BLACK EFFECT: BLACK STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN CACREP MASTER'S

PROGRAMS AT HBCUS

by

Angelia M. Lomax

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Doctor of Philosophy Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

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APPROVED BY:

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Joy M. Mwendwa, Ph.D., Committee Chair

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Melvin Pride, Ph.D., Committee Member

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Robyn Simmons, Ph.D., Committee Member

ABSTRACT

African American students' experiences in graduate programs at predominately White institutions (PWIs) have been explored in previous research. Said experiences were described using the following constructs: underrepresentation, invisibility, isolation, lack of support, and silence. There is minimal research that focuses on Black students' experiences at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), where the environment was reported to be welcoming, nurturing, and supportive. This study adds to the literature by exploring the lived experiences of African American students in CACREP-accredited master's counseling programs at HBCUs, with critical race theory (CRT) as the theoretical framework. After being identified as eligible based on a screening survey, semi-structured interviews and photovoice were implemented to allow space for the six participants to share their experiences. The following five themes and subthemes emerged from an analysis of their responses: relationship dynamics with the subthemes of representation, faculty, peers, and isolation; climate with the subthemes of program, HBCUs, and challenges; being Black; scholarship with the subthemes of CACREP and academic transactions; and COVID. Participants shared mostly positive experiences, noting the family feel of their programs, the pleasant relationships with their faculty, connectedness to their peers, and a sense of empowerment because of their Blackness. Implications for counselor educators suggest making the conscious effort to communicate in a timely manner, make students feel welcome, and teach from a multicultural lens.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, who instilled in me the ideal that I can be whatever I want and that my best is always enough. To my mother, whose unwavering support has allowed me to prevail and overcome obstacles both seen and unseen. Her belief in my capabilities gave me the courage and self-confidence I needed to pursue my dreams. To my father, who passed away in 2015, whose motto "Finish up strong" gave me the fortitude to persevere when I got weary. I am forever grateful for their guidance and love.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the experiences of minority students in institutions of higher education and in counseling programs have been studied. The postulation that students from minority groups have to adjust to college culture because of its incongruence with their culture of origin (Brown & Grothaus, 2019; Seward, 2019), was consistent with the historical narrative that higher education was created for the dominant culture (Bracey, 2017; Haynes et al., 2016; Stith & Blumenthal, 2019). The experiences of African American students at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) have been studied extensively. Said experiences were described using the following constructs: underrepresentation (Baggerly et al., 2017; Chancellor, 2019; Zeligman et al., 2015), invisibility (Baker et al., 2015; Haynes et al., 2016), isolation (Haynes et al., 2016; Jangha et al., 2018), lack of support (Seward, 2019; Zeligman et al., 2015), and silence (Haynes et al., 2016; Jangha et al., 2018).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were established to offer welcoming and nurturing learning environments specifically for African American students (Abdul-Alim, 2016; Bracey, 2017; Stith & Blumenthal, 2019). The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) included diversity in their vision/mission, core competencies, and standards for accreditation (CACREP, 2020a). To date, there are no studies of how Black students experience master's counseling programs at HBCUs. The focus of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of African American students in CACREP-accredited master's programs at HBCUs.

Background of the Problem

Historical Context of HBCUs

Black institutions of higher education were formed to provide Black Americans with quality education that would position them to better themselves (Bracey, 2017; College Atlas, 2017). The primary mission of historically Black colleges and universities was equitable educational opportunities for Black Americans (Bracey, 2017) at a time when segregation was technically illegal, but very much perpetuated in the education sector (Stith & Blumenthal, 2019). Although the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 funded the formation of liberal colleges that were encouraged to admit Black students, the colleges decided otherwise (Stith & Blumenthal, 2019). According to Bracey (2017), these institutions denied African Americans access to their land grant colleges. In response, Congress passed a second Morrill Act in 1890 which required states to either admit Black students to land grant colleges that were created as a result of the first Morrill Act or fund schools that would admit African Americans (Bracey, 2017).

The first HBCUs were formed in the 1800's prior to the end of the Civil War, in Pennsylvania and Ohio. They were created by former slaves, abolitionists, and black churches (College Atlas, 2017; Stith & Blumenthal, 2019), as Black Americans were resilient in their desire to learn (Bracey, 2017). Cheyney University, the first of these institutions, was formed as an act of an abolitionist's last will and testament (College Atlas, 2017). After the Morrill Act of 1890, there were various measures of enacting the new requirements. Some universities were only interested in the financial support that accompanied Black colleges. They did not desire to educate Black Americans, but this was outweighed by the millions of dollars in funding the region received for developing HBCUs (Bracey, 2017). HBCUs offered programs primarily focused on education, agriculture, and mechanical studies (Bracey, 2017; College Atlas, 2017).

Land grant institutions were either predominantly White or Black, both of which were mandated by law to receive equal funding (Stith & Blumenthal, 2019). The colleges that were

predominantly Black, however, were underfunded due to insufficient reinforcement of equitable allocation of funds (Stith & Blumenthal, 2019). Bracey (2017) reported White land grant colleges received 26 times more funding than Black land grant universities. It was suggested that separation and differences reinforced segregated education and an illusion of equal educational opportunities (Bracey, 2017). Jones (2016) posited the dominant society viewed HBCUs as a threat to white supremacy. Until the 1930's, Black Americans were primarily educated at historically Black colleges and universities, using minimal resources to create a unique experience for their learners (College Atlas, 2017; Stith & Blumenthal, 2019). Bracey (2017) offered the 1954 *Brown vs Board of Education* decision deemed racial segregation in public education unconstitutional (which included public colleges). Because of the refusal of the court decision to alter the character of White supremacists, historically Black colleges continued to take on the responsibility of educating Black Americans (Bracey, 2017). HBCUs were the educational training vessels for many of the leaders of the civil rights movement, including Zora Neal Hurston, Medgar Evers, and Jesse Jackson (Bracey, 2017; Jones, 2016). These institutions were designed for Black Americans to advance and progress but have always admitted and served students from diverse backgrounds (Abdul-Alim, 2016).

One group that was integral to the establishment and development of HBCUs was the Black church (Abelman, 2013). With a shared goal of community progression, Black denominational churches created HBCUs, including Fisk University, Spellman College, Hampton Institute, and numerous others (Lowe & Shipp, 2014). Church basements were utilized as learning centers that often evolved into formal institutions, such as Virginia Union University, Rust College, and Morehouse College (Hawkins, 2012). The institutional core of church-affiliated HBCUs is steeped in tradition, values, and culture reflective of the support received

from Black church organizations (i.e., United Methodist Church, African Methodist Episcopal Church, American Baptist Church, Seventh-day Adventist Church) at their inception (Abelman, 2013).

Social Context of HBCU Campuses

HBCUs are defined by the Higher Education Act of 1965 as institutions formed before 1964 to provide quality education for Black Americans (College Atlas, 2017). In 2017, there were 107 institutions of higher education recognized as historically Black colleges and universities (College Atlas, 2017). As a non-monolithic and complex group, there were elements characteristic of HBCUs. Abdul-Alim (2016) described the unique tradition of HBCUs to be one of "providing their students with a culturally, socially, economically, and politically relevant education" (p. 34). African American students felt validated, welcome, and accepted by the nurturing and supportive community of their HBCU (Abdul-Alim, 2016; Bracey, 2017). According to Abdul-Alim (2016), Black graduates of HBCUs typically had a better overall college experience than their counterparts who graduated from predominately White institutions Students described the climate of HBCUs to be "essential to their social functioning and mental health" (Bracey, 2017, p. 678).

HBCUs provided support to students, addressing social issues, and developing "Black consciousness" (Bracey, 2017, p. 678). HBCUs also offered exposure to a diverse background of education and focused intentionally on Black excellence (Abdul-Alim, 2017). However, there were challenges associated with these universities. The trend of Black colleges being underfunded that began in the 1800's has continued, resulting in limited finances for expenses such as facility renovations (Abdul-Alim, 2017). Jones (2016) shared that HBCUs have ranked lower than PWIs on the annual report "America's Best Colleges," from U.S. News and World

Report. Historically Black colleges and universities suffered from dismal graduation rates, yet simultaneously graduated an overwhelming majority of the Black degree holders in science and engineering (Abdul-Alim, 2017).

HBCUs and minority serving institutions have been supported by several organizations including, but not limited to the following: United Negro College Fund (UNCF), Quality Education for Minorities Network (QEM), Thurgood Marshall College Fund, and the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO; Abdul-Alim, 2016). The quality of educational institutions and programs was regulated by regional and programmatic accreditation agencies, respectively (Fester et al., 2012). Accreditation was funded by the institution and the process was administered by an accreditation team from the agency.

Historical Context of CACREP

CACREP is the accrediting agency for entry-level counseling and doctoral programs (Lu et al., 2018). They asserted their accreditation was associated with counseling-related, degree-specific programs as opposed to an institution, department, or individual (CACREP, 2020a). According to Brady-Amoon and Keefe-Cooperman (2017), the field of professional counseling was an early 1900's continuation of Frank Parson's vocational guidance that grew into a person-centered approach with a foundation of research and science. The organizations that supported the counseling profession in its formative years were the Association of Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES), founded in 1940, and the American Personnel and Guidance Association (CACREP, 2020a). The latter evolved into the American Counseling Association (ACA) in 1952 (West & Moore, 2017).

In the 1960's ACES initiated a conversation regarding the development of guidelines to standardize the educational process for training counselors (CACREP, 2020a; West & Moore, 2015). After nearly twenty years of research, preparation, and efforts to formalize, ACES integrated regulations outlined in the standards for School Counselors and Personnel Work for the foundation of its own standards (West & Moore, 2015). In 1981, following the accreditation of several programs and upon consultation with ACA (then the American Personnel and Guidance Association), CACREP was established (CACREP, 2020a).

The goal of CACREP was to standardize the education, training, and development of those studying to become counselors and counselor educators (Lu et al., 2018), as the profession solidified its identity (Montgomery et al., 2018). CACREP aimed to standardize the curriculum, culture, and competencies of counselor training programs (Field, 2017; Montgomery et al., 2018; West & Moore, 2015). The number of programs that sought and attained CACREP accreditation has steadily increased. The number of graduate counseling programs that were CACREP-accredited climbed from 63% to 66% from 2013 to 2014, then to 71% in 2015 (Lu et al., 2018).

Social Context of CACREP

For programs that were successful in being granted accreditation, student experiences and outcomes were examined. Compared to graduates from non-CACREP accredited programs, students whose master's programs were accredited committed less ethical violations, scored better on professional examinations, and demonstrated elevated competence (Lu et al, 2018; Strear et al., 2019). As of 2019, CACREP accredited the following master's level counseling programs: addiction counseling; career counseling; clinical mental health counseling; clinical rehabilitation counseling; college counseling and student affairs; community counseling; gerontological counseling; marriage, couples, and family counseling; school counseling

(CACREP, 2020a). Counselor education and supervision programs were the only doctoral programs accredited by CACREP (Brady-Amoon & Keefe-Cooperman, 2017; Lu et al., 2018).

CACREP accreditation was perceived as a measure of a program's quality and credibility (Eissenstat & Bohecker, 2018). It was also a method of accountability, as programs were charged with maintaining the standards they demonstrated at initial accreditation (Field, 2017). It appeared programs were earnest regarding adherence to CACREP standards, as some instructors were encouraged to "do things differently" to ensure alignment with CACREP regulations (Lu et al., 2018, p. 190). The instructors were only partial representations of the climate in CACREP-accredited programs. Accredited programs prepared competent counselors by ensuring that throughout their matriculation they attended professional conferences (Lu et al., 2017), were engaged in transformative learning (Prosek & Michel, 2016), and developed their professional identity (Person et al., 2020). According to Person et al. (2020), students who attended CACREP-accredited programs had a better understanding of the various roles to be assumed by a counselor, were aware of the expertise required for those roles and identified with the philosophies of being a counselor. Therefore, students from CACREP programs had a significantly higher score (on an inventory) related to their professional identity.

For students of color in CACREP-accredited programs, profound professional preparation was accompanied by adverse experiences (Baggerly et al., 2017; Baker et al., 2015). African American students reported feeling uncomfortable and disregarded in the programs, resulting in part from the lack of representation (Seward, 2019). Their desire for African American faculty mentors was often unmet, which impeded their feelings of connection to the university (Zeligman et al., 2015). A sense of isolation was intensified when students did not see themselves represented in the student body or *academic transactions* (Haynes et al., 2016). The

percentage of African American students in CACREP programs has remained around eighteen percent for the past few years (CACREP, 2018), leaving some students to be the only Black student in CACREP class on multiple occasions (Baker et al., 2015).

In these same spaces, microaggressions occur that often go unaddressed by the student or by the instructor (Jangha et al., 2018). Students have reported that their lack of response was due to feeling silenced by their isolation or fear of perpetuating stereotypes (Jangha et al., 2018). According to Haynes et al. (2016), professors who failed to address the microaggression, affirmed and allowed them. Students had to learn to cope with these experiences, which Chancellor (2019) contended led to racial battle fatigue (RBF). Resilience and John Henryism were ways that African American students may have persisted through the adversity they faced in programs (Hudson et al., 2015). This resilience would result in an improved sense of self-efficacy, which Butts and Gutierrez (2018) posited was fundamental to counselor development.

Statement of the Problem

It is reported that African American students who attended HBCUs had an overall better experience than those who attended PWIs, due to the former institutions being created specifically for the education of Black students. The environment was described as nurturing, welcoming, and a celebration of Black excellence (Abul-Alim, 2016). CACREP required the following: (a) diversity of faculty and students, (b) exploration of multicultural differences, and (c) instruction of ways to counsel diverse populations (CACREP, 2015). However, African American students in CACREP programs shared they felt isolated, invisible, and they experienced microaggressions (Baggerly et al., 2017; Jangha et al., 2018). It is problematic for stakeholders to be unaware of the experiences of African American students in CACREP programs that are situated in HBCUs. The students navigate a unique space by being enrolled in

8

a university that was essentially built for them, matriculating through a program that has historically been oppressive for Black students.

Purpose of the Study and Research Question

The proposed study will explore the perspectives of African American students in order to gain an in-depth understanding of their experience in CACREP-accredited clinical mental health counseling programs at HBCUs. The researcher will use qualitative methods, specifically phenomenological, to investigate participants' perceptions of their experience as a student in the program and at the university. Completing this study will give voice to Black students' experiences and illuminate student needs as they matriculate through the academic portion of their professional development.

The research question that will guide the proposed study is:

1. What are the lived experiences of African American students in CACREP-accredited master's counseling programs at HBCUs?

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

The proposed study will make four assumptions. The assumptions that will influence this study are based on a constructivist approach. Creswell (2014) explained that constructivists rely on participants' views of their lived experiences. One assumption is that participants will be able to reflect on and articulate their experiences. A second assumptions is that the participants will answer the researcher's semi-structured interview questions honestly. The third assumption will

be that the participants' race factored into their experiences. The final assumption is the participants will be genuinely interested in participating in the study.

Limitations

For the proposed study, one limitation is the reliance upon participants' memory and their honesty. By nature of the qualitative research approach, another limitation is the lack of generalizability (Alase, 2017). Results of qualitative studies are only generalizable to the participants of the particular study. Because the interviews were semi-structured, the research study will be hard to replicate exactly, as the improvised questions may not apply to other situations.

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Definition of Terms

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Academic Transactions – Classroom experiences that include "what is taught…[and] what is learned" in the context of master narratives (Haynes et al., 2016, p. 381). Such experiences include classroom discussions, curricula, textbooks used, and supervision.

CACREP – The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, which grants accreditation to counseling programs based on a self-study conducted with the agency's oversight (CACREP, 2020a).

Critical Race Methodology – A methodology typically used in conjunction with critical race theory that intentionally seeks information regarding race in order to create a space for participants' counter-stories to emerge.

Critical Race Theory – An analytical approach to assessing the role of race in the experiences of marginalized people, accompanied by the following tenets: race as a social

construct, racial permanence, counter-narratives, interest convergence, and differential racialization (Pulliam, 2017).

HBCU – Historically Black College and University, established prior to 1964 for the education of African Americans (College Atlas, 2017).

John Henryism – A form of active coping that can have positive and/or adverse implications such as resilience or exhaustion, respectively (Bronder et al., 2013).

Microaggression – Subtle, often inadvertent, communication of demeaning messages, typically directed toward minority groups (Ramasubramanian et al., 2017).

PWI – Predominately White Institution (Abdul- Alim, 2016). An institution where the majority of students are Caucasian.

Racial Battle Fatigue – Psychological, physiological, and behavioral stress responses to coping with racism (Smith, 2008).

Resilience – Persistence despite adversity; continuous matriculation through the master's program.

Self-Efficacy – The belief in one's ability to complete a task (Bandura, 1994). Used here to refer to the task of students graduating from the counseling program.

Underrepresentation – The lack of one's race being represented in the faculty, student body, and academic transactions; this may also include the intersectionality of one's race and gender.

Significance of the Study

Previous literature has focused primarily on the experiences of African American students at PWIs. Exploring the student experience in CACREP-accredited programs at HBCUs provided the stakeholders at those institutions with information regarding the unique needs of the students they serve. Research studies similar to this study revealed factors students reported which had an impact on their enrollment, engagement, satisfaction, withdrawal, or persistence (Honderich & Lloyd-Hazlett, 2015; McDougal et al., 2018; Varney et al., 2019). According to Honderich and Lloyd-Hazlett (2015), accreditation was the second most influential factor in students' decision about which university to attend because of its reputation of being associated with favorable ethical practices, environmental characteristics, and learning outcomes. Once in programs, McDougal et al. (2018) posited that culture-based organizations, positive relationships with faculty, and racial cohesion were positively correlated with student engagement. Students of color in counselor training programs shared absence of the aforementioned affected their withdrawal (Varney et al., 2019). The institutions in this study benefited from hearing directly from their students about what was important to them and what they needed.

Black students reported being silenced by overt and covert racism while in counselor training programs (Jangha et al., 2018). This study intentionally gave African American students space to share their experiences and to have their voices heard, an opportunity other scholars have advocated for in recent years (Varney et al., 2019). Doing so spoke to the underrepresentation experienced by Black students in counselor education (Zeligman et al., 2015) and the psychological implications thereof. The exploration of their experiences contributes to the literature on multiculturalism, Black student experiences, and the relationship between the two. It highlights diversity and multiculturalism, which are mentioned repeatedly throughout the CACREP standards as a requirement for accreditation (CACREP, 2015).

12

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was selected as the theoretical framework to approach the research question because of its focus on the ways race and racism affect "educational structures, practices, and discourses" (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015, p. 17). CRT is inquisitive and has been described by McCoy and Rodricks (2015) as liberatory and encouraging. The authors posited CRT could help others better understand barriers within the system of higher education that impact People of Color (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).

CRT is an analysis of race and racism in the context of higher education (Baker et al., 2015; McCoy & Rodricks). CRT was adapted from Critical Legal Theory (CLT), which was developed in the 1970's as a result of civil rights issues (Zorn, 2018). The goal was to reveal the perpetuation of racism within the legal system (Hernández, 2016). CLT evaluated legislative and court case outcomes, such as Brown v. Board of Education, to identify and uncover the oppression hidden in the language (Mambrol, 2018).

In the 1980's theorists examined how the ideals and considerations of CLT were pertinent to the higher education environment (Hernández, 2016). CRT began to uncover that racism was embedded in society and in institutions (Luke & Bangs, 2014). Since then, it has been used to expose hidden inequities in discourse and policies (Patton, 2015). Higher education was once considered the great equalizer, but upon investigation, was found to be drenched in racist assumptions (Patton, 2015). CRT explores how education continues to support the narrative of subordinate and dominate races (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). CRT brings into focus the dominant or master narratives that uplift the majority culture; these narratives have been hidden but their consequences are quite visible (Pérez, 2018).

CRT is not only concerned with race, but its relationship to power (Pulliam, 2017). The creators of the master narratives were also the authors of higher education policies and the meritocratic discourse that has oppressed individuals since their inception (Patton, 2015). By excluding diverse perspectives and continuing to teach from a lens that aligns with White experiences, the curriculum (taught by non-diverse faculty) reifies the racial injustices CRT seeks to expose and change (Patton, 2015). As a critical analytical framework, once it understands the role of race, CRT seeks to make changes to institutional structures for the betterment of society (Pulliam, 2017).

Critical race theorists agree on five main tenets that explain how race shows up and how racism is perpetuated. First, CRT acknowledges race is a social construct (Lee, 2018). Critical race theorists contend this socially constructed distinction results in tangible and impactful consequences (Lee, 2018). Second, while race is a social construct, there is a racial permanence that is undeniable (Allen, 2017). Theorists contend racism was characteristic of both people and systems (Allen, 2017). Racism was considered inherent in society, solidified by its power over political, economic, and social systems (Hiraldo, 2010). Third, people of color have a unique experience that can be told using counter-narratives (at times referred to as counter-storytelling). Counter-narratives (also referred to as counter-stories) are the first-hand accounts of people of color's experiences that often challenge master narratives by eliminating subordinance and inferiority (Allen, 2017). The stories of people of color's marginalized experiences aid in understanding how racism has impacted them in a given setting, such as a classroom (Hiraldo, 2010). Because of their experiences, it was presumed people of color had a unique voice and were experts on racism (Mambrol, 2018).

The fourth tenet was interest convergence, wherein CRT proposed that people of color only advanced when it served the interest of those in power (Pérez, 2018). CRT suggested if one analyzed the true benefits of civil rights legislation, it would be discovered that the dominant culture was such (Hiraldo, 2010). Opportunities that appeared helpful for minorities ultimately served those who were not people of color. Differential racialization is the fifth tenet of CRT. According to CRT, different groups are racialized in different ways and at different times. The way society racializes groups is based on how the majority culture will benefit most (Mambrol, 2018). Furthermore, each race has its own origins, history, and stereotypes. The latter changes over time with the characteristics associated with each race (Mambrol, 2018; Pullam, 2017).

A critical race analysis of higher education institutions highlighted the impact of curriculum and classroom exchanges (Pulliam, 2017). Allen (2017) suggested educators reevaluate their curriculum and pedagogical approaches through a CRT lens to identify which aspects fed into the master narrative. Pulliam (2017) urged teachers to include concepts such as storytelling in their classroom to help students find and use their unique voices. The omission of people of color's greatness from the curriculum was considered by CRT as a way of stifling the access and quality of education for minorities (Allen, 2017). Attention to and implementation of CRT by educators could make a difference.

By using tools created from CRT ideology, Allen (2017) posited all students would feel empowered. An environment would be created wherein each interaction in the classroom becomes an opportunity for students to be inspired, as recommended by Ladson-Billings (Mahari de Silva et al., 2018). CRT can be used to understand African American students' experiences (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Patton, 2015). Critical race analysis reveals the adjustments required for sustainable change, which for educational institutions, typically includes improving the

campus climate (Hiraldo, 2010). CRT is a social justice approach that aims to invoke change at the structural level (Pulliam, 2017).

In conceptualizing this study, the philosophical underpinnings of CRT were considered in the context of CACREP-accredited programs and HBCUs. CACREP acknowledged the complexity of the relationship between race and power in the context of higher education by instituting the following: (a) programs must recruit and maintain diverse faculty and students, (b) social and cultural diversity must be one of its eight core competencies for counselor education, and (c) must be weaved throughout its official standards (CACREP, 2015; CACREP, 2020a). African American students in CACREP-accredited programs validated the foregrounding of race in educational experiences, sharing that underrepresentation (Baker et al., 2015; Zeligman et al., 2015) and microaggressions (Ramasubramanian et al., 2017) had strong influences on their experiences. The creators of HBCUs addressed the issue of race and higher education by creating institutions specifically for the education of Black people (Abdul-Alim, 2016; Bracey, 2017). CRT was employed to understand African American students' experiences in CACREP-accredited programs that are purportedly intentional about multicultural considerations, situated in HBCUs whose foundations were built on the goal of racial equity.

Organization of the Remaining Chapters

Chapter Two will offer a review of the literature related to underrepresentation in CACREP programs, specifically as it is presented in the faculty, student body, and academic transactions. Relevant literature on concepts such as microaggression, racial battle fatigue, resilience, and self-efficacy will also be presented. Chapter Three will discuss the methodological approach, including the design of the study based on guidance from CRM and Photovoice literature. It will also address the trustworthiness of the study. Chapter Four will

16

present an analysis of the data as well as the findings of the study. The themes that emerged in responses from participants will be explored. Chapter Five will provide a summary of the findings as they relate to the research question. It will also discuss the implications of the results and offer recommendation for future studies.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of literature provides an overview of CACREP accreditation and HBCUs, followed by a discussion of the underrepresentation of African American students in graduate programs in the contexts of faculty, students, and academic transactions. Next, constructs that synthesize what previous researchers have found to be integral components of minority students' experiences are explored. Lastly, literature related to critical race theory is examined as the theoretical framework that supports the importance of the current investigation.

Program Setting

CACREP is regarded as the gold standard in counselor preparation educational programs (Eissenstat & Bohecker, 2018). It is the standard by which counselor training programs assess their credibility. In 2018, three states required graduation from a CACREP program for licensure applicants (Eissenstat & Bohecker, 2018). The authors stated by 2022, this will be a requirement for national certification through the National Board of Certified Counselors. Lu et al. (2018) reported graduates from CACREP programs scored higher on the National Counseling Exam (NCE) and experienced higher rates of gainful employment. In addition to validating the credibility and quality of counselor training programs (Lu et al., 2018), CACREP accreditation created a clear standard that enhanced the identity of the counseling profession (Eissenstat & Bohecker, 2018).

CACREP standards were a way of communicating the "collective values and professional goals" of the counseling profession (Strear et al., 2019). CACREP values include excellence in education, ethical decision-making, leadership, openness, and responsiveness to societal needs (CACREP, 2020a). Throughout its six sections, the standards outlined by CACREP described

the environment, curriculum, and behaviors that should be instilled during training to develop competent and prepared practitioners (CACREP, 2015).

Section one discussed requirements for the school environment, including specifics regarding the faculty and staff, academic unit, and institution. Section two explored the eight core curricular areas, comprised of the following: professional counseling orientation and ethical practice, social and cultural diversity, human growth and development, career development, counseling and helping relationships, group counseling and group work, assessment and testing, and research and program evaluations. Guidelines for practicum and internship were explained in section three. Evaluation of the program, faculty, staff, and students was covered in section four. Section five examined each of the counseling profession's entry-level specialty areas. Section six exclusively focused on doctoral programs in counselor education and supervision (CACREP, 2015).

The number of programs that seek CACREP accreditation has constantly increased since the organization's inception in 1981 (Strear et al., 2019). In 2017, 349 institutions offered programs with CACREP accreditation (Strear et al., 2019). As of April, 2020, that number increased to 421, according to CACREP (2020b). Of the 344 institutions that offer a CACREP accredited master's degree, eighteen identify as HBCUs (CACREP, 2020a).

HBCUs were created to provide a safe, respectable place for African Americans to not only learn but receive a quality education (College Atlas, 2017). Black students typically thrive at these institutions because of the nurturing, welcoming, and supportive environment (Bracey, 2017). The positive experiences resulted from the schools being designed intentionally and exclusively for African American students' equitable education, purposeful engagement, and successful matriculation (Beeks & Graves, 2017; Bracey, 2017). While HBCUs accept students

of all races, they are unapologetic about their studies being grounded in African American history and regality (Adul-Alim, 2016).

Black students who attended HBCUs reportedly had better experiences, higher retention and graduation rates, and were more likely to pursue graduate education as compared to their peers at predominately white institutions (Abdul-Alim, 2016; Beeks & Graves, 2017). West and Moore (2015) theorized HBCU counseling programs likely produced a significant number of African American counselors because HBCUs were the primary educators of Black students. However, graduate school options were limited for those alumnae seeking to earn a mental health counseling degree in a program that emulated their undergraduate experience, as there were less than ten CACREP-accredited master's programs that were also HBCUs. Based on findings from West and Moore's (2015) study, HBCU counselor educators suggested this sparsity was primarily due to lack of resources. The authors contended expensiveness of CACREP accreditation placed HBCUs at a disadvantage because they have limited financial resources. Therefore, a number of African American students who aspire to be counselors enroll in graduate programs at predominately white institutions (PWIs), which present a unique experience (West & Moore, 2015).

Representation

The racial climate in educational institutions has been a topic of discussion for several years and continues to have a major impact on African American students' experiences (Shavers & Moore, 2014). CACREP set forth standards that apply to all entry-level and doctoral programs seeking to obtain and maintain accreditation. CACREP standards require that programs: (a.) make an effort to diversify faculty and student body, (b.) create an inclusive learning community, and (c.) implement "strategies for identifying and eliminating barriers,

prejudices, and processes of intentional and unintentional oppression and discrimination"

(CACREP, 2015, p. 10). Yet African American students in CACREP programs reported feeling

uncomfortable, invisible, and disregarded (Baker, Gaulke, & Smith, 2015; Haynes, Stewart, &

Allen, 2016). Students reported feeling frustrated and disappointed with the lack of diversity in

the faculty, students, and curriculum (Seward, 2019).

Faculty

Similar to CACREP standards, the ACA Code of Ethics, standard F.11.a, requires

institutions and programs to maintain a diverse faculty (ACA, 2014). However, based on data

from the Department of Education, only twenty percent of full-time faculty in the United States

were persons of color in 2017 (Chancellor, 2019). In counseling programs where diversity is a

main focus, Black students continue to be underrepresented (Zeligman et al., 2015). In one

sample of 116 CACREP accredited master's programs, the Black faculty accounted for

approximately eight percent (Baggerly et al., 2017).

One group of participants were described as having a "yearning" for faculty and staff

who "look like them" (Zeligman et al., 2015, p. 71). Mentorship was identified as one of the

most important factors of Black graduate students' experiences (Baker et al., 2015; Zeligman et

al., 2015). In a hostile campus climate, mentorship offered the support and empowerment Black

women desired, as mentors were charged with considering both the psychological development

and emotional needs of those they mentored (Zeligman et al., 2015). One group of African

American women stated they preferred African American mentors because they would

understand their background. Because of the lack of representation in the faculty, it was hard for

Black women to find the type of mentor they were seeking. Limited representation in the faculty

hindered the connection that Black students felt with the university (Zeligman et al., 2015).

21

Having a diverse faculty decreased experiences of invisibility and isolation for minority students (Baggerly et al., 2017). Faculty had the power to improve the educational environment by validating student experiences and having more dialogue about topics related to diversity (Baggerly et al., 2017). In order to be competent and have effective conversations about diversity, Haynes et al. (2016) suggested multicultural preparation and training as a way to help faculty become part of the change that needs to occur.

The Code of Ethics (ACA, 2014) requires faculty supervisors in counselor training programs to be aware of how multiculturalism impacts the supervisory relationship and know to address it. Jangha et al. (2018) suggested that by addressing the role of race, supervisors created a safe space for supervisees. The authors recommended supervisors and faculty members increase their cultural competency, address microaggressions that arise in class, and intentionally empower students. By adhering to standard F.11.c of the Code of Ethics (ACA, 2014), the faculty member in the role of a supervisor infuses multiculturalism in their supervision practices.

Student Body

In 2013, ACA reported only 7.7 percent of their members were African American (Baker et al., 2015). While the count is limited to the organization's membership and the number of people who reported their ethnicity, it offers a sense of the low number of students matriculating through counselor training programs to become professional counselors. The Code of Ethics charges counselor education programs with ensuring that their student body is diverse (ACA, 2014). The number of African American students enrolled in CACREP-accredited counselor training programs has continued to account for only eighteen percent over the last few years (CACREP, 2018). One student, in a study by Baker et al. (2015), shared that on more than one occasion, she was the only African American in her class.

22

Isolation was a common theme in the literature, when researchers investigated the psychological factors that were part of Black graduate students' experiences (Haynes et al., 2016; Janghan et al., 2018; Zeligman et al., 2015). As a result of limited racial diversity on college campuses and a lack of diversity in the field, the fear and experience of isolation was present from the very beginning of the program, if not before (Zeligman et al., 2015). The authors noticed some of the women appeared to accept inequality and racism would continue to plague their experiences. As such, it was difficult for students to integrate and connect within the program (Baker et al., 2015). Green et al. (2018) posited that graduate school was "psychologically taxing and emotionally isolating" for Black women (p. 298).

Isolation led to either tokenism or invisibility (Haynes et al., 2016). Tokenism is the tendency for students and faculty to depend on students of color to speak for their entire race (Haynes et al., 2016). Students felt they were expected to be experts on their entire ethnicity when certain topics were presented during discussions related to multiculturalism. Conversely, other students felt that they were invisible because of their race. They reported experiences of feeling not valued or recognized, subjecting them to an inferior status. Instead of being empowered to "exercise liberation" in the classroom, they were required to adapt and cope with the status of inferiority placed upon them by being disregarded (Haynes et al., 2016, p. 381). This adopted deficit thinking was affirmed by what the authors called *academic transactions* (Haynes et al., 2016).

Academic Transactions

Academic transactions are classroom occurrences such as discussions, the curriculum, and faculty supervision (Haynes et al., 2016). One Black male student recounted a discussion during which one of his White counterparts inquired whether he (the Black student) ever felt like

an animal. The African American student felt it was culturally insensitive (Baker et al., 2015).

Multicultural insensitivity was displayed during class discussions with peers and inappropriate

dialogue went unaddressed by the instructor, leaving students feeling silenced and unsupported

(Jangha et al., 2018). Because of stereotype threats, Black women often chose silence in order to

avoid confirming the Angry Black Woman stereotype (Jangha et al., 2018). Uninformed

comments or situations that silenced Black students perpetuated unspoken master narratives and

promoted false inferiority of Black students (Haynes et al., 2016). When unaddressed, the

derisive comments and accompanying assumptions go unchanged (Hayne et al., 2016). An

instructor who fails to disrupt master narratives allows microaggressions to continue.

   According to Haynes et al. (2016), master narratives were responsible for the perceived

inferiority of minorities because they were supported throughout academic transactions,

sustained by hidden curricula, and silenced the oppressed. Master narratives resulted in African

American students feeling "inadequate and expendable" (Haynes et al., 2016, p. 381).

Microaggressions communicated by master narratives caused great distress whether knowingly

or subconsciously internalized by African American students. Textbooks written from the voice

of master narratives accounted for 70-95% of instruction in the classroom (Haynes et al., 2016).

They typically have a tone of prominence when referencing European history, while minimizing

the accomplishments of others. This narrative of superiority can be debilitating for Black

students (Haynes et al., 2016). Textbooks often served as another reminder that the field of

counseling is predominantly White (Baker et al., 2015).

   Jangha et al. (2018) highlighted the lack of diversity in the curriculum related to

counseling theories and the absence of recognition of the many contributions of minority

counselors. To train culturally competent counselors, Zeligman et al. (2015) proposed that a

culturally diverse curriculum is essential. The authors contended that not only is the lack thereof a disservice to the competence of future counselors, it disempowers minority students. Students described their experience as marginalizing when the course content was designed for dominant culture (Seward, 2019). The curriculum itself can be a hegemonic device when master narratives go undisrupted (Haynes et al., 2016). One group of African American women explained how they were forced to learn how to disrupt the master narrative. By persevering as students and becoming counselor educators, they represented a counter-narrative. They taught using critical-inclusive pedagogy that served as opposition discourse which demonstrated and maintained visibility and inclusion of all students. The change was possible because they became the instructors they needed when they were being inundated with exclusive curriculum (Baker et al., 2015). The idea that the Black women's discourse was "counter" to the master narrative was consistent with the perspective that research and literature developed by Black women was "atypical" in a discipline where most disseminators of knowledge are White (Green et al., 2018, p. 299).

Constructs

Feedback from minority students revealed themes of physical and mental factors related to their experiences in higher education. The way African American students received and responded to their experiences was conceptualized by exploring the following psychological constructs: microaggressions, racial battle fatigue, resilience, and self-efficacy.

Microaggressions

The term microaggression was originally coined by Chester Pierce to describe individuals' experiences of racism in the media (Wilson, 2017). One of the common definitions used is that of Derald and David Sue, who characterized microaggressions as "brief, everyday

25

exchanges that send denigrating messages" to minority groups whether intentionally or unintentionally (Lilly et al., 2018, p. 87; Wilson, 2017, p. 1). Racial microaggressions are those subtle, unconscious communications that send denigrating messages to people of color (Ramasubramanian et al., 2017).

According to Wilson, microaggression is an umbrella term that consists of three categorical subtypes: microassaults, microinsults, and miroinvalidations (2017). Microassaults (i.e., using a racial epithet) are typically more blatant and overt; for example, using a racial epithet to insult someone. Malott, Paone, Schaefle, and Gao (2015) offered the example of intentionally serving a White customer before a customer of color. Microinsults are usually unintentional, but are rude and demeaning to a particular aspect of a person's identity (Malott et al., 2015; Wilson, 2017). An example is someone expressing surprise that a person of color speaks well. Microinvalidations disregard one's thoughts, feelings, and experiences (Malott et al., 2015; Wilson, 2017). The most common example is colorblindness as it relates to race/ethnicity, because it ignores the "reality of racism" (Malott et al., 2015, p. 388). These subtle forms of racism have become more relevant in recent years because of the lack of social acceptability of overt racism (Ramasubramanian et al., 2017).

Impact of Microaggressions

The consequences of experiencing microaggression range from mental health issues to academic performance (Malott et al., 2015). Though covert, recipients of microaggressions on college campuses reported feeling their impact deeply, at times requiring self-advocacy and student-led protests (Lilly et al., 2018). Ramasubramanian et al. (2017) offered academic performance was one of many ways microaggressions negatively impacted students and explained the external factors that interfere with performance were exacerbated by experiencing

microaggressions. At-risk behaviors including alcohol and substance misuse were associated

with these experiences, increasing the rates of attrition (Lilly et al., 2018). Additional factors

that affected performance were physiological responses to microaggressions. Wilson (2017)

contended that high blood pressure and sleeping problems contributed to microaggressions.

Exhaustion and burnout were evident in students who reported being recipients of

microaggressions (Linder et al., 2015). The authors suggested physically distancing themselves

in the classroom was one way students responded to microaggressions.

In addition to physical isolation in the learning environment, students felt ostracized by

others (or themselves) as a result of microaggressions (Lilly et al., 2018). Lerner and

Fulambarker (2018) proclaimed microaggressions that persisted in the classroom were rooted in

social identities and privilege which translated into behaviors that made students of color feel

targeted. Students reported feeling dismissed by their instructor, which filled them with feelings

of inferiority and invisibility (Linder et al., 2015). Lukes and Bangs (2014) concurred that too

often, classrooms were sites of oppression. Adverse psychological effects were the result of the

injustices that manifested as microaggressions (Lilly et al., 2018; Ramasubramanian et al., 2017;

Wislon, 2017).

Depression was the most commonly reported mental health disorder identified as a

consequence of microaggressions (Lilly et al., 2018; Wilson, 2017). Posttraumatic Stress

Disorder, Substance Abuse Disorder, anxiety disorders, and eating disorders were also reported

as being associated (Wilson, 2017). Lilly et al. (2018) listed self-worth, self-doubt, decreased

ability to cope, and stress as forms of psychological turmoil recipients of microaggressions

experienced. The four psychological dilemmas imposed upon people of color by

microaggressions are as follows: sociodemographic realities, invisibility of unintentional

expression of bias, perceived minimal harm of microaggression, and catch-22 of responding to microaggressions (Wilson, 2017). These four dilemmas were consistent with the findings presented by Lilly et al. (2018), which demonstrated after experiencing microaggressions, the recipients questioned their experience and tried to make sense of it, leading to psychological distress.

One study indicated African American students reported the highest frequency and most distress from microaggressions, correlated with an increased likelihood of developing depression (Lilly et al., 2018). This extends beyond classroom interactions. According to Linder et al. (2015), students in graduate programs reported that perpetrators of the microaggressions they experienced were representatives from various levels of the institution. Microaggressions from higher levels persisted via nonverbal communications that supported unfair hierarchies and aforementioned master narratives (Lukes & Bangs, 2014). There was a demand from students that institutions address racial injustice that permeates their educational systems (Lerner & Fulambarker, 2018).

Racial Battle Fatigue

Acuff (2018) defined racial battle fatigue (RBF) as "exhaustion and stress associated with racial microaggressions that causes African Americans to experience various forms of mental, emotional, and physical strain" (p. 175). Initially coined by William Smith (2008) as an explanation of Black men's experiences, RBF identifies three interconnected stress responses: psychological, physiological, and behavioral. He contended that RBF was the fatigue that resulted from the constant use of energy used to cope with and fight racism. Additionally, RBF remained activated due to the continuous threat, expectation, and experiences of microaggressions (Chancellor, 2019). The research of Husband (2016) found recurring exposure

to microaggressions in unsupportive environments contributed to students' constant coping and ultimately a depletion of their psychological resources.

The battle with racial stress faced by African American students was an indicator that racial issues in college environments continued to go unresolved (Husband, 2016). In one study, a group of minority doctoral students in a Counselor Education program reported feeling pressured to "suppress [their] ethnic identity" so that they would align with the dominant cultural standards (Brown & Grothaus, 2019, p. 211). The lack of diversity in programs caused Black students to feel frustrated and like they were intruding in an unwelcoming environment (Seward, 2019). According to Chancellor (2019), there were likely to be physical stress responses, as RBF is both a psychological and physiological response.

Smith (2008) posited when experiencing RBF, a person's body may respond as if he or she were being physically attacked. Other physiological responses included shortness of breath, grinding of teeth, increased heart rate, and perspiration (Chancellor, 2019; Smith, 2008). Psychological reactions to racism included decreased self-esteem, hopelessness, resentment, decreased life satisfaction, defensiveness, and fear (Husband, 2016; Smith, 2008). Additionally, Smith (2008) and Wilson (2017) noted behavioral responses including John Henryism, stereotype threat, increased alcohol and drug use, quick temper, and decreased academic performance (Smith, 2008; Wilson, 2017).

Resilience

Resilience is defined as being able to adapt, reframe, grow, and persist through adversity (Dollarhide et al., 2018). For Black students in counseling programs, resilience manifests as persistence, engagement, and graduation, which result from employing various coping skills.

John Henryism is an active coping skill predominately used by African Americans that supports resilience.

John Henryism was originally developed by Sherman James in 1983 to explore the relationship between coping styles and blood pressure, based on the story of John Henry, which dates back to the 1870's (Bennett & Duncan, 2020). According to the authors, John Henry was a Black steel driver who competed in a race against a steam-drill machine in the formation of a railroad. John Henry beat the machine but dropped dead shortly thereafter, presumably from mental and physical fatigue. Sherman James understood the story to be reflective of the link between coping and psychological stress to hypertension (Bennett & Duncan, 2020). He described John Henryism as a psychological response to psychosocial stressors and persistence in the face of adversity (Bronder et al., 2013). The exertion of extra effort to cope with environmental stressors was characteristic of John Henryism (Annalakshmi & Venkatesan, 2018). Hudson et al. (2015) contended that John Henryism is the predisposition to cope with racial barriers and race-related stressors.

This form of active coping was often related to an increased sense of control and determination alike (Bronder et al., 2013), communicating that the mental health implications for its use may also be positive. Improved sense of dignity and one's meaning in life were associated with John Henryism, as purported by the authors. It was studied as a predictor of depressive symptomology and was identified to be negatively correlated thereto (Bronder et al., 2013; Hudson et al., 2015). These findings illustrate the strength and perseverance of African Americans, which includes Black students. Given the race-related stress that literature reported was perpetuated in academic environments, Black students would likely respond with John Henryism, imbuing them with determination and commitment to succeed.

By default, the response to adversity was a high-effort coping mechanism that not only promoted resilience, but also had a positive impact on individuals' psychological well-being (Bennett & Duncan, 2020; Bronder et al., 2013; Hudson et al., 2015). The conversion of coping to a source of empowerment was akin to altering negative stress responses, which Bandura (1994) contended would improve one's self-efficacy.

Self-Efficacy

Bandura's (1994) seminal research defined self-efficacy as "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (p. 2). According to Bandura (1994), the following factors influenced self-efficacy: mastery of experiences, social modeling, social persuasion, and physiological states. Mastery of experiences was the confidence that came from accomplishing goals. With every completed task, confidence gradually increased. Social modeling was the idea that one's belief in self was positively influenced by seeing others in similar situations excel. Social persuasion was based on the premise that being persuaded verbally encouraged one to put forth more effort. The physiological state was people's perceptions of their physical and emotional reactions. Bandura (1994) suggested all of these factors converge to produce one's perceived self-efficacy, which was interconnected with the goals people set, the amount of effort they put forth, and their resilience.

Due to its positive correlation with counseling competence, Rabaino et al. (2017) recommended counseling programs focus more on concepts that build and predict self-efficacy. Bandura (1994) made the following recommendations for increasing self-efficacy directly related to his four influential factors: be intentional about cultivating situations in which they would succeed; supply examples of extremely similar people who have succeeded at the same task; give

feedback that supports the idea that they have the capability to succeed; and provide coping skills for stress and reframe experiences.

Self-awareness and overall wellness were predictors of self-efficacy for master's counseling students in a CACREP program (Rabaino et al., 2017). Taken a step further, Butts and Gutierrez (2018) expanded self-awareness and identified dispositional mindfulness as significant to the development of counselors' (in training) self-efficacy. They defined dispositional mindfulness as the present moment awareness that came from meditation. The construct slightly oppositional to wellness, offered by Butts and Gutierrez (2018), was personal distress. Personal distress was described as discomfort from emotional situations, where one's ability to manage said discomfort was negatively correlated to counseling students' self-efficacy. The authors recommended programs teach their students how to regulate their emotions to prevent interference with clinical work and develop self-efficacy (Butts & Gutierrez, 2018). Counseling programs appeared to be the problem and the solution; the underrepresentation, microaggressions, and psychological distress were direct results of campus climate and experiences in educational environments (Lukes & Bangs, 2014; Seward, 2019; Shavers & Moore, 2014).

"Hostility from the majority" compounded by "minority invisibility," results in the development of an externally-influenced perception of self (Meer, 2019, p. 52). Out of oppression, African Americans emerge with "black soul" (Meer, 2019, p. 52). With the ever-present awareness of two-ness, Black people construct an identity based how they are seen through the *white gaze* (Pittman, 2017). According to Walker (2019), this double consciousness is not a true self-consciousness, rather it is the result of an internalization of negative perspectives. Du Bois (1994), credited with coining the term double consciousness, described it

32

as an awareness of one's twoness as a Negro and an American. Through the dark veil of double consciousness, African Americans seek to re-evaluate and redefine one's true self (Du Bois, 1994).

Summary

This review of the literature focused on the various experiences African American students have in higher education. It addressed underrepresentation, common psychological constructs, and recommendations from previous studies. A brief overview of CACREP accreditation and HBCUs was provided. While there is literature that has explored the experiences of African American students at PWIs and in doctoral programs, there is a paucity of research that investigated the experiences of Black students in CACREP master's programs at HBCUs. Previous literature provided information on the adverse impact that underrepresentation in faculty, peers, and academic transactions had on the experiences of students. A multitude of psychological responses ranging from invisibility to resilience resulted from said experiences. In the next chapter, the methodology will be presented. Chapter Three will explain the qualitative approach used and will outline the processes for selecting participants, collecting data, and analyzing data for this research study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African American students in CACREP-accredited master's programs at HBCUs. In the interest of Black students having idiosyncratic experiences in education (Berry, 2015), a qualitative approach was implemented, specifically phenomenological research, to gain a deeper understanding of the universal essence of the participants' experiences (Creswell et al., 2007; Dortch, 2016). Individual interviews and focus groups were used in the study. The methodological approach allowed each participant to share their narrative based on the meaning they made of their experiences (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015) by integrating critical race methodology (CRM) and photovoice. CRM is a methodological approach aimed at honoring the experiences of minority groups through invitational queries and the intentional provision of space for their storytelling (Linder et al., 2015). In response to curated prompts, photovoice invites participants to take photographs and narrate their attributed meaning (Latz et al., 2016). For this study, data was gathered and analyzed using the practices congruent with the aforementioned methodological approach. This chapter provides a description of the research process.

Research Design

Phenomenological Research

Qualitative methodology was chosen because it granted the researcher the opportunity to learn from participants (Jangha et al., 2018). A phenomenological approach was used in order to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning participants made of their experiences (Dortch, 2016), as they were regarded as the experts (Jangha et al., 2018). Pioneered by Edmund Husserl, phenomenological research seeks to describe participants' experiences based on first-person

accounts (Ellis, 2016). Over time, phenomenology has evolved. Two types of phenomenological research have emerged: hermeneutical and transcendental (or psychological). The former, researched in-depth by van Manen, focuses on the lived experiences of participants as well as the interpretation of their lived experience (Alase, 2017). Moustakas is credited with much of the literature on transcendental phenomenology, which is concerned exclusively with the description of participants' lived experiences (Alase, 2017). This study used the hermeneutical approach to provide a description and interpretation of the essence of the participants' experiences.

Critical Race Methodology

CRM guided the analysis of the meaning participants make of their experiences. The appropriateness of this analytical approach lies in the foregrounding of race in this study. The purpose of CRM in the context of higher education is to celebrate the perspective of minority students, in part to combat the deficit narrative that typically describes their experiences (Linder et al., 2015), but mostly to understand and empower students of color (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002), CRM operates from the foundation of five key elements:

(a.) intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination,

(b.) challenge to dominant ideology,

(c.) commitment to social justice,

(d.) centrality of experiential knowledge, and

(e.) transdisciplinary approach.

With these key elements established, CRM seeks to distinguish, analyze, and ultimately alter the function of race and racism in higher education by creating space for counter-stories to develop and emerge (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). When collecting data via interviews, CRM is

35

intentional about engaging participants in storytelling (Linder et al., 2015). Green et al. (2018) supported the use of storytelling and contended that marginalized people provided an "othered perspective" by sharing their valuable experiential knowledge (p. 300). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) warned creating counter-stories only in direct opposition to master narratives allows the latter to "dominate the discourse" (p. 32). Counter-stories garner deeper meanings from subjects (Smith et al., 2017) and give voice to their lived experience (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015) in the participants' own words. Counter-stories legitimize the participants' experiences while simultaneously dismantling the denigrating master narrative of oppression, deficiency, and subordination (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).

Photovoice

Photovoice is a technique that enables communication through photography. Developed by Wang, Burris, and colleagues (1997), photovoice contains three theoretical underpinnings: (a) critical consciousness, (b) feminism and voice, and (c) participatory documentary photography (Latz et al., 2016). In one of their earlier research projects, Carolyn C. Wang and Mary Ann Burris asked their participants to document concepts such as love and worry, but realized the photos alone were insufficient and incorporated an explanation of the photographs (Latz & Mulvihill, 2017). The combination of the photos and participants being given a space to voice their life experiences led the name to be updated from photo novella to photovoice.

In photovoice, photographs are used to represent, communicate, and give voice to the concerns of a person in the community of interest (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). It is considered participatory research (Wang & Burris, 1997) that employs participants as co-researchers because of their responsibility of taking the photographs and attributing meaning to them (Latz et al., 2016). Participants are given well-designed prompts (which at times they assist

36

in developing) to which they are to respond with photographs (Latz & Mulvihill, 2017). The photographs are taken in the participants' community, enabling them to think critically in a familiar space (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). With the researcher, participants/co-researchers describe the photographs and interpret their meaning (Latz et al., 2017). According to Latz et al. (2017), only the narration offered by the participant is considered data for the research study, not the photographs.

Wang and Burris (1997) offered three primary goals for photovoice: (a) foster participatory research that documents the strength and concerns of one's community, (b) initiate the discussion of photographs to elicit critical dialogue about the community among its members, and (c) impact social change by reaching policy makers (Latz et al., 2016; Wang & Burris, 1997). Similar to CRM and counter-stories, photovoice creates space for the voices of marginalized people (Latz & Mulvihill, 2017). The immediacy that results from the visual images adds depth to the data and amplifies the participants' voices (Latz et al., 2016; Wang & Burris, 1997).

Selection of Participants

Participants in this study were selected based on their enrollment status in one of the twenty-five CACREP-accredited master's programs at HBCUs. According to Moser and Korstjens (2018), the sample size for phenomenological research studies is usually less than ten, depending on the research question(s), data collection strategy, and sampling method. Qualitative studies often select a small and purposeful sample (Campbell et al., 2020). Doing so ensured that the selected participants will "yield appropriate and useful information" (Campbell et al., 2020, p. 2-3). Purposeful criterion sampling was used to ensure participants met predetermined criteria

(Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Qualified participants were required to meet the following criteria

for this study:

1. Self-identify as Black/African American.

2. Be enrolled in a CACREP accredited master's program at an HBCU.

3. Be willing to provide honest responses, have their interview recorded, and complete
   any required documentation.

4. Be eighteen years or older.

To be granted permission to conduct the proposed research, the researcher submitted an

application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). To solicit potential participants, the

researcher sent an invitation letter (Appendix A) via email to department chairs or coordinators

of counseling programs and asked them to forward the recruitment letter (Appendix B) to their

students, which included a link to the screening survey (Appendix C). The researcher located the

program leaderships' emails from CACREP's website. The students who completed the

screening survey and were deemed eligible to participate were contacted via email with an

informed consent (Appendix D) and an invitation to schedule a one-hour interview held via the

online platform Zoom. Once the interview was scheduled and the informed consent was returned

to the researcher, participants received an email with the Zoom link to access the meeting.

Instrumentation

The study sought to understand student experiences through virtual, semi-structured, in-

depth interviews that were recorded and later transcribed. The interview questions were

developed by the researcher, guided by both CRM and photovoice. The participants were

considered researchers because of their provision and interpretation of their photographs (Latz &

38

Mulvihill, 2017). One aspect of the researcher's role was to design the interview questions and conduct the interview, positioning the researcher as the key instrument for data collection (Creswell, 2014). The role of the researcher was to ask questions that invited participants to share their thoughts and feelings in order to convey the participants' stories (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Qualitative researchers maintain the responsibility of acknowledging and bracketing their biases to capture the essence of the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2007).

In the interest of CRT being used as the theoretical framework for the study, CRM was the methodological approach employed. The semi-structured interviews integrated recommendations from CRM regarding the language used in the interview prompts. Creswell (2014) noted that often phenomenological studies require multiple interviews in order to grasp the meaning being conveyed. The overview provided before the study informed the participants of the possibility of a second interview and an electronic member check.

<h3 style="text-align:center">Data Collection</h3>

The researcher and participant joined the virtual meeting at the scheduled time. The interviews were conducted by the researcher. When the researcher joined the Zoom call, Zoom immediately began recording the interview. The participants were reminded that they could decide at any point to no longer participate in the study. The researcher referred to a list of interview questions (Appendix E) and prompts (Appendix F) created based on CRM and photovoice, respectively. The purpose of the interviews was to gain an understanding of the students' experiences, consistent with the aim of phenomenological studies.

Individual Interviews

The researcher conducted a semi-structured, in-depth interview with each participant. The broad, semi-structured interview method the researcher used allowed space for the participant to interject additional information they wished to share to be presented naturally. This format was optimal for capturing what the participants communicated as most meaningful about the phenomenon of interest.

Focus Groups

The researcher offered participants the option to interview in a focus group format, which would have allowed multiple participants to be interviewed simultaneously. One of the benefits of focus groups, according to Queirós et al. (2017), is that researchers receive an increased amount of information due to the multiple perspectives shared. By using this method, researchers are able to obtain detailed information regarding individuals as well as the group (Queirós et al., 2017). All of the data was collected via individual interviews.

The researcher asked the interview questions, and the participants shared their responses. The photovoice prompts were reviewed at the end of the interview and sent to participants via email afterwards, offering an opportunity for participants to share and provide insight about their photograph(s). At the end of the interviews, participants were provided with the contact information for the researcher's dissertation Chair, to address any concerns. The recording and transcripts of the interviews were saved to a protected folder on the researcher's personal computer and to an external drive kept in a locked box, in a locked closet, at the researcher's residence. After the allotted time, the recordings and transcripts will be deleted. A pseudonym was assigned to each participant and the researcher ensured any identifying information was removed.

Data Analysis

The recordings of the interviews were transcribed using the Zoom transcript feature software. The researcher edited the transcripts, as the Zoom software's transcription was insufficient. Once correctly transcribed, the researcher took notes while reading through the transcripts, re-watched the video recordings, and reviewed the submitted photographs. Creswell et al. (2007) offered phenomenological research required researchers to identify significant statements and "collapse" them (p. 255). When reviewing the transcripts, common phrases and words were identified and highlighted during the coding process. Creswell (2014) described coding as bracketing chunks of data and creating categories. Participants' narration of the meaning attributed to the photographs was included in the coding process, as Latz and Mulvihill (2017) stated photovoice contributions were to be coded and interpreted like other qualitative data. Consistent with CRM, attention was paid to mentions of race and racism when coding (Linder et al., 2015). Categories were developed based on commonalities and repeated information found in the transcripts. According to Alase (2017), the codes and repeated phrases can "mean the 'core essence' of the participants' learned experiences" (p. 16).

The interview transcripts were re-read and the recordings were replayed. Some of the data was winnowed to aggregate it into themes (Creswell, 2014). The researcher interpreted the findings and decided how the identified themes were represented in the description of the interviews (Creswell, 2014). A thick description of the essence of the various experiences was presented (Creswell et al., 2007), giving voice to the participants' counter-stories.

The participants were sent a summary of their interview and themes from the researcher's understanding and point of view. How the researcher analyzed their counter-story was also shared with each participant. As part of the member checking process, participants were invited

to make amendments, ask questions, provide clarifications or add to their narratives. The

researcher then compiled the themes and wrote a final report based on the themes and supported

by participants' direct quotes. A qualitative auditor was employed to contribute to the study's

trustworthiness. The qualitative auditor was a doctoral student with qualitative research training.

Trustworthiness

Rigor of the proposed research study was ensured by addressing the trustworthiness

criteria, namely, the dependability, credibility, and transferability of information. Dependability

was established in the study by coding and re-coding. Triangulation was implemented,

corroborating the memos and transcripts, which helped warrant credibility. Use of the photos

was used as an additional triangulation method. To further establish credibility, the researcher

engaged in member checking, a process in which the participants judged the accuracy of the

researcher's interpretation (Creswell, 2013). Memoing continued to be used as a bracketing tool.

The researcher also engaged in reflexivity using the Framework of Researcher Racial and

Cultural Positionality, developed by H. Richard Milner (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). By

providing rich, thick descriptions (presented in the next chapter), the researcher empowered the

reader of the research study to determine its transferability.

Summary

The experiences of African American students in CACREP-accredited master's programs

at HBCUs was investigated in this study. A phenomenological approach was used in

combination with CRM and photovoice. Data collection and analysis followed the structure of

qualitative inquiry, with the use of semi-structured interviews and coding processes. Data

analysis also included the lens of CRM to determine the role of race in the participants'

42

experiences. Photovoice was implemented as an additional method of triangulation, involving

the use of photographs as a method for participants to describe their experiences. The

trustworthiness of the study was ensured by various techniques including coding, triangulation,

bracketing, and reflexivity. The goal was to give voice to participants' counter-stories and allow

for the emergence of a rich description of the universal essence of the participants' experiences.

Chapter Four will present the findings from the study. Themes and subthemes that arose from the

data will be described using direct quotes from the participants.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African American students in CACREP-accredited master's programs at HBCUs. In this chapter, research findings from the individual interviews will be presented along with data gathered through the photovoice methodology. The themes that emerged from the interviews and photographs will be included. One primary research question that guided the investigation: What are the lived experiences of African American students in CACREP-accredited master's counseling programs at HBCUs?

After coding the data, the following five themes were identified: relationship dynamics, climate, being Black, scholarship, and COVID. Although race was mentioned in various themes, it was highlighted as a separate theme (being Black) in order to pay special attention to those experiences, consistent with CRT and CRM, which were the study's theoretical framework and one of its methodologies, respectively.

Participant Profiles

All interviews were video and audio recorded using the Zoom platform between December, 2020 and February, 2021. The researcher sent invitations to representatives of each of the twenty-five eligible counseling programs as well as to individuals in her network to recruit participants. All participants were a result of those invitations. Once participants were identified as eligible to participate in the study based on the screening survey, they were sent informed consents. Once the signed consent forms were returned, interviews were scheduled. The recorded interviews were transcribed by Zoom. Due to inconsistent transcriptions, the researcher listened to each interview, correcting the transcriptions. Interviews and identifying information were stored on a flash drive, locked in a box in a locked closet and in a protected file on the

researcher's personal computer. A pseudonym was assigned to each participant. The researcher interviewed a total of seven individuals, one of which did not meet the participation criteria. That interview was neither transcribed nor included in the results of this study.

Six participants' interviews that described their experiences in CACREP-accredited master's programs were analyzed and coded, along with the photographs they submitted in response to two photovoice prompts. All participants attended the same HBCU. Five of the six participants were Black women and one was a Black male. Five represented the Clinical Mental Health Counseling specialty and one was in the School Counseling program. All participants were between the ages of 21-49 years of age. The pseudonyms and ten-year age range were implemented in an attempt to protect the participants' identities. The pseudonyms given were: Tammy, Justin, Jasmine, Sherri, Alexis, and Joy. What follows are brief descriptions of the participants.

Tammy is married with one child. She is in the 30-39 age range and identifies as a Black woman. She attended a PWI for her undergraduate studies and is making a career change to the counseling field. Her specialty is Clinical Mental Health Counseling.

Justin identifies as a Black male and as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. He is in the 21-29 age range. He attended an HBCU for his undergraduate program. His specialty is School Counseling.

Jasmine is a Black woman between the ages of 21-29. She attended an HBCU for a portion of her undergraduate studies. She is a military veteran and is currently in a Clinical Mental Health Counseling program.

45

Sherri is between the ages of 40-49. She identifies as a Black woman. She received her undergraduate degree from an HBCU. She is in a Clinical Mental Health Counseling program.

Alexis is a bi-racial woman who identifies as Black. She is in the 21-29 age range. Alexis has never attended an HBCU prior to her Clinical Mental Health Counseling program.

Joy is a Black woman between the ages of 40-49. She is married with two young children. She graduated from an HBCU with her bachelor's degree and is now in a Clinical Mental Health Counseling program. Counseling is her second career.
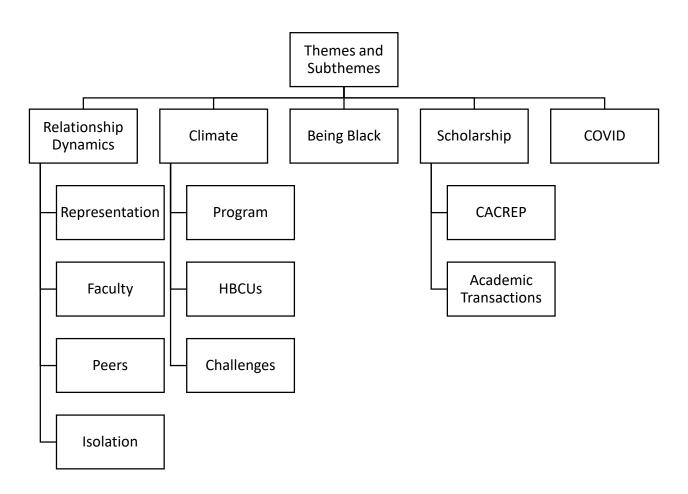
Table 1

Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	Age Range	Counseling Program Specialty	Undergraduate Experience
Tammy	30-39	Clinical Mental Health Counseling	PWI
Justin	21-29	School Counseling	HBCU
Jasmine	21-29	Clinical Mental Health Counseling	HBCU
Sherri	40-49	Clinical Mental Health Counseling	HBCU
Alexis	21-29	Clinical Mental Health Counseling	PWI

Guided by the research question, "What are the lived experiences of African American students in CACREP-accredited master's counseling programs at HBCUs?" the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews to reveal the universal essence of the phenomenon and the counter-stories of the participants. Eleven codes, consolidated into five themes (and nine subthemes), emerged. The themes and subthemes are displayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Themes and Subthemes

Themes

After coding the repetitive concepts and words, the codes were grouped into themes based on similarities in points of reference. In the forthcoming exploration of the themes, they are defined and supported by direct quotes from the participants. Interview responses as well as photovoice data are included in the presentation of data for each theme, where applicable. The photovoice and interview responses collaboratively tell the participants' counter-stories. All six participants were interviewed; four participants submitted photographs in response to the photovoice prompts.

Relationship Dynamics

When exploring the participants' experiences in their master's programs, there was recurring mention of the various relationships that have been formed and nurtured during their matriculation. Participants shared ways they were and were not represented in their faculty and peers. Relationships with faculty and peers were underscored by experiences of connectedness, accessibility, and isolation.

Representation

Based on the literature, Black students in master's counseling programs are often underrepresented in both their faculty and peers (Seward, 2019). While Black faculty represents a small percentage of faculty in CACREP programs, the participants shared they had a different experience in their program. Tammy said, "So all the faculty is Black," including the chair of the department (a Black woman). However, she stated there is only one male professor. Jasmine stated, "mostly Black women…are the spearheads…in our program."

Regarding their identities as Black women, Tammy, Jasmine, Alexis, and Joy were "over represented," "very represented," "definitely represented," and simply "represented," respectively. Joy shared she was "a member of a sorority" and "half of her faculty" were members of the same sorority. She also felt "represented in…the content of what [they] discussed" in class.

Relative to her peers, Tammy mentioned she was in the majority in regards to gender, as "there are only three Black males in the cohort." "There are only two males" in Alexis's cohort. She identified as "heterosexual and so that that shows up." Justin iterated that as "as a Black queer individual, you don't necessarily outwardly see yourself" and that he was "naturally an other," but felt comfort in knowing he had one queer professor. Due to "individuals [living] at intersections," Justin supported "more representation of all of us." Joy did not feel represented in her peers, as she was "with a cohort that is extremely young…like eight years younger than" her. Jasmine submitted selfies (photographs that she took of herself) with varying facial expressions. In the first two she was smiling, which she said was a representation of her being "thankful to have others that identify with the importance of who" she is.

Faculty

The participants spoke to the relationship dynamics between themselves and the faculty members in their program. Ability to communicate with faulty, interactions with faculty, and the impact of a representative faculty were discussed. Tammy described her relationship with faculty as "egalitarian…very equal," stating she felt like she was "friends with [her] teachers." Alexis stated she knew she had "people who are going to support [her], professors and things like that." Joy felt that her relationship with the faculty was a "partnership." However, she "would like to have a deeper connection with the faculty." Joy also felt "some of the faculty have not been as

49

strong as I would like. And as professional as I would like." She stated the dean "is really, really smart and he's very accessible…He is the bar that [she] would love to see in [her professors]."

The participants highlighted the accessibility of the faculty. Justin, Tammy, Joy, and Sherri said the faculty provided students with their personal contact information. Jasmine and Alexis reported on the faculty's responsiveness via email. Tammy, Joy, and Jasmine stated they have been able to express their concerns to faculty. Sherri recalled, "I have had a run in [with] a certain individual, but when I voice my pain and my concerns, it was rectified." Joy said she "had some, you know, real sit downs."

About the faculty, Tammy said, "I've never come into a situation where they weren't empathetic towards me…warm and accommodating." Tammy and Justin both felt their faculty were intentional in their interactions with students. Justin added his faculty "are always trying to help everybody." Jasmine said that her faculty "go the extra mile" and she does not "feel as though [she] would have gotten that just voluntarily anywhere else." Sherri said it stood out to her "how [her] department chairperson took an interest in [her]." She felt like her faculty "want[ed] to see [them] be successful." Joy said, "building the relationships with the faculty has been a deep, like, pleasure."

Jasmine discussed the significance of studying mental health under Black faculty, stating, "it's extremely important that I get that information from people that look like me because we already are kind of nonexistent in the field." Joy shared a similar sentiment: "I figure the best preparation to serve the population I want to serve would come from the people who look like the population." Also, that there are "benefits of…being in a program with faculty who genuinely care about Black people."

50

Peers

In the literature, Haynes et al. (2016) stated African American students felt invisible because of their race. In contrast, two participants of this study, Tammy and Justin, shared they feel "seen" in their program. When asked about his peers, Justin responded, "Oh my classmates, I love." Jasmine said that her cohort is "really close" like "another family." She said they have "been to dinner… to each other's baby shower so yeah divorces and marriages." Sherri and her cohort "love[d] each other even from day one. [They] are like family." Alexis shared she had "gotten close to two girls in particular and…having them there to be able to just remind me like why I started, it's been really good."

The primary method of communication between the participants and their peers was an application called GroupMe. The messaging app allowed the participants to stay in touch with their cohort. Justin and Jasmine referenced that their peers stayed connected via a group chat where they shared resources, opportunities, and, according to Alexis, "keep each other encouraged."

Isolation due to lack of representation impacted one participant's relationship with her peers. Joy did not "feel as connected to [her] cohort" since they call her "Mama [her name]." She felt "professorial" and like a "mentor" to her peers. She said, "I feel extremely different. So that's where I don't feel represented. I don't feel like there are married with multiple kids, you know…thus is a career shift for me…I wasn't a psychology major."

Isolation

The literature suggested Black students felt isolated in graduate programs because they are in the minority (Jangha et al., 2018). Participants spoke to isolation manifesting as a result of

varying factors, none of which were the same for any two participants. Justin said, "I won't say isolated or connected…because of the people that are in my life that are of so many vast experiences, particularly within the LBGT community…I'm usually definitely the other voice and I'm okay with that." Justin also noted he does not "feel that [they] are super, super connected." He stated he "feels isolated because there hasn't been many just social things…everything is always business."

Jasmine shared she felt isolated in the process of trying to "learn who [she is] as…a counselor." The "circumstances with the pandemic" made Sherri feel isolated. Alexis mentioned she "kind of [felt] isolated" because she "come[s] from a mixed household." She insisted she did not feel isolated "because of like instances that happened, that's just something [she has] always grow up with." She finds herself experiencing "a little bit of imposter syndrome" questioning "do I deserve to be in this space?" Joy spoke about her isolation in relation to the distance between herself and her cohort. She said, "I feel isolated in that I feel like I'm kind of the lone grown up…I just feel like I'm a resource."

Climate

The theme of climate entails the recurring statements of students related to the atmosphere of their program and HBCUs in general. It also explores the challenges they face in their program, which are consistent with the reputation of most HBCUs, according to the participants.

Program

All of the participants had similar experiences of their program's climate. When describing her experience visiting the counseling department on campus, Tammy reported, "each

person was always felt warm and welcoming." This extended "from the students to other faculty to even like the security." Justin said, "Some of the biggest things that I can say about the program very intentional, very caring, very supportive, and very, very warm." For Jasmine, her "program is a family." She described her program as "culturally accepting" and "empowering." Sherri stated she "feel[s] welcome" and like her program "is a family." She said "I am so glad that God has blessed me to matriculate" in her particular program. In regards to her program, Alexis said, "After I did like my first info session I was just like yeah, this is it…I wanted to feel like I'm in that place who's going to like feel like home and [school] felt like home for me." Joy said that when she arrived at her program, "it was like this is what this is what we supposed to feel like, it feels like home. It was fantastic." In Jasmine's first two photographs where she was smiling, she noted her demeanor was indicative of the "comfort and love" she felt in her program. Sherri also mentioned that she felt "loved" as well as "accepted;" and "grateful" for the opportunity to be in her program. She also submitted a photograph of herself smiling.
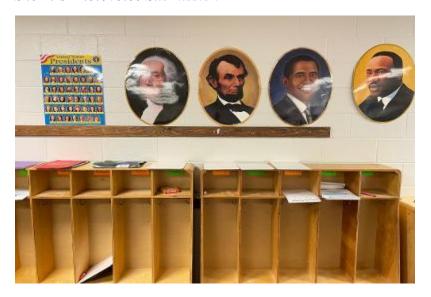
Similarly, Justin used the word community to describe an analogous experience. He described experiencing a "small town community feel," his program being "community minded community focused," and his experience with his cohort is "just always like a community." Justin shared his experience of learning "how to look at [his] people and [his] communities." To portray his feeling of community, Justin submitted a photograph of Black people hugging at a cookout.

In regard to counselor preparation and to serving the community, Tammy said her faculty teaches students "how to be ethical" and to "be mindful." Justin shared his program has "prepared [him] to counsel…people at the bottom of the intersections." Sherri stated, in regard to "some of the challenges you may encounter as a counselor in the mainstream world" her

professors "definitely prepared [her] for that." Additionally, once they become counselors, they "have to maintain a certain level of excellence." Alexis said, "No matter what space I walk into that I'm going to be competent…I'll be able to make changes in the way that I need to." Joy felt she and her cohort were "prepared to face the challenges that are external to HBCU campus or Black environment," but that she was also "in the best position to be able to serve and help Black people because [she] went through this program." Sherri shared because of the "academic rigor" she "truly feel[s] prepared to put that knowledge into action." She submitted three photographs of the inside of a classroom (Appendix G) and one standing in the hallway, as representations of her feelings.

Figure 2

Sherri's Photovoice Submission

Joy spoke to some of the issues she takes with her program. Joy had "been very unimpressed with individuals there." She offered this example: "it's the third week of school, why haven't why isn't canvas up and running yet, why haven't you sent me they syllabus?" Joy also felt like her program "take[s] whoever applies" and that "everybody gets A's." She said she is "not going to accept that oh it's an HBCU, so this is just kind of how it is."

HBCUs

HBCUs are known for providing an environment where African American students feel welcome, supported, and nurtured (Abdul-Alim, 2016). HBCUs are purported to celebrate both the diversity and accomplishments of individuals in the Black community (Abdul-Alim, 2016). The participants shared experiences consistent with the assertion of the literature. They used words such as unique, enriched, family, and nurturing to describe their HBCU experience.

Tammy said, "There is a very special, unique dynamic at HBCUs that you just can't find anywhere else." According to Justin, "At an HBCU, Blackness is going to kind of be enriched into every part of your educational experience." Jasmine said her HBCU showed "Black excellence" and made her think, "Where were these all my life?" Joy said, "I think attending an HBCU gave me more confidence." Sherri "like[s] the family feel and nurturing HBCUs provide." Tammy submitted a photograph (Appendix G) of her dog lying next to her bed. She said her bed represented the "comfort" she feels being a student at an HBCU.

Figure 3

Tammy's Photovoice Submission

Jasmine revealed she "fell in love with HBCUs" because there are "not just people that looked like [her], but people that look like [her] of various backgrounds." Justin and Jasmine spoke about the diversity of Black people that contributed to their experiences in their programs. Justin said, "I love it…it's Black in all of its shades all of its dimensions." He pointed out the students in his program "don't all have the same backgrounds," but are all there to "try to save the world one client at a time." Joy explained the culture of HBCUs to her niece, telling her, "you can be as different as you want to be…don't have to assimilate because…you're still us…you're still gonna be loved." Justin provided a picture of a group of Black people who were all dressed differently in order convey that "we are not monolithic."

Challenges

There were consistencies in the challenges participants faced in their programs. Tammy mentioned a lack of resources, technology issues, access to library books, and unnecessary delays in information. Justin said he wanted "better quality, service, education, and resources." "Communication, processes, lack of resources, and funding" were difficulties that Alexis identified with her program. Joy tried to be "understanding that [they] are under-resourced and underfunded," but she did not like the "limited class availability" with scheduling, and that her program did not have "premier faculty."

These sentiments represented a portion of those participants believed to represent the overall challenges other HBCUs navigated as well. Justin listed "logistical things," "financial aid," and "processes" as "typical complaints that you hear at HBCUs." Tammy, Jasmine, and Alexis spoke about the high cost of attendance at HBCUs. Alexis said, "funding opportunities…would definitely…make it easier to…to want to stay."

56

Being Black

Participants' offered descriptions of how they felt their being Black impacted their experiences in their programs. Tammy said, "I'm just glad to be Black because there is a sense of comfort in there and there is a benefit in being seen." To represent her feeling seen, she submitted a photograph of leaves being illuminated by the sun, "revealing their true color and beauty." Jasmine said HBCUs "find what makes you a pearl as far as being a Black person." When reflecting on how she felt as a Black woman at an HBCU, Jasmine stated, "I've never ben somewhere where I felt so celebrated just for doing my best." In the last two photographs she submitted, she was smiling in one and had a straight face in the other as a way to express the "duality of being a black counselor and student," which is both "rewarding and taxing."

In response to being asked how it felt to be in the majority, Sherri exclaimed, "It feels good! It feels good when you're in a program that's well run." Alexis shared, "being around a group of Black women…seeing them just do their thing…it encourages me." Joy explained, "That is what being Black in this program has given me...I'm more prepared to deal with not only Black trauma... [but] how it affects your development…our beliefs, and how we show up for our clients." Justin described the comfort and sense of relief he felt as a Black man in his program,

> My blackness…allows me to be automatic family…there's an automatic understanding of that's one of my people….Whenever you walk into a space it's like that's somebody that's my person. I don't know them. But there's an automatic understanding of that's one of my people. Um, and so you get to walk into a space a little bit more comfortable, a little bit more free. And so I would definitely say my blackness gave me an automatic level of comfort. You know, when a Black person enters into a White space. They have so many

mental battles that they have to tackle before they can even start focusing on work. So I

think being at allows me to just jump in and work. I don't have to focus on so many of

those other factors that can just do what I came here to do.

Scholarship

Scholarship is comprised of the way CACREP accreditation showed up in the

participants' experiences of their program, as well as in their encounters during academic

transactions. Haynes et al. (2016) limited academic transactions to classroom discussions,

curriculum, and faculty supervision. Explored as a subtheme for this study, scholarship expands

to student organizations and activities presented by the counseling program related to academic

or professional development.

CACREP

Three of the participants stated their decision to enroll in their program was dependent

upon CACREP accreditation. When asked whether CACREP accreditation influenced their

decision to attend their university, Tammy responded, "Oh, it was mandatory. If I want to be

somebody's, you know, counselor, I had to graduate from a CACREP-accredited school." Sherri

rated the importance of CACREP as a 10 on a scale of 1-10, and noted, if the program is not

accredited "you're wasting your time." Alexis shared she "was looking for schools, of course,

[that were] CACREP accredited" because "it is definitely highly highly recommended." Joy

"wouldn't have gone to a school that wasn't accredited." Justin said he "didn't even know

anything about [CACREP]" when he decided to enroll in his program.

Academic Transactions

Academic transactions included classroom discussions, curriculum, clubs and organizations, and school-related activities that occurred outside the classroom. Jangha et al. (2018) offered Black students felt silenced in classroom discussions because of multicultural insensitivity. Tammy shared she "can have very transparent conversations," which was "very essential to a counseling program." She went on to say, "we can say what we feel, how we feel, we don't really have to worry too much about people being offended." Justin shared his program "cultivate[s] a space that's umm welcoming to different beliefs." Jasmine shared, "There's so many difference…at the same time so many similarities…I feel like it helps us ground ourselves in being Black counselors…it definitely it enhanced the conversation."

Alexis spoke about being able to discuss certain topics,

> Especially thinking about, just like the climate of the nation of the world right now, like everything that we like have been going through like as Black people. It leaves me a safe space to feel safe like I can truly express, you know what I mean, how I feel. Different things that I feel like if I was at one of the other schools that I had thought about which is, you know, PWI, I don't know if I would have been able to talk about a lot of the things that I've been able to.

> Jasmine said, "We don't primarily learn from our [text]book, which I like." In reference textbook learning, Joy said, "the conversations we even get to have in the classroom about the textbooks, we get to do it based off of our life experiences and looking…through the lens of Black people." This made Joy feel "comfortable in the in the content."

> Tammy shared, "It's not much for a graduate student," but counseling students were tasked with attending mandatory seminars. Justin echoed this sentiment and noted his program

"hasn't done a lot," but when they do meet outside of class it was "through like Chi Sigma Iota…for some type of development." Jasmine communicated the students in her program "get a lot of opportunity" including "scholarships, publication opportunities, [and] internships." In Sherri's program they were "encouraged to participate in…organizations [including] Kappa Delta Pi and Chi Sigma Iota" and "to seek ways how [they] can be of service to others." Alexis and her cohort had "gotten information…about research…that [they] can participate in." Also, "there, of course, are like different like clubs and organizations that [they] can join."

COVID-19

Participants shared how the COVID—19 pandemic impacted their program experiences. They discussed the ways classes were delivered, how COVID created distance physically and intangibly, and their personal reactions to those unexpected changes. Justin explained his program tried to "stay connected to the student" by having virtual events. However, he was unable to "have certain conversations that would naturally develop if we were in person." Jasmine appreciated the use of YouTube and other videos on virtual platforms to supplement instruction. She felt like "having to learn this way" was "beneficial given the generation." Sherri shared she "feel[s] isolated with this COVID." Alexis reported, "The way that they've like handled this pandemic has definitely stood out." She said it "has been like a really great experience…the way they like delivered our courses. Just seeing…without having all the resources…they're still able to get things done." Even with the support, Alexis stated, "last semester was a lot…it was just like overwhelming," but she and her cohort "still found a way to, you know, build with each other." Joy "had such limited exposure…on campus…like half a semester" because of COVID. She "did not want to do [an] online program… so that was like really disappointing."

Summary

Profiles of the six research participants were included in this chapter. This chapter also shared findings from the interviews as well as accompanying photovoice responses from Black students in CACREP-accredited master's programs at an HBCU in the Southern United States. The following five themes emerged from an analysis of the responses: relationship dynamics with the sub-themes of representation, faculty, peers, and isolation; climate with the sub-themes of program, HBCUs, and challenges; being Black; scholarship with the sub-themes of CACREP and academic transactions; and the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter Five will offer a discussion of the findings presented in Chapter Four, along with implications for the counseling discipline and the researcher's recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

Six participants' (pseudonyms: Tammy, Justin, Jasmine, Sherri, Alexis, and Joy) lived experiences were explored in order to reveal the universal essence of Black students' experience in CACREP-accredited master's programs at HBCUs. In addition to individual semi-structured interviews, participants were invited to submit photographs that represented their experiences.

Chapter One provided the historical and social contexts of HBCUs and CACREP. The initial purpose and current culture of HBCUs was explored, highlighting the intentionality around providing a safe space that educates (Bracey, 2017) and celebrates (Abdul-Alim, 2016) Black scholars. CACREP's establishment as a standardizing agency for the counseling field was discussed (West & Moore, 2015), along with an overview of the challenges experienced by students of color in CACREP programs (Baggerly et al., 2017). The juxtaposition of Black students studying in CACREP programs situated within HBCUs was identified as the problem.

Chapter Two synthesized the current literature related to the experiences of African American students in CACREP programs. Underrepresentation in faculty and peers, adverse experiences in academic transactions, and the overall climate of CACREP programs was explored. The following constructs were identified in the literature: microaggressions, racial battle fatigue, resilience, and self-efficacy.

The research methodology for this study was explained in Chapter Three. It described the use of phenomenology, CRM, and Photovoice, all of which informed the instrumentation, the data collection, the data analysis. Methods implemented to ensure trustworthiness of the study were also discussed in Chapter Three. The philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology, CRM, and Photovoice were presented.

Chapter Four presented the findings that were a result of the participants' responses to individual interviews and photovoice prompts. The five themes and nine subthemes that emerged were supported by direct quotes from participants. The themes were: relationship dynamics, climate, being Black, scholarship, and COVID-19. The following subthemes were revealed: representation, faculty, peers, isolation, program, HBCUs, challenges, CACREP, and academic transactions.

This chapter offers the researcher's interpretation of the findings presented in Chapter Four. It demonstrates the interaction between the findings and current literature. This chapter also offers implications for social change, limitations, recommendations for action and future study, and ends with the researcher's experience with the research process.

Interpretation of Findings

The following themes emerged from this study: relationship dynamics with the subthemes of representation, faculty, peers, and isolation; climate with the subthemes of program, HBCUs, and challenges; being Black; scholarship with the subthemes of CACREP and academic transactions; and COVID. In this interpretation of findings, the themes and subthemes are explored in relation to the current literature, conceptual framework, and theoretical framework.

Relationship Dynamics

The participants spoke about how the various relationships they built impacted their experiences. They mentioned how representation affects the relationship dynamics amongst themselves and the faculty. Because African Americans come from a community-centered culture, the relationship dynamics heavily influence their overall experience in any space.

Representation

The review of literature provided information about Black students' experiences in CACREP programs, but those students attended PWIs. The literature purported African Americans students were disappointed with the lack of diversity throughout their CACREP programs (Seward, 2019). The participants of this study had the opposite experience, noting they were well-represented in their program by faculty and the student body. In the CACREP-accredited programs (School Counseling and Clinical Mental Health Counseling) at the HBCU attended by all participants, all of the faculty members were identified as African American. Based on participant accounts, all except two students in one of the cohorts identified as Black. In contrast to students in previous studies who felt uncomfortable and invisible (Baggerly et al., 2017), multiple participants in this study felt satisfied and seen in their program, which can be attributed to the representation in faculty and students.

Faculty

In one study by Zeligman et al. (2015), Black women were "yearning" to see themselves represented in their faculty and staff (p. 71). The Black women in this study said they were "over-represented" in their faculty and recognized most of their instructors and program leaders are Black women. One participant used the word "egalitarian" to describe the relationship she has with her professors. Another participant said her relationship with the faculty is like a partnership. The students feel like having Black faculty makes it easier to network with them and they know that they have the full support of their professors. Their professors go above and beyond by giving the students their personal contact information, texting them, checking on them throughout the semester, and scheduling video calls. Such behaviors may attribute to the reputation of HBCUs being nurturing and supportive (Abdul-Alim, 2016; Bracey, 2017).

64

Whereas Baker et al. (2015) conveyed that African American students felt disregarded, the participants' in this study noted how their faculty went above and beyond to make sure students were supported and guided towards success. One student was explicit about her belief that she would not have gotten this treatment anywhere else. Black faculty are intentional about pouring into their Blacks students, making sure they are treated with empathy and shown genuine interest. One of the participants described the process of developing relationships with the faculty as a "deep pleasure."

Peers

In programs that were not racially diverse, students had a hard time connecting with their peers (Zeligman et al., 2015). The participants in this study were in cohorts with mostly Black students. They said they loved their peers, and everyone felt like a family. Not only did they stay in contact and share resources, they also connected on a personal level. They talked about how they celebrated various significant life events with one another. The comfort they felt with each other also showed up in academic transactions, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Their relationship was able to grow with the use of technology. They communicated via an application that allowed messages to come directly to their phone. The participants used the group chat to talk about topics ranging from internship opportunities to offering messages of encouragement. Having a place for students to connect informally allowed for the development of authentic relationships. One of the participants referred to not having to navigate all of the other factors present when Black people walk into a space as a minority. Seeing themselves in their peers helped their relationships flourish organically.

Isolation

For African American students at this HBCU, isolation was the result of factors outside of race. Because there is diversity in Blackness and Black people are not a monolith, the participants carried differing opinions, identities, and journeys. One participant felt isolated from her peers because of her age and because she was the only parent in her cohort. By placing her on a different level, perhaps above them, the cohort created distance. Another participant expressed how she experienced imposter syndrome based on her grades and wondered if she deserved to be in the program. The participant who was part of the LGBTQ+ community felt isolated because his experiences were so different from others in his peer group. As opposed to the racial isolation discussed in previous literature (Baggerly et al., 2017; Haynes et al., 2016; Zeligman et al., 2015), the identities that were not normalized or that othered the participants here were points of isolation and disconnectedness.

Climate

The climate describes the energy and atmosphere of the participants' programs and of HBCUs overall. It provides insight into the challenges the participants face as students in their program and scholars at an HBCU. The review of literature offered African American students endured microaggressions (Lily et al., 2018) and racial battle fatigue (Husband, 2016) during their matriculation in university studies. Black women reported graduate school was draining for them, both mentally and emotionally (Green et al., 2018), another concept contradictory to the experiences of the participants in this study.

Program

Instead of their race being the premise of an ongoing mental battle, the participants Blackness was the very thing that enhanced their experience. It is refreshing to be in a space

66

where you are not only welcomed but celebrated; to learn in an environment where you see yourself represented, and not limited to a topic in a multicultural counseling course. The participants loved their program and they felt that the love was mutual. They were grateful and blessed to be able to study in that program. Moreover, they felt it a great benefit to be in a program where they could learn from instructors who looked like them and their desired population.

By having Black faculty in their counseling program, the university fostered an environment in which the participants learned from people who have been where they are. The program elevated the participants' counselor training by allowing them access to Black counselors and counselor educators who could speak to the duality, as one participant called it, of being a Black counselor. This type of mentorship is essential to the development of African American counselors and is the very thing Black students craved in other programs (Zeligman et al., 2015). Learning from Black faculty made the participants more comfortable and more prepared. Additionally, participants felt they were prepared to serve both the Black community and the broader community. They were in the unique position to learn information presented in textbooks from an African American lens. Blackness was able to be integrated throughout the program and even emphasized.

HBCUs

Consistent with the literature on HBCUs, it was discovered that the participants experienced the culture of Black excellence as it was taught and appreciated. The students felt at home in the welcoming and supportive environment of their HBCU. HBCUs were created for them, so it is understandable the participants felt a sense of belonging and acceptance; it was comfortable for them. Although each participant was different in some way, they all felt

welcome. They were excited to witness and be a part of the many dimensions of Blackness represented on HBCU campuses.

The experiences for this study's participants compared to those of students' whose experiences were recounted in the literature, support Abul-Alim's (2016) position that Black students who attend HBCUs tend to have a better college experience than their counterparts who attend PWIs. The participants were in love with their HBCU. They had more confidence because they attended an HBCU. They described the culture at HBCUs as special and unique.

Challenges

One participant noted it was great to see her university provide a positive experience despite its lack of resources, which is the challenge most participants referenced. Providing quality education without proper funding is a struggle that has plagued HBCUs since their inception (Stith & Blumenthal, 2019). Many of the challenges presented by the participants stemmed from their university's lack of resources. Namely, technology issues, limited access to library books, outdated processes, and limited class offerings. The participants believed the university's dependence on student fees for operational costs was the reason for their high tuition rate. They implied if HBCUs were better funded, more students could afford to attend. Students who cannot afford college are forced to attend schools that offer financial assistance. Often, assistance outweighs desire in regard to college choice.

Being Black

CRT was the theoretical framework that undergirded this study because of its focus on race and its role in educational environments. CRT uses five tenets to supports its position, one of which contends that Black people have a gift of counter-stories; they use their voices to share

their unique experiences that eliminate inferiority (Allen, 2017). The way the participants relished in the regality of being Black on an HBCU campus, communicated pride, visibility, and empowerment. Their counter-stories addressed the beauty of being Black and the comfort of learning in a Black space. Race showed up in their educational environment as a unifying factor, yielding encouragement, support, and opportunities for introspection.

As one participant expressed, Black students are able to walk into their CACREP programs at their HBCUs more comfortably because they do not have to navigate all of the factors dealing with otherness. They can do what they are there to do. When students feel represented in the faculty and student body, they can spend more time focusing on their academic development. They can pour their energy into learning and connecting, as opposed to mentally and emotionally processing their isolation and projected inferiority.

Scholarship

Mentions of CACREP and its impact on the participants' experiences was captured in the scholarship theme. CACREP was essential to this study because of its importance in the counseling field. Scholarship demonstrated the way participants traversed academic transactions in their program.

CACREP

By 2022, graduation from a CACREP-accredited program will be required for national counseling certification through NBCC (Eissenstat & Bohecker, 2018). Only half of the participants were adamant about enrolling in a CACREP-accredited program. One participant did not know what it was (but has since learned about it) and the other two were indifferent. It is beneficial for students to be aware of accreditation from the beginning of their admissions

process because it greatly impacts the trajectory of their career. Two participants shared the program leaders informed them that they were in the process of applying for accreditation renewal and made them aware of the process and outcome. Communication like this is essential, as it greatly impacts the students. If the program did not apply for reaccreditation, any student who graduated after Spring 2021would not be considered a graduate of a CACREP-accredited program (CACREP, 2020a).

Academic Transactions

For Black students at PWIs, academic transactions were elements of contention due to multicultural insensitivity on behalf of their peers (Jangha et al., 2018). As a result, they felt silenced (Jangha et al., 2018), tokenized, or inferior (Haynes et al., 2016). This study's participants felt differently. As Black students with Black peers, they were comfortable expressing their thoughts and perspectives. This particular CACREP program was said to be welcoming to different beliefs. The participants reported being transparent and being free to say what they felt, referring to classroom discussions as a safe space.

One participant shared textbooks are not their primary source for instruction. Their instructors teach the information from the textbooks but approach it from a Black lens. The students much prefer that format, which is not surprising, as Baker et al. (2015) iterated textbooks remind counseling students that the profession is predominately White. Through the lens of CRT, the textbooks and the exclusive teaching thereof, perpetuates the master narrative (Patton, 2015). By intentionally educating from a Black lens, Black faculty are reconstructing the narrative and contributing to the students' counter-stories. They are providing culturally appropriate education that will prepare their students to be competent and self-aware. Their instruction engages students in self-exploration and introspection as they develop their

professional identities. Teaching the standard material from a multicultural lens communicates to the Black counselors in training they have a place in the profession. It accentuates the necessity of their very existence as Black counselors.

Implications for Social Change

The participants were given space to use their voice and to tell their own stories about their experience in a CACREP-accredited program at an HBCU. The counter-stories of these six African American students have implications that extend to the community and institutions. Their stories provide brand new insight that can be used to make transformations and possibly create better environments for other Black counselors in training.

The participants' experiences convey the importance of representation in the learning environment. As counseling continues to be normalized, the profession will gain exposure. The Black community has started the process of destigmatizing and demystifying mental health. More Black counselors are needed in master's and doctoral programs to propel the paradigm shift. As recruitment and enrollment increases, representation will increase, causing more Black students to be comfortable in academic transactions, feel connected to their cohort and faculty, and remain committed to persisting through their programs. A result of their persistence might be an increase in the number of clinicians people of color feel comfortable utilizing for services. There is a positive correlation between the number of Black counselors and the number of Black counselor educators. As one increases, so does the other. In order for Black students to be represented in their faculty, Black counselors must become faculty.

Institutions have the power to cultivate a positive experience for their scholars. The university and programs attended by this study's participants employed astute and representative

faculty, required students to explore professional development opportunities, and maintained a culture of intentionality. The students were able to see their Black faculty not only as instructors, but also as clinicians. The faculty shared their research with the students. The professors connected students with professional organizations of which they were active members and leaders. When students are exposed to the work of counselors and counselor educators who look like them, they see themselves. It develops one of the tenets of self-efficacy, vicarious experiences. The program was intentional about teaching from a Black lens, again allowing the students to see themselves in the counseling field by using texts written by Black authors and teaching them ways to navigate Black trauma in a counselor-client relationship.

Limitations and Recommendations

The limitations of the study included the following: lack of generalizability, representation of one university, and issues with replicability. Opportunities for future studies were informed by the study's limitations. Recommendations for action were revealed based on the findings.

Limitations

One limitation of this study, as is the case for qualitative research, is a lack of generalizability. It cannot be concluded that all Black students in CACREP-accredited programs at HBCUs share the experiences of this study's participants. All participants attending the same university was a limitation of the study as well. While they represented two different programs at the university, students take many of the same courses for the first few semesters. The semi-structured interview format prevents the replication of the study, which is a limitation. As

participants shared, additional questions were asked. Based on what the participants shared, follow-up questions may have been used.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for further study include (a) recruiting participants from multiple schools and (b) using a different research method. There are eighteen HBCUs that offer master's programs that are CACREP-accredited. All eighteen of them were contacted using various approaches. It is recommended that an innovative strategy be used in order to solicit participation from more schools. It would provide a broader understanding of student experiences in this unique setting if more universities were represented. It is also recommended that future researchers consider the timing in the semester of when they reach out to the school representatives and students. Recruiting participants during any academic break is not advised.

The qualitative research design and methodology used for this study were appropriate for the research question. It is recommended that a quantitative approach be used to explore and measure constructs such as social and academic integration, satisfaction, and sense of belongingness, which would offer insight into students' experiences. Future studies should inquire about the racial profile of faculty and peers. It should not be assumed that every HBCU is as representative as the university explored in this study.

Recommendations for Action

Counselors, supervisors, and counselor educators can benefit from taking note of the findings of this study. Counselors should take partial responsibility for recruiting counselors of color. Some counselors will read the findings and be able to relate to the experiences of the six participants, in which case they should be intentional about guiding other future counselors

towards a similar experience. Other counselors will review the manuscript and identify with the students who were the focus of the literature review. For those counselors, this study should communicate that there are pathways less challenging than the one they may have traveled. Black counselors should do their part to be more visible in the community so younger generations can see themselves in the field and recognize a career as a counselor is a viable option. Black counselors should also be encouraged to pursue terminal degrees so that they can be a part of the change. Increased faculty representation in master's programs begins with increased enrollment of Black counselors in Counselor Education and Supervision doctoral programs.

It is recommended that all counselor educators consider the findings and assess what can be done to go above and beyond for one's own students. African American students benefit from having mentors that look like them. Black counselor educators should make themselves available for mentorship and support for students who request or require it (with support from leadership). Counselor educators should be intentional about creating a culture of respect and transparency in their classroom and programs. Faculty should communicate in a timely manner, make students feel welcome, and teach from a multicultural lens.

Supervisors should discuss with the supervisee, multicultural considerations in the supervisory relationship. The supervisor should assess what the supervisee needs and what will be beneficial for their development as a Black counselor. They should discuss shared trauma, the ways race influences their professional identity, and how race might show up in clinical settings. If unsure how to best support a Black supervisee, the supervisor should seek consultation.

Researcher's Experience

As I prepared to begin researching the experiences of Blacks students in counseling programs, I reflected on my personal experience in graduate school. I attended a PWI. The faculty and staff were racially diverse, predominately female, and it was not CACREP-accredited. I have never been a student at an HBCU (although I wanted to attend one since undergraduate school), but I have worked at a few in various professional capacities. As I read scholarly articles for the literature review, I engaged in memoing to track my thoughts and reactions to the information. I recognized in myself emotions such as anger, sadness, and empathy. I was partially surprised at some of the experiences the students reported. I was frustrated at how Black students' stories were being told.

Memoing helped me during the data analysis stage of the research process to bracket my biases and honor each of the participant's voices. Working at different HBCUs provided me with insight into the climate, cultural norms, and challenges of those institutions. The memos gave me a space to reflect on how my own experiences were the same or different from those of the participants. One participant mentioned challenges such as the processes and administration. I wrote a memo about that because I am a part of the processes and administration at an HBCU, and I needed to separate my personal emotions from the research.

I believe it was easier for the participants to share their experiences with me because I am a Black woman. Because of our history with participating in research, I think Black people may feel more comfortable when the researcher is a person of color. My age might have also affected the participants by increasing the relatability.

Prior to reading this study, I believed that students at HBCUs did not feel supported. In my professional experience, I have students tell me no one on campus helps them, the professors communicate in an untimely manner, or they are unaware of the campus resources. As a result, I

75

was under the impression that HBCUs and their students have a disconnect. We feel as if we are providing a particular experience, yet that is not how students receive it. After completing this study, I am encouraged to continually reflect on the intentionality around the culture of support at my university. I am still curious about how much accountability should be placed on the student.

Summary

Chapter Five began with a review of the content included in previous chapters. It provided an interpretation of the findings presented in Chapter Four. Chapter Five was a space in which the researcher space to allow the participants' counter-stories to be told. Each of the five themes (relationship dynamics, climate, being Black, scholarship, and COVID-19) and the subthemes (representation, faculty, peers, isolation, program, HBCUs, challenges, CACREP, and academic transactions) that emerged from the interviews and photovoice were discussed in the context of current literature. Implications for social change were offered regarding the community and institutions. Limitations, recommendations for future studies, and recommendations for action were included. Finally, the chapter provided insight into the researcher's experience with the process of conducting this study.

Conclusion

This study amplified the voices of six Black students in CACREP-accredited master's counseling programs at an HBCU. Historically, African American students have felt debased, invisible, silent, and much more in CACREP programs at PWIs. This study aimed to investigate their experiences at HBCUs, because HBCUs have the reputation of welcoming and nurturing Black scholars. Since there was a lack of literature on this topic, the goal of this study was to

determine the universal essence of the phenomenon of being Black in CACREP-accredited master's program at an HBCU, while allowing Black students to tell their counter-stories about said experience through word and photograph. Thus, the methodological approaches of phenomenology, CRM, and photovoice were utilized.

A clear answer was provided for the primary research question which asked, "What are the lived experiences of African American students in CACREP-accredited master's counseling programs at HBCUs?" The participants were matriculating through programs where they were represented in the faculty, their peers, and the content discussed in class. They had mostly positive experiences, with them noting the family aspect of their program, the pleasant relationships with their faculty, connectedness to their peers, and a sense of empowerment because of their Blackness. Students of color should not be relegated to adverse experiences. Racial battle fatigue and microaggressions are not inescapable rites of passage Black students must endure on their journey to achieving their goal of being a counselor. The participants in this study were in a program and at a university where they felt supported and celebrated. They felt prepared to serve the broader community upon graduation. There were challenges, but they were ultimately extremely satisfied with their experience. It is important that stakeholders take note of these counter-stories so improvements can be made and more Black/African American people in the community can be emboldened to become counselors. Black students deserve to learn in an environment where they feel supported, seen, nurtured, celebrated, welcome, and safe; a space where they can be authentic and develop into competent counselors.

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APPENDIX A: Invitation Letter

Dear [Recipient]:

My name is Angelia Lomax and I am a Ph.D. student in the Counselor Education and Supervision program at Liberty University. I obtained your email address from the CACREP website. I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The title of my research project is *Black Effect: Black Students' Experiences in CACREP Master's Programs at HBCUs*. The purpose of my research is to explore the lived experiences of Black students in CACREP-accredited master's counseling programs at HBCUs.

I am writing to invite students to participate in my research study. Potential participants must be 18 years of age or older, self-identify as Black/African American, currently enrolled in a CACREP-accredited master's counseling program at an HBCU, and be willing to participate. Students will be asked to complete the screening survey (https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/C7W9D69) and an informed consent prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to withdraw at any time. Attached is the Recruitment Letter to forward to any potential participants.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Angelia Lomax
Counselor Education and Supervision, PhD Student

Alomax5@liberty.edu

APPENDIX B: Recruitment Letter

[Date]

Dear Student:

As a graduate student in Liberty University's CACREP-accredited Counselor Education and Supervision program, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for my doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to explore lived experiences of African American students in CACREP-accredited master's counseling programs at HBCUs. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older and self-identify as Black/African American. Participants must be currently enrolled in a CACREP-accredited master's counseling program at an HBCU. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in a recorded interview using Zoom. Also, participants will engage in member checking, which will allow the researcher to go over the initial interview with the participant and create space for any questions or corrections. It should take approximately one hour to complete the initial interview and approximately 10-15 minutes for the member check. Your name and other identifying information will be collected as part of your participation and will be kept confidential. A pseudonym will be used when reporting the data.

Photovoice will be used as a method to facilitate a deeper understanding of the participant's experience through photographs. Upon agreeing to participate in this study, participants will take two to three photographs in response to a prompt from the researcher. Additional information regarding photovoice will be shared.

A screening survey for determining eligibility is provided online. Please use the following link to access the screening survey https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/C7W9D69. By completing the survey, you express interest in participating in the research study. After I determine your eligibility, I will contact you by email to schedule a Zoom interview meeting and send you the informed consent. Please feel free to contact me with any questions. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Angelia Lomax
Counselor Education and Supervision, PhD Student

Alomax5@liberty.edu

APPENDIX C: Screening Survey Questions

1. What is your age?
   a. 18-20
   b. 21-29
   c. 30-39
   d. 40-49
   e. 50-59
   f. 60 or older
2. What is your gender?
   a. Female
   b. Male
   c. Other
   d. Prefer not to say
3. Do you identify as Black/African American?
   a. Yes
   b. No
4. Are you currently enrolled in a CACREP-accredited master's counseling program at an HBCU?
   a. Yes
   b. No
5. What is the specialty area for your degree?
   a. Addiction Counseling
   b. Career Counseling
   c. Clinical Mental Health Counseling
   d. Rehabilitation Counseling, Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling
   e. Community Counseling
   f. College Counseling and Student Affairs
   g. Gerontological Counseling
   h. Marriage, Couple and Family Counseling
   i. School Counseling
6. What is your preferred interview format?
   a. Individual Interview
   b. Focus Group
   c. Either (open to individual interview or focus group)
7. Please provide your full name and email address.

Link to Survey: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/C7W9D69

Informed Consent

Title: Black Effect: Black Students' Experiences in CACREP Master's Programs at HBCUs
Principal Investigator: Dr. Joy Mwendwa, PhD, LPC, NCC, ACS, Liberty University
Co-Investigator: Angelia Lomax, M.S., Liberty University

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be eighteen years of age, self-identify as Black/African American, be currently enrolled in a CACREP-accredited master's counseling program at an HBCU, and be willing to participate. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

The purpose of this research study is to explore Black students' experiences in CACREP-accredited master's programs at HBCUs. This study will give students the opportunity to speak candidly about their experiences and have their voices heard. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project. By signing this form, participants consent to taking part in the study.

Background Information: An interview and photovoice will be used as a part of the research study. Photovoice requires participants to take photographs as responses to particular prompts offered by the researcher.

Procedures: If you agree to participate in this study, you would be asked to be involved in the following procedures.
1. You will be asked to participate in some type of interview (you may choose either a semi-structured individual interview or focus group) that includes Photovoice prompts. The individual interview will be approximately 60 minutes and the focus groups will be approximately 90 minutes. Photovoice will be used as a part of the research study and will require you to take photographs in response to particular prompts offered by the researcher, which will be included in the interview/focus group questions.
2. After the interview or focus group, you will take the photographs in response to the Photovoice prompts provided during the interview. The photographs must be taken by you, specifically in response to the prompts. You will be asked to send the photographs to the researcher via email, along with three to six sentences that describe how the photographs represent your response to the prompts. The photographs must not show identifying features of people or places in the community. The photographs are the property of you and the researcher and may appear in the researcher's published dissertation and/or dissertation defense. The activity will require up to 30 minutes of the interview or focus group time.

4. You will be asked to participate in member checking via email, which allows the researcher to communicate to you what information they gathered from your interview, focus group and Photovoice responses. It is an opportunity for you to ask any questions or make corrections to the information shared by the researcher. The member check will last approximately 15 minutes.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. The potential risk is a change in emotion.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from this study. Benefits to society include providing data that stakeholders might be able to use to better understand the needs and experiences of African American counselors in training. There are no direct benefits for taking part in this study.

Confidentiality: The record of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews/focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Questions: The research conducting this study is Angelia Lomax. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at alomax5@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Joy Mwendwa, at   If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Name of Participant (Printed) _____

Signature of Participant _____ Date: _____

Thank you!
Angelia Lomax

APPENDIX E: Interview Questions

Research Question: What are the lived experiences of African American students in CACREP-accredited clinical mental health counseling programs at HBCUs?

Interview Questions

1. When and how did you first know about HBCUs?
2. Tell me about how and why you chose this specific university?
3. How, if at all, did CACREP accreditation influence your decision to come to this university?
4. Tell me about how and why you chose your specific counseling specialty.
5. Who supported or did not support your selection of coming to your university?
6. When you first arrived to your university, what stood out most to you?
7. What other elements have you noticed about being part of your university now that you've been there?
8. Besides academic work in classes, what other events mark a typical semester at your campus/university?
9. How would you describe the climate of your campus/university (peers, faculty, and department)? Tell me about your experiences here.
10. Tell me about the ways you are or are not represented in your program.
11. What challenges have you experienced being at an HBCU?
12. How do you feel isolated or connected to your program?
13. How do you think your being Black has affected your experience?
14. How do you think attending an HBCU has prepared you to serve the broader community?
15. Is there anything else you would like to share?

APPENDIX F: Photovoice Prompts

1. Please provide between one to three photographs that depict how it feels to be you as a Black/African American student in a clinical mental health program at an HBCU.

2. Please provide between one to three photographs that describe how you experience the climate of your program.

APPENDIX G: Photovoice Pictures
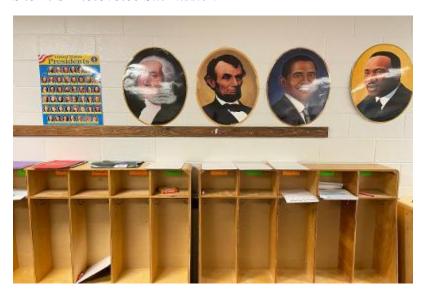
Figure 2

Sherri's Photovoice Submission

Figure 3

Tammy's Photovoice Submission

APPENDIX H: Audit Trail Table

Dates	Procedures
09/2019	Identification of research problem
12/2019-08/2020	Literature review and preparation of proposal
09/04/2020	Research proposal defense
10/15/2020	IRB application submitted
11/25/2020	IRB approval received
11/30/2020-12/07/2020	Invitation letters sent
12/09/2020-01/25/2021	Screening surveys completed
12/14/2020	Interview with participant with pseudonym Tammy
12/29/2020	Interview with participant with pseudonym Justin
01/15/2021	Interview with participant with pseudonym Jasmine
01/18/2021	Interview with participant with pseudonym Sherri
01/29/2021	Interview with participant with pseudonym Alexis
02/05/2021	Interview with participant with pseudonym Joy
01/23/2021	Transcription for first four interviews
02/01/2021	Transcription for fifth interview
02/05/2021	Transcription for sixth interview
02/05/2021	Data analysis process began
02/06/2021	Open coding
02/07/2021	Identification of themes and interpretation of findings
02/07/2021-02/10/2021	Wrote findings
02/13/2021	Wrote discussion
02/13/2021-02/17/2021	Edit Manuscript
02/17/2021	Manuscript submitted to dissertation chair
03/01/2021	Member check emails sent and responses received
02/28/2021-03/01/2021	Revisions and edits to manuscript
03/04/2021	Manuscript submitted to dissertation chair