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# Embracing Ujima: A Grounded Theory of African Americans Choosing the Counseling Profession

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Rashida Karriem Fisher

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Abstract

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MS, Capella University, 2012

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## Abstract

Racial and ethnic diverse populations experience discrimination in educational and career attainment and remain underrepresented in the counseling profession. The current literature provides limited guidance for the counseling profession and academic institutions for successfully recruiting racial and ethnic minority students in a master's level counselor training program. Social Constructivist theory and Adlerian/ Individual Psychology are the theoretical foundations of the study. This constructivist grounded theory study sought to understand the career decision-making process of African Americans choosing to enter the counseling profession and the influence of racial and ethnic identity on this decision-making process. Utilizing semistructured interviews via video-conferencing; 43 self-identified African Americans were commissioned to co-create an iterative career decision-making theory that informs recruitment and retention of African Americans to the counseling profession. Following the Charmaz's (2014) approach to data analysis; 15 themes that support the development of Embracing Ujima an interpretive theory of African Americans choosing to join the counseling profession—that informs a framework of recruitment and retention of African Americans to the counseling profession. The implications for social change include closing the knowledge gaps and informing counselor training institutions of the importance of physical representation, a sense of belonging, developing early-career pipelines, and positioning counselor educators as the chief career development professionals for the field of counseling.

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# Dedication

This work was an endeavor of love; an expression of my devotion and commitment to my family, community, and ancestors. My dissertation is dedicated to my mother Yvette (Fisher) Terrell and Father Otis J. Terrell, Sr. whose life has served as a source of inspiration. Everything that I am is because of you; you have both given me purpose, direction, and vision. May my life's work make you proud. Ubuntu- "I am because we are."

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"No matter what accomplishments you make, somebody helped you."

–Althea Gibson

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# Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Evidence that all humans are biologically one race has not resolved the social, economic, and health disparities among racial and ethnic minorities (Fine, Ibrahim, Thomas, 2005; Williams, 1999; Williams, Mohammed, Leavell, & Collins, 2010). Racism is a contributing factor in increased rates of disease, death, and overall decreased well-being conditional to a person's socially assigned race (Williams,1999; Williams et al., 2010). The social impact of race and racism has also contributed to mistreatment of African Americans and other racial and ethnic minorities by the counseling profession, the medical field, and society (Sue & Sue, 2016) along with disenfranchisement in educational and career attainment for racial and ethnic minorities (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009; Keels, 2013; Kerka, 2003; Robinson, Lewis, Henderson, & Flowers, 2009). These disparities continue despite political and social actions of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and affirmative action requiring institutions of higher education to seek the diverse representation of students (Gottfredson et al., 2008; Skrentny, 2002). This inequality is present across academic and career fields, including counseling and counselor education programs, which have identified both desires and needs for workforce diversity and declared resolve toward multicultural counseling competencies, social justice, and advocacy (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014; Council for Accreditation of Counseling and other Related Education Programs [CACREP], 2016, Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2015, 2016). SAMHSA, 2014).

The counseling profession has not kept up with the African-American population growth, and ethnic minorities continue to be underrepresented in the profession when

compared to the population. The 2010 U.S. Census Bureau identified an overall population growth of 9.7%, while the African American population increased by 12%. The disparate representation of African Americans and other racial and ethnic minorities across the counseling profession deprives the field of knowledge, worldviews, and values of historically marginalized and disenfranchised populations (Hipolito-Delgado, Estrada, & Garcia, 2017a), which exacerbates the challenges to serve African Americans and other racial and ethnic minority groups, who found counselor educators remain ill-prepared to support graduate students of color through successful degree completion (Hipolito-Delgado, Estrada, & Garcia, 2017b).

## Background

The United States has become progressively racially and ethnically diverse. Over half of population growth has been attributed to racial minorities (Frey, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Additionally, Frey (2014) described a declining White population and growing populations of color, noting that less than half of new births in 2011 were identified as White and most Americans under 18 will classify as a person of color by 2030. As the United States evolves to a minority-majority population (Frey, 2014), colleges and universities are essential to the advancement of social and economic equity. However, the use of affirmative action admissions practices by U.S. colleges and universities has led to public debate and legal battles. Notably, the 1978 Supreme Court decision of *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* ruled affirmative action policies of reserving spots for minority applicants violated the rights of White applicants yet noted the appropriateness of considering race to develop and maintain a diverse

student body (Regents of the University of California v. Bakke, 1978). Political and legal challenges to race-conscious affirmative action policies have continued to present day with the U.S. Supreme Court Case *Fisher v. The University of Texas,* which upheld a lower court decision declairing the validity of affirmative action guided admissions policies (Austin et al., 2013). Additionally, university-level policies, restrictions on affirmative action, bureaucratic structure, and legislative representation have had a substantial influence on enrollment of African-American and Hispanic students (Hicklin & Meier, 2008).

Higher education is also important in exposing students to three forms of diversity: structural (or compositional), classroom, and informal interactional (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002). Structural or compositional diversity is the numeric representation of racial and ethnic students attending the institution. The presence of structural diversity facilitates classroom and informal interactional diversity, which refers to student intergroup contact outside of the classroom (Gurin et al., 2002). The relationship between structural (or compositional), classroom, and informal interactional diversity is called the diversity rationale (Moses & Chang, 2006), which suggests that an increasingly heterogeneous student body is linked to a range of educational and social benefits including student development and learning (Bowman, 2010; Denson, 2009). Conversely, a predominantly homogeneous student body leads to a poor campus racial climate and "prevents institutions from leveraging the benefits of diversity for all students" (American Social Science Researchers, 2012, p. 36).

Diversity in higher education produces a range of educational and societal benefits. Research notes that increased racial diversity of the faculty and student body in higher education creates both immediate and long-term benefits, including enrichment of the educational experience, strengthening the workplace, and promoting economic growth (American Council on Education, 2012; Hurtado et al., 2015; Linder, Harris, Allen, & Hubain, 2015). For example, Bowman (2010) conducted a quantitative analysis of 12 predominantly White higher education institutions regarding the benefit of diversity courses and found the benefits of diversity courses were only evident following engagement in two or more classes; benefits varied across gender, race, and familial socioeconomic status. Bowman also found that taking two diversity classes improved participants' psychological well-being (B = .10, $p$ = .01), improved participants' appreciation of diversity and social justice (B = .12, $p$ < .02), increased comfort with discussing differences (B = .13, $p$ = .01), and increased participants socialization with diverse populations (B = .13, $p$ = .001). Further, taking three or more diversity-related courses improved all the above-identified benefits (B = .07, $p$ < .09). This was predominantly true for students who identified as White (B = -.21, $p$ < .03). Bowman's work supports the argument for both increased diversity in the student body and the infusion of instruction on multiculturalism in coursework, as it generates both educational and societal benefits.

Other research has also supported the impact of racial diversity in higher education on student outcomes (Clarke & Antonio, 2012; Gurin, 1999). Clarke and Antonio (2012) provide a model that embeds student interaction within greater societal

constructs and promotes flexibility in the approaches to facilitating cross-racial peer interactions within an ever-evolving campus environment. These authors integrated new knowledge produced by network theory and social psychology to propose a new framework for the scientific investigation on the impact of racial diversity on students in higher education. Clarke and Anthony (2012) recommend that higher education institutions develop a climate that is supportive of and inclusive of racial and ethnic minority students and actively facilitate cross-racial interactions.

Though diversity has benefits for higher education, there are challenges with multicultural competency. Boysen (2012) conducted a qualitative inquiry of 222 teachers and 166 students' perceptions of classroom microaggressions and the faculty's responsiveness in addressing the microaggressions. Overall, students reported perceived faculty and peers expression of micro insults and microinvalidations based on a variety of diversity dimensions, including economic status, race, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, gender identity and expression, disability, and age. Additionally, faculty of diversity-related courses were perceived as more responsive and more efficient in addressing microaggressions than their peers in nondiversity related courses. To address these issues with multicultural competency, revisions to Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) standards from the 2009 standards reflect an attempt to expand the instruction of multicultural counseling skills by incorporating multicultural competencies throughout an entire program as opposed to a single course (CACREP, 2016). Graduate counselor training programs currently accredited by the CACREP or seeking accreditation are required to prove that "the

academic unit makes continuous and systematic efforts to recruit, employ, and retain a diverse faculty" (CACREP, 2016, p.6.). However, there are few specific guidelines for meeting this objective (Cartwright, Avent-Harris, Munsey, & Lloyd-Hazlett, 2018).

**Diversity in the Counseling Profession**

In a 2001 proposal, the U.S. Surgeon General highlighted the nation's need to reduce racial disparities associated with the severity of mental health symptoms, overall rates of well-being, and underutilization of mental health care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). This proposal stressed the importance of multicultural counseling competencies for understanding how race, ethnicity, and culture influence reporting of mental health symptoms, seeking mental health care, and receptiveness to formal clinical interventions. Additionally, the report advocated for having increased racial and ethnic minority counselors to serve both as cultural navigators for the profession and deliver culturally responsive clinical care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). However, the counseling profession has not gained the trust of the racial and ethnic minority groups due to mistreatment and embedded biases grounded in a Eurocentric set of cultural values that guide its scientific inquiry, theoretical orientation, the conceptualization of mental illness, and approved guidelines for evidence-based practices. Consequently, behavioral health care systems have been ill-equipped to meet the needs of African Americans and other racial and ethnic minority populations (Sue & Sue, 2016; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

Following the 2001 U.S. Surgeon General's report recognizing the underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minority groups in mental health professions and clients for mental health problems, researchers have supported the significant contributions of racial and ethnic minorities in the mental health field. Speight and Vera (2009) noted that ethnic and racial minorities can provide new perspectives on the evolution of psychological thought from ethnocentrism to cultural relativism. Mental health services delivered from a predominantly ethnocentric worldview has not met the need for racial and ethnic minorities seeking care. Increasing the representation of racial and ethnic minorities in the counseling profession actualizes the profession's commitment to multicultural counseling, social justice, and advocacy endorsed by the ACA (2014), Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (2011), and CACREP (2016). Further, Santiago and Miranda (2014) examined the impact of diversity in clinical intervention trials. Santiago and Miranda reported an increase in the diversity of clinical trial participants from 17.6% to 21.4% in psychiatry, an increase in racial and ethnic diversity in social work from 8.2% to 12.9%, and an increase in representation in psychology from 6.6% to 7.8%. However, the numbers of those in these fields remain below the racial and ethnic diversity of the U.S. population at 30% (Census Bureau, 2013). Additionally, the improved representation of racial and ethnic minority groups in randomized intervention trials was not statistically significant enough to inform care for this population. Therefore, there is a need for more effort in workforce diversity.

Research has also indicated the importance of increasing representation in counseling on the therapeutic relationship. Chang and Yoon (2011) conducted a study on

23 racial and ethnic minority clients who participated in counseling with a White therapist for at least 1 year to identify the impact on therapy in cross-racial (racial mismatched) counseling pairs. One key theme included avoidance of race-related issues in therapy due to the perception that White therapists were unable to understand crucial aspects of the experiences of racial and ethnic minority clients; however, avoidance was mitigated due to therapist characteristics of compassion, acceptance, and level of comfort discussing racially related issues. Notably, a small subset of the participants perceived cross-racial therapy as positive and desirable, noting the perceived disadvantages of interracial treatment. The themes surrounding interracial therapy included: (a) increased the ability to understand race-related issues, (b) improved capacity for building a therapeutic relationship, and (c) ability to help develop coping skills to combat experiences of discrimination and oppression. But participants perceived some limitations with interracial therapy, noting the potential for over-identification by the therapist and client's increased self-consciousness about personally held values that conflict with the globally held values of the racial or cultural group (Chang & Yoon, 2011).

There has also been significant research on the underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities in the fields of counseling psychology, social work, and healthcare professions (Chaichanasakul et al., 2010, 2011; Robiner, 2006). Many mental health fields have identified a need to increase diversity in the workforce, including counseling psychology (Fouad, 2006; Maton, Kohout,Wicherski, Leary, & Vinokurov, 2006), school psychology (Rogers, 2006), social work (Beimers,Warner, & Mackie, 2013), and marriage and family therapy (McDowell, Fang, Bownlee, Young, & Khanna, 2007).

Additionally, research has explored the recruitment and retention of persons of color in higher education (Dumas-Hines, Cochran, & Williams, 2001; Flores, Clark, Claeys, & Villarreal, 2007), and the professions of general science and medical health professions (Cargill, 2009), physical therapy (Haskins & Kirk-Sanchez, 2006), nursing (Fleming, Berkowitz, Cheadle, 2005; Phillips, & Malone, 2014), chiropractic health (Calendar, 2006) and science and engineering (Collea, 1990).

In relation to the current study, previous studies have supported the integration of diversity in grounded theory research. Draucker et al. (2014) reviewed 44 grounded theory studies conducted in the United States between 2007 to 2012 to identify the level of efficacy in the integration of racial/ethnic diversity. According to Green et al., full integration of racial and ethnic diversity requires considerations of race and ethnicity at every phase of research (as cited in Draucker et al., 2014). Overall, the results demonstrated the poor integration of race and ethnicity into grounded theory research methodology, as 75% studies neglected to integrate race and ethnicity into any phase of the research project. However, five studies integrated race and ethnicity at all levels of research execution, and one study included race and ethnicity in some other diversity categories. Draucker et al.'s investigation support the benefit of continued integration of racial and ethnic diversity in exploring disparities in health and grounded theory research in general. Additionally, Draucker et al. provided a guide for aligning and assessing the integration of racial and ethnic diversity considerations in grounded theory.

Grounded theory has also been used to examine racial and ethnic minorities' decisions in professions. Hendricks, Smith, Caplow, and Donaldson (1996) utilized

classical grounded theory to examine the factors that influenced racial and ethnic minority students' decision to enter a professional program and variables impacting successful completion of the chosen professional program. Hendricks et al. interviewed 18 racial and ethnic minority students in engineering, business, law, and education in the Midwest United States. Results identified three factors that were significant in the students' choice of professional program and facilitation of program completion: (a) degree of service to the community, (b) level of family support, and (c) intrinsic determination (Hendricks et al., 1996). Additionally, Hendricks et al. found motivational differences across occupations, supporting the need for a grounded theory inquiry into career choice specific to the counseling profession. However, there is a lack of research on the factors influencing the decision to enroll in particular graduate degree programs, including the counseling profession (Dam, 2014).

In one of the few studies focused on the choice of counseling as a profession, Hill et al. (2013) examined the motivations of nine students considering a career in counseling. Six participants identified as European American. three identified as Asian American, and one participant identified as Hispanic. Participants expressed specific interest in becoming a therapist, indicated by a Likert-scale question. Additionally, the participants possessed a stronger inclination toward wanting to help others. The results of the study confirmed the results of previous research on influences and motivations for the career choice of therapists (Farber et al., 2005; Geller, Norcross, & Orlinsky, 2005) and expanded the understanding of the potential motivations.

Further, participants were driven to help those who experience similar challenges due to living in poverty, and culture was a strong motivator of the desire to become therapists for participants who were immigrants to the United States (Hill et al., 2013). Additionally, participants of Jewish culture nurtured values of respect, being of service to others, and valuing therapy (Hill et al., 2013). The outcomes of Hill et al.'s research reflect an evolution in the counseling profession from previous research that reflected White male dominance and a time when culture was not a consideration of a White female-dominated field (Michel, Hall, Hays, & Runyan, 2013).

Other gaps in research are related to career development and diversity in higher education. Sung, Turner, and Kaewchinda (2013) noted significant gaps in the literature on the educational achievement and career development of racial and ethnic minorities, especially regarding socio-ecological factors related to career choice and career paths. For example, studies have identified motivators of racial and ethnic minorities' career choice include social and contextual factors, mentoring, parental influence, teacher-counselor influence, self-efficacy, and racism (Grier-Reed & Ganuza, 2011; Sautter, Thomas, Dupre, & George, 2012). These factors included: race, familial, economic status, age, educational attainment of parents, and career achievement of family and friends. The results of Sung et al.'s work indicated a need for ongoing research on the career decision-making process of racial and ethnic minorities.

Worthington (2012) also identified a gap in research associated with the analysis of diversity in higher education policies and practices. Worthington's work provided

evidence of benefits associated with improved knowledge regarding issues of higher education attainment, and college recruitment and retention practices.

There also remains limited research on the specific motivations for choosing a career in counseling. For example, Racusin, Abramowitz, and Winter (1981) researched the influence of family dynamics on choosing to become a therapist but did not examine race or ethnicity. Additionally, Murphy and Halgin (1995) explored the differences in motivation for entering the mental health professions, sampling 52% males and 48% females but not collecting information regarding race or ethnicity. Further, Farber, Manevich, Metzger, and Saypol (2005) explored both motivations for career choice and pathways to entering the profession through a literature review, focusing on gender-linked career trajectories but not racial or cultural identity. Therefore, the lack of considerations for race and ethnicity in career choice specific to the counseling profession warrants the current study.

## Problem Statement

Racial and ethnic minority populations have experienced discrimination in educational and career attainment and remain underrepresented in the counseling profession (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009; Keels, 2013; Robinson, Lewis, Henderson, & Flowers, 2009). The American Community Survey (as cited in U.S. Census Bureau, 2015) revealed a significant disparity across all racial and ethnic minority persons employed as counselors, observing only 15% of all counselors are ethnic/racial minorities, whereas the U.S. Census Bureau (2013) reported that racial and ethnic minorities represented 27% of the population. Additionally, the ACA reported

membership as 82% Caucasian, 7.7 % African American, 2.3 % Asian, 0.7 % Native American, 1.3 % multiracial, 1.7 % Other, and 3.6 % Hispanic/Latino (personal communication with member programs coordinator) The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA, 2012, 2013) also reported that racial minorities account for only 19.2% of all psychiatrists, 5.1% of psychologists, 17.5% of social workers, 10.3% of counselors, and 7.8% of marriage and family therapists. Thus, racial and ethnic minorities are an overlooked population, and the counseling profession is a neglected occupation in the research of career choice (Flores et al., 2006).

The underrepresentation of ethnic and racial minorities is also reflected in the counseling profession's workforce shortages and lack of diversity for decades (Hoge et al., 2013; SAMHSA, 2013). Further, the counseling profession is experiencing ongoing challenges with the recruitment and retention of racial and ethnic minority counseling students (Haskins et al., 2013; Shin, 2008). The ongoing challenges in recruitment and retention are reflected in the underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities and a need for greater workforce diversity in the counseling profession as a means of building a sector that reflects, understands, and competently responds to the needs of the individuals of diverse backgrounds it serves.

In addition to challenges in representation, the counseling profession has limited understanding of the barriers faced by racial and ethnic minority students in a master's level counselor preparation program (Caroline, Kayla, & Kenny, 2015; Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2017a, 2017b) and doctoral students of color in counselor education programs (Henfield et al., 2011, 2013). Educational and career development institutions can

improve recruitment and retention strategies through increased insight into the personal and systemic variables influencing racial and ethnic minority students' decision-making process regarding self-selection into the counseling profession (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2017b). Thus, the focus of this study was to identify the career paths of master's level counseling students identifying as African American to understand the decision-making process for choosing a career in counseling.

This study addressed a lack of racial and ethnic representation in the research on motivations for entering the counseling profession (Farber et al., 2005; Hendricks et al.,1996; Racusin et al.,1981) and limited research on the unique influential factors for racially and ethnically diverse individuals engaging in the decision-making process (Hill et al., 2013). To date, I have uncovered one study identifying motivations that influence racial and ethnic minorities decisions about whether to pursue a career in counseling (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2017a). The counseling profession is missing insight into African-American students' interests in the counseling profession influencing career choice (Arthur, Collins, Marshall, & McMahon, 2013). Increasing diversity in the counseling profession is important for client care (Benish, Quintana, & Wampold, 2011; Smith, Domenech Rodríguez, & Bernal, 2011). Current statistics on the behavioral health workforce reveal persistent disparities in the representation of racial and ethnic minorities, but research has not provided recruitment solutions. The first step in addressing both the shortage of behavioral health professionals and the need to increase diversity within the counseling profession is to understand the decision-making process of African-American counseling students that lead to choosing the counseling profession.

## Purpose

The population in America is increasingly diverse; however, racial and ethnic minorities are underrepresented at each level of the counseling profession (Vasquez & Jones, 2006). Haizlip (2012) revealed the struggles of the mental/behavioral health field in recruiting and retaining African American faculty. The mental health and addiction counseling workforce are also struggling with decades-long shortages, a lack of diversity, high staff turnover, and questions about their effectiveness in meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse client population (Hoge et al., 2013; Nillson, Schale, & Khamphakdy-Brown, 2011). Although research has identified the need for diversity in counselor education faculty (Holcomb-McCoy & Bradley, 2003, Webb, 2015), highlighted the benefits of diversity in higher education (Hurtado, Alvarado, & Guillermo-Wann, 2015), noted the importance of workforce diversity (Santiago and Miranda, 2014), and explored the motivations of students of color pursuing careers in counseling (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2017a), there remains a need for a study that will merge current knowledge and strengthen the understanding of the career path and decision-making process for racial and ethnic minority students entering the counseling profession through the development of theory.

The purpose of this qualitative, constructivist grounded theory study was to identify the factors shaping African-American counseling students' decision to pursue a career in counseling. Using a social constructivist theoretical framework and a constructivist grounded theory methodology, my objectives were to (a) document the career paths of current African-American students in a master's level counselor education

program and current behavioral health professionals; (b) identify the iterative process of the participants underwent when choosing to enter graduate school; (c) interpret the influence of racial and ethnic identity on the decision making process; and (d) co-create a coherent, substantive theory that informs recruitment and retention of African Americans to the counseling profession to improve diversity in the workforce and meet the needs of an increasingly diverse help-seeking population.

## Research Questions

Research Question: What decision-making process do African-American students undergo when choosing to enter the counseling profession?

Subquestion: How does racial and ethnic identity influence the decision-making process of African Americans when choosing to enter the counseling profession?

## Methodological and Theoretical Framework

### Grounded Theory

Grounded theory, historically used in sociology and social science research, emerged as a qualitative methodology utilized to develop theory through the gathering and analysis of data (Baier & Wampler, 2008; Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miller & Fredericks, 1999). The use of grounded theory allows researchers to generate theory through the analysis of data and provides insight into behaviors, perceptions, and beliefs patterns of individuals (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Grounded theory is most appropriate when developing a broad conceptual level of understanding of a process or action that leads to the construction of theory when existing theories are inadequate or nonexistent (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser, 1992). This research employed a more

recent evolution of grounded theory, constructivist grounded theory, utilized by Strauss and Corbin (1994) and promoted by Charmaz (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006).

I used social constructivism as a theoretical framework. The constructivist grounded theory incorporates a social constructivist epistemology, which suggests that knowledge is socially developed through the lived experiences of the individual or group, underscoring the complexity of the human experience and nuances of behavior (Andrews, 2012; Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2013). I used this framework to emphasize constructivist grounded theory and its application to multiple socially constructs and understand the meaning-making of the individual student and collective group of racial and ethnic minorities and their career decision-making process (Hussein, 2015; Torres, 2009).

The use of a theoretical framework within grounded theory is a newer phenomenon and deviates from the core tenets of traditional grounded theory research (Mitchell, 2014). However, the constructivist grounded theory with a social constructivist conceptual framework is the most appropriate methodology for my research study, as it reflects the relationship between the researcher and participants as co-creators (Mills et al., 2006). Further, the use of the social constructivism framework supports the counseling profession's mandate for multicultural and social justice competency by placing emphasis on the voices of an underrepresented group and diminishes the pervasive individualistic perspective frequently adopted during data analysis (Charmaz, 2016, 2017).

Social constructivism is a sociological theory of knowledge, which asserts that human development and ways of knowing are socially situated and constructed through

interaction with others (McKinley, 2015; Young & Collin, 2004). The social constructivist approach to grounded theory is focused on the subjective meanings of the participants and makes explicit the beliefs and experiences of the researcher; it produces suggestive and tentative conclusions (Creswell, 2013; Higginbottom & Lauridsen, 2014; Young & Collin, 2004). Constructivist grounded theory indicates that theory is interactively constructed by the participants and researchers to understand the meanings of the participants' experiences (Higginbottom & Lauridsen, 2014). This design choice acknowledges my interpretive role biases and perspectives (see Higginbottom & Lauridsen, 2014; Young & Collin,2004). Constructivist grounded theory is the best design for my study because it is congruent with my own ontological and epistemological philosophies, as the design reflects my belief that knowledge is developed only through socially mediated, context-dependent, and culturally constructed processes (Higginbottom & Lauridsen, 2014; Young & Collin,2004).

## Nature of the Study

Research is involves inquiring to study problems (Gay & Airasian, 2003). Pairing the best method with the research question is an intertwined, bidirectional process (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005). The goal of my research was to develop a theory that explains the decision-making process of African Americans when selecting counseling as a career. Grounded theory is the qualitative method intended to generate a theory that emerges from the data (Charmaz, 2004; Glaser, 2007). Grounded theory is the most suitable method when there is no pre-existing theory to guide the scientific inquiry (Patton, 2015). The selection of grounded theory aligned with my research purpose

because it reaches beyond exploration, discovery, and description to generate a theory of a process, action, or social interaction (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Moreover, the development of theory provides a comprehensive explanation of a process or facilitates the production of a framework for ongoing research (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Additionally, grounded theory is the most rigorous qualitative approach (Mills et al., 2006) and promotes flexibility in data collection and analysis (Glaser, 2007; Charmaz, 2004), which was significant to the observation of the decision-making process. As is the case with qualitative research in general, the credibility of grounded theory is questioned due to the lack of consensus on methodology.

**Possible Types and Sources of Data**

The primary methods for collecting qualitative data are observations, individual interviews, focus groups, and action research, with interviews being the data collection method of choice (Cresewll, 2013; Patton, 2015). Because constructivist grounded theory allows researchers to acknowledge multiple sources of knowledge (Charmaz, 2014), I collected data from multiple sources, beginning with interviews, observations, and the review of documents to build a more comprehensive theory (Chen, 2011; Hardman, 2013; Charmaz, 2014). Increasing the diversity of data sources influences what the researcher can see and influences the applicability of the developed theory (Charmaz, 2014). I collected data through interviews (Patton, 2015; Richie, 2013), focus groups (Daley et al., 2010; Holton, 2009), observations, and review of documents (Chen, 2011; Hardman, 2013; Charmaz, 2014). For grounded theory, participants must be individuals

who are undergoing, have undergone, or observed the decision-making process for choosing to enter the counseling profession (Moorse, 2007).

I recruited African Americans currently enrolled in a master's program in counseling, attending online private institutions and public and state universities, new graduates, as well as other key knowledge holders such as counselor educators and counselor training program administrators. My grounded theory research began with the consensus of a sample size of 20-30 people. However, the heterogeneity and intragroup variances of my target population may warrant a larger sample size (Morse, 2007; Suri, 2011). Additionally, qualitative researchers seek to reach saturation in their studies, meaning the data collection and analysis is not uncovering new information from participants. Saturation in grounded theory indicates the data is comprehensively validated (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013; Sandelowski, 2008). Participation recruitment continued until I justified data saturation where no new concepts or categories emerge (Patton, 2015; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

I used theoretical sampling for the construction of theory through the illumination of variation and focused data collection, enabling me to select participants best suited to answer the questions guiding the study (Charmaz, 2006; Patton, 2015; Richie et al., 2013). Theoretical sampling is essential to ground theory design, allowing for flexibility as well as structure and representativeness (Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2014; Patton, 2015; Richie et al., 2013). Theoretical sampling is informed by coding, comparison, and memo-writing. By selecting participants and by modifying the questions asked in data collection, the researcher will fill gaps, clarify doubts, test their interpretations, and build

their emerging theory (Charmaz, 2014; Patton, 2015; Richie et al., 2013). Theoretical sampling requires recruiting participants with substantial knowledge about the process under investigation (Charmaz, 2006). Additionally, snowball sampling (Heckathorn, 2002) was employed to reach saturation. Snowball sampling facilitates diversity in participants and allows for gathering new insights into newly reconstructed knowledge collectively with the participants (Charmaz, 2014; Voicu, 2011).

Data were collected through 60-minute semistructured interviews with open-ended questions and follow-up questions for clarification (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). I implemented an interview protocol that began each interview with rapport building and provided full informed consent with clear explanations, allowed participants to seek clarification, and emphasized the voluntary nature of participation (Laureate Education, 2010). Further, member checking seeks clarification from the research participants through reviewing and approving aspects of the interpretation of the data they provided (Anney, 2014; Doyle, 2007). Though member checking is traditionally completed in a single event to verify the accuracy of transcripts or early interpretations, Curtin and Fossey (2007) and Doyle (2007) recommend ongoing member checking. The continuous member checking also aligns more closely with the constructivist approach to grounded theory, which sees participants as co-constructors of the emerging theory (Charmaz, 2014). The use of member checking relies on participant rapport (Carlson, 2010), so I used the informed consent process to address the increased time commitment adequately.

**Specific Type of Analysis**

Grounded theory is used to develop a theory through systematically collected and analyzed data (Patton, 2015). Grounded theory research allows researchers to discover emerging patterns and describe these patterns through theory generation (Charmaz, 2014). The themes, codes, and theory are developed through emergence (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The principle of emergence requires researchers to remain free from predetermined ideas to encourage theory generation (Patton, 2015).

I engaged in immediate data analysis by transcribing each interview before completing the next interview (see Patton, 2015). Data analysis began with initial coding before focused coding. The initial coding process included open-coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), line-by-line method, and in vivo codes (Charmaz, 2014). Focused coding included theoretical coding and theoretical sorting (Chamaz, 2014). Qualitative research creates copious amounts of data and requires comprehensive organization and management to ensure trustworthiness and credibility (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; White et al., 2012).

ATLAS.ti, a computer-based software, was selected because its structure aligns with grounded theory (Friese, 2011). I used ATLAS.ti transcription software to support the open-coding process through memoing, and visualizations to develop connections to larger concepts (ATLAS.ti, n.d.; Talanquer, 2014). ATLAS.ti provided adequate flexibility for data management, coding, and the evolution of theory building (Talanquer, 2014). ATLAS.ti can facilitate the analysis of large bodies of textual, graphical, audio and video data. Additionally, Charmaz (2014) emphasized the value of incorporating the

researcher's experiences into the construction of theory. Thus, memoing is central to reflexivity in qualitative research memos and indispensable to grounded theory methodology (Bringer, Johnston, & Brackenridge, Ortlipp, 2004, 2006). Like memoing, the benefit of using ATLAS.ti for journaling includes the ability to code the journal entries (Bringer et al., 2004, 2006).

## Definitions

The terms in this section are defined to create a unified understanding and dependable context for understanding the design and interpretation of research outcomes.

*Race:* For this study, the term *race* is grounded in constructivist race theory, which understands it as a sociopolitical construct used for grouping and categorizing people possessing believed inherited phenotypical and behavioral traits considered to be socially significant. Race is a nuanced social construct that includes refutes against historical scientific support of pure biology, acknowledges nuances of lineage and geography, and incorporates considerations of sociopolitical consequences (Morning, 2014; Thompson, 2006).

*Ethnicity:* For this study, the term *ethnicity* refers to a socially constructed category grounded in a shared set of values, behavioral patterns, linguistic patterns, political and economic interests, history, and ancestral geographical origination which distinguish one people group from another.

*African American/Black:* Although there are distinct cultural differences between the terms *African American* and *Black*, they are regularly used interchangeably. For this study, the U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.) notes that an individual's race is self-identified and

an individual who identifies as *African American* or *Black* is an individual having genealogical lineage from an African country, including Sub-Saharan African, Afro-Caribbean, and Afro-Latin lineage. The heterogeneity of this definition underscores the importance of understanding the role of racial identity and nuances of the varied histories, assorted identities, and diverse experiences of this people group.

*Career decision-making process:* For this study career decision-making is understood as the cognitive process of consuming various types of information, deciphering and making meaning of such information and choosing a course of action to pursue entrance into a particular career or profession (Gat & Tal, 2007).

*Recruitment:* For this study *recruitment* is understood as a collection of actions designed to identify, attract, and secure a pool of potential individuals for admissions to a graduate-level counselor training program and eventual entrance into the counseling profession (Ratna & Chawla, 2012).

*Retention:* For this study the term *retention* is used to describe systematic employment of tactics and activities designed to prevent attrition of previously recruited and selected students into a graduate-level counselor training program.

## Assumptions

There were a collection of assumptions that guided the research design and data collection process. This research is designed to gain insight into the career decision making process of African Americans choosing to enter the counseling profession and uncover an iterative theory for the recruitment and retention of African Americans in the counseling profession. Thus, I assumed that there is a need to increase representation of

African Americans in the counseling profession. Further, I assumed that the existing theory on career development and decision-making does not adequately reflect the career decision-making process of African Americans in general and those choosing the counseling profession specifically. During this study, it was assumed that participants were able to accurately recall and provide truthful responses that correctly reflected their thoughts, experiences, and courses of action surrounding the decision to enter the counseling profession and apply to a master's level counselor training program. I also assumed that participants answered the demographic and eligibility honestly. It was assumed that all participants were those who self-identified as African American/Black (as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau) and were enrolled in or previously completed a master's level counselor training program. I also assumed that participants felt comfortable engaging in the recorded interview and understood their responses would be used to inform the development of theory.

## Scope and Delimitations

To improve the overall trustworthiness of the research results, I created a set of eligibility criteria. The scope of the study was to uncover an iterative theory of African Americans choosing to enter the counseling profession. Thus, the scope of the study defined the counseling profession as those specialty areas of clinical mental health, marriage and family therapy, and addiction counseling available under the 2016 CACREP standards. Eligibility was restricted participation in the study to who self-identified as African American/Black. Participants must have been at least 18 years old, either be a graduate student in a counselor training program seeking a master's degree in

counseling or have completed a master's degree in counseling and currently work as a practicing clinician. Participants could hold any variation of clinical license associated with the counseling profession. The clinical licenses excluded were those associated with social work and psychology. Participants could be attending or have completed a master's degree in any format: online, brick and mortar, private institutions, and state universities.

## Limitations

The scope and delimitations are designed to ensure the quality and trustworthiness of the research. Nonetheless, there are inherent limitations of every research design. For this constructivist grounded theory research, the potential limitations include participants failing to report key experiences or action steps due to inability to accurately remember all steps and lack of awareness (Bennett & Gaines, 2010). The absence of key information compromises data analysis. There is also a potential influence of respondent bias during data collection and researcher bias during the analysis process, swaying data interpretation and research outcomes. Additionally, there are inherent biases with purposive and theoretical sampling (Kolb, 2012). Limitations and potential biases were addressed by completing comprehensive research to select the appropriate research design, engaging in memoing, member checking, and using theoretical saturation to support appropriate interpretations and implications of the data gathered from too few participants.

## Significance

The current and growing shortage of mental health professionals is a national issue, and recruitment and retention are recognized priorities (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). However, there needs to be a better understanding of the decision-making process of African Americans, Native Americans, and Latin and Asian Americans (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2017a) that guide their choice to pursue a career in counseling. Additionally, racial and ethnic minorities experience significant health disparities in access and utilization of behavioral health services (Chen & Rizzo, 2010; Lê Cook & Alegría, 2011). Although all racial and ethnic minority populations experience disparate access and reduced utilization of behavioral health care, African Americans are found to be overrepresented concerning adverse treatment outcomes and negative experiences (Carpenter-Song et al., 2010; Lê Cook, McGuire, & Zaslavsky, 2010). The future of the counseling profession will lie in the ability to recruit and retain a more *race-conscious* profession that moves the counseling profession closer toward reflecting and competently responding to the needs of African-American populations (Santiago & Miranda, 2014).

This research narrows the gap by cultivating increased insight for addressing the underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minority counseling professionals with a focus on African Americans. Research findings may (a) promote increased knowledge and insight regarding how to successfully attract racially diverse individuals into the counseling profession by uncovering barriers unique to people of color, (b) establish best practices in diversifying the counseling workforce, (c) inform the creation of educational

pipelines for racial minority students into the counseling profession, (d) develop a more race-conscious profession (ACA, 2014; Ratts et al., 2015; Young & Brooks, 2008), and (e) lead to lowered rates of attrition among racial and ethnic minority clients. Additionally, these new insights may serve to highlight issues of importance to marginalized student populations (Clark, Mercer, Zeigler-Hill, & Dufrene, 2012). Actively promoting a racially diverse student body furthers the mission of the ACA (2014) and actualizes the professions' education standards surrounding multicultural competencies (CACREP, 2016) by shifting the Eurocentric culture of the counseling profession to include alternative knowledge systems grounded in Africentric cultural values and healing traditions (Gone, 2016; Nwoye, 2015).

## Summary

In this chapter, I described the pertinent information to justify the study. This chapter contained an introduction, a review of the background of the study, the gap in the literature, and identified the problem. Further, in this chapter, I identified the purpose, the research question, and reviewed the framework for by which the research question was answered. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of the prevailing literature shaping career decision-making.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review synthesizes the research relevant to the current study on the decision-making process of African Americans choosing to enter the counseling profession. The review provides a rationale and identifies gaps in the literature that demonstrate the need for conducting the current study. This chapter describes the literature search strategies, defines the key search terms, and includes a discussion of the utilization of literature in grounded theory studies. Additionally, this chapter provides a review of the theoretical foundation and a review of the literature related to career choice.

## Literature Search Strategy and Key Search Terms

The literature review is comprised of resources from the Walden University Library, Google Scholar, and the bibliographies and indexes of reviewed books and articles. The referenced articles from books and articles from Google Scholar were recovered from the Walden University Library. Multidisciplinary databases were used in the Walden University library through the following search engines: Academic Search Complete, Thoreau Multi-Database Search, ProQuest Central, SocINDEX, and Expanded Academic ASAP. Specific peer-reviewed journals were reviewed including *Counselor Education and Supervision*, *Journal of Counseling and Development*, *The Career Development Quarterly*, *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, *Journal of Black Psychology*, *Journal of Career Development*, and *Journal of Vocational Behavior*. The sources selected for the literature review were not more than 10 years old, except for essential articles that were used despite being older than 5 years. Search terms included *grounded theory,*

*constructivist grounded theory, social justice in grounded theory, counseling profession and diversity, workforce diversity, counseling professionals workforce, racial and ethnic minorities in counseling, African Americans counseling professions, diversity in behavioral health, career choice, career decision-making, social constructivism, social constructionism, multicultural counseling and social justice, recruitment in higher education, choosing a profession in psychology, choosing to be a therapist, diversity in higher education, diversity in counselor education,* and *racism in counseling.*

### Use of Literature in Grounded Theory

Grounded theory methodology is selected when attempting to explain a process by discovering emerging patterns in data, leading to the generation of a theory (Charmaz, 2014). The use of literature remains controversial among grounded theorists (Birks & Mills, 2017; Charmaz, 2014). For classic grounded theory, Glaser suggested that conducting a priori literature review would unduly influence data analysis and subsequently taint theory generation (Birks & Mills, 2017; Charmaz, 2014; Maz, 2013). However, the constructivist grounded theory tradition notes that the literature review is critical to the researcher's working understanding of the phenomenon of interest, the development of the research question, justifying the study by identifying gaps, and avoiding duplication of theory generation (Birks & Mills, 2017; Charmaz, 2014).

## Conceptual Framework

This qualitative inquiry was grounded in the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism and the epistemological stance of social constructionism (see Schwandt, 2003). Both social constructivism and social constructionism are rooted in symbolic

interactionism and phenomenology, which suggests that reality is subjective and created through individuals' conscious and unconscious meaning-making, actions, and interactions with their environment and people, underscoring the complexity of the human experience and nuances of behavior (Andrews, 2012; Brewster, 2013; Charmaz, 2014, Diaz-Leon, 2015). Social constructivism and social constructionism have increased in popularity among the social sciences including psychology, career development, and education (Young & Collin, 2004). Though criticized by philosophers, social constructivism is a sociological theory developed by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann that indicates that individuals develop within a social context and knowledge is gained within a culturally and historically informed social context and interaction with others (Kukla, 2013). Social constructionism, pioneered by Lev Vygotsky, implies that all reality is socially constructed through individual and shared action, leading to a collective understanding of the world (Charmaz, 2014; Diaz-Leon, 2015).

**Social Constructivism and Social Constructionism**

The two theories are seemingly homogenous under the term *constructivism* (Andrews, 2012; Diaz-Leon, 2015; Young & Collin, 2004), as they both contend that social structures are co-constructed by the people within their society. However, there is an important distinction—social constructionism addresses the development of social structures co-created by the group, whereas social constructivism addresses how individuals learn from interactions in a group and society that shape their reality and ways of knowing what is true (Andrews, 2012; Diaz-Leon, 2015). As a theoretical framework, social constructivism is used to uncover the learning and meaning-making

surrounding individual and group experiences that inform actions (Birks & Mills, 2017; Charmaz, 2014). That data are used to "generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meaning" (Creswell, 2013, p. 21). The researcher's objective is to analyze the gathered data from the participants' worldview (Briggs & Coleman, 2007).

**Social Constructivism in Education and Career**

Researchers have proposed a social constructivist approach to education and career as a strategy to improve effectiveness when working with diverse populations (Grier-Reed & Ganuza, 2011). Social constructivism is applied in education as a theory of learning that informs teaching instruction. Social constructivism suggests that learning is an active process in which the learner creates, interprets, and reorganizes information to better understand the world and his or her place in it (Gordon, 2008). Constructivists, therefore, proclaim that knowledge is both constructed through an individual's lived experiences and co-created through interaction with others within that social community influenced by "historical and cultural traditions" (Jha, 2012, p. 174). Additionally, social constructivism contends that no one right answer or fact exists due to the subjective nature of knowing (Pelech & Pieper, 2010).

The application of social constructivism in education is significant to counselor education, as marginalized groups have experienced an exclusion of their realities in psychological theory, diagnosis, and treatment (Caroline, Kayla, & Kenny, 2015; Linder, Harris, Allen, & Hubain, 2015). For instance, Jha (2012) highlighted challenges with the implementation of social constructivism to teaching pedagogy, noting the lack of definable boundaries of the classroom and the historical and cultural traditions of

education. But social constructivism, when comprehensively applied, creates an inclusive learning environment that improves the learning experience and sense of belonging to both the educational institution and career field (Kugelmass, 2006; Young & Collin, 2004). Constructivism has been used in vocational psychology, career counseling, and development literature dating back to 1989 (Jha, 2012; Savickas, 1989). As an example of its application to education, Grier-Reed and Ganuza (2011) explored the influence of constructivism on career decision self-efficacy for 81 Asian- and African-American students delivered through a 15-week career course. Results indicated that constructivism helped incorporate multicultural competencies in career counseling—that is, the application of constructivism significantly increased career decision self-efficacy across five core elements including occupational information, planning, goal selection, self-appraisal, and problem-solving.

## Interpretations of Career

Work has been promoted as fundamentally positive and intrinsically rewarding. Engaging in work creates a sense of meaning and purpose while utilizing an individual's strengths (Dik & Duffy, 2012; Dik et al., 2015). For example, Dik, Byrne, and Steger (2013) found that individuals expect their chosen work to (a) develop potential and utilize their strengths, (b) provoke purpose, and (c) provide ways to impact the public good. Additionally, Alfred Adler, the founder of individual psychology (also referred to as Adlerian psychology) asserted that everyone must find ways to navigate three universal challenges in life (life tasks): work, love, and social (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964; Stoltz, 2011). Adler argued the work task was one of humanity's most significant life

challenges, as it requires individuals to find a career or vocation that maintains basic needs for survival while contributing to society (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964; Stoltz, 2011; Stoltz & Apodaca, 2017).

There are several ideas associated with the term *career* such as the terms *job*, *profession*, or *calling* (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997). A review of these related terms helps provide context for understanding career decision-making. For example, Hall (2002) defined a career as the "individually perceived sequence of attitudes and behaviors associated with work-related experiences and activities over the span of the person's life" (p. 12). Hall's definition reflects Adlerian/individual psychology's concepts of phenomenology, teleology, and holism, which suggest that an individual's behavior is motivated by a set of thoughts, feelings, and convictions informed by the individual's subjective reality and interpretation of lived experiences. Thus, objective reality is less important than individuals' meanings for their experiences. Phenomenology is the way in which people perceive their world, holism requires an understanding that individuals are social and are understood more fully within their sociopolitical and cultural context, and teleology suggests that humans are creative, decision-making beings who act in goal-directed ways with purpose (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964; Griffith & Powers, 2007; Oberst & Stewart, 2014).

In addition to *career*, the term *job* is focused on a quid pro quo relationship, where an individual receives payment for the completion of work or services (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Thus, holding a job implies minimal personal satisfaction associated with the duties of the position. Additionally, leaving a job occurs more

frequently and is driven by opportunities to increase compensation. Use of the term *profession* implies an individual's investment in the work conducted with a more in-depth connection between labor activities, self-esteem, and meaningfulness (Lent, 2013). Those who usually describe their work as a profession change at lower rates than those doing a job (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Holland's theory of vocational types more closely aligns with the concepts of job and profession (Patton & McMahon,2014).

The most philosophical idea associated with a career is the term *calling*, defined as a summons to a precise role motivated by a higher sense of purpose (Dik et al., 2015; Duffy & Autin, 2013). Further, Wrzesniewski et al. (1997) noted that the term *calling* is linked to an individual's self-ideal where compensation is not an immediate consideration. The work accompanying a calling is thought to fulfill a greater purpose, is linked to a superior self-awareness of a person's place in the world, and is promoted passion and endurance (Dik et al., 2015; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010). Super's theory of career development best describes the experience of a calling to a career, as it emphasizes the developmental stages of self-concept as it relates to career decision-making (Dik et al., 2015).

## Theories of Career Decision-Making

The common influences of career decision-making across class, race/ethnicity, and gender include interest, knowledge about career options, salary compensation, and potential job security (Goffnett, Divine, Williams, & Cook, 2013; Wan, Wong, & Kong, 2014). Additionally, there are three contextual factors that influence career decision-making: historical (Valcour, 2010), ideological (Lucas et al., 2006), and cultural (Samuel,

2012; Thomas & Inkson, 2007). Globalization and shifts in perceived loyalty between employee and employer have changed how individuals select the best places or industries to engage in work (Rousseau, 2011). Generational changes in socialization and work and life values also influence the decision-making process (Macky et al., 2008).

Culture has been identified as essential to understanding career decision-making (Inkson, Dries & Arnold, 2014). Social cognitive career theory is one career development and decision-making model that accommodates the multilayered aspects of career research (Lent, 2013). Social cognitive career theory was designed to bring together the common elements of career theories, addressing vocational interests, career choice, and career-related performance (Lent, 2013). Social cognitive career theory asserts that career choice is primarily influenced by a sense of self-efficacy and expectations of outcomes. Outcome expectations refer to the anticipation of both desirable and undesirable results of any course of action (Lee, Flores, Navarro, & Shu, 2016). Hence, understanding career decision-making requires consideration of individual differences related to dimensions of identity (e.g., gender, age, class, sexuality, racial and ethnic identity), and contextual influences.

In addition to culture and social cognitive theory, Adlerian/individual psychology is a socioteleo-analytic theory of personality that offers a holistic perspective of career decision-making. Adlerian/individual psychology distinguishes between what career an individual chooses and what informed (both conscious and unconscious) the decision-making process (Sweeney, 2019). Adlerian/individual psychology is focused on the goals and purposes of individual behavior and the interconnectedness of those actions within

the social context of the individual. One foundational concept of this theory is *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*, which loosely translated from German means community feeling and describes the social embeddedness of individuals (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 134). Amundson, Borgen, LaQuinta, Butterfield, and Koert (2010) echoed the importance of community feeling, belonging, and inclusion when engaging in career decision-making. Additionally, Adlerian/individual psychology is focused on the teleological (goal-directed) nature of an individual's actions as the psychology of use versus the psychology of possession—that is, all behaviors are viewed as actions toward a goal. Different than other career theories that consider the traits, values, interests, and abilities of an individual to match with a career, Adlerian/individual psychology considers how these traits are used to create a sense of belonging, social contribution, and significance (Sweeney, 2019).

Adlerian/individual psychology also diverges from prevailing career development theory asserting that career interests are cultivated in early childhood (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Most career development theorists note late adolescence and emergent adulthood as critical times in the career development process. It is during this time that individuals experience a heightened sense of urgency to identify a career that situates them as a valuable member of their community and society (Marsh, Bradley, Love, Alexander, & Norham, 2007; Mei & Newmeyer, 2008). College is also critical to the career development of individuals, as this is the time career choices are made. A substantial number of undergraduate students enter college without a declared major, and many will change their declared major more than once. The individual's career decision-

making is either encouraged or discouraged by academic performance, college faculty, and parents (Sung, Turner, & Kaewchinda, 2013). For example, Sung et al. (2013) completed a survey of college students at a predominantly White institution and uncovered multiple socioecological factors related to career decision-making and career paths: race, familial, economic status, age, educational attainment of parents, and career achievement of family and friends. These results indicate a need for ongoing research on the career decision-making process of racial and ethnic minorities. Additionally, Garcia, Restubog, Bordia, Bordia, and Roxas (2015) conducted survey research of 235 college students in computer science and found a direct relationship between parent and guardian support, faculty support, and career decision-making self-efficacy. Garcia et al. also noted the importance of time as a mitigating factor.

**Culture and Career Decision-Making**

Research has indicated that career choice by historically marginalized groups is influenced by information, cultural and racial identity, environment, parental and family support, and salary (Byars-Winston, 2010; Edwards & Quinter, 2011; Olamide & Olawaiye, 2013). However, career theories have lacked applicability for racial and ethnic minorities (Arthur & McMahon, 2005, Byars-Winston, 2010; Fouad & Byars-Winston, 2005). Although similarities in career choice exist between privileged and historically marginalized groups, historically marginalized groups are driven by different sociopolitical factors (Byars-Winston, 2010; Constantine, Wallace, & Kindaichi, 2005; Kerka, 2003). For example, Jackson and Nutini (2002) interviewed 21 middle school students attending public school and uncovered four themes related to career choice,

career assessment, and counseling: lack of available resources for learning, experiences of discrimination on participants' career learning, contextual barriers, and psychological barriers. Additionally, Fouad and Byars-Winston (2005) identified substantial differences between privileged and historically marginalized groups in their perceptions of career-related opportunities and barriers, noting perceived barriers deterred historically marginalized groups from choosing to counsel as a career choice.

Hendricks, Smith, Caplow, and Donaldson (1996) utilized classical grounded theory to examine the factors that influenced racial and ethnic minority students' (1) decision to enter a professional program and (2) variables impacting successful completion of the chosen professional program. The fields of engineering, business, law, and education were selected to represent the spectrum of educational training needed to enter the profession. Engineering and business were selected as they only require a bachelor's degree for entry into the field. Law was selected as it requires post- bachelor's degree education. That is a graduate/ professional degree.

Lastly, of nursing, social work, and education, considered transitional professions, education was selected as it required graduate degree training only after entering the profession. Hendricks et al. (1996) sampled 18 racial and ethnic minority students; eight identified as African American, five identified as Hispanic, and five who identified as Native American from a predominately White research institution in the Midwest region of the United States. Face-to-face interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview format. The interview protocol included questions focused on five themes: (1) student's choice of professional program, (2) student's career goals, (3) student's support

system, (4) barriers to program completion, and (5) ideas pertaining the ideal program experience. Transcriptions of the interviews were hand-coded.

Results of the data analysis identified three major factors that significantly persuaded the students' choice of professional program, facilitated successful program completion, and shaped their vision of an ideal professional program: (1) degree of service to community, (2) level of family support, and (3) intrinsic determination. The first theme (degree of service to the community) most significantly explained the students' choice of a professional program. All participants selected their career, except business, out of a sense of obligation and commitment to societal and cultural. Those in business indicated the choice was related to goodness of fit and response to enjoying the subject matter. The level of family support and intrinsic determination explained the likelihood of program completion. That is, the students with strong family ties discussed an ability to acclimate to college life seamlessly. Additionally, all of the participants noted high levels of internal motivation for success; leading to increased confidence to overcome barriers and complete the professional program and achieve their career goals.

Hendricks et al. (1996) called for ongoing research surrounding career choice for racial and ethnic minorities and the validation of the themes uncovered. While this article is significantly outdated, the implications of Hendricks et al. (1996) provide a comprehensive review of the use of grounded theory methodology for exploring racial and ethnic diversity in career choice. Further, Hendricks et al. (1996) highlighted a continuing gap in the current literature. A review of 36 articles citing Hendricks et al. (1996) found research on family support in college (Fischer, 2007; Guiffrida,2005), racial

differences in acclimation to college life (Eimers & Pike,1997), racial and ethnic minority student's perceptions of college retention interventions (Andrade, 2009; Eimers, 2001), racial and ethnic minorities experience on predominantly white college campuses (Guiffrida, 2006), and racial and ethnic minorities in the science professions (Chang, Eagan, Lin, & Hurtado, 2011). Additionally, Hendricks et al. (1996) found motivational differences across occupations; supporting the need for a grounded theory inquiry into career choice specific to the counseling profession. The lack of culturally appropriate career development theory and practices warrants heightened efforts to research and develop multicultural theories and assessment tools for career development (Byars-Winston, 2010; Collins, Arthur, McMahon, & Bisson, 2014).

## Disparity in Education and Career Attainment

Research indicates higher education institutions committed to diversity experience positive outcomes for student, faculty, and staff (American Council on Education and the American Association of University Professors, 2000; Bowen & Bok, 1998; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999). These benefits transcend the ethnic background of the students so that all students report an increased ability to work with members of other ethnic groups, an increased acceptance of those from other cultural backgrounds, and increased participation in community-based and other civic activities following graduation. These findings highlight the positive consequences of a diverse student body and dispel myths about the perceived negative experiences of students exposed to race-sensitive admissions policies. On a societal level, the benefits of a diverse workforce are becoming better understood. Recent data from the Bureau of Labor

Statistics (U.S. Department of Labor, 2005) suggest an increased need for psychologists in all major employment sectors, from schools to public agencies to private companies. Increasing the representation of mental health professionals of color within the profession has the potential to benefit civilization by highlighting unmet needs, contributing new knowledge.

## Workforce Diversity

The racial and ethnic diversity of the United States has increased substantially and is projected to continue to grow (Frey, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Frey (2014) noted a diminishing white population and expanding minority population, highlighting less than 50% of new births in 2011 identified as White. Further, Frey (2014) estimated 2030 would reflect Whites as the numerical minority as over half of Americans under 18 years old will identify as a member of a non-white racial or ethnic group. Across several decades research has underscored the importance of and the need to improve cultural diversity in the counseling workforce has been promoted (Johnson, Bradley, Knight, & Bradshaw, 2007; Marbley, Bonner, Malik, Henfield, & Watts, 2007). The rapid increase in the United States' population of racial and ethnic minorities comparative to Whites demonstrates the counseling professions' need to improve workforce diversity. Building a workforce that reflects, understands, and efficiently responds to the needs of the diverse individuals it serves (Holcomb-McCoy & Bradley, 2003; Johnson et al., 2007). Despite previous improvements in workforce diversity (Johnson et al., 2007), counseling programs continue to note challenges with the recruitment and retention of racial and ethnic minority counseling students (Haskins et al., 2013). The counseling profession has

made efforts to improve the representation of historically marginalized populations through recruitment and retention of racially and ethnically diverse faculty (Brooks & Steen, 2010; Johnson et al., 2007, Turner, Myers, & Creswell, 1999). However, there have been fewer tangible efforts in the counseling profession to improve representation of racial and ethnic diverse populations as practitioners than efforts in other helping professions.

**Workforce Diversity in the Counseling Profession**

The counseling profession's fundamental mission was to enhance vocational and career attainment through initial specialization in career counseling and school counseling (Gladding, 2013). This specialization has not directly supported diversity in the counseling profession, as racial/ethnic minorities remain underrepresented at all levels of the counseling profession (Vasquez & Jones, 2006). Among CACREP-accredited programs, less than 5 percent of the faculty identify as African American (Haizlip, 2012; Johnson, Bradley, Knight, & Bradshaw, 2007), while Johnson et al. (2007) found that less than 10 percent of students self-identified as African American.

Researchers found individual and societal factors impacting the lack of African Americans in the counseling profession. Proctor and Truscott (2012) explore the factors contributing to attrition rates in school psychology graduate programs and found poor relationships with peers and faculty compounded with a misalignment between the African American students' career objectives and the professional practice of school psychology lead to prematurely leaving the program. Hensfield, Owens, and Witherspoon (2011) found that African American students require more self-agency,

engagement in race-based professional groups, and supportive relationships with their academic advisor to complete a counselor education program. Chandler (2010) found a) lack of awareness about the counseling profession within racial and ethnic populations, b) inadequate presence of the profession in racial and ethnic communities compounded with inaccurate considerations of the issues relevant to African Americans, c) insufficient recruitment and retention across the spectrum of students, practitioners, and faculty, and d) poor educational funding support contributed to the low numbers of African Americans in the counseling profession.

Researchers in the counseling profession have? worked on developing and promoting multicultural competencies (CACREP, 2016a). However, the absence of multicultural counseling theory and current trends in poor education and career achievement, and persistent poor counseling outcomes for racial and ethnic minorities underscore a need for increased diversity among the counseling profession workforce (Chao, Wei, Good, & Flores,2011; Collins, Arthur, McMahon, & Bisson,2014; Johnson, Bradley, Knight, & Bradshaw, 2007; Marbley, Bonner, Malik, Henfield, & Watts, 2007).

## Counselor Education

The academic field of counselor education is concerned with the training of competent counseling professionals (Hill, 2004). Counselor education programs provide emerging counselors with the theoretical knowledge and practical skills necessary to work with diverse clients in a therapeutic setting. Counselor educators (faculty members in counselor education programs) are charged both with the dispositional and professional identity development of emerging counseling professionals. The CACREP is

the U.S. national counselor education accrediting body. CACREP requires students to complete coursework in the areas of ethical practice, social and cultural diversity, human growth and development, career development, theories of counseling, group counseling theories, assessment and testing, and research and program evaluation. (CACREP, 2016). Further, CACREP (2016) requires that counselors in training partake in skill development training through supervised clinical practice.

The field of counselor education prepares professional counselors who will work directly with clients, in a variety of settings, to address their client's life challenges and promote growth and health-oriented perspectives. Lott and Rogers (2011) found potential students experience reluctance to apply to a graduate program due to limited representation or perpetuation of stereotypical images of racial and ethnic diverse populations is marketing material, curricula, and textbooks. Furthering work conducted by Gurin (1999), Clarke and Antonio (2012) conducted a qualitative inquiry into how racial diversity in higher education impacted student outcomes, focusing on the benefits of racial and ethnic diversity to higher education students. Clarke and Anthony integrated new knowledge produced by network theory and social psychology to propose a new framework for the scientific investigation of racial diversity on students in higher education. Clarke and Anthony recommend higher education institutions develop a climate that is supportive of and inclusive for racial and ethnic minority students and actively facilitate cross-racial interactions.

Higher education institutions are similarly challenged to effectively recruit and retain students of racial and ethnic diverse backgrounds. Racially and ethnically diverse

students describe experiences of microaggressions and racially biased prejudicial treatment and proport receiving less support and mentorship compared to their White counterparts. These experiences of microaggressions and prejudicial treatment were attributed to poor academic engagement, low social support, and decreased connection (Clark, Mercer, Zeigler-Hill, & Dufrene, 2012; Lott and Rogers, 2011). Accordingly, social support from peers and faculty members are essential to the success of graduate students. Conversely, limited access to social support and faculty mentorship adversely impacts the success of graduate students (El-Ghoroury, Galper, Sawaqdeh, & Bufka, 2012).

Boysen (2012) conducted a qualitative inquiry of 222 teachers and 166 students' perceptions of classroom microaggressions and the faculty's responsiveness in addressing the microaggressions. Overall, students reported perceived faculty and peers' expression of microinsults and microinvalidations based on a variety of diversity dimensions, including economic status, race, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, gender identity and expression, gender identity, disability, and age. Boysen's work provided evidence of a continued lack of multicultural competency among faculty instruction and classroom management. However, this was truer for those teachers of non-diversity related courses. Faculty of diversity-related courses were perceived as more responsive and efficiently addressed microaggressions than their peers of non-diversity related courses. Thus, microaggressions in the classroom committed against students from marginalized groups is an ongoing challenge (Boysen, 2012).

The 2016 CACREP Standards reflect an attempt to expand the instruction of multicultural counseling skills, by incorporating multicultural competencies throughout an entire program, as opposed to a single course (CACREP, 2016). The perpetuation of microaggressions in the classroom is influenced by the counseling professions' Eurocentric middle-class values (Thompson et al., 2004).

**Diversity in the Counseling Profession**

This racial and ethnic disparity in the counseling profession remains despite enduring attention and calls for action through the passage of Affirmative Action requiring institutions of higher learning to seek the diverse representation of students (Gottfredson et al., 2008). Affirmative action is a set of policies, laws, and administrative guidelines designed to correct the effects of racial discrimination through the assurance of equity and access to opportunities for racial and ethnic minorities with an intentional focus on employment and education (National Conference of State Legislators, 2014). Following the 2001 US Surgeon General's report recognizing the necessity of diversity in the workforce, Santiago and Miranda (2014) conducted a qualitative inquiry into the benefits of training more racial and ethnically diverse therapists. Santiago and Miranda (2014) conducted a qualitative inquiry into the impact of diversity in clinical intervention trials. Santiago and Miranda (2014) reviewed data from the National Association of Social Workers, the National Institute of Mental Health, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, and the Psychiatric Nursing Association and found increased diversity among counseling professionals. That is racial and ethnic diversity is increasing from 17.6% to 21.4% in psychiatry.

Racial and ethnic diversity is improved by approximately four percentage points in social work; moving from 8.2% to 12.9%. Lastly, ethnic and racial minority representation in psychology improved from 6.6% to 7.8%. Despite the noteworthy growth of diverse populations in social science research, the numbers remain considerably below the US population of 30% (Census Bureau, 2013). Noteworthy is the absence of the counseling profession in Santiago and Miranda's (2014) examination. Despite the omission of the counseling profession, Santiago and Miranda's (2014) work supports an argument for continued efforts in workforce diversity. CACREP provides reporting regarding the race and ethnicity of those enrolled in both master's and doctoral level programs. The 2016 CACREP Vital Statistics report found a small increase in the enrollment of racial and ethnically diverse students from 32.82% in 2015 to 34.15% in 2016 (CACREP, 2015; CACREP, 2016b). Enrollment for students identifying as African American increased from 18.63% in 2015 to 19.56% in 2016 (CACREP, 2015; CACREP, 2016b). While these statistics illustrate improvement in the diversity in student population, this data does not accurately represent the field as the data is not systematically collected and does not include statistics of applicants not accepted into the program. Additionally, CACREP does not report data on the racial and ethnic identity of graduates. Thus, disparity in retention and program completion is not identified.

## Motivations for Choosing the Counseling Profession

The counseling profession has devoted extensive attention to multicultural competencies in the application of teaching (CACREP, 2016; Chao, Wei, Good, & Flores, 2011) and clinical practice (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, &

McCullough, 2016). Less devotion has been given to improving the diversity of its workforce. Career choice is multidimensional, driven by multiple sociopolitical and motivational factors (Barnett, 2007). Uncovering the motivational factors influencing African Americans' drive to become a counseling professional has implications for the development of the profession. Fussell and Bonney (1990) found the selection of counseling as a profession was influenced by parental profession, birth order, personality traits, and intrinsic values. Fussell and Bonney (1990) placed significant emphasis on intrinsic values and asserting early childhood experiences substantially influenced the drive to choose a career in counseling. Farber, Manevich, Metzger, and Saypol (2005) explored both motivations for career choice and pathways to entering the profession through a literature review. Farber et al. (2005) found the experience of marginalization, painful childhood experiences, behaving as a helper to others early in life, engaging in therapy, a need for autonomy, a need for intimacy, a need for intellectual stimulation and understanding others, and a need for personal growth all influenced the choice to become a therapist. The work of Farber et al. (2005) did not note the representation of racial and ethnic minorities in the literature reviewed. The work of Hendricks et al. (1996) explored career choice for racial and ethnic minorities but did not include counseling or psychology as a professional program.

Hipolito-Delgado et al. (2017a, 2017b) investigated the factors influencing students of color pursuing both a master's level or doctoral-level degree in counselor education. They found exposure to the counseling profession and a commitment to social justice were the principal factors influencing their decision making. Students of color

who worked in a related field had a family member who worked in a helping profession, or experienced counseling themselves encouraged exploration of counseling as a viable profession. Further students of color were attracted to the profession for its perceived ability to positively influence the lives of marginalized and underrepresented communities (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2017a, 2017b). The work of Hipolito-Delgado et al. (2017a, 2017b) interviewed 19 individuals in a graduate or doctoral program who identified as Asian and Latin. This gap in the literature persists regarding underrepresentation of other racial or ethnically diverse populations in the counseling profession. Despite research, a saturation of career and professional research for racially and ethnically diverse population there lacks significant studies about career choice in counseling profession at the graduate level. The gap between the current literature influenced the development of the question.

Similarly, Norcross and Faber (2005) and Barnett (2007) contend choosing a career in counseling was partially unconscious and encompassed more than a mere desire to help others. Norcross and Faber (2005) identified the psychological, family, and cultural as motivating factors for choosing the counseling profession. Theories of career development are criticized for their lack of applicability for racial and ethnic minorities (Leong & Leong, 1995). Additionally, having a family of origin or a lived experience of adversity concerning trauma, mental illness, substance abuse, or family violence shaped an individual's decision to pursue a career in counseling (Barnett, 2007).

Hendricks, Smith, Caplow, & Donaldson (1996) found racial and ethnic minorities had different motivations for career choice. Racial and ethnic minorities were

notably absent from the samples of research on the factors influencing the choice to become a therapist, (Farber, Manevich, Metzger, & Saypol, 2005; Murphy & Halgin, 1995; Racusin, Abramowitz, & Winter, 1981), apart from Hill et al. (2013). Racial and ethnic minority populations remain underrepresented in the counseling profession (ACS, 2014). Considering the projected workforce shortages in behavioral health care (SAMHSA, 2013) and Counselor Education programs' difficulty with recruitment and retention of racial and ethnic minority counseling students (Shin, 2008; Haskins et al., 2013), there is a need to identify the decision-making process of racial and ethnic minority students entering the counseling profession. Due to the limited information about the career decision-making process of racial and ethnic minorities' choosing counseling as a profession, counselor educators are ill-equipped to attract racial and ethnic minorities to the counseling profession (Young & Brooks, 2008).

## Recruiting Ethnically Diverse Students in Higher Education

There is an absence of scholarly research on effective recruitment and retention of underrepresented populations in master's level counseling programs. The most commonly studied samples were of high school or undergraduate students. The research suggests both potential overlooked population and occupations. That is, it is important to learn about career behaviors of members of the community and for those careers requiring graduate-level education for entry into the profession (Flores, Berkel, Nilsson, Ojeda, Jordan, Lynn, & Leal, 2006). Few studies address issues of application/validation of culture-specific theories, and career patterns or choice. Worthington (2012) conducted an observational qualitative inquiry into the current state of diversity in higher education.

Worthington (2012) identified a gap in research associated with the analysis of diversity in higher education policies and practices. Worthington's (2012) work provided benefits of improved knowledge regarding issues of higher education attainment, and college recruitment and retention practices. Worthington (2012) recommend college administrators work to conduct research to improve inclusion, equity, and access efforts.

The substantial empirical knowledge about the four-year college choice process among high school students related to undergraduate college admissions has led to formalized recruitment and retention models (Broekemier, 2002; Nora, 2004; Perna, 2006). The literature surrounding undergraduate college choice suggests students' satisfaction and goodness of fit predominantly shapes choice (Broekemier, 2002; Broekemier & Seshadri, 1999). The notion of the goodness of fit aligns with the Holland theory of vocational types. Marketing for graduate-level programs have used college choice models, yet there remains little empirical research or insight into the factors influencing the decision to enroll in a particular graduate degree program (Dam, 2014), including the counseling profession. Understanding the choice process for graduate-level programs has significant implications for recruitment and retention programs, enhancing and maintaining diversity, and policy decisions (Dam, 2014). Shin et al., (2011) closed the gap by exploring the extent to which CACREP accredited institutions intentionally addressed diversity within enrollment and graduation rates of master's level counselor training programs. This study focused mainly on the limitations of CACREP accredited programs' data collection processes. Shin et al. (2011) found only half of the respondents systematically collected data regarding racial or ethnic identity. Additionally, their

findings echoed the CACREP Vital Statistics reports in that programs did not systematically collect data regarding the racial or ethnic identity of graduates. While not the focus of this study, it is essential to note that representative data is also missing for other underrepresented and marginalized populations, i.e. sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability (Shin et al., 2011).

There has been considerable scholarly attention given to recruitment and retention of racial and ethnic minority counselor educators, specifically African Americans. The literature found many programs have an inadequate representation of racially and ethnically diverse faculty and lack targeted strategies to recruit and retain ethnic minority faculty (Hammett-Webb, 2015; Holcomb-McCoy & Bradley, 2003). The unintentionality of collecting and analyzing data regarding the diversity of recruitment, retention, and graduation rates of students, clinicians, and faculty suggests institutional bias and lack of multicultural competence. The decades of an effort spearheaded by the ACA's Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development division has not affected enough change to dismantle institutional behavior.

## Summary and Conclusions

The literature review presented above explored the literature relevant to the current study on the decision-making process of African Americans choosing to enter the counseling profession. The literature review presented the relevant scholarly work used to develop the research question and justify the study. The application of traditional career development theories has limited the counseling profession's ability to successfully attract and retain African American students and subsequent counseling professionals.

Thus, there is critical information missing about why or how careers in counseling are chosen among African Americans and other racially and ethnically diverse groups. The limited number of articles uncovered directly addressed the recruitment and retention of racially and ethnically diverse students into graduate counseling education programs. The literature primarily focused on marriage and family therapy, psychology, and school psychology.

# Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

## Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, constructivist grounded theory study was to develop a process and theory for recruitment and retention of racial and ethnic minority individuals in the counseling field. Through constructivist grounded theory analysis, I explored the career paths of current African-American students and behavioral health professionals. This chapter provides an overview of how this research was conducted, outlining an explanation of the research design and rationale for using constructivist grounded theory as the qualitative design. I also describe my role as a researcher. Next, I describe the methodology, including justification for participant selection, the context of the study, recruitment procedures, data collection, and data analysis. Lastly, I address issues related to methodological rigor: trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as well as ethical considerations.

## Research Design and Rationale

A qualitative inquiry is ideal for identifying factors associated with a career choice in counseling and how to use the factors to engage, recruit, and retain racial and ethnic minorities into the counseling profession (Grove et al., 2013; Polkinghorne, 2005; Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Khoshnava, Shoghi, & Cheraghi, 2014). Further, a qualitative research method allows for the development of hypotheses, whereas a quantitative approach is used to test hypotheses (Gay & Airasian, 2003). Thus, I employed a grounded theory method as the qualitative method that is focused primarily on processes (see Morrow, 2007).

## Research Question

This study was designed to develop a theory of recruitment and retention of African Americans into the counseling profession by asking "What decision-making process do African American students undergo when choosing to enter the counseling profession?" Additionally, I sought to understand the influence of racial and ethnic identity in decision-making by asking how racial and ethnic identity influence African Americans choosing to enter the counseling profession.

## Design

This was a qualitative study with constructivist grounded theory methodology. Grounded theory has been widely used in sociology, psychology, and nursing because of its flexible approach and its theoretical beginnings in sociology (Grove et al., 2013; Hussein, Hirst, Salyers, & Osjui, 2014). Therefore, this was an appropriate approach to identify the decision-making process for African Americans choosing to enter the counseling profession. Grounded theory is used as a flexible approach to collect and analyze data and develop a theory "grounded" on the data through analysis and comparison of data (Charmaz, 2007; Glaser, 2011; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Holten, 2011). Flexibility in data collection was important for this study because is not possible to directly observe the decision-making process for career choice. Additionally, grounded theory is selected for its capacity to explain and provide meaning to socially relevant phenomena, especially when little to no empirical information exists (Charmaz, 2014).

Grounded theory facilitates the identification of themes and categories (factors) through data collection using interviews (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this study,

grounded theory was used to uncover the power of identified factors, perceptions, and life experiences that guide the decision-making process of African Americans pursuing a career in counseling. I took a social constructionist (Burr, 2003) framework to grounded theory methodology for the data collection and analysis. Constructivist grounded theory incorporates a social constructionist epistemology, which indicates that knowledge is socially developed through the lived experiences of the individual or group, underscoring the complexity of the human experience and nuances of behavior (Andrews, 2012; Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2013). Constructivist research approaches help form a partnership between the researcher and participants to construct meaning based on multiple realities. The goal of constructivist grounded theory is to understand behavior and lived experiences from the perspective of those who live in it based on the idea that a sociological understanding of behavior must include the meaning that social actors give to what they and others do (Charmaz, 2004; Young & Collin, 2004). When people interact, they interpret what is going on, and this is what gives social life its patterned quality. Constructivists gain multiple views of a phenomenon and locate it in its complexities, encouraging multiple data collection methods (Charmaz, 2006). For example, Ellis (1993) used grounded theory to study the information-seeking patterns, arguing the use of direct observation is "almost entirely impracticable" (p. 475).

**Philosophical Underpinnings**

The social constructivist paradigm of constructivist grounded theory evolved out of the phenomenological philosophy of Edmund Husserl and other German philosophers' study of interpretive understanding they called hermeneutics (Charmaz, 2006). This

paradigm is focused on understanding human experience (Eichelberger, 1989; Mertens, 1995) and suggests that "reality is socially constructed" (Mertens, 2005, p. 12). As such, researchers rely on participants' perspectives on the studied phenomenon (Cohen, 1994, p. 36) and recognize the impact of their backgrounds and experiences on the research. Constructivists do not begin with a theory (as do positivists); rather, they "generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meanings throughout the research process" (Creswell, 2013, p.9).

**Research and Social Justice**

This study's purpose and methodology was designed to promote social justice. A constructivist inquiry is based on the acceptance that knowledge is subjective, contextual, and is constructed between researcher and participant (Creswell, 2013). The lived experiences and perspectives of individuals connected to and impacted by the social phenomenon are valuable (Humphries, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Research that challenges power seeks out unexamined perspectives and addresses consequences of power, which is required for the advancement of social justice (Charmaz, 2011; Denzin & Giardina, 2009; Humphries, 2008). Utilizing the social constructivist framework and constructivist grounded theory in this study gives voice to African Americans as a historically disenfranchised people group and therefore engages in social justice.

**Alignment of Methodology**

This study was designed to identify and explain the decision-making process influencing career choice among African American master's level students in a counselor education program. The purpose of the study was to provide a theory that informs the

recruitment and retention of African Americans in the counseling field. A qualitative study was ideal for identifying factors associated with a career choice in counseling and how to use the factors to recruit and retain racial and ethnic minorities in the counseling profession (Polkinghorne, 2005). A qualitative method also allowed for the development of hypotheses rather than testing hypotheses (Gay & Airasian, 2003).

Other approaches were not appropriate for the study. The ethnographic approach facilitates insight into the everyday life of a participant but does not uncover perspectives and belief systems (Creswell, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Because I sought to understand the factors influencing the behavior of career choice, an ethnographic approach was not appropriate. Similarly, a phenomenological approach was not suitable because it does not focus on the cause of behavior but instead provides a description and assigns meaning to practice (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Finally, using a narrative approach would not have provided a large enough data set to develop a theory (Creswell, 2013; Straus & Corbin, 1998).

To address the purpose of the study, a constructivist, grounded theory approach was used. This methodology is used to construct a theoretical framework informed by collaboration of the research population (Birks & Mills, 2017). Grounded theory was the best approach for my research because it was a flexible, inductive method that allowed me to use open-ended questions regarding an individual's decision-making process associated with career choice and the motivators and barriers during the decision-making process (Birks & Mills, 2017; Creswell, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1980). Flexibility in data collection was important because it was not possible to directly

observe the decision-making process. Grounded theory also permitted participants to describe their experiences and inform the generated theory (Birks & Mills, 2017; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), which helped convey the authentic voices of participants and promote social justice, as all themes and theories came directly from their words and experiences (Charmaz, 2008, 2011; Mauta, 2016).

## Role of the Researcher

For this study, I acted as the chief administrator. That is, I completed all data collection, transcription, and analysis. Any researcher engaging in grounded theory research must identify his or her philosophical positionality because each researcher possesses a unique phenomenology that guides his or her worldview (Birks, 2014; Birks & Mills, 2017). A self-examination is also an important form of quality control, which involves the researcher identifying any personal bias and experience with the phenomena under study (McCracken, 1988). These efforts minimize potential effects of researcher bias during the interview process. Further, credibility is established when the researcher can see the world as seen by the participants in his or her study because the researcher is the primary instrument measuring constructs based on the real world (Patton, 2015).

### Researcher Biases

To maximize the credibility of the present study's findings, I first identified areas where my personal biases might have influenced the research process or outcome. This required me to recognize and isolate my biases prior to starting the data collection. A social constructivism framework recognizes multiple truths and appreciates subjectivism, which warrants the researcher embracing a position of mutuality during the research

process. This is divergent of the traditional position of objectivity in grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2014).

My identification as an African American, heterosexual, female created issues of positionality during the completion of this qualitative research project (see Bourke, 2014). My positionality provided both advantage and liability, as I can identify with the participants. My experience informed this study both as a racial and ethnic minority counselor and counselor educator noticing underrepresentation in the classroom. I was positioned with the ability to understand the lived experience of the participants and ask more precise questions to reveal a more vibrant narrative (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Creating a relationship with interviewees leads the researcher to shift between being an insider and outsider of the group studied (Patton, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The role of an insider facilitated rapport building and a better understanding of language, concepts, and experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I sought to build rapport with each participant individually, as there are various personal factors, including experiential differences that solidify my position as an outsider (Patton, 2015). While developing and conducting this research, from the formulation of the preliminary research question to the drafting of the interview protocol, my positionality as an African American studying issues of the race remained at the forefront of my mind (Chiseri-Stater, 1996; Pillow, 2003).

My interest in the study topic is also important to identify as a potential influence on the study. As I entered the counselor education field, the country was experiencing high unemployment rates, and many individuals decided to engage in higher education for better jobs, which increased the numbers of people of color participating in higher

education (Douglass, 2010). I became interested in career counseling theories and practices involved in directing people to higher education, which I experienced through personality tests and other career assessment tools affirming my choice of a counseling profession (Di Fabio, 2016). However, my work as a program administrator facilitated the witnessing of the lack of workforce diversity in the counseling profession (see Johnson, Bradley, Knight, & Bradshaw, 2007), and the student body was predominantly White (National Centers for Education Statistics, 2014). Knowledge and social change efforts are critical to improving workforce diversity, especially for the counseling profession (Frey, 2014; Marbley, Bonner, Malik, Henfield, & Watts, 2007). Throughout my graduate program, I have explored this topic from many positions, which led to the current study on motivational factors of racial and ethnic minorities choosing the counseling profession. This combined my interest in career choice and passion for workforce diversity in addition to supporting my commitment to social justice and advocacy (see Rudestram & Newton, 2015).

## Methodology

### Participants

Participants were individuals self-identified as African American/Black and a student in or graduated from a master's level counselor training program. The counselor training program can include specializations in clinical mental health, marriage and family therapy, and addiction counseling. These specializations were included based on the Department of Education (2015) statistics, which noted that of the 1,791,000 bachelor's degrees conferred during the 2011/2012 academic year, 350,000 were in

psychology, social sciences, and related programs, and approximately half of these individuals went on to pursue a master's level degrees in counseling and related field. Further, the percentage of counselors or mental health professionals who hold degrees in these specialty areas highlight the significant shortage of racially and ethnically diverse mental health professionals. The current research project was designed to create a theory that can be used to attract and retain these minorities to the counseling profession.

I initially recruited African Americans currently enrolled in a master's level counselor training program and attending online, private institutions, and state universities. Expanding the geographical area increases respondent rates (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). Additionally, increasing access to the target population to include geographical diversity increased the credibility and trustworthiness of research outcomes, as geographic locations impact the sociocultural climate and perspective of a problem (W. Frazier, personal communication, January 11, 2016).

**Sampling Plan**

Theoretical sampling is a foundational characteristic of grounded theory research. However, before theoretical sampling, initial data collection and analysis must occur. Therefore, I used purposive sampling as the initial strategy for participant identification. Purposive sampling is designed to produce rich, in-depth understanding centered on a phenomenon and can be used with the grounded theory as a methodology (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2013). Purposive sampling generates maximum variation in the participants. Using a purposive sampling strategy allowed the selection of participants based on characteristics related to the research question and topic such as experience,

activities, and demographic identifiers (see Patton, 2015). Additionally, snowball sampling was employed to reach saturation (Heckathorn, 2002). Snowball sampling facilitates diversity in participants and allowed for gathering new insights into newly reconstructed knowledge collectively with the participants (Charmaz, 2006; Voicu, 2011).

After purposeful and snowball sampling, I used theoretical sampling for the construction of theory through the illumination of variation and focused data collection, enabling me to select participants best suited to answer the questions guiding the study (Charmaz, 2014; Patton, 2015; Richie et al., 2013). Theoretical sampling allows for flexibility while providing rigor and structure for data collection and analysis, utilizing both inductive and deductive methodology to ensure representativeness (Charmaz, 2014; Patton, 2015; Richie et al., 2013). Theoretical sampling is essential to ground theory design (Charmaz, 2007) and is informed by coding, comparison, and memo-writing. Theoretical sampling analysis increases questions; by selecting participants and modifying the questions asked in data collection, researchers can fill gaps, clarify doubts, test their interpretations, and build their emerging theory (Charmaz, 2007; Patton, 2015; Richie et al., 2013).

**Sampling Size**

My grounded theory research began with the consensus of a sample size of 20-30 people (Creswell, 2013; Suri, 2011). This number, which is typical for grounded theory studies (Charmaz, 2014), allowed for sufficient diversity but is still small enough for all responses to in-depth interview questions to be efficiently collected and transcribed. The

heterogeneity and intragroup variances of my target population and ability to develop a robust and relevant theory warranted a larger sample size (Morse, 2000, 2008). Therefore, 43 participants acted as the principal research database.

**Data saturation.** Theoretical saturation is a method used in grounded theory to refine the categories in research. The final number of interviewees was actualized upon achievement of theoretical saturation. That is, the data collection and analysis process did not lead to new questions or uncover any new information (Charmaz, 2014). I recruited until I justified data and theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2014; Patton, 2015; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The sample size was dependent upon saturation of the data. Saturation was reached when there was no new information gathered from the data (Dworkin, 2012). Saturation of data also included when no new insights and theoretical categories aroused (Charmaz, 2014). For this study, the sample size was determined when no newer themes or codes were obtained (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2013).

## Recruitment

This study used inclusion criteria to guide the appropriateness of participation. First, the participant self-identified as African American. The participant was a student in a counselor education program seeking a master's degree in counseling or a related field or working as a practicing clinician. Lastly, the participant was willing and able to participate in one-to-one interviews via a video platform. Participants were identified through an all-encompassing Google search to identify public databases for African American counselors. The invitation to participate in the proposed research study was petitioned via email to database participants. Email addresses were secured via publicly

published directories. A recruitment invitation letter was sent electronically via posting on the counselor educators' listserv (CESNET-L). Additionally, recruitment invitations were sent electronically via Facebook and LinkedIn groups to which I belong.

## Data Collection Plan

Contrasting the objectivist foundation of the traditional grounded theory to identify a theory, the constructivist grounded theory is steeped in subjectivity that acknowledges multiple realities and sources of knowledge and uses the collective experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data (Charmaz, 2014). Thus, I initially collected data through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Grounded Theory encourages the use of diverse data types and sources to facilitate theoretical saturation (Birks & Mills, 2017; Charmaz, 2014; Richie, 2013). Increasing the diversity of data sources influences what the researcher can see and thus influences the applicability of the developed theory (Charmaz, 2014).

The methodological flexibility and eclecticism of constructivist grounded theory allow the researcher to revise and adopt new information gathering methods. Therefore, the adoption of additional data collection methods may be warranted following insights gained from initial data collection and analysis. Using theoretical sampling method requires the researcher to continuously evaluate and identify the populations best to turn to during the data collection process (Birks & Mills, 2017; Charmaz, 2014). While I was not able to accurately identify the additional potential populations to include in the study, likely participants could include counselor education and supervision (CES) doctoral

students, subject matter experts such as CES faculty, leaders in diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education, and those who've completed research on the subject.

**Interviews**

I used an interview for data collection to identify the views, experiences, beliefs, or motivations of individuals on specific processes or behaviors (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015; Richie, 2013). Grounded theory and preceding models (e.g., Strauss and Corbin, 1990) use face-to-face interviews to explore a particular research phenomenon (Opdenakker, 2006; Redlich-Amirav & Higginbottom, 2014). Interviews are conducted in both synchronous and asynchronous methods (Patton, 2015). I selected interviews as my primary data collection tool. Richie et al. (2013) noted interviews could deliver access to the meanings people assign to their lived experiences.

Further, Creswell (2013) contended interviewing is the most direct way to facilitate qualitative research as it allows for informed consent, comprehensive interviewing, and facilitates gathering follow-up information based on participant nonverbal cues. Nonverbal cues such as voice, cadence, and body language of the interviewee can give the interviewer a substantial amount of extra information that can be added to the verbal answer of the respondent to a question. Additionally, face-to-face interviews limits time delays between question and answer, and promotes more spontaneous responses, without an extended reflection (Opdenakker, 2006).

I made the argument for video interviewing. By using video conferencing with specific populations, access, and availability significantly improve. This allowed me to have a more robust sample rather than being limited by convenience. This was vital for

developing a theory that is comprehensive of the heterogeneous quality of my target population (Charmaz, 2014). Additionally, video interviewing provided the benefits of face-to-face talking by allowing synchronous communication and observation of social and non-verbal cues. Further, video interviews can be recorded, allowing connection of the interviewee's words with facial expression and gestures to enhance understanding, ensure accuracy and support reflexivity (Redlich-Amirav & Higginbottom, 2014; Sullivan, 2012).

Lastly, video interviews helped to reach saturation. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) as cited in Sullivan (2012) argued saturation quickly develops when theoretical or purposive sampling is used, the sample captures all variations appearing within the data until each aspect, and the data is rich and complete. The more complete the saturation, the easier it is to develop a comprehensive theoretical model**.**

This was necessary for my study due to the importance of a varied geographic location. Kim et al. (2014) found significant racial-ethnic differences and regional variations of racial-ethnic differences in perceived benefits from mental health services. Rentfrow, Jokela, and Lamb (2015) and Rentfrow et al. (2013) found geographic (regional) differences in personality based on political, economic, social and health indicators. These research findings suggest there would be geographic differences in career decision making in general, and perceptions of the counseling profession, specifically.

**Video Interviews**

The interview incorporates the critical components of in-depth interviews: a combined structure with flexibility, interactive, and uses a range of probes and minimal encouragers to solicit explanation (Richie et al., 2013). Each interview was approximately sixty minutes in length. The interviews directly addressed the research questions, providing both expected and unexpected themes. This suggests more in-depth discussions will produce more information (Locke, Silverman, & Spirduso, 2010). Kvale (1996) and cited in Ritchie et al. (2013) further support the need for in-depth interviews that are reflective.

Kock (2004) uses a psychobiological model to propose a link between the naturalness of computer-managed communication and face-to-face communication. The psychobiological model highlights media naturalness, which suggests the higher the degree of naturalness of the technology the lower the cognitive effort required to use it for communication (Kock, 2004, p. 333).

**Interview Protocol**

Participants completed one 60-minute interview. Interviews were video audio-taped and transcribed. I utilized a semi-structured format, comprised of 10 open-ended questions to both guide participants regarding what to talk about and allow for flexibility in the discovery and expansion of information relevant to participants that I am not able to conceptualize (Charmz, 2014; Patton, 2015; Richie, 2013). I adopted open and neutral body language and minimal encouragers during the interview. I employed strategic use of silence as it allowed participants space to contemplate their responses, talk more,

elaborate or clarify their thoughts. I used reflecting and probing remarks (Patton, 2015; Richie, 2013). Theoretical sampling informs the selection of the next participant and what questions to ask during interviews.

**Setting.** The interviews were conducted in the researcher's home office located in a large urban area in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Participants were given the option to complete the interviews in settings of their choosing, including but not limited to offices, a conference room at the public library, or their homes, provided the selected space ensures confidentiality and minimizes interruptions for at least 60 minutes.

## Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis is viewed as a form of evolutionary learning during which assumptions and judgments are repetitively made and adjusted, during the ongoing discovery of meaning. The exchange between the participants and data challenge the researcher's assumptions to expose new insight and knowledge (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Patton, 2015). Qualitative researchers seek to reach saturation in their studies, a time when the researcher hears nothing new from participants. In a grounded theory research data collection and analysis continued until theoretical saturation is achieved. That is, the researcher discontinues data collection and analysis when no new concepts or themes emerge and all constructs of the constructed theory are well-developed (Charmaz, 2014). The development of a robust and relevant theory requires gathering rich and exhaustive data properly situated within its social contexts (Charmaz, 2014). The fundamental steps for this include: (1) developing the initial research question; (2) initial data collection; (3) immediate initial coding for tentative categories

and themes; (4) writing initial memos; (5) focused coding to redefine conceptual categories; (6) advanced memo writing; (7) ongoing comparison of old and new data and theoretical coding and theoretical sorting; and (8) ongoing theoretical sampling as needed to seek specific new data and deepen concepts that have not reached theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2014).

## Coding

In constructivist grounded theory, coding refers to "categorizing segments of data that simultaneously summarize and account for each piece of data" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 111). This research followed the principles and methods of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014), I engaged in immediate data analysis by completing a verbatim transcription of each interview before starting the next interview (Charmaz, 2014; Patton, 2015). Parallel data collection and analysis continued throughout the study to allow and inform theoretical sampling. Data analysis began with initial coding then moved to focused coding. During initial coding, the researcher works to inductively generate as many ideas and concepts as possible. The initial coding process included open coding using the line-by-line method and in vivo coding (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Focused coding employed axial coding (Charmaz, 2014).

## Open Coding

Open coding entails identifying concepts and developing categories based on similarities and dimensions (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The line-by-line method requires the researcher to name every line of the transcribed interview. Line-by-line open coding facilitates the discovery of both implicit and explicit data foundational

for uncovering processes. While cumbersome, line-by-line coding method also aids in mitigating researcher bias by compelling the researcher to give attention to information that might not otherwise appear significant (Chrmaz, 2014). Following open coding, In vivo coding is used to assign a label to a section of data, such as an interview transcript, using a word or short phrase taken from that section of the data. At this stage of data analysis, the codes are abstract and generate categories or concepts (Birks & Mills, 2017; Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz, 2014).

**Focused Coding**

Focused coding requires the researcher to review the initial codes and identify those most predominant or significant to the development of the theory (Sbaraini, Carter, Evans, & Blinkhorn,2011). During this second level of data analysis the researcher follows the identified set of codes throughout the full dataset. Focused coding employed axial coding, utilized to identify relationships among the open codes. Axial coding is the process of linking codes together utilizing inductive and deductive thinking to develop larger categories and themes (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Axial coding is a systematic way to generate themes. Axial coding helps uncover hidden processes by conceptualizing the who, what, when, why, and how of the researched phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Further, axial coding is used to provide fuller explanation of the research process and give direction for further inquiry by highlighting categories that are shallow and thus in need of more data to reach saturation.

**Memoing**

Memoing is a foundational data analysis method in grounded theory research (Birks & Mills, 2017; Charmaz, 2014). According to Charmaz and Bryant (2008), memoing helps the researcher to engage with the data and emerging analysis, helps to recognize analytic gaps, helps to provide additional material for different sections of the research paper, as well as mobilizes the researcher in recording and developing ideas at different stages of the project. Memos are used to capture the researcher's thought process while conducting grounded theory research. Memoing is a data analysis method that records the researcher's reflective thoughts leading to the construction of a theory, including judgments, reactions, and comparisons made between interviews (Birks & Mills, 2017; Hoare, Mills, & Francis, 2012; Sbaraini et al., 2011). During the study, I wrote extensive conceptual memos. Following each interview, I wrote a memo to capture what was? learned from the interview, what themes seemed to emerge from the interview, and what additional questions were generated. I followed the memoing procedure outlined by Charmaz (2014) to include memos regarding the emerging initial and focused codes, and the themes and concepts emerging from each interview, and how processes occur. After a few interviews, the interviewer/researcher also begins making and recording comparisons among these memos. Memoing was strengthened with the use of mapping; specifically, concept and cognitive mapping (Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009). Concept or cognitive mapping is a technique used to demonstrate how people visualize relationships between various concepts. Mapping coupled with memoing can aid in theory development (Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009).

## Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling is a fundamental data collection and data analysis method to grounded theory design (Birks & Mills, 2017; Charmaz, 2014; Sbaraini et al., 2011). Theoretical sampling is guided by the initial coding, focused coding, comparisons, and memo-writing of the study (Charmaz, 2014). In theoretical sampling, I collected, coded, and analyzed the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As a data analysis method, I employed theoretical sampling to identify relationships between initial codes and themes and gaps in the current data set. Next, I developed subsequent research questions. Lastly, I sought clarification from existing research participants and identified other appropriate data sources (Sbaraini et al., 2011).

## Reflexivity and Comparative Analysis

For theory development, being reflexive at all times is important when conducting qualitative research. I shared my preconceptions and ideas about the study. Sharing my thoughts affords the reader an opportunity to understand how I reached conclusions and interpreted the data. The comparative analysis is the process of comparing data to the categories (Creswell, 2014). With this process, data is constantly being compared with one unit of data to another. With constant comparative methods, I compared the data for things that are similar and different (Charmaz, 2014).

## Data Transcription Software

Because qualitative research creates copious amounts of data and requires comprehensive organization and management to ensure trustworthiness and credibility (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; White et al., 2012), I used transcription software as

it supports the open coding process through memoing, and visualizations to develop connections to larger concepts (Talanquer, 2014). Transcription software provides adequate flexibility for data management, coding, and the evolution of theory building (Talanquer, 2014). Transcription software can facilitate the analysis of large bodies of textual, graphical, audio and video data. Charmaz (2006) emphasized the value of incorporating the researchers' experiences into the construction of theory. Thus, memoing is central to reflexivity in qualitative research memos and indispensable to grounded theory methodology (Bringer, Johnston, & Brackenridge, Ortlipp, 2004; 2006).

**Tracking Data Collected and Analyzed**

The organization and tracking of data are critical and an extension of theory development in grounded theory. Glaser (1992) suggested that the conceptual route from data collection to a grounded theory is a set of double-checking. The methods used to manage and organize the data threads are also characteristic of acquiring theoretical sensitivity, a fundamental concept in grounded theory (Hoare, Mills, & Francis, 2012). Other ways of learning theoretical sensitivity comprise such as open coding, category building using a matrix, and reflecting in memos are identified as best practices for data organization and management (Hoare, Mills, & Francis, 2012; Maxwell, 2013). A central conclusion of the literature about qualitative research is that continuing and recent advances in technology: computer hardware, software, internet access, and electronic communication, have transformed the efficiency of managing mountains of words (Mangabeira, Lee, & Fielding 2004; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The benefit of the use of qualitative software for storage and management is it frees researchers from

tedious managing tasks, such as allowing them to focus on the data and their reactions to it. It provides dynamic and simultaneous access to different components of the data analysis, from excerpts to codes to annotations to demographic information (Ishak & Bakar, 2012). Additionally, it more quickly directs researchers' attention to themes and relationships emerging from the analysis (Ishak & Bakar, 2012; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

## Methodological Rigor

There are fundamental practices used for quality assurance essential to the general principles of qualitative research and grounded theory. The quality, trustworthiness, and credibility of grounded theory research are evaluated by examining the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study (Amankwaa, 2016; Connelly, 2016; Sikolia, Biros, Mason, & Weiser, 2013). Credibility can be reached through purposive sampling, prolonged engagement with research participants, collecting data from a variety of sources (data triangulation), audit trails, member-checking, and peer debriefing (Amankwaa, 2016). Morrow (2005) further suggests seeking validation through participant checks. Credibility was established through member-checking and the use of reflective journaling (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016; Connelly, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). checking is a technique used to validate that the participants' views were articulated and reflected accurately. Member checking was conducted through participant validation (Cope, 2014). Transferability and trustworthiness are attained through clear descriptions of the research, seeking a diverse sample, and the methodology for interpreting results through collaboration

(Morrow,2005). Additionally, purposive sampling ensured the transferability of current research (Anney, 2015).

I engaged in data cleaning, which intends to identify and correct these errors or at least to minimize their impact on study results (Creswell, 2013). White, Oeike, and Friesen (2012) discuss data processing and cleaning in relation to ensuring dependability and transferability. The data processing and cleaning required utilization of standardized transcription protocol. This process aligns with the three-step process developed by Van den Broeck, Argeseanu Cunningham, Eeckels, and Herbst (2005) that includes screening, diagnosis, and treatment. Data cleaning is a great way to manage and categorize data as it is complementary to other methods such as establishing a matrix and using notes and memos during the interview process (Creswell, 2013; Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). Dependability is a trustworthiness concept of resembling reliability (Morrow, 2005). Dependability confirms that data accurately represents the changing conditions of the phenomenon under study and should be consistent across time, researchers and analysis techniques (Morrow, 2005). To increase the reliability of data collection, interviews were transcribed verbatim with emphasis on repeated data (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, an audit by a peer researcher was used? to confirm procedures were followed.

The quality of grounded theory research is achieved during data collection and analysis, as the researcher must maintain “methodological congruence and procedural precision” (Birks and Mills, 2017, p.33). Methodological congruence necessitates the researcher has aligned the study protocol with their personal philosophical positioning

and research question and rectifies any inconsistencies as they arise (Birks & Mills, 2017). The demonstration of procedural precision in the theory generation occurred through memoing and maintaining an audit trail (Birks & Mills, 2017).

## Ethical Procedures

As a researcher, I was required to adhere to the core ethical principles of beneficence, autonomy, and justice (ACA, 2014). Participation was voluntary. Each interviewee had the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time (Creswell 2013). I avoided the exploitation of this information, by allowing each participant to review their interview, make revisions, and examine the final manuscript before publication (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The informed consent included information about the study and procedures, voluntary participation, potential benefits and risks, anonymity, and my contact information on the information and consent page (Creswell, 2013). Each interviewee was able to ask questions and obtain a copy of the research results. Grounded theory methodology requires both data collection and analysis procedures evolve during the course to the study.

### Informed Consent, Anonymity, Confidentiality, and Privacy

My research design employed purposive and snowball sampling. During recruitment participants were provided with study information that could be forwarded to additional potential participants. Instructions included strict directions not to provide the names and/or contact information of potential participants, but to forward the research information and my contact information. All participants made initial contact with the researcher to indicate interest in participating. Data collected in person, both via

interviews and video recording, inherently were not anonymous. The collection of identifying information was essential to the study methodology. Because of the integral role of participants in this research design complete anonymity could not be provided. Research participants provided basic demographic and contact information for follow-up interviews, as participants were asked to consent to and engage in follow-up interviewing and review of their interview transcription and make revisions. Data results were reported using pseudonyms.

Informed consent has been a primary requirement for ethics committees to approve a researcher who can subsequently gain access (Siminoff, 2003). Glaser (2001) recognized the restraint which the human subjects' requirement for informed consent places on theoretical sampling. Upon dissertation committee and the institutional review board approval, I contacted all potential participants by email and sent an informed consent document containing the purpose of the study, procedures, the risk, and benefits of their participation, confidentiality, their rights as participants, and the voluntary nature of this study for their review. Participants were asked to review, sign and return to the consent to the interviewer.

The email offered a session to review the informed consent document and ask questions before signing and agreeing to participate. The informed consent form plainly stated that participation in this research was entirely voluntary and participants could address any concerns. Participants had the right to decline to answer any questions. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without loss of any rights, benefits, or services. Participant one-to-one interviews were coordinated via

telephone or email, whichever communication method the participant preferred. No messages were left via voicemail unless the participant provided permission. Additionally, research results and findings are available to participants through written or verbal request.

**Data Storage**

All interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom. This allowed the researcher to download and label each interview with an individualized participant identification code. The interview files were stored in a password-protected folder on the researcher's computer. The files were backed up frequently on a password-protected external hard drive in a locked cabinet. The video recordings were destroyed immediately once the video recordings were transcribed and the accuracy was verified. Lastly, the transcribed interviews contained participants' identification codes and not their names and will be stored separately from demographic information. Only the researcher had access to these files.

## Summary

This chapter provided an overview of how the research was conducted, outlining an explanation of the research design and rationale for using constructivist grounded theory as the qualitative design. I described my role as the researcher. I described the methodology, including justification for participant selection, the context of the study, procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection, and data analysis. Lastly, I addressed issues related to methodological rigor: trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, along with ethical considerations.

# Chapter 4: Results

## Introduction

Through a social constructivist theoretical framework and a constructivist grounded theory methodology, this study was conducted to develop an emergent and substantive theory that (a) outlines the iterative process of African-American graduate students choosing to join the counseling profession and subsequently apply to a master's level counselor training program; (b) understands the influence of racial and ethnic identity on the decision making process; and (c) supports the recruitment and retention of African Americas to the counseling profession. This chapter provides an introduction to an interpretive theory of recruitment and retention of African Americans to the counseling profession as it developed from the data. This chapter begins with the research setting, recruitment proceedings, and participant demographics of the current research. Additionally, this chapter provides a review of the data collection and analysis, presenting a collection of emergent codes, categories, and insights used in the generation of the theory. This chapter also includes a review of the results, including evidence of credibility and trustworthiness. Finally, this chapter concludes with a review of the data used in uncovering an emergent and interpretive theory of recruitment and retention of African Americas to the counseling profession.

## Research Setting

Grounded theory qualitative methodology is used to develop theory through systematically collected and analyzed data (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser, 2005). Grounded theory and later modified versions (Strauss & Corbin, 1997, Charmaz, 2009, 2014)

traditionally involve face-to-face interviews to explore a research phenomenon (Redlich-Amirav & Higginbottom, 2014; Sullivan, 2012). However, video conferencing methods are becoming the method of choice for qualitative research data collection (Woodyatt, Finneran, & Stephenson, 2016). Thus, I conducted semistructured interviews via video conferencing, which improved access and availability to research participants and allowed for more purposive and theoretical sampling. Improving accessibility to potential participants was vital for developing a recruitment and retention theory inclusive of the heterogeneous quality of the targeted population (Seitz, 2016; Sullivan, 2012).

All semi-structured interviews were conducted through the Zoom videoconference platform. Video interviewing was implemented to capitalize on the benefits of the face-to-face meeting, as it both facilitated synchronous communication and allowed for observation of social and nonverbal cues. Video conferencing also aided in rapport by creating an ability to observe and respond to visual and nonverbal cues, an essential element for collecting rich responses from qualitative research participants (Seitz, 2016; Sullivan, 2012). Additionally, video interviewing promoted feelings of safety and encouraged increased depth of responses by acting as a psychological barrier (Woodywatt et al., 2016).

I conducted all the interviews at the home or work office. To ensure comfort and safety, participants completed the interview in a self-selected environment that was comfortable and private (see Seitz, 2016; Sullivan, 2012). The use of Zoom video conferencing supported participant privacy, as it is HIPAA-compliant and provided two-way encrypted communication between me as the host and the participant (Zoom Video

Communications, 2018). During data collection, there was minimal technology-related challenges, though two interviews experienced disruptions due to low Internet signaling, which led to stalled audio and visual connections There were no challenges with developing an interpersonal connection.

**Participant Recruitment**

Data collection began upon receipt of Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Participant recruitment was conducted for over 5 months. As part of the purposive and theoretical sampling methodology, participants were recruited via a Google search to identify public databases for African American counselors. An invitation to participate in the study was given via e-mail to database participants. All e-mail addresses were secured via publicly published directories. I also utilized the Walden Participant Pool message board, the counselor educators' listserv (CESNET-L), the ACA Connect Listserv (Call for Study Participants community), and counselor related social media groups I hold membership in. Finally, I used snowball sampling. Table 1 identifies the number of participants recruited via each recruitment method. Potential participants were identified from the eligible participants generated from the recruitment. Snowball sampling acted as a supplementary recruitment method via an inquiry of each participant following completion of their interview to forward the initial e-mail invitation to other individuals they perceived as potential eligible participants. E-mails received from a participant referral were responded to using the participant selection process. All recruitment invitations were sent electronically.

Table 1

*Participants Recruited by Recruitment Method*

| Method of Recruitment | Number of Participants Generated |
|---|---|
| CESNet Listserv | 11 |
| Snowball Sampling | 7 |
| Google search | 10 |
| Walden Participant Pool | 3 |
| ACA Connect Listserv (Call for Study Participants) | 4 |
| Counselor related social media groups | 8 |

**Participant Selection**

Following receipt of an e-mail expressing interest in research participation, the participant was thanked for their interest and forwarded a link to complete the demographic and eligibility survey via Survey Monkey. Those participants meeting eligibility criteria continued and were invited to complete individual interviews. A follow-up e-mail was provided with a copy of the approved informed consent document for review. The e-mail also requested the participant electronically sign the document via e-mail containing the words "I consent." Following receipt of the electronically signed informed consent document, participants received an e-mail providing a list of available days, dates, and times for conducting the interview. Once a day and time were confirmed, a unique URL was provided to the participant via e-mail to the designated interview conducted with Zoom video conferencing.

**Participant Demographics**

Sixty individuals expressed interest in participating in the current study by responding to an invitation e-mail. All potential participants were invited to complete a

demographic and eligibility survey to confirm that they met the identified eligibility criteria. The demographic and eligibility survey collected information on the participants' racial identity, gender identity, age, level of education, and state of residence. Eligibility criteria for the current study required participants to self-identify as African American and either be a student in a counselor education program seeking a master's degree in counseling or a related field or hold a master's degree in counseling or a related field and work as a practicing clinician. Thus, the demographic and eligibility survey asked whether the participant was currently enrolled in or completed a master's level counselor education program. If applicable, participants were asked to identify the type of master's degree completed. Additionally, participants were asked to identify the current clinical license they held.

Of the 60 potential participants, 47 met the eligibility criteria. Of the 47 eligible participants, 43 participants completed interviews via the Zoom video conferencing platform. Individuals were omitted from the participant pool due to holding clinical licensure (i.e., LICSW, LP) or completing a master's degree in a discipline outside of the counseling profession (i.e., clinical social work or psychology). Two respondents were excluded due to their White/Caucasian racial identity. Four of the eligible participants declined to participate due to ongoing scheduling conflicts.

**Demographic Statistics**

Of the 43 eligible participants, 31 identified as African American/Black, and 12 identified as multiracial, which was concluded as one identity of African American/Black. Twenty-five percent (12) of the participants identified as cisgender

males, and 75% (31) of the participants identified as cisgender females. No eligible participants or respondents identified as a transgender male, a transgender female, gender fluid, or agender. Of the 43 eligible participants, seven identified between 18-24 years old, 12 participants identified between 25-34, eight participants identified between 35-44, seven participants identified between 45-54, five participants identified between 55-64, and four participants identified between 65-74.

**Education, clinical licensure, and geographic location.** Twelve participants held at least a bachelor's degree, as they were current students in a master's level counselor education program. Twenty participants reported holding a master's degree in counseling or a related field. Two participants reported completing a professional degree (Doctor of Jurisprudence degree), and eight participants held a doctoral degree (Ph.D. or EdD). Of the 43 participants, 14 did not hold a clinical license, as they were current students in a master's level counselor education program. Twenty-four held a clinical license, and 16 participants reported holding a license as a professional counselor; this ranged from licensed professional counselor, licensed professional clinical counselor, and licensed mental health counselor. Two participants held a clinical license in marriage and family therapy, and seven held a clinical license as an alcohol and drug counselor. Of the 43 participants, four were dually licensed as a professional counselor and alcohol and drug counselor, and seven participants were actively working toward dual licensure in co-occurring disorders. All participants reported residing in the United States. The participants resided and held clinical licensure in the following states: Minnesota, Illinois,

Wisconsin, Maryland, Georgia, Florida, Texas, Louisiana, New York, and Massachusetts. See Table 2 for participants' demographic characteristics.

Table 2

*Participant Demographics*

| Characteristics | Number |
|---|---|
| Gender | |
| ▪ Cisgender female | 31 |
| ▪ Cisgender male | 12 |
| ▪ Transgender male | 0 |
| ▪ Transgender male | 0 |
| ▪ Gender Fluid | 0 |
| ▪ Agender | 0 |
| Age | |
| ▪ 18-24 years old | 7 |
| ▪ 25-34 years old | 12 |
| ▪ 35-44 years old | 8 |
| ▪ 45-54 years old | 7 |
| ▪ 55-64 years old | 5 |
| ▪ 65-74 years old | 4 |
| Racial Identity | |
| ▪ African American /Black | 31 |
| ▪ Multiracial | 12 |
| Highest Level of Education | |
| ▪ Bachelor's degree | 12 |
| ▪ Master's degree | 20 |
| ▪ Professional degree | 2 |
| ▪ Doctoral degree | 8 |
| State of residence | |
| ▪ Illinois | 4 |
| ▪ Louisiana | 3 |
| ▪ Georgia | 2 |
| ▪ Florida | 3 |
| ▪ Maryland | 2 |
| ▪ Massachusetts | 1 |
| ▪ Minnesota | 20 |
| ▪ New York | 1 |
| ▪ Texas | 2 |
| ▪ Wisconsin | 5 |
| Currently held license | |
| ▪ Unlicensed/ student | 14 |
| ▪ Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC/LPCC) | 13 |
| ▪ Licensed Mental Health Professional (LMHP) | 3 |
| ▪ Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC) | 4 |
| ▪ Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT) | 2 |
| ▪ Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselor (LADC) | 7 |
| ▪ Dual Licensure | 4 |

## Data Collection

In grounded theory, theoretical sampling is the chief method for the formation of an emergent theory. However, initial data collection and analysis was facilitated through purposive sampling for participant identification and selection grounded on specific characteristics associated with the research question (see Charmaz, 2014). Additionally, snowball sampling was instituted to ensure saturation and diversity amongst participant characteristics (see Heckathorn, 2002).

### Individual interviews

Individual interviews are a requisite of constructivist grounded theory research and served as the primary data collection source for the current research (see Charmaz, 2014). Interviews were conducted through Zoom, a video conference software. All interviews were scheduled for 90 minutes. The first 15 minutes of the 90-minute interview was allocated for rapport building and review and confirmation of the informed consent. Sixty minutes of the allotted time was dedicated to the actual data collection with a semistructured interview. An additional 15 minutes was allotted for debriefing and to answer any outstanding questions.

All interviews followed a semistructured format, and I asked specific open-ended questions guided by an interview protocol, followed by reflections, additional open-ended questions for clarification or elaboration of responses, and summaries (Qu & Dumay, 2011). The interview protocol offered a blend of structure and flexibility for gathering rich and descriptive data (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). Each participant engaged in a minimum of one semistructured interview through Zoom. The

average length of an interview was approximately 45 minutes. The initial interview protocol (see the Appendix) was comprised of an opening statement, which guided me to review informed consent and affirm the participants continued willingness to engage in the interview. The interview protocol included a total of 14 interview questions categorized by the research question and subquestions.

At the time of the scheduled interview, both the participant and I accessed the unique link created for the Zoom video conferencing session. Because grounded theory inquiry is an emergent research design, research questions and data sources are frequently adjusted as the research progresses and new insights are developed (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Following the completion of approximately three interviews, the interview protocol was amended to improve the natural flow and progression of information gathering. The protocol was amended to three higher-level categories surrounding: (a) the decision-making process, (b) the influence of racial identity, and (c) recruitment and retention.

The audio recordings of each interview were saved on the password-protected laptop used to conduct each interview. Each record was then uploaded to a password protected USB stored in a locked file cabinet in my home office. Transcription was completed with ATLAS.ti Transcription software, which supported the open-coding process through memoing and visualizations to develop connections to larger concepts (Hutchison, Johnston, & Breckon, 2010; Talanquer, 2014). ATLAS.ti provided flexibility for data management, coding, and the development of the theory (Hutchison et al., 2010; Talanquer, 2014). Following complete transcription of the participant's interview, the

participant received a follow-up e-mail thanking them for their participation with an attached copy for their transcribed interview. Participants were asked to review the transcription for accuracy. Participants were also encouraged to provide any clarification or elaborate on any material in the transcription. Each participant was provided 2 weeks for their review and offering of corrections and clarification of any responses. Ten transcribed interviews were returned with corrections and clarification.

## Data Analysis

The researcher is considered the chief instrument in grounded theory methodology (Janesick, 2011; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). As reviewed in chapter 3, the data analysis strategy for this study followed the constructivist grounded theory methodology of Charmaz (2014) and Straussian grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) (the foundation of Constructivist grounded theory) of parallel data collection and analysis; including immediate data analysis, memoing, open coding (using the line-by-line method and in vivo coding), focused (axial) coding, theoretical sampling, reflexivity, memoing, and comparative analysis. The use of constructivist grounded theory as an analytic approach was to discover the motivating actions and experiences driving African American's decision to enter the counseling profession. Additionally, the inquiry investigated the influence of racial and ethnic identity on the decision-making process.

I used constant comparative/simultaneous analysis method for data analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Data analysis began following completion of the first interview. I engaged in memoing during the first interview and each subsequent interview. Memoing

documented my immediate and subsequent reflections throughout the data collection and analysis process (Charmaz, 2014; Miles et al., 2014). Additionally, the memos captured my thoughts on the emerging data during the comparison of codes and categories (Charmaz, 2014). Each recorded interview was transcribed verbatim in a word document before coding analysis in ATLAS.ti. Figure 1 illustrates the data analysis process.

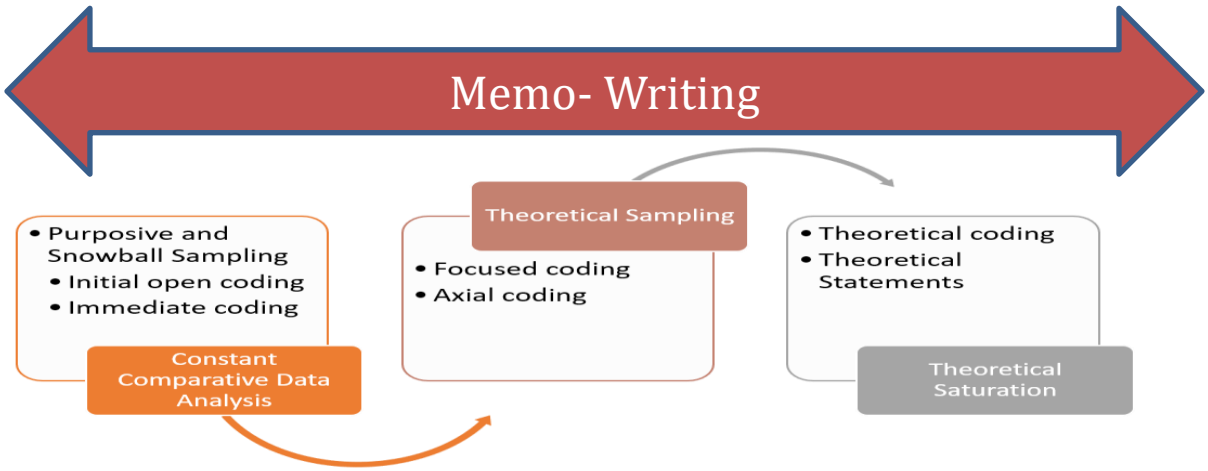


*Figure 1.* Data analysis process.

**Initial/Open Coding**

I reviewed the transcript of the first interview immediately and conducted initial open coding; utilizing line by line and sentence by sentence to identify codes and categories before the second interview was completed (Charmaz, 2014). This pattern of open coding of the transcript of a completed interview before conducting a new interview continued until data saturation was identified. The principal obligation of the researcher is to capture the meaning behind participants' words and reported actions (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2014). Open coding resulted in highlighting seemingly pertinent words and

phrases. The repetition of their use determined appurtenant words or phrases, the evocation of effect form the participant or researcher when used, and those in which the participant placed emphasis (Charmaz, 2014). The coding process highlighted themes in the transcripts that were not only congruent but appeared to be divergent or incongruent with previously stated ideas. During the interview, this led to the use of reflections and additional open-ended questions to evoke clarifications.

**Focused/Axial Coding**

Following the completion of open coding, I began focused (also referred to as Axial) coding; surveying the transcript for unexpected ideas. Focused coding allows the researcher to begin clarifying and refining emergent theoretical concepts by sorting, categorizing, and synthesizing open coding results. That is, the researcher begins to develop categories and groupings of actions or events (Charmaz, 2014; Charmaz & Belgrave, 2014).

Next, I engaged in axial coding; identifying associations between the codes identified in each interview transcript. During Axial coding, the researcher further clarifies and sharpens categories to uncover the emergent theory (Charmaz, 2014; Charmaz & Belgrave, 2014). Axial coding required continuous rereading of the transcripts to determine connections between the first and each subsequent interview. Data were evaluated for shared meaning, and clustered based on their similarities. With each subsequent transcription, I also engaged in a comparative study of incidents (incident by incident coding); whereby I identify the recurrence of words, phrases, or ideas that confirm my conceptualizations. During Axial coding, I worked to connect the

coded categories in ways that explain a phenomenon or answering the questions of *who, what, when, where, why, and how.* This required continual reflection of the reported actions and *the outcomes of actions* of the participants (Charmaz, 2014, p. 148). This is the precursor to theory development by identifying properties of the emergent themes.

**Theoretical Sampling and Constant Comparative Analysis**

Theoretical coding ensued as the data collection and analysis progressed. Theoretical sampling situates data collection among emerging concepts to confirm and solidify categories (Butler, Copnell, & Hall, 2018; Charmaz, 2014). I began to conduct theoretical sampling following completion of the first (initial/open coding) and middle (focused/axial coding) stages of data analysis. I identified and recruited additional subject matter experts to interview based on the codes generated from open and focused coding (Butler, Copnell, & Hall, 2018; Charmaz, 2014). I recruited participants who both met the original purposive sampling criteria and were acting as counselor educators to confirm or disconfirm the initially generated research findings. I conducted interviews with seven selected participants who self-identified as African American, having graduated from a master's level counselor education program and currently acting as a counselor educator. Those interviews were used to confirm or disconfirm codes and themes surrounding the importance of physical representation, need for belonging and community, and proposed recruitment strategies.

**Theoretical Coding**

Lastly, I engaged in theoretical coding through the integration of Axial coding results (Charmaz, 2014; Yin, 2011). Theoretical coding results in a unified theoretical

framework for the development of theory. During the theoretical coding process, I worked to integrate and refine the categories (Charmaz, 2014; Yin, 2011), and identify the interconnection between the open and focused coding (Charmaz, 2014). To further support supporting the development of the theoretical framework, I engaged in sorting of the memos. Theoretical sorting of memos stimulates the emergent theoretical/conceptual framework (Charmaz, 2014; Holton, 2010). During the review and sorting of memos, I simultaneously re-engaged in the literature to which supported the discovery of innovative theoretical codes (Glaser, 2005).

**Constructivist Data Analysis**

Grounded Theory necessitates the voices of research participants are accurately reflected in the research results and the generated theory. Constructivist refutes theoretical agnosticism, which required active memoing to grapple with my predeveloped notions and ideas, positionality, and world view based on lived experience, identities of power and marginalization that inevitably influence the interpretation of the data (Charmaz, 2014). Codes were co-constructed as participants used similar language to describe ideas and actions. These were used to shape the in vivo coding. For example, the code “physical representation” evolved as both relevant to racial/ethnic identity recruitment and retention of African American student in the Graduate program. This led to the recruitment of participants who met the initial research criteria and also were current counselor educators. During the simultaneous coding and data collection process, I frequently re-reviewed the literature to explore topics and ideas I had not previously used to shape the original research proposal. This also generated greater understanding

and added depth to the interpretation of results. The literature review conducted for the initial research proposal was then updated to reflect the analytic categories.

For greater adherence to the constructivist grounded theory methodology; theoretical sampling required adjustments in the data collection process; including interview protocol and participant selection. I followed the emergent leads uncovered in the data that were surprising and absent from the initial research conceptualization (Charmaz, 2014). I engaged in member checking with the participants, identified additional criteria for participants to clarify emergent leads. As a result, I began to seek out participants who met the initial research criteria and also were current counselor educators. Additionally, informal clarification of emergent themes was clarified by asking questions of the Facebook communities for which I am a member.

**Coding using ATLAS.ti**

Initial, focused, and theoretical coding was conducted using ATLAS.ti. The ATLAS.ti coding software empowered me to view and code simultaneously. The coding was completed to uncover action-oriented themes related to the participant's responses to experiences and feelings that moved them toward deciding to pursue a career in the counseling profession. Toward the social constructivist theoretical foundation, coding was conducted to discover and understand the influence and meaning of ethnic and racial identity and the sociopolitical environment on those actions.

To begin the development of an emergent theory of recruitment and retention of African Americans to the counseling profession, in vivo codes were identified from the words of the participants in the transcribed interviews (Charmaz, 2014). I conducted line-

by-line initial coding. Take the words and phrases that are action-oriented that seems to stand out and speak to the data. This produced copious amounts of codes. These initial codes were then supported with memoing and then categorized codes by linking the identified sectors during focused coding based on Constructivist Grounded Theory methodology. That is, comparing incidents, both routine and significant actions. Taking line by line codes and test them against the data and looking for the larger story, the data are trying to say. Lastly, theoretical coding occurred through the recognition and discovery of relationships between codes. Consistent with Constructivist Grounded Theory, I engaged in the renaming of codes and categories during the data gathering, and analysis process advanced, and new data emerged and facilitated developed more meaningful insight and discover more relevant initial codes.

## Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the measurement of quality in qualitative research methodology; applied to methodology, data sources, and the researcher. This study received IRB approval (09-07-18-0566949) by Walden University. Credibility, transferability, and dependability were established and maintained throughout the data collection process. This research study met the criteria of a constructivist grounded theory study by examining a process as the crucial element in theory. The research utilized a coding process which facilitated the emergence of theory through the examination of data and presented the theory as an interpretive model. As stated above, I engaged in concurrent data collection and analysis throughout the research; beginning with the initial individual interview. I used memoing during the data collection and

analysis processes; being aware of my (the researcher's) influence on the processes. The simultaneous collection and analysis of data maximized trustworthiness by increasing the reflexivity of the researcher (Hays & Singh, 2012). Features of ATLAS.ti provides an audit trail of the coding process, which maximizes trustworthiness, dependability, credibility, and transferability.

Additionally, member checking was used to establish trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I consulted with participants during two phases of the data analysis process. Participants were asked to review their transcribed interviews to provide clarification and elaborate on any thoughts or ideas. Secondly, I selected specific participants (those who were also counselor educators) and provided them with the developing findings (list of emerging codes and categories) and asked them to provide their perceptions of accuracy (Hays & Singh, 2012).

**Credibility**

Member checking and memoing were the primary strategies used to ensure the research results were accurate, representative of the data collected, and illustrated solid connections between each level of coding (Charmaz, 2014; Cooney, 2011; Merriam &Tisdell, 2016). Participants reviewed their transcribed interview results, and selected participants were asked to review initial interpretations of the data; which enhanced both the trustworthiness and credibility of the research. Additionally, continuous concurrent data collection and analysis for theoretical saturation was employed to ensure credibility (Charmaz, 2014). I used participants' words to develop initial codes and identify emerging themes.

Further, the use of memoing heightens my awareness of personal influence on the data analysis processes (Charmaz, 2014). Due to my positionality as an African American counselor; with experiences directly related to the research questions, I intentionally recorded disconfirming data during the memoing process (Cooney, 2011; Sikolia et al., 2013). The intentional recording of disconfirming data? or discrepancies in participant responses was done to counter the researcher's confirmation bias; preventing the interpretation of data as confirmation of my pre-existing beliefs (Charmaz, 2014; Cooney, 2011; Sikolia et al., 2013).

**Transferability**

To ensure transferability, this researcher engaged in theoretical sampling, used of an audit trail through data analysis software, and provided detailed descriptive descriptions of the data collection and analysis processes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To increase transferability, I remained faithful to the research design and constructivist grounded theory methodology, by utilizing purposive, snowballing, and theoretical sampling (Anney, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The data collection sampling was a diverse representation of the African American population; including age and demographic location. Interview data were video, and audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded multiple times in consideration of comparisons within each interview and between interviews. Study participants were involved in the process; acting as member checking agents.

### Dependability

Dependability is the stability or consistency of the inquiry process. Dependability occurred through fidelity to the theoretical sampling approach to data collection, interpretation, and reporting of findings. Dependability in qualitative research is controversial, as some experts suggest member checking, expert review, and triangulation are options to ensure the dependability of the themes (Cope, 2014; Gunawan, 2015). Finally, to offer an assurance of confirmability that the information reported in the themes was the ideas and experiences of the participants, I provided extensively quoted responses to support the themes that connect them back to the original data (Cope, 2014).

## Study Results

This research had two research questions: (1) What decision-making process do African American students undergo when choosing to enter the counseling profession? Moreover, (2) How does racial and ethnic identity influence the decision-making process of African Americans choosing to enter the counseling profession? Additionally, participants were asked questions to inform the improvement of recruitment and retention of African Americans in master's level counselor training programs. Themes from question one centered on (a) calling, (b) exposure to the profession, (c) interpersonal influencers, social network guidance, and mentorship, and (d) use of practical information. Themes from question two centered on (a) legacy of enslavement, (b) liberation for the black community, (c) the importance of physical representation, and (d) being uniquely qualified. Themes from the questions about recruitment and retention centered on (a) building a bridge/ early recruitment, (b) targeted recruitment, (c) sense of

belonging and community atmosphere, (d) effective multicultural curricula, (e) culturally responsive mentorship, and (f) practical accessibility. Each major theme included multiple sub-themes. Additionally, there were many interconnections among and between the themes of each research question. Below highlights the study results in the participants own words.

**Research Question 1: What decision-making process do African Americans undergo when choosing to enter the counseling profession?**

The first research question sought to understand the unique and culminating experiences that led African Americans to become interested in the counseling profession as a career option. Secondarily, the first research questions sought to uncover the specific action steps and information African Americans used to decide to enter a master's level counselor training program. For each participant, the decision-making process resulted from the possession of natural characteristics, interpersonal skills, and individual traits identified as foundational for facilitating the counseling process. Participants spoke to personal, professional, and academic experiences, environmental and circumstantial influences, which created a sense of self-efficacy and inspiration for entering the counseling profession. The validation of these culminating experiences affirmed the counseling profession as the best fit for achieving personal and professional satisfaction and led to taking active steps toward this goal; namely applying to a master's level graduate counselor training program. The first research question corresponded with questions one through five of the interview protocol (see Appendix C). Themes from question one centered on (a) calling, (b) exposure to the profession, (c) interpersonal

influencers, social network guidance and mentorship, and (d) use of practical information.

**Calling.** Participant responses during interviews cemented the sense of calling as the first pillar in inspiring African Americans to join the counseling profession. Participants described their interest in and choice to enter the counseling profession as an evolving higher level directedness and connection to a greater purpose and personal mission. Participants explicitly used the word *calling* while discussing their interest in becoming a counselor; as it was identified in 30 out of the 43 interviews and mentioned on 236 occasions by the participants. These descriptions echoed the working definition established by the work of Dik, Duffy, and Eldridge (2009) who explain this phenomenon as "work that involves an external summons and connection to a sense of purpose in life" (p.560). Akin to the concept of *calling*, participants described the decision to enter the counseling profession was about the goodness of fit; frequently used the term *niche*. The concept of *calling* can also be understood and conceptualized within the framework of Adlerian/ Individual Psychology; which understands the notion of an internal drive and divine conviction toward a path of action as one's teleology. Adlerian/ Individual Psychology understands people as goal-directed by nature. All conscious and unconscious behavior is enacted to reach a final goal (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964; Griffith & Powers, 2007; Oberst & Stewart, 2014). Thus, career decision making occurs as a movement toward the fulfillment of an ultimate "end" goal. Adlerian Individual Psychology postulates the end goal for every individual is to achieve a sense of

belonging, felt superiority or significance, and usefulness (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964; Sweeney, 2019).

- One participant stated, “I believe it was a calling more than a career choice. A natural gift.”
- Another participant stated, “I literally had a different career that I thought I would be in until retirement. God redirected my path using a series of unfortunate events. I love what I do and see it as a calling.”
- A participant noted, “ I always wanted to help people who had survived what I had, sexual abuse, PTSD, low self-esteem and after my daddy survived and beat addiction but died prematurely due to depression, I knew I had to do something..I knew I was called to make a difference.”
- A participant stated, “there were many experiences that seemed to all guide me to become a counselor…like a calling on my life because I’ve always been directly or indirectly in positions to help people through difficult times.”
- A participant noted, “Counseling was my life’s calling. I thought I was going to be a lawyer or something else, but my path continued to be directed to counseling. I finally accepted my calling & I’m delighted with my decision to become a counselor.”
- A participant recalled, “So mine is two-fold. I’m prior military- coast guard, and I was transitioning out, trying to figure out what I wanted to do. I worked as an academic advisor, and I got energy from supporting the students with managing stress. I’m pretty good at it and thought ‘I found my niche.’”

Additionally, participants mirrored the work of Elangovan, Pinder, and McLean (2010) who highlight the religious and spiritual undertones associated with the word *calling*. Participants described their choice to enter the counseling profession as a sort of submission to the will of a higher power or universal force. That is, instead of an active choice to enter the profession, there was a reverse respond to the beckoning of the counseling profession.

- One participant stated, “It chose me. I was an auditor for Head Start and the stories I would get… I was like ‘I am just here to see if the kitchen meets federal regulations,’ After a while, I felt compelled to answer the call”.
- A participant recalled, “It was my gift and purpose from God. Additionally, it does something to my heart and spirit when a client finds their way to success mentally, professionally...”.
- Another participant said, “This profession chose me. Recently, I realized all of my experiences …many jobs had led me to where I am today. I was a high school peer counselor, a preschool teaching, a social work/ case manager, and now I’m where I’m supposed to be a counselor”.
- A second participant stated, “God ordained my life...I honestly had no intention to be a therapist. My undergrad was criminal justice, and I wanted to be a Probation officer….”.
- Another participant stated, “I had a career in nursing and liked it, but I could not do it anymore then I found my love and my Passion. I truly feel that this is God’s calling and purpose over my life”.

Participants' responses described a sense of self-efficacy towards being a counselor due to the possession of innate characteristics, interpersonal skills, and individual traits commonly associated with providing counseling services. That is, participants, endorsed being psychologically minded and having a natural disposition toward helping others; informally acting in a helping role; being an individual people felt comfortable discussing personal matters and soliciting advice. Self-efficacy is the universal term used to conceptualize one's level of belief in their capacity to succeed in a given task or meet the challenges of everyday life (Bandura, 1986). An individual's level of self-efficacy is said to be a predictor of career choice. Common between social cognitive career theory and Adlerian/ Individual Psychology, self- efficacy is thought to be developed through a series of learning experiences coupled with genetic and environmental conditions. Adlerian/ Individual Psychology observed this as superiority or striving for significance. That is human beings' natural proclivity towards success driven by the need to feel capable in meeting the tasks of life. Further, Adlerian/ Individual Psychology asserted that individuals would engage in movement (behaviors) towards superiority in useless or useful ways. For most individuals their career choice may facilitate feelings of superiority/ significance, or self- efficacy by engaging in work that is useful and contributes to the greater good of society (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964; Griffith & Powers, 2007; Oberst & Stewart, 2014).

- One participant stated, "You know…At 19 years old, I saw the world as those who help people and those who understand physics. I chose to help and never looked back".

- A participant recalled, “I never knew what a therapist/ counselor really was, but always knew I wanted to work with children. I got a job as a para (professional) in a group home for kids, and while there, I realized what I was called to do. I was able to connect with the kids naturally…”.
- Another participant noted, “I have always wanted to help people. When I first went to college, it got into nursing. So, for me, that was all about money… working as a nursing assistant, I realized that I wasn’t up for dealing with death. I wanted to promote life”.
- A participant stated, “I had always been curious about how the mind works and why people do what they do…”
- Another participant stated, “I became a counselor...therapist because I realized early on I had a knack for guiding people through darkness…”. Another participant noted, “From umm as early as childhood, I always had a caring nurturing personality, and I want to help those who may feel alone and don’t know how to express themselves...”.
- Another participant noted, “I am a people person and a problem solver. People naturally come to me for advice and help with their life problems. After 20 years in the Army as an HR (Human Resources) officer, it seemed to be a natural next step for me. It’s where I feel comfortable and ‘at home.’ It doesn’t feel like a job or something I hate getting up every day to do. I love helping people and seeing them grow”.

- One participant stated, “it was something that I always did... dealing with family members and friends... always calling me for advice. So, I thought ‘why don’t I utilize my talents and get paid for it?’”
- A participant noted, “Well, I think it started with my own experiences as a client and therapy. And, I mean psychology was interesting. I think I’ve always been personally interested. I’m always asking like how something works and how people operate”.
- A participant recalled, “I wanted to understand people’s behaviors so originally wanted to be a psychologist, but as things progressed, I wanted to help others to learn how to best navigate through life’s obstacles.”

**Exposure to the profession.** Participants reported both academic and professional experiences as critical in influencing both their interest and decision to choose a career in the counseling profession. Approximately 40% of the participants had exposure to psychology during high school. Approximately half of all participants had exposure to the counseling profession during the matriculation of a bachelor’s degree. For many participants, their decision to pursue a career in counseling was either 1) a desire to advance or evolve as a helping professional, or 2) divergence from a different career path. In addition to professional and academic exposure to the profession, many participants described personal experiences related to counseling services. Both affirming and adverse experiences influenced the decision to join the counseling profession.

- A participant recalled, “It is God’s purpose for me. I took my first psychology course in high school, but I pursued being an attorney because it’s the only

thing I felt would make my abusive father happy and proud of me. Law didn't work out. I was pulled back to psychology, perhaps because I experienced domestic violence, anxiety, and depression growing up, and God told me to help people save their lives. Now I'm a therapist, and I help people find their calling through career coaching. It's actually helped me to heal and emphasize on an extremely deep level".

- A participant noted, "Before I was called to be a therapist, I was first a client and patient...".
- A participant said, "Yeah. Well, I mean I did my undergraduate work in psychology and my associates work in the counseling field. So, okay. Back in my day, you could become a drug and alcohol counselor at the associates level. My first job after my associate's degree was being a counselor inside of an adult correctional facility. You know all my education was applied towards becoming a clinical counselor. I was a counselor while I was working on my bachelor's and then as I work on my Master's I was moving up in the counseling field".
- A participant noted, "I saw an African-American uh licensed independent clinical social worker, and I was. I was mesmerized by that, and I was thinking 'wow, that's something that I believe that I can do and that's obviously doable because he did it'".
- Another participant stated, "I was in my psychology bachelor's program. And one of the electives was a clinical psych course. That's where I really got a

sense of the avenues in the field that one could take and still, you know, meet their end goal. And so in that class, the professor had a panel of licensed professionals come in and talk and speak about their profession, and it was really enlightening. Because I knew I wanted to get to the people and so I wanted the path of least resistance to get to serve communities in need...".

- One participant stated, "I think it was a psychology class that I had in high school that got me interested in looking at the counseling field. At first, I wanted to become a psychologist, but as I was going through the bachelor's program at my local university, the word counseling came up…and that kind of piqued my interest and once I graduated, I was, you know, looking for a master's program in counseling".
- A participant stated, "Because I needed a therapist that looked like me and couldn't find one."
- One participant stated, " I originally applied for a speech therapy program, but didn't get in…but that happened for a reason because it turns out that this is my calling and this is just what I was supposed to be doing..I think I was attracted to the Speech therapy because they earned more money and in my mind, I was still helping people..".
- Another participant stated "I was looking to relocate back to the state I went to for college and applied to jobs on indeed using keywords 'children, at-risk youth, etc I applied and got a job as manager in a mental health group home for children and adolescents…because of my own childhood story and

traumas, I was able to see myself in those girls. My knowledge of mental health grew, and through that, I found my calling. I went from a group home manager with a bachelor's in human services to deciding to go back to school for the LPC. And I've loved every learning moment"!

- One participant stated " So first the personal, my mom definitely was a main factor in me wanting to go towards mental health… growing up with her having OCD and a large amount of social anxiety and just dealing with the depression over the years and then my own anxiety has definitely pushed one into the counseling direction. Also, I realized that probably my senior year of high school. But when I went to therapy in college, then I knew for sure".
- A participant noted, "So I began my career working with kids and youth. I wanted to get a job working as a licensed staff at a school. I didn't necessarily want to help kids by teaching them wanting to help by providing counseling and guidance. I started working with; I quickly realized that I need more and deeper skill set, and so for my career development, I acquired my school counseling license. Then working as a school counselor, those experiences kind of led me to become a licensed professional clinical counselor. I saw a need…".
- Another participant recalled "Well, my interest was my trauma that I experienced and not knowing, at the time, that lost was trauma and that I was displaying different depressive symptoms and also hypervigilant behavior as I got more information. I did human services for my bachelor's degree and took

a counseling skills class. Professionally, I was a case manager, and as I was doing case management, I've noticed that I didn't per se like to get resources for my clients. You know, I didn't remember resources because I couldn't retain information and I would spend most of the home sessions or intake just talking about their emotions and thoughts and feelings…".

- A participant stated, "My family had a phenomenal therapist, and it was then I wanted to help others sift through their lives and heal as she did with my family."
- A participant recalled, "Because my experience with counseling was so bad when I was a kid, I didn't want other people to have the same experience. My counselor was awful,"!
- One Participant said, "So with bachelor's degree I couldn't do what I wanted to do. I can get a mental health practitioner position, but that's about the furthest I could go. But I wanted to open my own practice… that led me to go into the master's program."
- A participant noted, "I have a sister who is disabled, and I witnessed my sister receive mental health services, and I didn't agree with how they were doing things. I completed my undergrad in psychology, then realized you can't do much with that".
- Another participant stated, "Actually had an interpersonal relationships class. I still remember the class..and that Professor was doing some research and I got a chance to kind of be an assistant. We talked a lot, and I got to understand

the differences, I realized I didn't want to do research, but work with the people".

- A participant recalled, "I went to my own counselor. I had a health condition with my heart, and through that process, it was recommended I see a counselor. I had been interested in counseling as a whole, so going to one that kind of started the process for me...kind of sparking the fire for me for this".

**Interpersonal influencers, social network guidance, and mentorship.** Participants responses uncovered social influences of on career decision making; depicting collectivist and symbolic interactionism components to the decision-making process. That is, participants' interest and subsequent decision to pursue a career in the counseling profession was encouraged, mentored, and mediated by significant interactions with individuals in their social network. Social network guidance occurred across the spectrum of relationships; from deliberate and chance encounters to repeated and long-term interactions with interpersonal influencers (Bosley, Arnold, & Cohen, 2009; Parker, Arthur, & Inkson, 2004).

Participants identified the benefits of practical advice, mentorship, and encouragement in supporting the navigation of the application processes. Information received from peers, co-workers, faculty members, and counseling professionals was used to both spark interest in the counseling profession and take practical action steps to apply to a master's level counselor training program. The participants recounted their increased knowledge about the counseling profession was directly related to information received from peers, co-workers, and counseling professionals. This reflects the work of

Gardner and Holley (2012) who found relationships to be influential to an individual's career decision- making. Similarly, Adlerian/ Individual Psychology asserts that encouragement and creation of belonging is the chief intervention for supporting the healthy human development. Applied to career decision-making and development, feeling a sense of connection and belonging is critical (Oberst & Stewart, 2014; Sweeney, 2019). The participant words below reveal the importance of social connection and encouragement during the decision-making process.

- A participant stated, "it was a fellow student at school. He was in my last class. I remember it research methods. He was actually in the class, you know, but he was you know, he's a pretty smart guy, and we talked about plans after graduation. He told me about his plans to go to graduate school. I kind followed his lead. He was really enthusiastic and encouraging".
- Another participant recalled, "I had a few of my instructors from (college institution) encourage me, but there was one in particular. She actually encouraged me to go further and saw something in me. She said, 'you'd do good in counseling.' Then she said maybe you should think about going for a master's in counseling and you know… that was what I needed".
- A participant stated, "My professor was very influential. She was an African-American female, and she just blew my mind honey. She helped me really figure out what program was going to be best for me, you know because she had the knowledge. You know, we talked about State licensure and everything".

- Another participant recalled, “So, she (supervisor) actually gave me a resource for different graduate schools. I asked two co-workers about their experiences; both were working on a doctorate degree at the time. So I was like I’ll check out (graduate institution). I chose the one that was a good fit for me….”.
- A participant noted, “I’m the first Ph.D. in my family though. So, you know, they were always encouraging me, and so I suppose I had that kind of encouragement to… you know, yeah, I think I have had a few people in my corner”.
- A participant stated, “I had a professor that took me under her wings. She provided mentorship and the encouragement I needed to take the right steps”.
- One Participant stated “ You know, and I didn’t know and my supervisor the time was like ‘you don’t like case management, and you should go to grad school to do therapy’, and I’m glad that she said that because I was thinking ‘like, oh my gosh, she’s gonna fire me, she’s gonna think I’m not a good case manager’, but she was saying that there’s a need there. There’s a need there. And I think she could see that there was a passion of mine to talk with people processing their emotions”.
- Another participant recalled “ My personal experience was just being a person in recovery from substance use disorder and then as I was taking care of my own health, you know working on my recovery, people ..my friends, family, and colleagues actually gave me a suggestion..encouragement that I was good at talking with other people about problems and stuff…so so that kind of

influenced me a lot. I think probably my own personal recovery and then getting that kind of affirmation from a couple of people".

- A participant said, "mostly I had a couple of mentors that were also professionals that encouraged me along the way. We met while in school. So, an African American lady, you know, she was engaged in the community where the school was, and then I took her multicultural class for my undergraduate degree, and so after that class, we met and mostly I was like tapping into her expertise".

**Use of practical information.** Participant responses indicated that once a decision was made to join the counseling profession, participants took practical steps towards selecting a graduate school by reviewing published information.

- A participant stated, "I definitely looked into, you know. Umm CACREP schools. I looked at the school's websites and when to a couple of informational sessions".
- A participant said "umm real practical information, you know general information about financial aid and resources and loans and providing an understanding of what is expected inside of the program. Having that information helped me feel confident because now, I got options and a plan spelled out and I got names and a list of people who could help me along the way".
- Another participant noted, "once I knew that's what I wanted to do, I began to do my research. I got on the internet and searched so many websites. I saw

a couple of schools I liked, so I went to their open house. Informational sessions".

- A participant recalled "well… mostly I used people, my supervisors, and co-workers, but once I had information from them, I looked at the school's websites and sent requests for more information".
- One participant stated, "I looked general information on websites about financial aid and resources and loans, what the program offered if I could get licensed. Then I thought about convenience".
- Another participant stated, "Well, I tend to do a lot of research. So, I researched pretty much everything. Yeah, it was researched looking online".

**Research Question 2: How does racial and ethnic identity influence the decision-making process of African Americans choosing to enter the counseling profession?**

The second research question sought to uncover the unique ways in which racial and ethnic identity influenced African Americans' choice to join the counseling profession. Secondarily, the second research questions sought to understand how racial and ethnic identity influenced the selection of a master's level counselor training program. All participants indicated a racial identity of African American based on the definition of the racial category in the US census. However, the data collection uncovered the nuances of racial identity and heterogeneity of this racial group. Thirty-one identified as African American/ Black and twelve identified as multiracial; with one identity being African American/ Black. Of the Thirty-one self-identified as African American/ Black, two emphasized an ethnic identity group. For participants, racial and ethnic identity…

The second research question corresponded with questions six through ten of the interview protocol (see Appendix C). Themes from question two centered on (a) legacy of enslavement, (b) liberation for the black community, (c) the importance of physical representation, and (d) being uniquely qualified.

**Legacy of enslavement.** Racial identity is a complex culmination of external group categorization and internal sense of group membership as it aligns with a collective lineage and historical narrative. Participant responses indicated dissatisfaction with the racial category of *African American*. Many described the term African American, as defined by the US census, as being too expansive and inclusive; and flattening their historical experience. Participants in the study preferred the term *Black* rather than *African American* as it spoke to their racial identity being shaped by the unique history and lineage of the African American minority group experiencing enslavement and continuing systemic racism, racial oppression, disenfranchisement, and marginalization in the united states. Specifically, participants' identification as *Black* directly influenced their motivation for joining the counseling profession.

Adlerian/ Individual Psychology would explain this through the terms of common sense and phenomenology. Where common sense is used to describe the norms, rules, and convictions shared in society; phenomenology refers to the unique subjective perspective of the individual (Griffith & Powers, 2007; Oberst & Stewart, 2014; Sweeney, 2019). Echoing the social constructivist perspective, Adlerian/ Individual Psychology understands individuals as meaning makers; interpreting information from their lived experiences while interacting with the environment. Thus, an individual's

worldview is a subjective reality which directs movement; conceptualized as one's private logic. (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). While Adlerian/ Individual Psychology emphasizes the importance of understanding the private logic of each individual, it seems there is a phenomenology unique to African Americans who prefer the term *Black*.

- A participant stated, "African-American Black. I'd use that interchangeably. But I like Black. That means you know; my family and my roots are in slavery and oppression and inequality in this country. It means being disconnected from land and language, you know like I get really, I get really upset sometimes when I talk to my Caribbean peers or African immigrants because sometimes they don't get it. They have such a tie to a motherland…regardless of how long they have been in the United States, their heart their soul their identity is in a motherland".
- Another participant noted, "I identify myself as a black person. My ethnic identity is African American, but being black is about being connected with slavery, oppression, and discrimination...".
- One participant stated, "I'm a Black American woman. Okay not taking away from my African roots, but I.. I don't know which area region of Africa I come from. I don't know that as of yet because I haven't done my DNA test. It's just I'm here in the US and I'm black".
- A participant said "Yeah. Racially, I'm classified as black also known as African American, and I would say ethnicity wise I guess my ethnicity would also be black American or African American. It means that I'm a black

person. I come from a lineage of slavery that means for me that a lot of times I have to deal with institutionalized racism have to deal with various forms of white privilege or white supremacy".

- Another participant stated, "My racial and ethnic identity is an African-American man. Culturally. I guess it's important to say Southern African American. I have a connection to the American history and captivity of Africans from Africa and a group of people that forged, but I really would say they forced their way inside of American culture. My descendants who are African slaves".
- Another participant stated "Black…well, a lot of people in America like to identify us as African American, I can't identify with African-American because I live and I worked with a lot of Africans, and they get citizenship. They're African-American. I am of African descent. But I distinguish between them and being black because I have not been allowed to be American, you know, it's hard to be a label…So if I can't be American, then I'm gonna be Black".
- One participant said, "I identify as black or African-American woman. I'm originally from St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands. Well, you know… I don't necessarily identify as a Caribbean American, but I mean, in the big scheme of things doesn't matter, it how you're treated in the U.S., but I'm more aligned with black or African-American".

- A participant stated, “I identify myself as a black American female.…So I prefer the term black American versus African-American because the Black American speaks to my ancestors who were affected by the history of slavery. So, I feel like there’s that generational trauma that my ancestors and my family experience versus like African immigrants that’s living there in the USA”.

It is important to understand there was some bidirectional distinction between being of African descent and Black. Of the Thirty-one self-identified as African American/ Black, two emphasized their ethnic identity group.

- One participant asserted, “ So I identify as an Afro-Caribbean American female…that means that my descendants are African or my ancestors are African from Africa and Caribbean because my parents are from the Caribbean, but I also grew up in the Caribbean, and American because I was born on the island of  St. Thomas which is a U.S. Territory. So I’m an American citizen. I don’t. I don’t consider myself African-American or Black American…I more would identify and subscribe to the Caribbean culture than the American black culture”.
- Another participant asserted, “My ethnic identity is African-American and Jamaican, my racial identity is human. I do identify with African-Americans more strongly than I do any other group and I strongly identify with my Jamaican ethnicity as well…. I think just the aggression in the anger that comes out in a lot of the expression and so when I think African-American, I

> see more struggle and as a group (African Americans) and this is my perspective…we identify strongly as victims and there's… there's not a lot of empowerment in the victimhood. And so, Jamaicans don't identify as a victim".

**Liberation for the black community.** Participant responses during interviews cemented racial identity, specifically the direct identification and alignment with the legacy of enslavement, as the second pillar in inspiring African Americans to join the counseling profession. The participants' alignment with the legacy of enslavement has created a unique phenomenology and movement/ lifestyle-oriented toward social justice and advocacy. The orientation to social justice and advocacy echoes that of Adlerian/ Individual Psychology's systemic and social justice perspective. Adlerian/ Individual Psychology emphasizes the social embeddedness of individuals and this importance of understanding the social experiences of inequity, oppression, and discrimination (Mosak & Maniacci, 1999; Oberst & Stewart, 2014; Sweeney, 2019). Mosak and Maniacci (1999) note Adler as being a social activist; promoting social justice. In establishing a working definition of social justice Davis, Cox, and Adler (as cited in McAuliffe, Danner, Grothaus, & Doyle, 2008), noted social justice as a necessary goal for democratic societies striving for "equitable access to societal institutions, resources, opportunities, rights, goods, [and] services" (p. 47). Davis, Cox, and Adlerian/ Individual Psychology profess that every individual should have equal access despite their belonging to any socially defined people group.

Participants identified the black individuals, families, and community as their expressed priority. That is, participants viewed themselves as advocates and change agents and described values and beliefs that aligned with Liberation Psychology and Black Psychology. Liberation Psychology and Black Psychology are theoretical praxis that aim to diminish the psychological distress imposed by oppressive historical and sociopolitical power structures. Both argue there are inequalities in Eurocentric and Western-centric based ideologies of traditional psychology which result in the marginalization and disenfranchisement of African American/ Black peoples (Azibo,1994; Montero, Sonn, & Burton, 2017).

Participants described the desire to destigmatize mental illness and promote counseling among African Americans/ Black people. Additionally, participants expressed personal and professional commitment to support the healing of experiences of racism, oppression, discrimination, and marginalization.

- One participant asserted, “Black therapists are the key to putting the psychological abuse of white imperialistic culture in a frame that is tolerable for black culture.”
- Another participant said “ I find that black counselors are few and far between ..and very necessary because of racism embedded in American culture…and the very real damage that is done to people that are treated by those that don’t understand them or care…but see blacks as something to be contained…clients need culturally competent therapists”.

- A participant stated, “I have a first- hand experience of the stigma and torment of mental illness in the decades before modern psych meds such as SSRIs. By the grace of God, I was eventually saved, but through this journey, I saw just how broken and inadequate the American mental health system is. It is my personal and professional mission to challenge the stigma and the pain one person at a time”.
- A participant said, “Well, it was recommended to seek counseling. I had I got a white woman for the first couple of weeks. I’ve had a couple of Asian women, and I had a white male counselor. I never worked with an African-American therapist. Hmm, and it was disappointing to me that nobody I saw for counseling could understand what I felt like as a client… so I wanted to fill that gap. You know those experiences were really challenging and even oppressive”.
- Another participant noted, “Because misdiagnosis from someone who lacks cultural competency can be deadly. I want to be a part of changing the occurrence of further stigmatization through misdiagnosis”.
- One participant proclaimed “Yeah…really being awakened and understanding the struggles and the challenges that our (African American/ Black) community has faced in this area and knowing the need exists, I felt like... I felt a calling. I felt like I have to do this… Like there is no way I can let this go on. I have to be a part of changing the conditions of my people.

- A participant noted, “You know… It is important that our cultural nuances of pathology are acknowledged; not every counselor is going to do that. And so for me, I was thinking I integrate myself into this field that disabled my community for so long and change it. And so that became, and I’m still on that mission to take power away from whatever was done in the past and really make a difference in my community for my people... Yeah. This is like a lifelong mission for me”.
- A participant stated “I think it was huge. You know, given my first experience with the Caucasian older therapist again and just seeing the providers… just the disparity in who was being serviced and who was servicing. I just felt it was like my duty to change the way services are delivered for my people. So I think that it (racial identity) was really everything actually”.
- Another participant stated, “I chose to be an agent of change, primarily one of color, to reach out to those who look like me, and assist them with dispelling the negative connotation associated with the profession.”
- One participant said, “There are so many problems and issues faced by African Americans. Blacks are due to racism and discrimination. And then to go to get help and be told you’re crazy because you are responding to these socially sanctioned adverse conditions. That is, I mean, I understand that that’s oppression. The mental health field is designed to liberate people. I want to be a part of liberating my people from the damage of racism”.

- A participant stated " Being a therapist, being a black therapist is a really strong part of my identity because my mission is to be a vessel of the humanity of Blackness, that we are humans and promote counseling that acknowledges that we feel everything our fellow non blacks do, but our pain is uniquely different and needs a deeper level of understanding. I want to change the counseling profession to properly care for the mental health needs of the black community".
- Another participant noted, "being a Black counselor or therapist. Oh, a unicorn, especially in Minnesota. To me, as a black counselor, it is mandatory that I use social justice within my therapy sessions. So, to me when I'm working with a black client or family, I give them a chance to talk about the discriminations they're experiencing, the microaggressions that are causing external stress within their life… that's affecting their daily functioning just from being a black person in America".

**The importance of physical representation.** Participants identified a desire to increase diversity in the profession and noted the visibility of Blacks in the counseling profession as vital to promoting the utilization of counseling by African Americans. Participant responses indicated a belief that improving the representation of African American/Blacks would have a direct impact on the counseling professions ability to identify and address the needs of African American/Black individuals, families, and community.

- A participant proclaimed, “Black therapists and counselors also offer a space for mutual understanding on a neutral plane. Black people of all walks of life can be accepted and understood in a black mental health professionals office, that’s why representation is so important”.
- A participant proclaimed “my presence ( as a black therapist) matters. I literally had a new teen client tell me that she would have left the initial session if I was White. I acknowledged and told her I understood what she meant”.
- Another participant stated, “Representation. People of color have resented the idea of therapy for decades. Seeing someone who looks like them and understands their culture creates a more inviting space and permission to come in and get the long-overdue help”.
- A participant noted, “The significance of being a black counselor is evident when other Black people express heartfelt gratitude for your decision to go into the mental health field and occupy these spaces. It touches me every time”.
- One participant said, “Having a therapist...counselor with hues that look similar to my own is significant because I never even heard of such an opportunity when I was younger. All the counselors were white. This didn’t mean they couldn’t help, but the level of empathy is different, in my opinion. That’s significant to me”.

- Another participant stated, “Because, right or wrong, physical representation is what is immediately apparent. Additionally, as a black therapist, it is my mission”.

**Uniquely qualified.** Participants’ responses argue for being uniquely qualified and fundamentally competent to provide counseling services to African Americans and other racial and ethnic diverse populations. Participants, like those in the work of Goode-Cross (2011) and Goode-Cross and Grim (2016) expressed mission-driven to commit to the well-being of African American/ Black clients. Participant’s suggested their identity as a member of a marginalized group provides an inimitable understanding of the sociopolitical context and experience of historically marginalized and disenfranchised individuals. Participants’ responses mirror the work of Goode-Cross (2011) and Goode-Cross and Grim (2016) who found African American/ Black mental health professionals express a deep sense of shared lived experience and commonality with African American/ Black clients which subsequently leads to greater ease and skill in the development and maintenance of a therapeutic alliance.

This reflects the sentiment of Adlerian/ Individual Psychology’s emphasis on egalitarian relationship and horizontal (diminished hierarchy) movement. That is, sharing a similar racial profile promotes the perception of increased expression of cultural empathy, egalitarian relationships empowerment, and power-sharing actions (Chung & Bemak, 2002; Hammer, Crethar, & Cannon, 2016; Mosak & Maniacci, 1999; Oberst & Stewart, 2014; Pedersen, Crethar, & Carlson, 2008; Sweeney, 2019) when compared to cross-racial interactions (Tettegah, 2016).

- Another participant noted, “Being able help... to help others of color because you can understand and relate to many cultural issues. Having cultural competence that you have lived and not read about that you are able to apply with clients”.
- One participant proclaimed “Visibility, representation, a safe space, not having to explain so many things, or tip-toe around conversations about race & inequalities. I love being able to have conversations with my clients in the same language style that they and I use at home. There is this deeper level of appreciation & understanding that does not even need to be spoken”.
- A participant stated, “Being a black therapist comes with a unique set of experiences, skills, and characteristics to understand Black people.”
- A participant proclaimed, “ I love this question, and at the same time it’s very affirming. We are significant. We offer something no other person can, ourselves”.
- A participant declared, “Because the relationship built with a therapist is the therapy. Sometimes Black people can’t connect with therapists who don’t look like them because (for example) a white therapist may trigger past trauma experiences. Seeing a person of color sitting across from you in the therapy room instills a deeper level of hope and resilience”.
- One participant noted “I’ve had a few clients call and say they sought me out because they didn’t want to risk having to explain where they came from to

> someone who wouldn't understand even if they tried. A lot of people say "the human experience," but it definitely varies and should be represented."

**Recruitment and Retention**

The research was designed to uncover the motivating factors influencing the decision-making the process of African American choosing to join the counseling profession and subsequently apply to a master's level counselor training program; which informs the recruitment and retention of African Americas to the counseling profession. Participants were asked questions designed to elicit effective strategies for leading African Americans to apply to a particular graduate-level counselor training program and remaining in the program until completion. Participants were asked to recall the recruitment and retention strategies used by their graduate school of choice and provide suggestions for successful requirement and retention. Data was generated from questions 11 – 14 of the interview protocol (see Appendix C). Themes from these questions centered on (a) building a bridge/early recruitment, (b) targeted recruitment, (c) sense of belonging and community atmosphere, (d) effective multicultural curricula, (e) culturally responsive mentorship, and (f) practical accessibility.

**Building a bridge/early recruitment.** In this category, nearly all participants emphasized African American/ Black individuals are receiving early exposure to the mental health field and counseling profession. Participants suggested increased awareness would work to destigmatize mental illness and support familiarity with counseling and a potential career option and consequently lead to African Americans becoming interested and seeking training. Participant responses suggested graduate schools begin recruitment

efforts earlier through increased visibility in local high schools and undergraduate institutions. This theme mirrors the major theme of *exposure to the profession* identified in question one.

- A participant noted, “We (Black counselors and faculty) can also mentor others even from the high school level and help bridge the gap within black and African-American communities”.
- One participant suggested, “ I think that graduate school should go to high schools and give presentations on Career days and really uh walk and talk through not only the profession about a little bit about their life to connect the listeners to who they are as a person and their experience.”
- Another participant suggested, “umm I guess specifically organizing groups of students. Either in high school and in college and just kind of having like maybe quarterly meeting with him where you give him something to eat, and you have a panel discussion and maybe some kind of open. Umm an Open dialogue of demonstrating with Psychotherapy can be in real time. So, they can have a chance to kind of see it in a safe environment using some umm safe parameters, you know with it, of course, and I think that that would be powerful to have high school and college students just to meet and see and experience.”
- One participant said “ I think we have to start off earlier, you know, maybe making this line of profession attractive early by showing young people it’s viable early You know, if we want young African-Americans to think about

being a counselor when they grow up and say ‘I want to be a counselor, you know, like my counselor and the counselor I saw that came to my school’. They need to see us more”.

- A participant stated, “I think building a bridge with student organizations from other institutions are important. Many undergrad universities have some type of student group or student organization that targets people from different ethnicities. So graduate schools need to collaborate with them. They should go directly to them as support. whether that means sponsoring an event and creating tours of the school. Maybe even a mini-class, so people know what the training looks and feels like”.
- Another participant suggested “they should expose black students while they are in high school or reach out to freshmen at orientation. I remember choosing a major and not really knowing what I could do with it. I just knew I needed to declare and finish college”.

**Targeted recruitment.** Participants identified a significant lack of intentional recruitment targeting African Americans. The responses indicate that counselor training programs are not mirroring their value and desire to increase diversity expressed by the profession. Participants cited the importance of diversifying the graduate school’s admissions personnel and recruitment specialists and specifically speaking to the need for diversifying the mental health field and counseling profession. Participant responses also highlighted the effectiveness of highlighting the presence of diverse faculty and staff at

the institution, and diversity, inclusion, and social justice as a core mission of the school and it's the curriculum.

- A participant proclaimed, "So, unfortunately, you know, there was no recruitment. I didn't see any signs that said ' we want you; we want black people to come here for counseling' Oh, no and is pretty much was. It was like the best-kept secret".
- One participant stated, "no, no, there was no recruitment targeting my race. However, I already had my mind made up 'cause of my two co-workers and what they helped me with. But... if I was hesitant it would have been helpful to have her (the admissions personnel) even be happy to see me... 'like you know what I'm glad you're thinking about wanting to enter this field. There's a limited amount of counselors of color in this field'.. if she would have had statistics, you know, to let me know, promote this a a great thing for my community.
- One participant stated, "umm well, really, I don't think there was recruitment specific to me or my race. But I would have liked to see more faculty that were people of color. What did attract me was the mission of social justice and diversity on their website".
- A participant said, "You know, honestly they didn't. I was… I was surprised by that. They didn't really outside of that one professor. They didn't really pursue me at all. I never received any type of, you know, information packages or someone reaching out trying to get me in the program".

- Another participant noted “No, I can’t really say that there were, but one of the predominant professors in the program is an African-American woman, so she definitely is in the forefront of a lot of things… I could say that at least my school definitely pushed the whole social justice and multiculturalism issue. you know, the whole inclusion piece is definitely is their big thing, and that really attracted me to the school.
- A participant said, “You know, their need to be more of us in marketing. It needs to be more of us going out into the communities and selling the need for people of color to be involved on this side of the couch, so to speak”.
- A participant noted, “No it was not explicit to my race, but I looked on their websites. I chose the program that emphasized the value of diversity and had some kind of diversity among the faculty and staff”.
- Another participant noted, “ oh my goodness that was probably over ten years ago, so I don’t remember exactly but, I don’t remember anything explicit. I know I looked on their website because I’m gonna do my research to compare pros and cons. But, I do remember when I saw the faculty and I looked at the faculty within both programs. There was more diversity in the mental health Faculty. Hmm. That was a huge influence”.
- One participant stated, “nope, you know, not at all… which is very sad and I’m even sad to have to say this out loud. But, you know, my first professor was an African-American woman and she had a really strong presence, and

she was really Afrocentric and confident. Then I really knew I was in the right place".

- A participant stated, "like they're being professors that look like me and that being the image of a school would be helpful. I want to see myself represented and a part of the school. Like if there were posters and flyers and people that look like me or you like that would have drawn me in a bit more. You know, like absolutely, to see strong prominent people in our community and feel connected to those people".
- One participant noted, "The language within the program was very diverse in the sense that we welcome racial and ethnic minority students or, you know, applicants to apply. There was a lot of emphasis on multiculturalism and multicultural competence a lot of focus on ethics, and those were also deciding factors".
- Another participant emphasized making connections with academic institutions that target African American/ Black individuals. They suggested, "How about recruiting from HBCU's into the counseling program, you know going to the source."

One participant that noted his racial or ethnic identity had no bearing on the selection of a graduate school.

- The participant noted, "My school is in a very white area so that also could have played a part in it...from a recruiting standpoint. But it honestly it was

not a huge factor in my choice, I looked at their accreditation. It was CACREP accredited".

**Sense of belonging/community atmosphere.** While all participants identified a prominent lack of intentional recruitment of African American/Black students, there was a notable acknowledgment that feeling welcomed and experiencing a sense of community during the application and admission process was particularly vital to their decision to attend the selected graduate school. Participants also placed value on the presence and provision of support with retention.

- One participant stated "umm there were noble attempts, you know, I feel like the staff worked to build a relationship with me and were generally warm and welcoming, it didn't feel like just getting another number.
- Another participant said, "umm It not just feeling like they're just kind of like running me through just kind of like the program like talking to me like how they talk to everybody else. Like actually getting to know me actually trying to I felt like I was like becoming a part of the community".
- A participant noted "so (name of admission personnel) was just so personable and inviting and accepting, and that's the same feeling that I got from my family down south. That made all the difference. I just stopped in she was willing to take that time it just like lay it out, you know and answer all of my questions. Whereas, when I went to the information sessions at (names of academic institutions) and had follow-up questions that I didn't want to like

ask in a group setting, and they did not make me feel comfortable seeking the answers".

- A participant asserted, "There needs to be a feeling of collaboration and encouragement in the learning environment. It is also important to have freedom of thought; we are very averse to oppressive and competitive environments".
- One participant stated, "umm well, … it was the admission person. So, I think she was key for me deciding to go there versus going to (names of academic institutions). They took forever to get back to me, and it seemed more like a business... at (name of an academic institution) you know, I was able to sit down with them for a one on one session and talk about the different options".
- A participant stated, "So, It was important to be at an institution where I would be comfortable in the learning environment and get the support and encouragement I need to be successful."

**Effective multicultural curricula.** Participant responses identified a need for the intentional infusion of a multicultural paradigm within the curriculum. Participants noted the absence of culturally competent faculty and multicultural curricula created challenges. Subsequently, participants highlighted the importance of the inclusion of cultural perspectives throughout the curriculum, class discussions, and internship.

- A participant stated, "as a student, I only made it through my program because I had a professor that mentored me and created a safe place for me to talk

about things, not in the curriculum. As a counselor educator, I try to be that person, and the students constantly express the need for more".

- A participant noted, "To be honest with you my experience was really challenging. Nobody talked about race and if they did it was full of stereotypes. I took pretty early on…maybe the third or fourth class. I took the Multicultural counseling class because somebody told me this particular professor was really good. She's was a white woman, but you know, it was a lot of teaching stereotypes. There need to be more culturally competent professors".
- One participant stated, "I was able to get training from my internship, but not at school at all. Everything I learned about working with people of color was during my internship. I would have been nice to be introduced to it in class".

**Culturally responsive mentorship.** Participants noted the need for active mentorship and guidance throughout their graduate school experience. Mentorship and the increased sense of connectedness associated with mentorship were highlighted as a critical retention strategy for mitigating the challenges of attending a predominantly white academic institution. This theme mirrors the theme of *Interpersonal Influencers, Social Network Guidance, and Mentorship* uncovered through participant responses to research question one and *physical representation* uncovered through participant responses to research question two.

- One participant suggested, “They should have Black faculty, or at the least faculty who are culturally competent and can provide mentorship to the students.”
- Another participant noted, “it’s so important to have mentorship and peer support. I was the only African American and even a person of color in my class throughout my graduate program. It was lonely. There were others in the program, but we weren’t connected. Thinking back, I didn’t really think about mentoring as being an integral part of my success. But it was. Luckily, I had people at work”.
- A participant emphasized “Well… I had a hard time the first year of my program and was about to leave, but they (academic institution) hired a Black faculty member. She became my informal mentor and I wouldn’t have made it if it wasn’t for her. She helped me navigate that system and maintain my dignity while doing so”.
- Another participant stated, “There need to be more supportive services. So for me, I needed to have more support around race”.

**Practical accessibility.**

- A participant noted “one major attraction was its accessibility. It was a 16-month model where you go once a month for the whole weekend. You go to school Friday Saturday and Sunday once a month, and you do that for 16 months, and then you’re done with your master’s degree. So that was really nice, and it made it accessible for people because you know, I don’t feel like I

probably had that luxury of taking time off to go to school. Definitely, you know, A lot of people from my community lot of African Americans can't afford to do that".

- Another participant stated " I chose the program because I worked full time and you know, needed a program that was designed for people who work in the day and you know, needed to attend class in the evening or weekends. Also, the online classes were attractive''.
- One participant emphasized "… it really came down to being able to attend classes in the evening and weekends. I was important that I could still work full time because that was the only way I could afford to complete the program".
- A participant noted, "I deliberately looked at programs that didn't have a GRE. I'm not a good test taker, and standardized tests are racially biased anyway. So, I questioned the programs that still use the GRE as an admissions requirement".
- Another participant stated, "I liked that the program... the classes were only five weeks and I did one at a time, which seems very rigorous, but I liked the idea of you could be done with that class being able to focus on one thing at a time".

## Review of the Results

For each participant, the decision-making process resulted from the possession of natural characteristics, interpersonal skills, and individual traits understood as a calling.

Participants spoke to the symbolic interactions and experiences in personal, professional, and academic settings that promoted an interest in the counseling profession and cultivated a sense of self-efficacy. The validation of these culminating experiences affirmed the counseling profession as the best fit for achieving personal and professional satisfaction and led to taking active steps toward this goal; specifically applying to a master's level graduate counselor training program.

A key outcome of this research is the contextual mediator of racial and ethnic identity. That is, research results highlight the significance and meaning of racial identity on the interpretations of lived experiences that increase interest in joining the counseling profession. While participants used the terms Black and African American interchangeably, there was dissatisfaction with the racial category of African American; perceived as a flattening of the unique historical lineage associated with the enslavement of those with African ancestry. The racial identity of Black more accurately describes the racial identity shaped by a history of enslavement and continuing systemic racism, racial oppression, disenfranchisement, and marginalization in the united states. Additionally, racial identity shapes the African American's understanding of role as a helper and has implications for professional identity, cemented racial identity, specifically the direct identification and alignment with the legacy of enslavement, as the second pillar in inspiring African Americans to join the counseling profession.

Research results seem to validate the findings of Chao, Wei, Good, and Flores (2011) who note African American/Black graduate students enter master's level counseling programs with a greater level of race consciousness and multicultural and

social justice counseling competence. Participants are choosing to enter the counseling profession with the expressed priority for promoting wellness and aiding in the healing of the black individual, family, and community. Participants viewed the role of a helper as intrinsically linked to being a social justice change agent. Participants described a commitment to destigmatizing mental illness and promote counseling among African American/Black people; including a fundamental personal and professional commitment to support the healing of experiences of racism, oppression, discrimination, and marginalization. This position fully aligns with the definition of counseling and multicultural, social justice and advocacy, social justice counseling paradigm.

Understanding the phenomenology of African American/Black individuals choosing to enter the counseling profession informs the successful recruitment and retention of African Americans on an institutional level as echoes of participant responses in research questions one and two were found in the identified and suggested recruitment and retention strategies. It is important to begin recruitment as early as high school and actively create a bridge from undergraduate to graduate school. Academic institutions must engage in targeted recruitment that speaks to a commitment to diversity, social justice and advocacy; while acknowledging the value of African Americans to the school and profession. Additionally, academic institutions must evaluate their admission criteria and educational delivery structures to increase accessibility and improve ease of completing the educational requirements while maintaining their current status quo.

Despite a lack of targeted marketing participants described a sense of belonging and community atmosphere as critically influential in deciding to attend a specific

graduate counselor training program. That is, participants, desired an academic environment that facilitated collaboration, inclusion, and connection. Participants reported experiencing emotional distress, social isolation, and dissatisfaction with the training due to a lack of physical representation. Participants noted a lack of diversity among the faculty and staff in their programs and a notable promotion of racial stereotypes and absence of curriculum that reflected the relevant experiences of African Americans (Haizlip, 2012; Maton et al., 2011). Participants suggested retention efforts should include the interweaving of multiculturalism into the curriculum, and increasing diversity of faculty and staff, and the intentional provision of culturally responsive mentorship.

**Theoretical Description**

Via the constructivist grounded theory methodology, the current research results support the development of Embracing Ujima: An interpretive theory of African American's choosing to join the counseling profession. The decision-making process of African Americans choosing to enter the counseling profession is grounded in the Kwanzaa principle of Ujima (collective work and responsibility) which takes a collectivist approach to counseling that works to heal and support wellness in the African American/Black community by taking personal and professional ownership of the communities' problems. Ujima is the principled enaction of Social Interest. Embracing Ujima: An interpretive theory of African American's choosing to join the counseling profession entails three integrated dimensions to the model. African American/Back individuals become interested in the counseling profession when they possess an innate

set of interpersonal skills, natural psychological mindedness, and disposition toward helping others that are affirmed through either exposure to counseling or exposure to the counseling profession. Professional and academic symbolic interactions mediated by the guidance and mentorship of interpersonal Influencers and use of practical information led to feelings of self-efficacy and a decision to apply to a graduate counselor training program. The phenomenology of racial and ethnic identity is the contextual mediator which shapes the potential counseling professional's selection of a graduate counselor training program and informs their perceived role as a helper.

## Summary

A theory comprises a set of abstract principles used to explain or understand a specific phenomenon to inform a course of action(s) (Andersen & Kragh, 2010; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012; Charmaz, 2014). The results of data collection and analysis via constructivist grounded theory methodology support the development of an interpretive theory of the decision-making process African American's undertake when choosing to join the counseling profession. This chapter described the setting, participant demographics, data collection, methods, data analysis, and the results of the study in narrative form with a summarization of the findings. Chapter 4 included examples of evidence of the trustworthiness of data analysis supporting the development of the theory which answers the research's chief questions. Chapter 5 will further describe interpretations of the study findings, study limitations, recommendations, and implications for further research.

# Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

## Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, constructivist grounded theory study was to understand the decision-making process of African Americans pursuing a career in counseling. Forty-three self- identified African Americans who were either a current student in a master's level counselor training program or had completed a counselor training program were interviewed to help address the research questions: "What decision-making process do African Americans undergo when choosing to enter the counseling profession?" and "How does racial and ethnic identity influence the decision-making process of African Americans when choosing to enter the counseling profession?" Using a social constructivist theoretical framework and constructivist grounded theory methodology, I sought to (a) document the lived experiences of African-American students in a masters-level counselor education program and current behavioral health professionals; (b) identify the iterative process participants underwent when choosing to enter graduate school; (c) understand the influence of racial and ethnic identity on the career decision-making process; and (d) co-create a coherent, substantive theory that informs recruitment and retention of African Americans to the counseling profession.

With constructivist grounded theory methodology and the theoretical framework of social constructivism as well as the result of constant comparative data analysis with auditing and memoing, this study provides an iterative theory of African Americans' career decision-making process for entering the counseling profession grounded in the

participants' words, expressed lived experiences, and meaning-making of those experiences (see Charmaz, 2014). The developed theory reflects the unique perspectives of the participants and fills the identified gap in the literature surrounding the decision-making process of African Americans choosing to enter the counseling profession. The career decision-making process participants underwent was informed by their sense of a calling to the profession, along with natural characteristics, interpersonal skills, and psychological mindedness associated with counseling. Participants described symbolic interactions—experiences in personal, professional, and academic settings that affirmed their sense of calling and improved self-efficacy. The affirmation of these experiences coupled with the use of practical information and mentorship from interpersonal relationships led to applying to a master's level counselor training program.

Racial and ethnic identity served as a contextual mediator for the interpretations of participants' lived experiences that increased interest in joining the counseling profession and shaped their understood role as a helper. The results of this constructivist grounded theory study support the development of embracing Ujima—an interpretive theory of African Americans choosing to join the counseling profession. Embracing Ujima informs a framework of recruitment and retention of African Americans to the counseling profession using principles of Adlerian/individual psychology.

## Interpretation of the Findings

### Career Decision-Making

The findings confirm the current literature presented in Chapter 2 concerning their interpreted meaning of work and subsequent career decision-making process. Participants

described their decision to enter the counseling profession as a compelling force grounded in a desire to engage in work that fulfilled a personal mission while utilizing their perceived natural strengths, talents, and predispositions and contributed to the overall good of society (Dik et al., 2013; Dik & Duffy, 2012; Dik et al., 2015; Foutch, McHugh, Bertoch, & Reardon, 2014; Lent, 2013). Furthermore, there was a developmental element associated with the career decision-making process. Participants noted having symbolic social (professional, personal, and academic) and cultural experiences with the counseling profession that encouraged an increased sense of self-awareness, and self-efficacy, a greater sense of purpose and passion (Dik et al., 2015; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010).

Though a less dominant theme, participant responses confirmed the work of Norcross and Faber (2005), who spoke on chance in career decision-making. Participants referenced encounters with professionals in academic and educational settings that sparked interest in the counseling profession and marked a change of course. Further, Hirschy, Wilson, Liddell, Boyle, and Pasquesi (2015) identified socialization as a critical element of professional development, which encompasses symbolic interactions with influential people (professional colleagues), notable experiences, and characteristics of the master's program professional colleagues as a crucial influence of professional identity development. While the findings in this study are specific to experiences during and after graduate school engagement, the findings of Hirschy et al.(2015) have implications for the work of counselor educators and reflects the decision-making process

of African Americans before choosing to enter the counseling profession as expressed by participants.

**Influence of Racial/ Ethnic Identity**

Although participants used the terms *Black* and *African American* interchangeably, there was dissatisfaction with the racial category of African American, which was perceived as a flattening of the unique historical lineage associated with the enslavement of those with African ancestry. The racial identity of Black more accurately describes the racial identity shaped by a history of enslavement and continuing systemic racism, racial oppression, disenfranchisement, and marginalization in the United States. The results of this research echo some of the findings of Farber et al. (2005), who identified cultural marginalization; adverse childhood experiences; having a predisposition toward psychological mindedness; affinity toward aiding in the healing, growth, and development of others; and experiencing validation and affirmation from someone as factors in choosing the counseling profession. Unique to this study's participants was the mitigating factor of racial identity—that is, identifying as Black both shaped the participants' motivation to enter the counseling profession and identified client population.

Results also align with the work of Collins and Arthur (2010) and Ratts et al. (2015, 2016) highlighting the impact of the individual's cultural identity and worldview on the therapeutic relationship and counseling process. Participant responses emphasize their racial identity's influence on the view of psychopathology and subsequent provision of counseling services, also validating the findings of Chao et al. (2011), who noted that

African-American/Black graduate students enter master's level counseling programs with a higher level of race consciousness and multicultural and social justice counseling competence. Thus, participants are choosing to enter the counseling profession with the expressed priority for promoting wellness; aiding in the healing and liberation of the Black individual, family, and community.

Participants viewed the role of a helper as intrinsically linked to being a social justice change agent. Participants described a commitment to destigmatizing mental illness and promoting counseling among African-American/ Black people, including a personal and professional commitment to support the healing of experiences of racism, oppression, discrimination, and marginalization. This position fully aligns with the definition of counseling and multicultural, social justice, and advocacy (Ratts et al., 2015, 2016). Participants enter or entered the counseling profession while embracing the social justice counseling paradigm, recognizing that culture is imperative to the counseling process and racial identity. Racial identity entails a direct identification and alignment with the legacy of enslavement, which is the second factor inspiring African Americans to join the counseling profession. Thus, the principle of the Nguzo Saba (Kwanzaa) Ujima (oo-JEE-mah) is the best representation of the collective career decision-making process of African Americans choosing to enter the counseling profession. African-American/Black healers possess an intrinsic desire to help individuals from their community driven by a shared experience of sociocultural traumas that perpetuates a sense of ownership and personal responsibility for the collective uplift (J. Lofgren, personal communication, July 7, 2019).

**Recruitment and Retention**

Understanding the subjective reality of African-American/Black individuals choosing to enter the counseling profession informs the successful recruitment and retention of African Americans on an institutional level, as echoed by participant responses that answer Research Questions 1 and 2. It is essential to begin recruitment as early as high school and create a bridge from undergraduate to graduate school. Academic institutions must engage in targeted recruitment that speaks to a commitment to diversity, social justice, and advocacy while acknowledging the value of African Americans to the school and profession. The results suggest that admissions marketing materials should highlight and emphasize the institution's commitment to social justice, diversity, and inclusion (Pack-Brown, Thomas, & Seymour, 2008). Additionally, academic institutions can evaluate their admission criteria and educational delivery structures to increase accessibility and improve ease of completing the educational requirements while maintaining their current status quo.

The current study validates findings from previous work on recruitment and retention of racially and ethnically diverse individuals in graduate school. The participants' responses noted the importance of the chosen graduate school's demonstration of a commitment to culture and diversity (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2017). Participants looked for physical representation among the faculty and staff on the website and declarations through the mission, and vision of the school (Bryant, Foxx, Kennedy, & Dameron, 2018; Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2017; Lott & Rogers, 2011). Despite a lack of targeted marketing, participants described a sense of belonging and community

atmosphere as influential in deciding to attend a graduate counselor training program. Participants desired an academic environment that facilitated collaboration, inclusion, and connection; however, they reported experiencing emotional distress, social isolation, and dissatisfaction with the training due to a lack of physical representation.

Participant responses also highlighted social support and mentorship as critical for success during graduate school participation (Bryant et al., 2018; Clark, Mercer, Zeigler-Hill, & Dufrene, 2012). Participants noted a lack of diversity among the faculty and staff in their programs and a notable promotion of racial stereotypes and absence of curriculum that reflected the relevant experiences of African Americans (Haizlip, 2012; Maton et al., 2011). Participants suggested retention efforts should include the interweaving of multiculturalism into the curriculum, increasing the diversity of faculty and staff, and the intentional provision of culturally responsive mentorship.

**Theoretical Description of Embracing Ujima**

The relevant preexisting theories for explaining career decision-making have limited applicability for racial and ethnic diverse individuals. Findings validated elements of preexisting theories, though these theories were insufficient to understand the career decision-making process of African Americans choosing to enter the counseling profession. Embracing Ujima—an interpretive theory of African Americans choosing to join the counseling profession—is a framework using principles of Adlerian/individual psychology, which provide a solid theoretical framework to position the emerging themes and factors compelling African Americans to both choose the counseling profession and select an institution. The Kwanzaa principle of Ujima is the manifestation of social

interest. The decision to enter the counseling profession and selection of a particular institution is reflected in the Adlerian/individual psychology concepts of belonging, community feeling, striving for significance, and encouragement.

## Implications

The counseling profession is uniquely positioned to address these issues, given the profession's legacy career choice and development with its origination in vocational/career guidance profession and then evolved toward mental health (Lent, 2013), the role of culture and the effects of racism in psychological functioning (Sue & Sue, 2016), and the influence of sociocultural identity and context on vocational development (e.g., Swanson & Fouad, 2015; Worthington, Flores, & Navarro, 2005). Further, counselors have an ethical obligation to advocate on behalf of clients (ACA, 2014). The social justice counseling paradigm engages in advocacy and activism to address unfair social, political, and economic conditions that hinder the academic, career, and personal/social development of individuals, families, and communities (Arredondo & Perez, 2013). Increasing the diversity of the counseling profession with race-conscious individuals will help amend historical and current societal oppression of disenfranchised populations (Moe, Perera-Diltz, & Sepulveda, 2010). The chief objective of workforce diversity is to promote and value differences among all person in the work environment to enact change (Hudson, 2014; Scott, 2014). Workforce diversity is imperative and relevant across professions and business sectors; including behavioral health services (Scott & Byrd, 2012).

**Counselor Education and Supervision**

The counseling profession has engaged in an evolutionary process for developing and promoting multicultural competencies (Laureate Education, Inc., 2009) that live up to the inherent responsibility of social justice in its definition to "empower diverse individuals, families, and groups" (Kaplan, 2010, p.5). The ACA Code of ethics mandates counselor educators engages in recruitment and retention activities to ensure diversity of the student body of a counselor training program (ACA, 2014). Consequently, counselor educators and counselor training programs must adopt the practice of multicultural and social justice competencies by being culturally responsive and considering the cultural phenomenology of each student. Similarly, counselor educators, acting as representatives and gatekeepers of the profession, have an additional responsibility to engage in social justice, leadership, and advocacy activities which promote diversity in the field. Acting in the function of a mentor, role model, and trainer of racial and ethnic diverse counselors- in training (ACA, n.d.; ACA, 2014; Bryant et al., 2018; Clark, Mercer, Zeigler-Hill, & Dufrene 2012). Recruitment and developing a workforce pipeline to the counseling profession should begin as early as high school, which will work to destigmatize and demystify mental illness in the Black community, as well as increase considerations for being a counseling professional. Participants suggest that counselor educators are vital to the recruitment and retention of African American students (Grapin, Bocanegra, Green, Lee, & Jaafar, 2016). This necessitates counselor educators provide culturally responsive accommodations and adaptations to enhance and support the well-being and success of racially and ethnically diverse students (ACA.

2104). As described by the participants in this study, counselor educators are advised to employ culturally validating andragogical strategies that actively reflect the cultural worldview and lived experiences of African American/ Black individuals.

**Counselor Education and Supervision as Career Development Practitioners**

Counselor Education and Supervision professionals are charged with an absorbent amount of responsibility in the personal and professional identity development of counselor trainees, acting as the chief career development practitioners for the counseling profession. The CES professionals' roles and responsibilities are layered with complexity, ambiguity, and high demand associated with the facilitation and evaluation of the requisite clinical skills and professional disposition for entering the counseling profession (ACA, 2014; Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, 1993; Remley and Herlihy,2014). Consequently, CES doctoral programs should adjust its curriculum to ensure CES professionals receive more specific training to develop the competencies of career counseling and career development practitioners. Further, the development of competencies of career counseling and development must be aligned with the multicultural and social justice counseling framework to ameliorate the perpetuation of Eurocentric and Western-centric biased frameworks of counseling and counselor education.

**Higher Education Institutions and Administrators**

Educational institutions will benefit from increased insight in how to recruit and retain a racially and ethnically diverse student body in master's level counseling training programs; as both white and racial and ethnic minority student's benefit from shared

learning experiences with a racially diverse student body (Krueter et al., 2007). Considering the benefits of diversity in the educational environment and the importance of physical representation to prospective African American and other racial/ ethnic diverse students (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2017; Ponterotto et al.,1995) it is critical that graduate program administrators actively and intentionally work to diversify the faculty and staff concurrently with recruitment of diverse students. Research has comprehensively documented the benefits of a diverse student body (Haslerig et al.,2013). Requiring a racially and ethnically diverse student body, and subsequent workforce will further the mandate of multicultural counseling competencies and advocacy outlined by ACA (2014) Code of Ethics and CACREP (2016) education standards. Graduate counselor training programs currently accredited by CACREP or seeking accreditation are required to engage in "continuous and systematic" recruitment of diverse faculty (CACREP, 2016). Unfortunately, there are scant specific guidelines for meeting this objective (Cartwright et al., 2018).

**Social Change and Advocacy**

Social justice and advocacy have been repositioned as a foundational role and responsibility for all clinicians of the counseling profession (Arthur & Collins, 2010; Ratts et al., 2016). Social justice advocacy in counseling urges counselors to use their knowledge and expertise to create new opportunities for clients actively, to change the systems that perpetuate injustice, and to advocate for new policies that will institutionalize equity and fairness (Eriksen, 1997; Wronka, 2008). Additionally, we work to promote the counseling profession (Eriksen, 1997). Advocacy efforts result in positive

social outcomes for both the field and the consumers of counseling services (Wronka, 2008).

The principal goal of social justice and advocacy endeavors is:

> Full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable, and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure (Bell, 1997, p. 3).

Advocacy is the enactment of a social justice paradigm involving intentional action steps taken which contribute to the advancement of society and creates equity (Arthur & Collins, 2010; Fickling & Gonzalez, 2016; Ratts, Lewis, & Toporek, 2010). In career development, this requires CES professionals and academic institutions to fully recognize and advocate against the role that Eurocentric and Western-centric values and customs play in limiting the career development of historically disenfranchised populations. The current literature provided evidence of ongoing disparities in workforce diversity in the counseling profession (Santiago & Miranda, 2014; Worthington, 2012). Participants spoke to the importance of practical accessibility as a key consideration for both their attraction to and ability to complete the counselor training program. Participants were attracted to programs that allowed them to continue full-time employment while advancing their education; as they lacked the financial privilege of not working during graduate school. Employment statistics in the U.S note ongoing race-based inequity in the domain of work (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2016a). Unpaid internships are standardly built into the counselor training

program despite ongoing legal and ethical challenges (Mchugh, 2017; Moore, 2016; Tepper & Holt, 2015).

Unpaid practicum and internship experiences exacerbate the economic challenges of both completion of a master's degree in counseling and subsequent entrance into the profession. The counseling profession is complicit by promoting and allowing unpaid internships (McDermott, 2013). Improving workforce development efforts through increased racial and ethnic diverse mental health professionals moves the counseling profession closer toward reflecting and competently responding to the needs of an increasingly racially and ethnically diverse population (Santiago & Miranda, 2014). To improve this racial and ethnic diversity, counselor training institutions must be more proactive in advocating for paid internships that support economically disadvantaged counselor trainees; who disproportionately are members of racial and ethnic groups (Oconnor & Bodicoat, 2017). Further, increasing accessibility of African American counselors will inspire more African American clients to pursue counseling services. Research finds racial and ethnic diverse populations have a preference for engaging in counseling services with someone of the same race (Cabral & Smith, 2011; Hayes et al., 2011; Swift, Callahan, Tompkins, Connor, & Dunn, 2015).

Colleges and universities offering counselor education training programs must improve recruitment and retention strategies to meet the CACREP standards for increased diversity among faculty. The results of this research narrow the gap in the literature by providing increased insight for addressing the underrepresentation of African American counseling professionals. The research findings promote increased guidance

for successfully attracting African American/ Black. Results of this research project inform the creation of educational pipelines for African American into the counseling profession, and subsequently develop a more race-conscious profession (ACA, 2014; Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2015; Young & Brooks, 2008); leading to lowered rates of attrition among racial and ethnic minority clients. Promoting a racially diverse student body, and the corresponding workforce further the mission of the ACA (2014) and actualizes the professions' education standards surrounding multicultural competencies (CACREP, 2016).

## Limitations of the Study

This study sought to understand the career decision-making process of African Americans choosing to pursue a career in the counseling profession and develop an iterative theory that informs recruitment and retention of African American's to the counseling profession. While the constructivist grounded theory was the most appropriate methodology, the interpretation and application of the research findings have limitations. The research design; specifically interview protocol and developed research questions may have promoted Question-order bias and Leading questions and wording bias. All data collected was based on the self-reports of participants. My identity as an African American may have promoted some acquaintance and sponsor bias.

Similarly, my positionality in the research may have led to confirmation bias in the way data was analyzed. This research study collected qualitative data from 43 individuals who self- identified as African Americans. Participants were geographically diverse. Despite the sample size exceeding the identified consensus size of 20-30

(Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Suri, 2011), it is not fully sufficient to represent the diversity within the racial category of African American/ Black. Participants were recruited electronically, and interviews were conducted via videoconferencing requiring participants to be comfortable with navigating the internet, social media, email, and Zoom video conferencing software. These limitations directly decrease the generalizability of the study.

## Recommendations for Future Research

There is a consensus among the prevailing career development literature that there remains a gap of applicability of theory to diverse populations. Since the 1990s research has given more attention to the cultural influences of career development and choice. Career development professionals have begun exploring and uncovering new knowledge to inform the development theory that is more reflective of diverse populations (Arulmani, 2011; Cheatham, 1990; Leong & Brown, 1995). Nonetheless, more attention is needed to understand individual and group variations that result in culturally-specific career development services. More qualitative research that uses the lived experiences, voices and worldviews of historically disenfranchised is recommended.

It is recommended that additional research is conducted to clarify the career decision-making the process of each racial/ethnic group and other disenfranchised people groups choosing to enter the counseling profession. The counseling profession would benefit from an increased understanding of each racial/ethnic group's unique experiences leading to an interest in and selection of a career in counseling. This increased knowledge will further the efforts begun by the research project and subsequently improve the

diversity of the counseling profession. Lastly, further research is warranted to clarify *Embracing Ujima*: An interpretive theory of African Americans choosing to join the counseling profession for its accuracy in accurately reflecting the decision-making process of African American/ Black individuals and its success in improving recruitment and retention efforts.

## Conclusion

This study utilized a constructivist grounded theory study to understand the career decision-making process of African Americans/Blacks choosing to pursue a career in the counseling profession. Through the collection of data from semi-structured interviews with Forty-Three self-identified African Americans who were either a current student or had completed a master's level counselor training program, Embracing *Ujima*: An interpretive theory of African American's choosing to join the counseling profession was developed. *Embracing Ujima* provides a framework for understanding how shared culture and racial and ethnic identity influence the decision-making process of African American/Blacks when choosing to enter the counseling profession. The theoretical framework is designed to inform the recruitment and retention activities of academic institutions and CES professionals. The results of this study suggest that symbolic interactions; experiences in personal, professional, and academic settings that both affirmed their sense of calling and cultivated self-efficacy leading to the perception of the counseling profession as the best fit for realizing personal and professional fulfillment.

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# Appendix: Interview Protocol

**Opening Statement:** Thank you for meeting with me today. My name is Rashida Fisher. I am currently a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education and Supervision program at Walden University. I am working to complete my dissertation in fulfillment of the degree requirements by conducting a qualitative study designed to understand why African Americans choose to enter the counseling profession and interpret the influence of racial/ ethnic identity on the decision-making process. This interview is an opportunity for you to share your rationale and decision-making process when deciding to become a counselor. Since this is a grounded theory study I may need to interview you more than once just to clarify some queries and to build the developing theory. Are you open to a second interview if needed?

**Review Informed consent:** I received your email consenting to participate in this research project. I want to remind you-

1. you will engage in a semi-structured interview with the possibility of a follow- up interview. The initial interview is scheduled for 60 minutes. However, we are not required to meet for the entire 60 minutes. Following the interview, there will be a debriefing session to process your experience of the interview. I have allocated a total of 90 minutes for the interview and debriefing.
2. Participation in this research is completely voluntary. Your participation and the information you provide during the interviews will be kept strictly confidential.
3. Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as fatigue, stress or becoming upset. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. If distress occurs, I will check to see if the participant would like to pause or discontinue the interview. If additional services are needed a referral will be provided. The benefit of participation is being a co-creator of a coherent and substantive theory that informs recruitment and retention of African America's to the counseling profession. I hope that these changes will positively improve diversity in the counseling profession and subsequently meet the needs of an increasingly diverse help-seeking population.

**Introductory Questions**

1. Before we begin the discussion, do you have any questions for me?

**RQ 1: What decision-making process do African American students undergo when choosing to enter the counseling profession?**

1. What personal, professional, or academic experiences influenced your interest in joining the counseling profession?
2. Describe how your professional, academic, and personal experiences led you to apply to a graduate program for counseling.
3. What pertinent information did you consider when deciding to become a counselor?
4. What or who were the best sources of information during your decision- making process?
5. You probably identified several possible paths of action, or alternatives to a career in counseling. Why did you choose the counseling profession vs. another helping profession (social work, nursing, psychology)?
6. Which specialty area (CMH, Addiction, COD, MFT, etc.) did you choose and why?

**RQ 2: How does racial and ethnic identity influence the decision-making process of African Americans choosing to enter the counseling profession?**

1. Please describe your racial/ ethnic identity. What does that mean for you?
2. What influence did your racial or ethnic identity have on your decision to choose counseling as your profession?
3.What does it means to you to be a Black/ African American counselor?
4. How did your racial/ ethnic identity influence your considerations when selecting a specific counselor education master's degree program?

**Questions regarding Recruitment and Retention**
5. Describe any helpful recruitment strategies that attracted you to the master's level degree program you selected.
6.Describe any helpful recruitment and/or retention strategies that were focused on your racial/ ethnic identity.
7. Suggestions for recruitment and/or retention strategies for African Americans?
8. Anything I missed or didn't ask that you think is important to think about?

**Debriefing session protocol:**
Statement
Thank you for your participation in my study! Your participation is greatly appreciated.
Review the purpose of the Study: I previously informed you that the purpose of the study is to understand why African Americans choose to enter the counseling profession and interpret the influence of racial/ ethnic identity on the decision-making process.
I realize that some of the questions asked may have provoked strong emotional reactions. As a researcher, I do not provide mental health services. However, I can provide you with a comprehensive and accurate list of clinical resources that are available, should you decide you need assistance at any time. If you feel upset after having completed the study or find that some questions or aspects of the study triggered distress, talking with a qualified clinician may help. If you feel you would like assistance, please contact: Sankofa Counseling and Consulting at (651) 493-2856.

Confidentiality:
Again, I want to emphasize Your participation and the information you provide during the interviews will be kept strictly confidential. You may decide that you do not want your data used in this research. If you would like your data removed from the study and permanently deleted, please email me within 48 hours.

Final Report:
If you would like to receive a copy of the final report of this study (or a summary of the findings) when it is completed, please feel free to contact me.
Final Question and Answering:
Do you have any questions form me?