

SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

Code-switching 101: Black women counselor educators' personal and professional identity development

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Abstract

The perceptions of personal and professional identity development from four Black women counselor educators were examined through a collaborative autoethnography methodology. Themes identified include (a) intentionality of code-switching, (b) inextricable identities, (c) fight for and with authenticity, and (d) mutual development of personal and professional identities.

KEYWORDS

Black women, code-switching, collaborative autoethnography, counselor education, personal identity development, professional identity development

Imagine holding your breath at every turn in your career, being hypervigilant every morning about your hair and your clothes, replaying conversations in your head to make sure your tone did not come off 'too Black' or angry. ~ Dr. Janeé Avent Harris

INTRODUCTION

Code-switching occurs when people from historically marginalized groups alter how they present or express themselves to gain acceptance from others in dominant groups (McCluney et al., 2021; Stewart, 2022). Code-switching may involve adjusting one's appearance, style of speech, behavior, and expressions to optimize the comfort of others in exchange for fair treatment, advancement, and employment opportunities. The code-switching phenomenon is visible in various settings, particularly in professional and educational environments where people of color navigate spaces in which they are the racial/ethnic or gender minority.

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As four tenured Black women counselor educators, we operate from marginal spaces in our professional environments, yet we found success in “climbing the ranks” in the professoriate. Dr. Crumb is a clinical mental health counselor-supervisor and associate professor in the counselor education program at East Carolina University (ECU). Dr. Cartwright is a licensed professional counselor supervisor, assistant vice provost, and an associate professor of counseling at the University of North Texas. Dr. Hammonds is a clinical mental health counselor, an associate professor, and director of the clinical mental health counseling program at Appalachian State University. Dr. Avent Harris is a clinical mental health counselor associate, associate professor, and director of the counselor education program at ECU. We have made notable contributions to the counseling profession at local, state, regional, and national levels. Collectively, we authored or coauthored 103 articles that were published in peer-reviewed professional journals. We contributed to eight edited books. Additionally, we conducted approximately 218 professional presentations at local, state, regional, national, and international conferences. Our curricula vitae document more than 115 examples of internal and external service contributions, and we received recognition with 38 awards for our professional contributions. Two of us have served as presidents of counseling associations at the state level.

Despite our respective contributions, Black women, overall, hold less than 3% of tenured positions in the U.S. higher education system (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Hence, we became curious about attributes on our paths to tenure. We discovered “code-switching” as a common factor and became interested in why we engage in code-switching, as it juxtaposes the principles of authenticity and transparency valued in the counseling profession.

The purpose of this study is to explore code-switching in relation to personal and professional identity development. The following research questions guided this study: (1) What are the code-switching experiences of Black women counselor educators? (2) What are the impacts of code-switching on professional identity development? We selected womanist theory (A. Walker, 1983) to conceptualize how our multifaceted personal identities and experiences influence the development of our professional identities. We used collaborative autoethnography (CAE) as a methodology, as it is well suited for a communal examination of the experiences of Black women, especially as it relates to the intersections of their personal and work lives (Ngunjiri et al., 2016). Accordingly, in this study, we champion decolonizing research methodologies that center the worldviews and experiences of non-Western individuals and openly confront and challenge the colonizing practices that have influenced education in the past and present (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). The following sections contain selected literature pertaining to the experiences of Black women counselor educators and their personal and professional identity development.

Code-switching: Black women counselor educators in the context of whiteness

U.S. institutions of higher education have expectations of specific behavior based on the standards of Whiteness (Haskins & Singh, 2015). Whiteness is understood as “an amalgamation of qualities including the cultures, histories, experiences, discourses, and privileges shared by Whites” (Marx, 2006, p. 6), which functions to provide people with rewards for conforming to White norms (Haskins & Singh, 2015). Whiteness, entrenched in hegemonic higher education systems, reinforces exclusionary practices that impede the ability of Black women counselor educators to gain access to and succeed in the discipline of counselor education (Erby & Hammonds, 2020; Haskins & Singh, 2015; Lester et al., 2021). Acknowledging the privilege of Whiteness carries the embedded consideration of race and gender. Moon and Holling (2020) asserted:

(White) feminism ideologically grounds itself in a gendered victimology that masks its participation and functionality in white supremacy. By erasing women of color, positioning women as victims of White male hegemony, and failing to hold White

women accountable for the production and reproduction of White supremacy... There are indelible ties between White supremacy and patriarchy, thus race and gender. (pp 8–9)

Whiteness and its privileges function to further suppress authentic personal and professional identity development for Black women counselor educators. Cartwright et al. (2018) documented a Black woman attempting to assimilate to the dominant culture by straightening her hair instead of wearing it in its natural state during a counselor education faculty interview process. Erby and Hammonds' (2020) co-autoethnography, capturing their experiences as Black women counselor educators, noted them constantly monitoring their voice tones to avoid proverbial stereotypes of being viewed as angry or intimidating. Likewise, Lester et al. (2021) found that Black women counselor educators purported that students frequently challenged and devalued their assignment feedback. The internal and external pressures to adhere to White norms (i.e., code-switching), presumptions of incompetence, and overall racial battle fatigue may thwart the personal and professional identity development as well as the career advancement of Black women counselor educators (Lester et al., 2021; T. L. Walker & Bruns, 2022). Professional identity development constitutes integrating professional values into one's identity (Healey & Hays, 2011). Yet, the context of Whiteness complicates the professional identity development of Black women, as researchers have identified many do not feel comfortable or safe enough to fully embody their roles as counselor educators.

Personal identity development

Race, religion/spirituality, partnership status, gender, and social class are identity markers that contribute to the personal development of Black women (A. Walker, 1983). Understanding the various identities and the perceptions, privileges, and disadvantages affiliated with the identities assists with understanding how Black women are seen in the world and can offer insight into personal and professional identity development (Cartwright & Hammonds, 2022). Because the hegemonic history of counselor education created an environment of exclusion and difficulties for historically underrepresented groups (Haskins & Singh, 2015), privileged and marginalized counselors are called to explore and examine their racial and ethnic identity development and the degree to which they belong and ascribe to particular identities (Ratts et al., 2015). Models and theories on racial and ethnic identity development include those specifically created for people from specific groups who hold historically marginalized identities, such as Cross's (1971, 1995) model for African American identity development.

Racial/ethnic and gender identities contribute to how one interprets and receives messages related to the various identities they hold. Historically, women faculty have earned less than their male counterparts. As a compounding factor, motherhood, specifically, was found to have a significant negative impact on the professional experiences of Black women counselor educators (Haskins et al., 2016; Neale-McFall et al., 2018; Trepal & Stinchfield, 2012). Although Cross's model (1971, 1995) addresses personal identity development for African Americans, there is a dearth in the literature that accounts for the intersections of identity development (e.g., race, gender, parental status) regarding the personal or professional identity formation and development of Black women counselor educators (Gibson et al., 2015). Aspects of the workplace naturally influence ideas related to how people should look and behave, what they should believe and value, what skills, attitudes, and ethics are appreciated, and how people should conduct themselves to achieve professional success (Healey & Hays, 2011; Magnuson et al., 2009; Moss et al., 2014). Given that personal and professional selves must co-exist (Healey & Hays, 2011), personal identity will inevitably influence the perception of the counselor education profession for which Black women are a part, as well as their ability to feel successful within the constructs of what the profession has decided exemplifies professional identity development and success.

Professional identity development

The role of social contexts in determining how individuals present themselves is central to the conceptualization of code-switching (McCluney et al., 2021). Gibson et al. (2010) highlighted that professional identity is the perception of self as a professional in the context of a professional community. Existing research on professional identity development in counselor education is often situated in the trainees' experiences of instruction, clinical supervision, and mentorship (Dollarhide et al., 2013; Grater, 1985; Hess, 1986; Hogan, 1964; Limberg et al., 2013; Loganbill et al., 1982; Owens & Neale-McFall, 2014; Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987), while other research (Brott & Myers, 1999; Gibson et al., 2015; Luke & Goodrich, 2010; Magnuson et al., 2009; Woo et al., 2016) center the experiences of professional development through broader lenses, incorporating practice, leadership, and engagement in professional activities.

Nugent and Jones (2009) asserted that an individual's sense of professional identity is formed by combining inherent personal characteristics and professional training in a professional context. The embodiment of this professional identity is unique and varies in expression based on several factors. These factors, such as the counseling professional's characteristics, practice contexts, and sociocultural backdrop, offer a framework for understanding the formation of a counselor's identity (Calley & Hawley, 2008; Dollarhide et al., 2013; Mellin et al., 2011). Researchers found the concept of personhood to be a unique and inseparable component of professional identity (Calley & Hawley, 2008). Essentially, professional identity is, in part, the external expression of the confluence of one's identities, beliefs, values, contextual experiences, and familial or societal roles, among other factors (Healey & Hays, 2011; Woo et al., 2016).

Furthermore, models of professional identity development reinforce the relationship between role, behavior, and context. For example, Skovholt and Rønnestad (1995) believed the process began by defining one's role, imitating experts, and finding one's footing as an autonomous professional. The final three stages of their model—integration, individuation, and integrity—seem to represent professionals coming into their own and standing firm in their identity. While this process may unfold unimpeded for some, those with multiple marginalized identities often face additional barriers. The hegemonic higher education system represents a set of standards that often map onto more socially acceptable, palatable, or safe points of view.

Academia, which touts academic freedom and protection from persecution for challenging ideas, still exists in the backdrop of our current sociocultural landscape. Authenticity and the ability to successfully integrate personal identity as a central component of professional development (Healey & Hays, 2011; Woo et al., 2016) are paradoxical to demonstrating professional identity. A glaring example is the selection of course materials and curriculum (Calley & Hawley, 2008; Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Educational Related Programs [CACREP], 2016), which is highly dependent on what a department, university, or system is willing to back publicly. Notably, critical race theory (CRT), recently garnered national backlash as it became a highly politicized ideology, even though counselor educators of color (Haskins & Singh, 2015) champion CRT-informed pedagogical and curricular strategies to enhance the educational experiences of counselor trainees. In essence, Black women counselor educators must navigate the dissonant messages of the expectation to bring themselves authentically to their work while simultaneously being asked to do so in an environment that may not be safe, supportive, or protective of the integration of their full identities, ideas, or beliefs—all which constitute their professional identity.

As a final point, researchers found leadership roles and service to the profession to be a means of demonstrating professional identity while contributing to a collective counselor identity and the individual development of more junior members of the field (Meany-Walen et al., 2013; Myers et al., 2002; Storlie et al., 2015). Woo et al. (2016) explored the process of professional identity development among counselor educators, asserting that counselor educators who train future counselors may have unique experiences in professional identity development regarding the influence of a combination of

factors such as education, engagement in professional activities, and the practice of mentoring. Findings of their study support the influence of mentorship (relationship with more senior members of the profession who guided career and professional decision-making), goodness of fit (alignment of values and the chosen program's expectations), and professional engagement and contribution (participation in professional counseling-related activities beyond the university setting) were instrumental in study participants' professional development. Scholars support the notion that identity development, as a process, hinges on the individual's unique experiences and encompasses their context and sociocultural influences of the time in which they developed. In relation to the current study, Black women have a unique experience navigating multiple marginalized identities while attempting to traverse primarily White spaces. While personal and professional identities are separated in this review of literature for ease of explanation, Black women's personal and professional identities are seldom disentangled (A. Walker, 1983).

METHOD

We selected womanism (A. Walker, 1983) as the conceptual framework for this study. Womanism purports that the experiences of Black women are unique from other population groups and traditional feminist theories. Womanism acknowledges the intersections of Black women's identities and the impact those identities have on their experiences in the larger society. As four Black women, womanism allows us to document our progressive movement in the counselor education profession while being mindful not to be captivated by illusions of equity (Collins, 1986). Through womanism, Black women are heard, affirmed, and validated; thus, this framework supports the decolonization of extant research in counselor education and values us as purveyors of our own experiences. Furthermore, womanism challenges people to move beyond increasing knowledge and awareness toward liberatory action for Black women and other groups experiencing oppression and marginalization.

Aligned with our efforts to decolonize research and examine the professional identity development of Black women in counselor education, we utilized CAE as a methodology to respond to the research questions: (1) What are the code-switching experiences of Black women counselor educators? (2) What are the impacts of code-switching on professional identity development?

CAE is a qualitative approach involving two or more co-researchers who collectively use their self-stories as data (Ngunjiri et al., 2016). CAE privileges women of color educators and researchers as subjects of their interrogations to provide critiques of social-cultural phenomena (Lapadat, 2009; Ngunjiri et al., 2010). Although there is no singular approach to CAE, methodological transparency is imperative (Ngunjiri et al., 2016). Hence, we used the concurrent collaboration model in which each member of our research team participated in similar schedules of data collection, analysis, and report writing (Ngunjiri et al., 2016). We captured each step of the data generation and analysis process and used an analytic-interpretative approach (Ngunjiri et al., 2016) to analyze self-data and situate findings in the literature.

Data generation and interpretation

We used various methods of data generation (Ngunjiri et al., 2016), which included individual narrative writing, conversational engagement (frequent conversations and group chats), archival materials (email exchanges, photos), self-reflective journaling, and field notes from teaching and professional presentations. Data were organized using Microsoft Teams applications. We followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis process: (a) familiarize yourself with the data, (b) generate initial codes, (c) search for themes, (d) review themes, (e) define and name themes, and (f) produce the manuscript. Data gathering and interpretation was an iterative process, and we included additional steps to increase rigor and transparency (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

TABLE 1 Theme and subtheme identification across participants.

Theme and subthemes	Participant name/identifier			
	Avent Harris	Cartwright	Crumb	Hammonds
Intentionality of code-switching	*	*	*	*
Code-switching as a skill/tool	*	*	*	*
Strategy/protective factor	*	*	*	*
Invisible and visible behaviors/actions	*	*	*	*
Inextricable identities	*	*	*	*
Mothering	*	*	*	
Race	*	*	*	*
Gender	*	*	*	*
Socio economic status		*	*	
Language		*	*	*
Fight for and with authenticity	*	*	*	*
Signaling and affirmation		*	*	*
Safety	*	*		*
Exclusion		*		*
Mutual development of personal and professional identity	*	*	*	*
Who am I?	*	*	*	*
Tenure and promotion	*	*		*
Confusion and disillusionment with counselor education	*	*	*	*

Note: The asterisk denotes identification of theme/subtheme.

The collaboration between this group of scholars began approximately 4 years ago due to a need for support, encouragement, and mutual personal and professional interests. During our conversations, we began generating research ideas that could impact Black women in counselor education and developing professional presentations on code-switching. The data generation and interpretation timeline for the current study occurred over a 7-month period. First, we met to discuss our goals of disseminating information on code-switching through professional presentations (interactive engagement), and we discussed the most appropriate methods of capturing our code-switching experiences for an empirical study. Second, after deciding that autoethnography allowed us the privilege of sharing our personal and professional experiences, we developed a data generation and interpretation plan. Third, we created two writing prompts for narrative writing components and each of us responded to the writing prompts, sharing our experiences (individual narrative writing). Fourth, we independently reviewed all narratives to develop a list of commonalities for potential codes and themes and developed a codebook. Fifth, we met to discuss the commonalities and overlap of potential themes and codes (conversational engagement). During the meeting, we organized ideas, defined codes, and defined themes. Sixth, we re-coded each of the narratives applying the codebook and discussed our coding experiences (conversational engagement). Finally, we organized themes and codes into Table 1 and transferred our experiences to the findings section of the current study to prepare the study.

Trustworthiness

Following strategies suggested by collaborative autoethnographic researchers (Ellis & Bochner, 2006; Ngunjiri et al., 2016), we used the following approaches to increase trustworthiness: interactive

engagement, multiple rounds of consensus coding to negotiate meanings, researcher triangulation, theoretical grounding, and review of archival material to support self-data. In addition, we used an outside contributor (Ngunjiri et al., 2016) with experience in autoethnography, who offered suggestions for critical reflection but did not engage in data interpretation or manuscript writing.

FINDINGS

We identified four primary themes, *intentionality of code-switching*, *inextricable identities*, *fight for and with authenticity*, and *mutual development of personal and professional identities*, and 14 sub-themes (see Table 1) to address the research questions. The first theme addressed the deliberate and intentional code-switching we utilized as a strategy to gain access to privileged settings to present as palatable and to eventually impact systems in ways that create equality for underrepresented groups. The second and third themes identified the multiple identities we hold that are impossible to separate from each other and how we grappled with remaining authentic in primarily White spaces. The final theme revealed how we faced personal growth in professional settings, which prompted simultaneous personal and professional development. The themes are presented in detail in the following sections.

Intentionality of Code-Switching

We operationalized *Intentionality of Code-Switching* as our awareness of the environments, reasons, and manners in which we decided to code-switch. This theme resonated with all of us and emerged as the first theme of the study due to its salience and prevalence in our counselor education careers. Within the theme *Intentionality of Code-Switching*, we identified the following subthemes: code-switching being a skill or tool for advocacy, code-switching being utilized as a strategy and protective factor in counselor education, and visible and invisible methods of code-switching. Code-switching as a skill or tool for advocacy speaks to our experiences integrating into predominantly White university settings to make changes that positively impact historically marginalized groups.

Dr. Cartwright gave voice to using code-switching as an advocacy tool when she shared:

It [code-switching] affords me the opportunity to enter spaces that I likely would not be in. Code-switching helps me to be non-threatening and, yes, assimilate into dominant culture which is helpful for me to gain access to settings and conversations to make an impact. This impact and having access to the settings may not only be beneficial to me but to others (i.e., my students, mentees, other colleagues, and other underrepresented faculty to come). When I think about code-switching, I think about advocacy ... if I must make a few sacrifices for the greater good I am okay with that.

Dr. Crumb shared that she used code-switching as a tool for advocacy and identified it as a protective factor when she stated:

I view code-switching as a tool or strategy that provides an adept way to dismantle oppressive systems and hold space for the representation and inclusion of those who share marginalized identities akin to mine ... I consider code-switching as not cutting off parts of myself, but as a protective factor I can utilize on my path to personal and professional progression.

We all noted the visible and invisible aspects of code-switching and utilizing it as a protective factor. All narratives mentioned the straightening of our natural hair to conform to Whiteness. As an example,

Dr. Hammonds shared, “I believed the [faculty] interview was a high stakes event and I did not want to potentially stand out in a negative way for anyone on the committee.”

Inextricable Identities

The second theme, *Inextricable Identities*, emerged as we explored our various identity markers and the depth they hold in our respective lives. Our historically marginalized identities inform one another and are impossible to decipher, separate, or divide. The subthemes and identities that emerged from our narratives and exploration of archival data revealed our race, gender, motherhood, socioeconomic status, and language/dialect as salient. We all noted our inextricable identities and each identity’s nuanced roles in our respective personal and professional lives. Dr. Crumb is a first-generation college graduate from a small, rural, high-poverty town and stated that her socioeconomic status (i.e., lower socioeconomic status) was salient and resonated mostly with code-switching experiences. Dr. Crumb used a photo to elicit remembrances of engaging in code-switching in academic spaces with Black women from middle and upper socioeconomic statuses. She spoke about these experiences when she shared:

I have often had to code-switch when surrounded by individuals who share similar identities—Black women counselors. Here, the differences in social class statuses are significant. I can recall certain Black women labeling me as “ghetto” or “hood” although they knew nothing about my background. Their judgment was solely based on my dialect. I remember instances of either speaking up less or overindulging myself in literature to assure that I was well-versed on various topics during oral discussions.

We collectively agreed that being a mother is a salient identity due to the additional tasks and energy that mothering embodies as a counselor educator. However, Dr. Cartwright provided a nuanced recollection of the felt pressure to code-switch to mask being a divorced mother. Dr. Cartwright shared:

My marital status changed from married to divorced during my journey towards tenure. I was embarrassed to be divorced and, in some ways, to have a child and not be married because I thought people would assume that I was young and immature and had a child out of wedlock. I masked my divorced status in academic settings by continuing to wear my wedding ring in professional settings.

Dr. Cartwright believed this form of code-switching helped reduce stereotypes and misperceptions about Black women and single motherhood. Overall, the narratives in this section exemplify how our salient personal identities coalesce in academic workspaces and the nuanced situations that may beget code-switching.

Fight for and with authenticity

As counselor educators, we defined this theme as leveraging authenticity while processing internalized oppression and daily circumstances. This theme highlighted the oppressive experiences we all faced while navigating the counselor education profession and landscape. This theme yielded three subthemes: signaling and affirmation of identities, safety, and exclusion from colleagues.

We described our experiences as “exhausting, oppressive, and unsafe.” Dr. Avent Harris made a note of her experiences adapting to academia, attempting to remain authentic, and shared her feelings of unsafety when she noted, “I tried to be true to myself while also trying to adapt to spaces that seemed nothing like me. While academy is a newer territory, the sense of feeling apprehensive and

unsafe to be authentic is all too familiar.” Dr. Cartwright shared her experiences being excluded from research spaces by colleagues when she shared:

Everyone had their groups and teams and I was never included or considered. They never saw value in what I could bring to research teams or professional spaces. That prompted me to create my own and I am glad I did because the team I created has been able to impact our community in the ways that matter to me.

On the other hand, Dr. Hammonds shared accounts of her journey with authenticity and the signals of support she received from a White colleague. She shared:

While I can more comfortably visually present in ways that are authentic to me, there are more subtle environmental expectations around yielding in conversation or taking up ‘appropriate’ amounts of space... I was told [by a White colleague] that my opinion and viewpoint is valued and that I tend to sit back, observe, and wait to speak up. This feedback is reflective of how I interact in large group settings, such as department or college meetings.

Our summative experiences speak to our desire to be authentic with who we are as beings while navigating a landscape in higher education and counselor education that has been oppressive, discriminatory, and unwelcoming in many ways.

Mutual Development of Personal and Professional Identities

Mutual Development of Personal and Professional Identities speaks to how our personal and professional identities develop and inform one another. The three subthemes identified were as follows: who am I?, tenure and promotion, and confusion and disillusionment with counselor education as a profession. All participants noted and identified with the theme and each of the sub-themes. Dr. Crumb shared about her personal and professional identities informing one another and specifically noted aspects of uncovering who she was when she shared:

I am fortunate to have had social justice-oriented counselor educators who did not shy away from topics regarding privilege and oppression in the classroom and openly addressed classism, racism, colorism, anti-essentialism, and other topics. The information I learned has been integral in the development of my social justice and advocacy work in my personal life and as a counselor educator.

Dr. Avent Harris’ narrative reflected a unique account of code-switching research interests and how it resonates with her personal and professional identity development:

My most salient professional roles include researcher, teacher, supervisor, and advocate. These roles have shaped by my personal identities as a Black, cisgender, straight, Christian, woman and more recently as a wife and mother...I knew I wanted to study the role of the Black Church in mental health... But this is not what I [have] always told everyone. As I reflect now, post-tenure, I shake my head at the times I tried to code-switch my research interests. In certain audiences I would say ‘I am interested in researching spirituality in counseling.’ While I am interested in that topic, I knew in my heart that was not the focus of my research. I felt ashamed to say I am going to study how the Black Church shapes the attitudes and perceptions of mental health and counseling in Black Communities. I think my vitae tells the story of my professional identity development.

She continued to share about her professional identity development over time and how her research became a closer reflection of her true self. She moved from previous disillusion toward freedom to embody her true research interests, she shared:

Over the years, one can see how I began publishing and presenting closer to what mattered to me. The more I evolved in my own personal development, the more I grew in my professional identity development. The more I became settled in who I am and how my identities shape my experience, the more I became confident in my contribution as a scholar and educator.

Regarding the subtheme *who am I?*, Dr. Hammonds stated, “At times I wonder who I really am... How much of my bubbly personality is natural disposition and how much is the result of conditioning and reinforcement of “acceptable behaviors”?”

All the participant scholars noted the elusiveness of earning tenure and promotion. Further, all participant scholars spoke to the myth that tenure provides a sense of freedom—their sense of power restrictions and censorship remained in some ways. The freedom achieved alongside tenure is mythical for Black women with multiple marginalized intersecting identities. The participant scholars noted that their White counterparts had the rights, protections, and privileges of being both White and tenured, whereas their multiple marginalized intersecting identities limited their ability to fully embody their personal and professional selves. Even in the higher education system designed for academic freedom, the larger sociocultural system created boundaries.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we used CAE to examine our code-switching experiences and personal and professional identity development. We discuss each theme within the context of existing literature, specifically emphasizing how our findings relate to professional identity development and highlighting new contributions from the current study. Researchers have explored various areas of counselor educator identity development, including counselors-in-training, counselor education doctoral students, and tenured and tenure-track counselor educators. This study builds upon the current landscape of counselor education research as we focused on the experiences of Black women counselor educators who are often underrepresented in the academy and whose voices are not always amplified in the literature.

Intentionality of code-switching

Our narratives highlighted the various aspects of code-switching, including self-censoring, shifting appearances (e.g., hair, dress, speech), and professional interests. These sentiments are reflected throughout the counselor education literature as faculty of color continuously articulate a pressure to assimilate to the standard of Whiteness prevalent in the academy (T. L. Walker & Bruns, 2022).

Further, the findings of our study aligned with Cartwright et al.’s (2018) findings, identifying the faculty interview as a notable event in which Black women exercised intentional hypervigilance around code-switching. The current study expands on these previous findings and reveals that securing employment does not grant a reprieve from code-switching. The participants noted that any separation from code-switching was short-lived, and the need to code-switch resurfaced at each career transition and promotion.

Young (2009) spoke about “playing the game to end the game” (p. 72) in reference to high-profile Black Americans (e.g., Barack Obama) who engage in code-switching to get to a certain level to create an environment so that others do not have the same marginal experiences. Accordingly, Lester et al. (2021) found that Black women counselor educators develop survival strategies to navigate the oppression and marginalization they encounter in the academic culture.

Other scholars noted similar findings that contribute to professional identity development, such as developing collaborative professional relationships that transcend work (Gibson et al., 2015) with colleagues who provide expressions of support, respect, and appreciation (Magnuson et al., 2009) and partaking in leadership roles and service to the profession (Woo et al., 2016).

Finally, other studies shared that achieving tenure provided a “pressure release, relief, or sense of belonging” (Gibson et al., 2015); however, findings in the current study exemplified that even with the status of tenure, Black women counselor educators still have the need to code-switch to propel success and create pathways for individuals from minoritized groups.

Inextricable identities

The findings support the core tenets of womanism that center on race and gender as constructs that shaped the participants’ worldviews and their experiences in counselor education (Avent Harris et al., 2021; A. Walker, 1983). Moreover, the participants’ narratives support Crenshaw’s (1989) intersectionality framework that suggests their identities influence each other and are, in fact, inextricable. These findings extend literature on the professional identity development of tenured counselor educators (Gibson et al., 2015) and leaders in counselor education (Woo et al., 2016) by considering the influence of race and gender as lenses to understand the process of professional identity development.

Furthermore, the role of motherhood was highlighted as an influence on professional identity development. Similarly, Haskins et al.’s (2016) study of the experiences of African American counselor educator mothers discussed how their status as mothers exasperated their experiences of racial marginalization and created an internal sense of pride as they matriculated through the academy despite systemic barriers. The current findings support these sentiments and expand the discussion to include how marital status may impact Black women counselor educators’ intersections of motherhood and professional perceptions. Previous literature on Black women counselor educators (Erby & Hammonds, 2020; Lester et al., 2021) had not discussed how single Black women might feel an added pressure to present as married to avoid negative stereotypes. As a result, these Black women may engage in code-switching behaviors such as wearing a ring or using language that would suggest they were married. Wester et al. (2009) investigated the relationship between demographics such as gender, marital status, and academics among counselor educators. Their study found no significant relationship between marital status and wellness; however, it is essential to note that 80% of the participants identified as White (Wester et al., 2009), highlighting the lack of cultural/racial diversity in this study.

Fight for and with authenticity

The fight for and with authenticity theme highlighted the tension between our desire to be authentic and the lack of safety for this vulnerability within the academy and the counselor education profession. This theme added depth to the previous themes about code-switching and illuminated how Black women counselor educators self-censor and navigate stereotype threat (Fields & Cunningham-Williams, 2021; Overstreet et al., 2021). Black women counselor educators desire authenticity while at the same time fear that any deviation from White cultural norms may falsely confirm negative stereotypes such as the angry Black woman (Erby & Hammonds, 2020). In the professional identity development process, one of the hallmark transformational experiences is when counselor educators gain autonomy in self-identifying their understanding and expression of being an academic (Dollardhide et al., 2013). This process is increasingly nuanced for Black women as they navigate a pull toward authenticity while still feeling the need to conform to the culture of Whiteness that dominates academia. This constant hypervigilance has severe emotional and psychological consequences for Black women counselor educators (Avent Harris et al., 2021; T. L. Walker & Bruns, 2022). Academic

culture, marked by the process of promotion and tenure, is inherently taxing, and to add this additional emotional burden is unfair and may help explain the attrition rates of Black women as they move through the academic ranks (Overstreet et al., 2021).

Moreover, the counseling profession is built upon the premise that authenticity and self-awareness are necessary for counselor identity development, particularly with respect to multicultural competence and humility (Ratts et al., 2016). The findings in this study suggest that the ability to be authentic is a privilege not afforded to all Black women counselor educators. This is especially noteworthy because we are responsible for the learning and professional development of counselors-in-training who would benefit from transparency in teaching and supervision and the adoption of critical pedagogical practices that may challenge those who seek to uphold the status quo.

Mutual development of personal and professional identity development

While professional identity development (Gibson et al., 2010) includes personal attributes as a part of one's development, the focus often remains on the professional identity as the ultimate outcome. Often, these two constructs are addressed independently. However, the findings from this study indicate that one's personal and professional identity development occurs simultaneously and is ongoing. Particularly for Black women in counselor education, despite their success or tenure status, they must always consider their multiple historically marginalized identities in various professional contexts, especially contexts grounded in Whiteness. Akin to other research, this finding highlights the importance of focusing on mutual development and intersectionality, especially in formative times of professional identity development such as in doctoral training (Limberg et al., 2013).

Implications and future research

We offer these implications as a call to action (Ratts et al., 2016) to examine the cultures of academia that necessitate code-switching. Although counselor education emphasizes multiculturalism and social justice, our narratives suggest that the philosophy and actions of the counselor education profession are incongruent (Ratts et al., 2016). We acknowledge the transparency and vulnerability offered by the research team in sharing stories to affirm those who share similar experiences and inspire others who hold identities of power and privilege to join in as co-conspirators (Love, 2019).

Co-conspirators move beyond allyship and join in the movement leveraging their privileges to support and offer protection for those who hold marginalized identities and are more vulnerable in advocacy situations. Although discussions around privilege and oppression in academic settings can stimulate a range of emotions (Chan et al., 2018), counselor educators should infuse such topics throughout curricula which may aid the process of professional identity development for minoritized students and influence a commitment to social justice for all counselors and educators (Dollarhide et al., 2016).

The current study also highlighted the tension between advancement as a counselor educator and authenticity. This tension, termed respectability politics (Okello, 2021) or playing politics (Magnuson et al., 2009), has been noted by counselor education researchers yet is understudied. Additional research is needed that explores Black women's internalization of respectability politics in counselor education regarding career satisfaction, professional development, and other outcomes measures. Future quantitative studies could include regression analyses to understand the relationship between Black women counselor educators' personal and professional identity development.

Overall, findings of the current study offer unique perspectives on professional identity development from Black women counselor educators. However, there are notable limitations. CAE as a research practice is often criticized for being too evocative, lacking rigor, or displaying self-report bias (Ngunjiri et al., 2016). Nevertheless, as social science researchers, it is our ethical right to write about our

experiences and cultures with the goal of decolonization (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). CAE is the emergence of a praxis that holds social justice and inclusivity at its core (Lapadat, 2009).

THERE IS NO CONCLUSION

This study provided only a glimpse of our collective experiences of code-switching. It is not our goal to debate the advantages or disadvantages of code-switching but to depict the invisible and visible processes that Black women counselor educators undertake on their professional identity development paths. Accordingly, we agreed that code-switching is not “a means to an end.” Unfortunately, there is no finite conclusion. Systemic oppressions and whiteness actively function in and out of U.S. institutions of higher education and stifle the representation of Black women tenured professors across many disciplines and institution types (Erby & Hammonds, 2020). Although the number of Black women counselor educators may have increased, and we may be more visible in leadership at our institutions and in the profession, this does not reflect an inclusive or equitable culture in higher education within the discipline of counselor education. This study serves as a call to action for the counselor education profession to provide support and advocate with and on behalf of groups who feel code-switching is the primary way to achieve upward mobility and success.

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