested by Dad and just the gamut. I have a student who is severe anxiety, was just in my office today. So, it's really forcing me to acquire new skills, to research things, to really be involved in professional development, and just even having... Like, I don't really have a counselor or group of counselors that I can go

to and say, "I need help with this. What do you do?" So, trying to build that network, it's just been very taxing. I definitely leave every day physically, emotionally drained.

Jamison also added,

It actually pushed me further and helped me to grow professionally, because I've had to adjust and adapt ways to reach and communicate with students and families. I've learned a lot of tech skills that I didn't know previously before, I've learned a lot of different programs and apps that I can use to reach and make connections with students and families. So, that part as far as professionally, that's how COVID-19 has affected me.

Marshall noted,

"Having trainings, speakers, and professional developments that are done by African American males. So, they can give their perspective as well as other minorities. Giving, again, as I stated before, not having a one-sided number or race doing, being at the forefront. But making sure it's well-rounded. So, as I said trainings, that are done by African American males, Hispanic males. Um, trainings that promote, counseling programs to recruit African American males by school districts maybe in partnership with different universities".

Sterling added,

Having orientations because usually those orientations are across different occupations like teachers and other support staff in the building and stuff like that. It's tricky, because nowadays, I don't know with the whole controversy about

critical race theory, those conversations can be important... I think they've gotten to become taboo.

The four participants shared common thoughts about the importance of professional development. Several participants mentioned how the impact of COVID-19 and the Critical Race Theory (CRT) controversy influenced their need for further professional development to be successful in their school counselor roles. The controversy over CRT in schools could negatively impact how school counselors implement Social Emotional Learning (SEL), which is a significant component of the school counseling curriculum.

Theme 5: Being Intentional

The theme, being intentional, was generated based on the participants' responses regarding ways to enhance recruitment and retention of Black male school counselors in K-12 public schools as well as advice for Black males entering the profession. All the participants in this study shared examples of how to best address their underrepresentation in school counseling. This theme produced the following categories: find your voice, taking recruitment and retention seriously, and increasing diversity and resources in school counseling.

Find your voice. Black male educators pay an "invisible tax" in schools such as getting less support and being cast into nonacademic roles (El-Mekki, 2018). Educators who are the only black males in a school tend to feel voiceless and disconnected. Findings in Pabon (2016) and Henfield et al. (2011) confirmed that the Black males in their studies felt that their voices were silenced by being pigeonholed. Six out of the eleven participants identified with the subtheme, finding your voice, by encouraging

Black male school counselors to advocate, develop their voice, and not allowing themselves to be categorized. For instance, Graham noted,

I would say to, uh, definitely be a student. To be open. But understand that, um, you have a voice. And to find your voice, as far as counseling goes. Because, you know, when you're in female-dominated profession, there are things and there are ways that, uh, many women do their job and that we don't do them that way. And, uh, for me, I have had to just become comfortable with that is the way everybody else does it. And they're excited one way. And I show my excitement another way. So, you know, that's not to say that I'm some kind of way behind and not doing something. But you can often feel like, um, that you're kind of on an island by yourself, um, when you're looking at the mass majority and how they may embrace the profession as opposed to how you embrace the profession. I think understanding that the way you embrace the profession is absolutely fine. As long as you're passionate about what you're doing, and you feel like you're operating in purpose. Uh, I think being able to celebrate your own individuality and speak up when people want to put you in a box.

Jordan stated,

Take care of yourself. Stay the course. Um, and you know, if at first you feel like you're- you're not in a place you're being heard or you feel appreciated, find that place, you know? I mean, I- I would... You know, I- I think we give up oftentimes too, because we know our potential. We know our worth. But when you're in the wrong place, it- it's- it does, it does everything to you, you know? I mean, I had to

leave a really toxic job even though I was making some pretty nice money, you know? And my, um, thoughts, you know, the- the experience that I've had, my expertise was not being valued. Um, and, uh, it- it just, it is demoralizing, I think, as a man in general, but you know, especially as a Black man, you're being invited to the table but all of a sudden, you're being told to shut up. Okay, well, that's not a place where I want to be. Growth, you know? Stay to the course, you know? Find what works for you. I just think I'm really very fortunate to have found this job, where I can invent, and I can create. I'm trusted. I'm valued. Um, maybe sometimes a little too much, but I appreciate it, you know? And I know when I have to speak up and say, "Hey, That's beyond me, you know?" Like that's not what, uh, in the scope of a school counselor's role, you know?

Dayton added,

The first thing that comes to mind is, uh, it's showtime. It's showtime. Like, the spotlight is gonna be on you. And in, in more ways than one. Like I think, because it's like, again, it's going back to that, that dual, the duality of it. Like not only am I a black male school counselor, but again, I'm a black man in schools. I think there's a shortage of black educators, in general. That's what I mean by the spotlight. You gonna have to be ready because there're gonna be a lot of people that don't feel that your qualified. They're going to question your expertise, and they're gonna wonder what you're even doing there. School counseling, as a whole, it's a under-appreciated profession. Like with the counseling identity, and still the lack of awareness on, on the part of administrators and teachers. Sometimes, I feel like, as

a school counselor, you have to kind of advocate for the profession. You have to host workshops just to let them know what you are actually there to do. And because of that, I think they need to know that, okay, not only will you receive scrutiny or have doubt, naysayers, you're also going to have to advocate for the profession.

Jayden noted,

I think another key point of advice I would give is to set boundaries early, not just with your social folks, you need to set professional boundaries with everybody, because I think walking into this role and people already have this, "He's the savior," kind of mentality, they're going to task you with everything. They're going to expect you to participate on the equity team, or diversity, whatever, or this task force and that one, and I think, you know, and that's not, it's a good problem to have, because people are inviting you to the table, unless, it doesn't necessarily mean they want you there, and I've learned that too, but you're going to be invited to a lot of, to participate in a lot of different things, and I think we have to know how to say, "No," and be okay with that, because you can't say, "Yes," to everything, you're going to burn yourself out, and now you're setting an expectation that you're going to be able to jump through hoops like a freaking monkey for everybody and their entertainment, and once you've set that as your foundation, that you're going to be able to do a 150 percent all the time, now you're going to be expected to do a 150 percent, 200 percent all the time. So, set them boundaries early, um, and it's hard, but the sooner you can do it, the easier life will be, I think. And advocate for yourself in whatever way that is, if you need to protect the time

to get this done, do that, if you need a mental health break, take that, and be
unapologetic about it.

Marshall added,

Hearing African male, African American male counselors, hearing their
perspective, hearing their experiences, um, I think it needs to be heard. I think
everyone's voice is important, whether, regardless of what race they are. But ones
that have been, um, not as visible or not, um, as, uh, they're lower in quantity, I
think there's need to be heard because it's foreign to the masses. So, I think it needs
to be heard.

In addition to finding voice, Clyde mentioned the importance of having a heart for the work
of a school counselor,

My advice would be to make sure that it is s, in your heart. Make sure it's something
that you want to do from the heart. Uh, I can tell you know as an educator in the
education field period you sure not, not going to be doing it for the money.

Taking recruitment and retention seriously. Nationally, school districts struggle
with recruiting and retaining Black males to the education profession (Bryan & Williams,
2017). Consequently, the presence of Black male educators is lacking in K-12 public
schools, which impacts the overall learning outcomes for all students, specifically Black
males. Six of the eleven participants shared their thoughts about their underrepresentation
and what K-12 school stakeholders and counselor training programs need do to enhance
the recruitment and retention of Black male school counselors. For example, Jordan stated,

I think we have to stop playing games and be intentional. Um, I've seen too many administrations, and I've been on an administration, uh, administrative team, where the question will come, how do we get more diverse candidates? I pointblank told the principal once, "I can produce a list within five minutes of Black male candidates. You just say the word." And never heard any feedback, and I don't think we're truly serious as a society-... and really... And again, it goes back to the first questions you asked me. There is, there is a fear that I think people have when it comes to the Black male. Like, you know? They're happy to have one. And really and truly, and I'm saying this not tongue in cheek, it is, it is my lived experience that I think if we were to have another Black male on this campus, it would truly intimidate people. Um, and I would love to see that and I think as a Black male myself, even just having someone on campus would be a breath of fresh air, you know? Just knowing, um, and I think that students typically, especially students who look like us, flock to us naturally.

Jayden added,

I think to strengthen or retain anybody, we have to want to recognize black males in this role, in the context that they're in this role. This is a very white woman dominated field. Um, so, we're very intentional about looking at how a black, not just a black person, but how a black man is in this space. You know, black men, we... and this is some of the literature I remember reading popping out of me, but as far as the terms I'm going to use, but it's something I see all the time. Black men, especially black s- male counselors, you're allegedly the savior of all things that's

going to come out of these kids, these black and brown children. We are expected
to save them. We're expected to perform all the duties that come with school
counseling, the duties that don't, we're expected to do, to balance that while also
dealing with our own stuff. Um, I think sometimes we- we welcome black male
educators to a space, if that person presents themselves in a way that's digestible to
their white counterparts. So it's just like just really understanding how our identities
impact just our interactions with people is critical. I'm not saying that it's other
people's responsibility to necessarily know exactly what I got going on, but it is
your responsibility to understand holistically what this might look like to me,
especially if you're going to keep talking about diversity, inclusion, justice, and
retention and recruitment of black men. You can't recruit and retain no damn body,
if you don't even understand their experience in this, in this context.

Graham noted,

I think when we're able to understand the impact. Like, with more research to
pinpoint the importance of the role and ways that it can be, you know, to recruit. I
think when we understand because typically, when it comes to Black males, we go
into administrative, administration, you know? I think males, period, though. When
you just look at males period, many of them go into more administrative-type roles.
Um, so to give, uh, understanding of recruitment, I think when you're working with
a lot of people who work with students, um ... and I'm even looking at coaches, and
you know, who do certain things within a role ... I think highlighting, uh, the
importance of counseling. Uh, and I think in our, in our society we're doing more

of a big thing of telling people to go to therapy and all that kind of stuff, and work with counselors. And so it's getting out there to people. I don't know if it's connecting to Black males that, you know, this may be something that I can do. Um, and maybe when it comes to teacher programs, uh, or, uh ... and when I say that, I mean identifying people with those skills sets to kind of highlight the role of the counselor. Because in school districts, uh, the role of administration is highlighted and when it comes to even mentorship, there are more mentorship programs for administration. And many times, the mentorship programs for counselors do not exist.

Several participants noted that a better effort at marketing to the college of education undergraduate programs as well as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) could help with recruiting Black males into the school counseling profession. For example, Jack stated, "Definitely go to HBCUs and tell them the need. Make sure that, that the college, the university have accredited programs in which you could get more licensed counselors. Make sure that they know it's a need."

Jamal added,

So, I think making a more active effort to go into the education classes or go into the classes, go into the... like, holding events alongside, um, organizations that have a lot of black males in it and kinda sho-... and kinda saying, like, "Hey, you are needed.

Jordan stated,

There are too many HBCUs that pump out quality candidates. There are organizations one can go to that are specific to Black male counselors, right? You know? Like, this is... You can find these resources if you really want to. You just have to stop playing games.

Dayton shared,

Oftentimes, I get these emails from certain universities, encouraging the teachers to come back to school and get a certification and become an administrator, or something like that. Or perhaps, maybe, the schools seeking out the black men in their school and encouraging them. So maybe, the counseling department, from these various universities, going to the public schools and intentionally seeking out the black men and encouraging them to come into the field of counseling. That's one idea. That's ... There, there may be ... Yeah, I think that may be the best way because, again, like with ... and to be honest, if it wasn't for my wife, who majored in counseling, becoming a counselor would have never crossed my mind, just to be honest. I think maybe even just put the marketing, just making undergrad students more aware of being a counselor. Making it more marketable to those undergrad students that are pursuing education to where, you know, they have the goal of maybe being a teacher, but then, letting them know "Okay, if you pursue this, then, you know, you can go straight into counseling".

Increasing diversity and resources in school counseling. Ten of the participants provided their thoughts about infusing diversity within school counseling as well as increasing resources so that school counselors can provide quality services to all students.

For instance, Jack stated, "Support your counselors that you currently have and to recruit people who look like the students that you're representing. If you're representing a population that has 50% African American, means you have 50% African American on your staff". Sterling added, "The fact that I was a black male and was an asset to them because they felt like there was a need. I mentioned a lot that you can't be what you can't see."

Graham noted,

> I think again being able to understand, um, the cultural differences. because you take a cross-cultural class, uh, within, uh, our profession and it's geared a lot toward different cultures that we work with, and the adjustments that we need to make when working with different cultures. I think we need to take that same approach when it works with different counselors. That, uh, that same, you know, adjustments need to be made.

Marshall added,

> I think it's good to have, um, others to increase the numbers of quality, caring, competent, intelligent, and they're out there, uh, African American males in that role. Seeing others is, uh, it's a comforting thing. Uh-... but not only in the counseling role but, uh, in the administrator role, uh, in leadership roles within the school district. I think it helps, with understanding, perspective, um, comfort level, uh, it just makes it more well-rounded when you have a variety of ethnicities being in education, not just one particular race and not seeing, uh, other minorities. So, I

think that that could help, um, with retaining, um, treating them, treating everyone

equally, you know, fairly, respectfully, um, professionally.

Jamal stated,

> I would say having... So, I think it goes back to kind of just how... it goes back to
> how they should support all people of color in education, which is having more of
> an awareness of understanding that not everybody comes from the same
> background and has the same, um, kind of like the same way they go about things.
> I think, like I said, like I mentioned earlier, like, so far, my biggest challenge when
> it comes to the more professional side of school counseling is, um, having to
> constantly kind of like say... kind of constantly say, "I'm not in any way angry. I
> just really feel like we need to get this thing done, and I'm worried that these kids
> are going to fall through the cracks." And when you... and then, the fact that I have
> to sit there, have to... I've had to sit there sometimes and kind of say, like, "This is
> not me being aggressive at all. Like, just because my voice is not, like, all happy
> dory like Suzy down the street does not mean that I'm not in any way just as
> approachable as any other person in this role," um, so I think more training and
> understanding in diversity but also kind of fostering those conversations.

Jamison shared concerns about the direction of school counseling due to the politics over

diversity-based teaching,

> There's another layer that I really didn't delve into that much, was the fact that being
> a black man, there's so many things that are going on in America right now, and
> there's parts of this w-... this country that are literally erasing our culture and erasing

the fact that... o- or trying to hinder and block us from talking about race and things that, you know, need to be talked about so that we can be better as a country. And it's just... it's very frustrating. Now I live in a state to where they're trying to block history, so we c-... like, educators can't even talk about diversity or equity or inclusion, because it's going to come off a certain way. And that's really sad that we live in a world where, as in education, y-... it's almost like you have a muzzle. There are parents who are, like, who don't want to talk about social emotional learning, they don't want their children to participate in lessons, because they feel like it is, um, it's propaganda and it's promoting different things that they don't want their children to be exposed to. And I... that is a recent ev-... like, a thing that's going on, it is really mind boggling. So, it's, like, okay so you can't talk about, like, race. Not even just race, but really history and the experience of different cultures. You can't talk about that, you don't... we can't word... now getting limited to where, like, parents don't want their children to have, like, social emotional learning. So, what will a counselor be able to do? It makes me really scared for this profession in the future.

Jayden shared his thoughts on how counselor training programs and school districts are not intentional enough about infusing diversity,

I just always felt that that was kind of odd that if we focused so much on social justice and inequity, we would have been a lot more intentional about conversations around all students. Um, I also felt like a lot of when we talked about race, when we talked about social justice and equity, it was always in relation to race

specifically, but I felt like we left out immigration status, we didn't talk about LGBTQ+ populations, and we didn't talk about students with disabilities. I just felt like for a program that talked a good game about, justice, and inequity, I just felt like it was very... I don't want to say lackluster, but I'll say lukewarm, and I tell my professors all the time to this day, that I felt like that program was not designed for people of color, or marginalized groups, it was designed for white people, to kind of wake-up to the issues that we see every day. I think we're real quick to say, "Oh, we want more diversity, we want this, we want more ideas," but the moment those ideas are different than what yours are, they oppose what your views are, now you have an issue, when this person asserts himself in a way that is professional, but maybe it's in a tone that you're not familiar with, because you're not used to black voices, now you're intimidated, you're afraid, "He was disrespectful, he was scary, or intimidating."

Several participants asserted that school districts need to be more intentional about increasing resources for Black males to have successful outcomes in their school counselor roles. For instance, Clyde stated,

My recommendation would be to let counselors come into the building, your black male counselors, come into the building and do what they're there to do, serve the children. Let them work hands on with the children. And like I said earlier, forgo all the other stuff, all the non-counselor-related duties.

Eli added,

Counselors aren't necessarily the back up for other, you know, voids that are happening. I understand that you know, there may be certain shortages, you know, they may be, you know, internal issues as far as like staffing but, you know, counselors are... they're not just security guards, they're not your cafeteria monitors, they're not you're not individuals who are supposed to do bus duties, they're... you know, they are, they have, you know, pretty much a job, responsibility to the students as well with making sure that they are, uh, teaching them, you know, a variety of different ways to, you know, still be and have, uh, uh, a good mental health.

Jordan noted,

Districts have to take counseling seriously. I think there's still too much debate about what is the school counseling business, right? I mean, well, we have to like, fight just to get counselors in the building. I mean, talking about getting the Black counselors is doubly hard, right? Like, so, you know, we've got to get that straight. But then I think unfortunately people at the top have to see it in order to see the impact, right? It's sort of like the, what we're talking with ASCA, right? It's like, we almost got to prove our worth and our jobs, right? Showing the impact my presence in this building has in numbers, right? Because anecdotally, it already impresses people, but in numbers, I'm sure would really, truly, probably convince people without even having to say any more. Um, you know. Reduction in behavior issues, right? Just take that one student people are still talking about that. You know? It's like, but then you give me inappropriate activities and I can't spend the

time with students, I can't do the counseling. I can't get in the classroom and so, I think my advice would be take counseling seriously, and then the proof is in the pudding, right? Look at the results. Uh, listen to your counselors. Have a conversation with them. Invite them to the table. They will tell you what's happening. They have a pulse of the building.

Jayden stated,

If your goal is to recruit and to retain black male counselors in any space, you have to be very intentional about always carving out time to check on them, always carving out space to support them and cheer them, not just let them talk. Carving out space for them to feel heard and you support them in whatever it is they express. I think a lot of people think that just by recruiting black and brown or other marginalized groups of people, that they fix the situation, they check the box, "We got the black kids and we know that you know the ratio from black and brown teachers don't match the ratio to the kids," and they think just throwing them in there is going to fix it, no, also understand that black and brown people are going to have their different experiences, and their own, you know, baggage that they bring into the classroom that ultimately that's going to affect children, but also just from a system's perspective, how a white educator experiences everyday life is not the same as a black or brown educator in everyday life. Just being very intentional about collecting data and checking in with them is critical.

Discrepancies

Participants' lived experiences as Black male school counselors in K-12 public schools varied, but their stories were consistent pertaining to their professional and personal experiences. The only discrepancy occurred with one participant who viewed his lived experience as a Black male school counselor a bit differently than the others. The participant noted that he can be naïve to things around him such as stereotypes and bias against him. The participant shared that he believed in staying professional and giving everyone the benefit of the doubt even if he is not being treat as he should.

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Summary

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In order to answer the research question, "How do Black male professional school counselors in US public schools describe and make meaning of their professional experiences?" I used Giorgi's (2009) 5-step descriptive phenomenological method to support the analysis of data collected from 11 participant interviews. The data analysis process produced thematic categories that personified the study participants' lived experiences to address the research question and purpose of the study. I identified five themes and 17 subthemes as described and outlined in the results section of this chapter. Black male school counselors that served or currently serve in US, K-12 public schools provided insight into their motivation to enter the school counseling profession as well as their thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes concerning their underrepresentation. The participants also discussed their resiliency, coping skills, and pride to overcome professional, academic, and personal challenges associated with being Black male school counselors. They also supported the idea of employing more Black male school

counselors and offered possible solutions and strategies for enhancing recruitment and retention.

This study revealed several findings as a result of the data analysis process that require further discussion. Chapter 5 will provide an analysis and interpretations of the participants' lived experiences and the overall findings of the study. In addition, a discussion on the limitations, implications, social change impact, and suggestions for future research on this topic as it relates to the school counseling profession will be included.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive phenomenological study was to understand the unique experiences of Black male school counselors regarding their underrepresentation in the school counseling profession. Although the literature highlights their importance in the education field, the impact of Black males working in the school counseling profession had not been well-researched. The aim of this study was to explore the lived experiences of Black male school counselors and determine if any themes emerged to shed light on their motivation to enter the school counseling profession, factors related to their underrepresentation, how their career experiences shape their development as professional school counselors, and thoughts on recruiting and retention efforts. I conducted this study using Giorgi's (1970) Descriptive Phenomenological Method to address gaps in the research, including information on how Black male school counselors make meaning of their educational and professional experiences. In this chapter, I summarize the key findings of the study, which included using social constructivism as the theoretical framework for data analysis (Creswell, 2013; Martinez et al., 2017). The main findings in this study suggest that Black males can be successful as school counselors in K-12 public schools with supportive services and networks. The participants in this study also provided implications for Black male entering the school counseling profession as well as counselor training programs and K-12 school districts for enhancing recruitment and retention strategies for Black male school counselors.

I chose a qualitative phenomenological approach since it was most appropriate for understanding the lived experiences of Black male school counselors given that they have direct, immediate experience in the role. The results of this study were compared to the previous findings identified in the Chapter 2 literature review to determine whether this research added new information about the phenomenon under inquiry. The findings of this study did support previous research explored in the literature review. Black male school counselors are needed to service students in K-12 public schools and can help address the concern about the underachievement of Black male students. Furthermore, counselor training programs and school districts need be intentional in recruiting and retaining Black males. In Chapter 5, the research findings, limitations, recommendations, implications for social change, and conclusions are discussed.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings were interpreted using the descriptive psychological phenomenological approach, and I thoroughly compared the themes and information received from all 11 participants to the current literature found in Chapter 2. I used descriptive psychological phenomenology to confirm that the interpretation did not go beyond the data, findings, and extent of this study. In this section, I will compare some previous research related to Black male educators and the counseling profession with my current results.

A Call to Serve

Parzych et al. (2019) noted that the schools serving the most students of color or the most students from low-income families have been shortchanged when it comes to

receiving services from their school counselors. To improve these conditions, Black male counselors can be influential in promoting a culturally inclusive and productive campus setting that lead to favorable academic and behavioral outcomes for all students (Dollarhide et al., 2013). Grapin et al. (2016) stated that increasing diversity in the counseling profession may also increase the likelihood that traditionally underrepresented populations will have their needs appropriately recognized and addressed.

The results from the theme, a call to serve, are consistent with the research literature regarding the importance of multicultural-based school counseling. All participants in this study expressed at least one experience regarding their motivation to help underrepresented students by entering the school counseling profession. For instance, two participants stated that their interactions with students during their time as classroom teachers influenced their decision to become school counselors. Ten participants shared that making a positive impact and building rapport with students were influential in their decision to become school counselors. One participant shared a story of how he successfully made a positive impact on an academically and behaviorally challenged student when other school stakeholders struggled to reach them. Seven participants shared how their passion for becoming role models and advocates for marginalized students led them to becoming school counselors. One participant noted how his love for helping the underdog (minority student) inspired him to pursue a career as a school counselor. Six participants discussed how their presence as Black male school counselors helped strengthen the identity of the school counseling profession considering that it is female dominated.

Professional Challenges

School counselors acknowledged the toll that the pandemic has had on the social and emotional health of all school stakeholders (Strear et al., 2021). Boyd and Mitchell (2018) noted that Black males described how they were able to excel and persevere through the threatening environments they faced as a result of racial stereotypes in both social and academic settings. The gender gap in the counseling profession has created a female-dominated environment, which leads to male marginalization and feelings of not having a voice or place within the counseling field (Michel et al., 2013). Holman et al. (2019) stated that school counselors experienced burnout and professional challenges as a result of role ambiguity and being assigned non-counseling duties.

My research confirmed this information as professional challenges was a consistent theme across all 11 participants' experiences. Each participant shared examples of how the COVID 19 pandemic impacted their ability to provide adequate personal, social emotional, academic, and college/career services to their students due to social distancing and schools moving to a virtual platform. The results of this study also align with Boyd and Mitchell (2018) as six of the participants discussed having a sense of pride being a Black male and serving as a school counselor. They also recognized the stereotypes that comes with being and Black male school counselor but continued to persevere. For instance, one participant noted the being a Black male is power, but also dangerous. Seven participants also discussed challenges they encountered being the only Black male school counselor on their campus or in their counselor training program which aligns with the results of Michel et al. (2013). One participant used the term,

unicorn to describe the experience of being the only person who looked like him in many places. Seven participants expressed frustration regarding assigned noncounseling duties and role ambiguity which negatively impact their job performance with students. Several participants gave examples of the noncounseling tasks they were assigned and one participant experienced role ambiguity when he was assigned administrator duties.

Academic/Personal Challenges

Cross-Lee (2014) conducted a generic qualitative study with nine Black male professional counselors and found that the participants experience academic and personal challenges in their graduate programs. In Ward's (2017) study, participants shared common concerns regarding lack of communication, inconsistencies, and unfair treatment in their graduate counselor education programs. Goodman (2015) noted that school counselors-in-training need to be prepared not only for professional best practices but also for the realities of the field. Irvine (2019) suggested that having a resilient attitude greatly benefitted the academic success of Black male students.

My research results aligned with Cross-Lee (2014), Goodman (2015), Ward (2017), and Irvine (2019) as all 11 participants shared academic and or personal challenges in their counselor training programs and school counselor roles. Five participants shared stories of how their respective counselor training programs provided a textbook perspective such as learning various counseling theories but did not prepare them for the actual job of a school counselor. Several participants shared instances of what they thought were lack of communication, inconsistencies, and unfair treatment in their graduate programs which were consistent with Ward's (2017) study. For instance,

one participant stated that he felt that the white people in his program were given "a lot of passes and coddling" when they engaged in discussions about race as it related to systemic issues, or how they interact with people socially. The participant stated that he felt robbed of learning opportunities, because professors were not holding white people accountable in those spaces. All participants shared stories that demonstrated their resilience throughout their graduate studies and in their jobs. Several participants shared examples of challenges such as balancing work and their graduate studies as well as how they cope in their school counseling roles.

Support Networks

Findings in Henfield (2013), Haskins et al. (2013), and Michel et al. (2013) noted that participants felt isolated, unsupported, and voiceless not only in the counseling profession, but in counselor training programs as well. Participants in Brown and Grothaus (2019) shared how cross-cultural mentorships was critical to their success in their graduate program. In similar findings, Hannon et al. (2019) affirmed that active mentorship was essential so that Black male counselor professionals can have a felt sense of support. My research results aligned with the existing literature as having support networks in place were important to all the participants' success during their counseling training and in their role as school counselors. Five participants reflected on how their graduate counselor training programs prepared them for their school counselor roles, specifically highlighting the importance of the internship and practicum experience. Seven participants shared examples of the importance of having active mentorship in place for academic and career success as well as support to help navigate concerns that

come with being a Black male school counselor. One participant noted that just having the support of another person is critical even if it was someone with a different cultural background. Four participants also shared that seeking support through professional development, trainings, and orientations were important in helping them acquire resources to provide adequate school counseling services during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as working through the Critical Race Theory (CRT) controversy.

Being Intentional

Pabon (2016) conducted a qualitative study that examined the life histories of four Black male educators and found that the participants felt discouraged by the irrelevancy of the curriculum to teaching in urban schools and undervalued by teacher educators who silenced them in their courses. Similarly, Henfield et al. (2017) provided firsthand accounts of two Black male counselor educators' experiences leading school counseling programs and found that common leadership models are not appropriate for all individuals since, especially with member of marginalized communities. My research confirmed this information as several participants discussed the importance of being intentional about advocating, developing their voice, and not allowing themselves to be categorized or "placed in a box." For instance, one participant noted the importance of setting professional boundaries with everyone because many school stakeholders view Black male school counselors as "saviors," and task them with a plethora of duties on campus. Another participant used the phrase, "It's showtime" while referencing that the spotlight tends to be on Black male school counselors since many school stakeholders will feel that they are not qualified or question their expertise.

Chandler (2010) conducted a qualitative study with 44 Black students and three Black faculty members from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and found that more innovative strategies are needed to enhance racial-ethnic diversity in the mental health professions. In a similar study, Brooks and Steen (2010) examined the insights of 12 Black male counselor educators regarding their underrepresentation as faculty members in counselor education programs and concluded that there is a need for effective recruitment and mentoring of Black males in counselor education programs. Findings in Haizlip (2012) noted that counselor educator programs are not being intentional in their recruitment and retention practices with minority students, especially Black males. My research confirmed the findings in Chandler (2010), Brooks and Steen, and Haizlip studies as six participants shared thoughts about their underrepresentation and how the recruitment and retention of Black males in counselor training programs and K-12 school counselor roles. One participant stated that more emphasis is placed on Black males going into administrator type roles and not school counseling. Another participant suggested that school district counseling program decision makers need to "stop playing games" and be intentional about recruiting and retaining Black males. Several participants in my study attended an HBCU for their counselor training and suggested that K-12 schools would benefit by enhancing their recruitment efforts for black male school counselor candidates at these universities.

In a phenomenological study, Henfield et al. (2011) explored 11 Black doctoral students' perceptions of challenging experiences in counselor education programs. Henfield et al. concluded that counselor educator programs have a responsibility to

provide an atmosphere of inclusion and acceptance of all its students. This is consistent with Haskins et al. (2013) findings that there was a lack of inclusion of Black counselor perspectives within course work. Counselor educators must examine practices, standards, and policies in their programs to ensure equity for all students as well as serve as leaders and advocates to increase racial diversity within the counseling profession (Haskins et al., 2013).

The results of Henfield et al. (2011) and Haskins et al. (2013) studies confirm the information in my study as 10 participants provided their thoughts about infusing diversity within school counseling programs so that school counselors can provide quality services to all students, especially Black male school counselors. One participant noted that K-12 schools need to be intentional in recruiting more minority educators to match the population of the minority students served on campus. Another participant asserted that "It is hard to be who you don't see" which speaks to the need for more Black male school counselors.

One participant expressed his concern for the future of school counseling due to politics over diversity-based education, which will impact how school counselors' approach social emotional learning with students. Four participants shared that school districts need to increase resources so that Black males can be successful in their school counselor roles. For instance, one participant stated that some sort of created space would be a great resource so that Black male educators can have a voice about how they are being used and feel supported. Two participants shared that the best resource school districts can provide is to create an environment where Black male counselors can

provide counseling services to students and relinquish most non-counselor related duties such as disproportionate assignment of disciplinary responsibilities.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations that factored into this qualitative descriptive phenomenological study. The first limitation is generalizability. A small sample size of 11 participants was used in this study and limited to Black males who served or currently serve as school counselors in K-12 public schools in the US. 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. Therefore, institutions of higher learning, counselor educators, and K-12 school districts may find these results applicable to Black male school counselors.

The second limitation was my role as the researcher. As the sole researcher of this study, I am both a Black male and served as a school counselor in K-12 public schools in the US. I engaged in bracketing to reduce researcher bias (Patton, 2015), which supported trustworthiness and confirmability as addressed throughout this study. The descriptive psychological phenomenology method entails that the researcher adopted the phenomenological attitude by bracketing any presumptions and experiences and taking a fresh look at the data without compromising its validity or existence (Giorgi, 2009).

Throughout this study, I remained aware of my beliefs, thoughts, and knowledge about being a Black male and my experience as a former school counselor in K-12 public schools. I bracketed my beliefs, thoughts, and knowledge throughout the process. To minimize researcher bias, I engaged in member checking, which I provided all

participants the opportunity to ensure accurate representation of each participant's

account from the verbatim transcripts. Further, I engaged in reflective journaling during

the data collection process to manage my thoughts, opinions, and feelings since I had a

personal connection to the research topic.

The final limitation was the use of purposeful sampling. The study results were

limited to self-reported, interview data, which relied on the openness and honesty of the

participants. therefore, the results were limited by the participants' trust in procedures to

ensure confidentiality to provide honest responses to their personal lived experiences of

being a Black male school counselor who served or currently serve in a K-12 public

school. I used clarification and summarizing techniques during the interview process to

ensure accuracy. Since participation was voluntary and they could stop at any time in the

process, I had no reason to believe that the participants were being dishonest during the

interviews.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was the first to examine the lived experiences of Black male

professional school counselors who served or currently serve in K-12 public schools. It is

my best hope that this study serves as a trailblazer for future studies, both qualitative and

quantitative, to explore topics pertaining to Black males and their experiences serving in

school counselor roles in US public schools. Future research is needed to focus on the

themes that emerged from this study. Exploring these themes individually instead of

collectively could perhaps address the gaps in the literature or gain a better understanding

of the lived experiences of marginalized populations other than Black males in school

counselor roles. Additionally, more research should be conducted on the perspectives of Black males in other areas of the counseling profession as well, which may differ from the Black male school counselors' perspectives.

Many of the participants in this study had professional challenges with being assigned non-counseling duties and role ambiguity. While these issues are common with school counselors across all genders and cultural backgrounds, they could potentially make the difference with recruiting and retaining efforts of Black males in the school counseling profession. Therefore, more research is needed to emphasize the implications of assigning non-counseling duties to school counselors. This research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, further inquiry is needed on how school counselors across all genders and cultural backgrounds are coping with the aftermath.

Replication studies are valuable to the scientific process as researchers can use similar findings can validate results, add to the qualitative literature, and discover new insights. A replicated study could address the lived experiences of Black male school counselors in K-12 public schools and private schools separately and then compare the findings. Another replication of this study could explore the lived experiences of Black male school counselors who work in K-12 public schools in marginalized communities versus predominately White schools, and once again comparing the findings. Identifying both the similarities and differences within these settings would be essential in gaining a true understanding of the affect these experiences can have on retention of Black male school counselors in diverse school settings.

Implications for Positive Social Change

The results of this study can bring positive social change on many levels. This study is significant because it highlights the impact and challenges of Black males who serve as professional school counselors in K-12 public schools across the US. The lived experiences of Black male school counselors in this study revealed that their overall experience working in K-12 public schools have been rewarding but challenging. The stories shared by the participants may also encourage other Black males to consider a career in school counseling. Having information on the positive and negative experiences of Black male school counselors may provide the knowledge necessary for other Black males interested in entering the profession so that they know how to navigate through any academic and career challenges they may face. The importance of active mentorship, access to support networks, finding voice, and demonstrating resilience were key aspects for consideration.

This study may impact positive social change at the organizational level. Black males in this study shared stories that underscored their motivation for becoming school counselors and the positive impact they make on the academic, personal, social emotional, college and career achievement of all students. However, several of the participants believe that school decision makers are not being intentional about increasing diversity within school counseling programs. This information may help K-12 school districts enhance their recruitment and retention efforts of Black male school counselors. The results of this study may highlight the need for graduate counseling training programs to enhance their recruitment and retention strategies to increase the

representations of Black male students. By doing so, it would increase the pool of

qualified Black male school counselor candidates for K-12 school districts to consider.

Several participants in this study attended an HBCU for their graduate counselor training.

Considering that HBCUs produce a significant number of Black educators, the results of

this study could be advantageous for CACREP to work with these schools to gain

accreditation so that students in counseling-related programs receive high-quality,

pertinent training that prepares them for licensure and success in professional practice.

Therefore, this study would include sharing the results with college and universities,

professional counseling organizations, and K-12 public school districts.

Furthermore, this study may have implications for positive social change at the

society level. My aim is to have the results of this study published in the professional

counselor literature, make them accessible to the research participants, and the public to

bring awareness about the experiences of Black male school counselors in K-12 public

schools and the positive impact they make on all students. In addition, I plan to share the

results by presenting at professional growth and leadership conferences on the local,

state, and national levels. By sharing these findings, my hope is that they may have

significant implications for counselor education leaders and K-12 school district

stakeholders to improve upon their efforts to increase diversity within their counselor

education and campuses school counseling programs, respectively.

Conclusions

This research study allowed Black male school counselors in K-12 US public

schools the opportunity to have a voice and share stories about their lived experiences in

the school counseling profession. This study is one of the first to address Black males that

work in the school counseling profession, but further research is needed to continue

bringing awareness about the impact this population have on the academic, personal,

social, and college and career achievement of all students, especially Black males.

Studying the perceptions of Black male school counselors in K-12 public schools was

essential for addressing their lack of representation in the profession and to give voice to

their experiences as it relates to the phenomenon. The 11 Black males who participated in

this study displayed courage and communicated themes that revealed that their

educational and career experiences was rewarding but filled with challenges. The themes

generated from this study revealed concerns that consisted of the lack of diversity,

support, stereotypes, coping mechanisms, and role ambiguity. Many of the participants

suggested that students needed to see diversity in schools, which was a key motivator for

them to enter the school counseling profession. The themes identified from the interviews

of all 11 participants signified a shared cohesive vision regarding their lived experiences

as Black male school counselors.

The knowledge gathered from this study is a starting point for gaining a better

insight of how Black male school counselors make meaning of their experiences working

in K-12 public schools. The results of this study may contribute to positive social change

by encouraging leaders within K-12 school districts and counselor education graduate

programs to take the necessary steps to improve retention and recruitment efforts of

Black males. It is my best hope that the personal stories shared by the participants in this

study will ignite a much-needed dialogue about increasing representation of Black male

school counselors in K-12 public school districts.

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Appendix A: Demographic and Semistructured Interview Guide

Demographic Questionnaire

1. Are you a current or former professional school counselor?

2. Are you licensed or certified professional school counselor, and in what

   state(s)?

3. What is your gender?

4. What is your age?

5. How long have you served as a professional school counselor, and at what

   grade level(s)?

Interview Question Guide

1. Describe what being a Black male means to you?

2. What factors lead you into professional school counseling?

3. Describe any challenges that you may have experienced while attending your

   counselor education program?

4. In what ways, if any, did your counselor training program prepare you to work

   with students in K-12 public schools?

5. Please describe your experience when you first began as a school counselor in a

   K-12 public school.

6. How do you describe and make meaning of your professional experiences as a

   Black male school counselor?

7. How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your role and job satisfaction as a

   Black male professional school counselor?

8. What ways can the recruiting and retention efforts of Black males into the school counseling profession be strengthened?

9. Based on your experiences, what advice would you provide to other Black male professional school counselors who are entering the profession?

10. What recommendations would you give to K-12 school districts and counselor education programs to support the professional success of Black male school counselors?

<div align="center">Debrief</div>

Describe how you feel.

Please describe your overall experiences as a participant in this process.

What questions do you have?